

## Open to Scrutiny: an outsider hears the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu*.

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Greek philosophies like *Stoicism* and Indian *astika* philosophies like *Advaita Vedanta* have one thing in common: they both hate the human body which oozes blood, mucus and puss; there is in them an intolerance for the demands of the human body. This hatred in turn has been accommodated within colonial narratives of oppression and through this narrative, has transmitted to us this Manichaeian distrust of our flesh. We have nothing but our bodies to experience the world, yet we are scared of our bodies. The Abrahamic religions too are sullied with this intolerance of the body. They distinguish between the *sarx* and the *pneuma*; maintaining that the former is fallen, disgusting and shameful while the latter is to be tended since it will endure death. Marxist thought too is divided in these lines: while classical Marxism sees the body as miscible with the material world; it denies the spirit vehemently as an object to be denied thus reinstating the need to speak of the spirit. By a method of double negation Marxism reinstates the ancient division between the body and the spirit. The superstructure is abstract and a product of this world; therefore it is spiritual. This establishes that all known narratives within the sciences and the humanities fail to see the only truth that is self-evident: this reality of the human body that we inhabit in the *here and the now* --- the Heideggerian *dasein*. In West Bengal this process of making abject the human body is done thus: Tagore's songs are seen as more deep and venerable than Kazi Nazrul Islam's songs; in turn Islam's songs are seen as more acceptable than Lalan Fakir's songs; in turn Fakir's songs are seen to be better than the songs of the original Auls' and Bauls' songs; the latter are seen as more enduring than the *Bhadu* and *Tushu* songs of Bankura, especially the Bishnupur subdivision of Bankura and *sine die*. The same critic who praises Negro spirituals as beautiful and valid vehicles for the transmission of collective protest, hates the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* as being too erotic to be acceptable. Yet this same respectable critic

would not have existed had her/his parents not felt bodily desire for each other and this very desire, mentioned in the beginning of this essay, disturbs the critic in such a way that s/he confuses the singers of the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* with unbridled passion and eroticism, naturally to be avoided. The British thought their women to be less eroticized than Indian women who were perceived to be less erotic than African women; all this based on the darkening skin colour. This method of seeing skin colour as determining the formation and accommodation of desire is at work in Bishnupur and the lumping of this body-centric genre with cultural apathy. The singers of the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* have darker skins than those of the metropolis or the colonisers who took Bishnupur away from the original inhabitants of the place; thus the songs are automatically seen as depraved and ugly. The apparatus of the State with its whole might declare the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* to be taboo, to be dangerous in other words for speaking desires is dangerous.

How does the State declare this genre as dangerous: it does so by linguistic, economic and cultural means:

- I. The Bengali language as spoken in Bankura and especially in Bishnupur is held up to ridicule. The normative Bengali accent is taken to be that spoken in Kolkata.

Therefore what is different, is impure. From this follows that those who speak this different Bengali are illiterate and therefore less enlightened needing the interference of the State in the form of mainstream songs like Tagore's songs or Nazrul-songs. The indigenous songs and their singers are conflated with the lower-castes since only those with lesser intelligence will opt for the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu*. The enlightened will opt for the spirit of *Vedanta* in other forms of cultural transmission; the enduring appeal of mainstream Bengali songs is in their other-worldly content. The *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* are content with this world and this creates anxiety in academicians of all brands since the secret longing of higher academics is to ferret out some esoteric

knowledge existing in some arcane theory about the world which only those intelligent enough, studious enough will understand. It can be the realities of quantum physics or the sublime object of some ideology, but it has to be seriously hard to understand --- only then is the critic happy. We seek some imaginary depth to work within and make evident through jargon. The *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* do not allow this hypocrisy and thus defeat the purpose of academics. So they are disowned publicly and enshrined within the *domain of the joke* in Bishnupur. It is well known in psychoanalytic literature that the *joke* is the space for expressing repressed desires and sublimating anxieties which arise out of totems, taboos and libidinal urges.

