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CONTRASTING VISIONS: TAGORE AND LALON FAKIR'S
METAPHYSICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Section One

Introduction:

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was a prominent Bengali poet, philosopher, and Nobel Laureate in Literature. His metaphysical perspective is centered on the idea of **divine immanence and unity**. Tagore saw the divine as an all-encompassing presence that infuses every aspect of the universe. He believed that the ultimate reality or Brahman is both transcendent and immanent, existing within and beyond the world. Tagore's philosophy emphasizes the harmony between the individual soul and the universal spirit, advocating for self-realization through love, nature, and artistic expression. His work reflects a vision of interconnectedness and the unity of all existence. **Lalon Fakir** (circa 1774–1890) was a Bengali mystic poet and Baul saint known for his spiritual songs and teachings. His metaphysical perspective is characterized by **mystical and experiential spirituality**. Lalon emphasized the concept of "Moner Manush" (the man of the heart), representing the divine presence within each person. He rejected traditional religious rituals and social norms, focusing instead on personal spiritual experience and the inner search for truth. Lalon's philosophy advocates for transcending material and social divisions to achieve spiritual liberation and unity with the divine essence. Believes in a divine essence that is both within the world and beyond it, promoting unity, love, and artistic engagement as pathways to realizing this divine presence. Focuses on the inner divine presence within each individual, rejecting external rituals and social norms in favor of a personal, mystical approach to spirituality.

Rabindranath Tagore and Lalon Fakir are two iconic figures in Bengali culture and spirituality, each contributing significantly to the discourse on metaphysics. While their approaches to metaphysical questions diverge considerably, both offer rich insights into the nature of reality, the self, and the divine. Tagore's metaphysical views are intertwined with his humanism and universalism, while Lalon Fakir's philosophy is deeply rooted in mysticism and personal spiritual experience.

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One of Rabindranath Tagore's songs that reflect his metaphysical ideas is "Jibon Jokhon Shukaye Jay". In this song, Tagore delves into the impermanence of life and the idea of seeking solace in the divine. It conveys a deep spiritual longing and the recognition that material life is transient, while the spiritual connection with the divine is eternal. The lyrics reflect Tagore's exploration of the metaphysical relationship between the self and the greater cosmos. One of Lalon Fakir's songs that deeply reflect his metaphysical ideas is "Khachar Bhitor Ochin Pakhi". In this song, Lalon Fakir explores the concept of the soul (often referred to as the "unknown bird") being trapped within the body, symbolized by a cage. The song delves into the transient nature of life, the mystery of the soul's origin and destination, and the quest for spiritual liberation. Lalon's metaphysics often revolved around the idea of the soul's journey, the impermanence of the material world, and the search for a higher truth beyond physical existence. This song is a profound reflection of his spiritual and philosophical musings.

Section Two

Rabindranath Tagore's Metaphysical Perspective