- II. It is by labelling a region that other regions become normative. Thus for Kolkata to be a metropolis, it has to be seen and believed to be better in all respects than the districts. For ideologies to survive, there has to be class divisions. This is affected by the sovereign act of naming; thus Marxism tacitly agrees that there is indeed a proletariat and a bourgeoisie; capitalist ideologies locate the movement of capital as defining progress and while both Marxism and capitalism are at loggerheads on the surface; they collude to label regions of India as wretched and beyond help. Thus they have agreed that Bishnupur is too fallen to be redeemed. What comes out of Bishnupur is by this logic, puerile and not worthy of the critical gaze. Hence it is alright to not bother about the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu*.
- III. While *Advaita Vedanta* stresses the illusory nature of this world, robbing man of agency and contingency since according to this powerful school of thought *beyond the seen is the unseen* and which therefore creates a class who can *see*, while others simply do not *see* since they neither have the *karmic* luck to understand the unseen nor the *samskara* to experience the *Brahman* or logos of Hinduism; thus whoever denies *Advaita Vedanta* is seen to be imprisoned by *tamas*, or darkness and forever

bound to samsara. Yet Bishnupur is the site of another philosophy; that of the *Agamas* as ritualised in the Tantric way. We find the famous headless mother-goddess temple here. Yet she is surpassed by other non-energetic, less scary but calmer deities. *Vaishnavism*, a much watered down form of *Advaita Vedanta* is the religion of choice. *Bhadu* and *Tushu* see the body as real and self-evident like the *Agamas* and classical Tantra do; contrary to both *Advaita Vedanta* and *Vaishnavism*. The grand narrative of Indian philosophy does its cultural work by contextualising this indigenous mode of singing with unbecoming sexualised symbols befitting those who have bad *karma* in their pasts. While the classical mode or *gharana* is prioritized over the indigenous and real *gharana* of Bishnupur; the singers of the *Tushu* and *Bhadu* are seen as non-spiritual, in fact incapable of spirituality. The irony is that while only a chosen few enjoy or understand classical Indian music, which is a very divisive tool of silencing others; the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* which is enjoyed by everyone since they are so real, so true to the soil, that classical singers denounce them as heretical and sinful. They do it so that there is some implied but non-existent value to their mode of cultural work. The reasoning is thus: if one appreciates the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu*; one is foolish, low-caste, culturally naïve and philosophically lightweight. Therefore, through a process of mimicry, the people of Bishnupur have been taught over the generations to respect and treasure their so called classical heritage which is an illusion over their real, more powerful heritage: the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu*. The truth is, the elites of Bishnupur feel ashamed of this mode of singing and have been able to transmit their shame in everybody around them. The *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* are thus seen as defiling and impure.

It is now sufficiently clear that the process of marginalisation has been at work in othering this mode of singing so as to annihilate it since only then can the indigenous

people of Bishnupur be homogenised with the mainstream of the State, thereby rendering the original people of Bishnupur voiceless. When these songs are forgotten, the total colonisation of Bishnupur would be completed and the colonising project started by the Mughals would be over. This essay makes a case for studying the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* anew and rediscover them and bring them to the attention of mainstream scholars within the social sciences and the humanities. The purpose of this paper would then be served.

### **General Notes:**

The aim of this paper is not to analyse songs or the form or the content of the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* but rather to see them as cultural artefacts which we are at risk of losing. The references in this paper to theories are to those of Jane Tompkins (*vide* cultural work), Elizabeth Wright (the *unspeakability* of desires), Homi Bhabha (*mimicry*) and Slavoj Žižek (*sublime object of ideology*). The *domain of the joke* mentioned in the essay is found in the works of Freud and needs no new reference. *Dasein* is not translatable; the *Bhadu* and the *Tushu* reinstate the *dasein*, while other modes of culture in Bishnupur negate the *dasein*.

This author's academic training renders him incapable of either translating or appreciating this genre. This work is best done by those who practise these songs, i.e. the indigenous people of Bishnupur, Bankura. The author is recused from this urgent work since his training is culturally that of an alien intruder into Bishnupur. In this sense, this essay is open to cultural scrutiny since the writer is a coloniser and himself, a part of the State apparatus.

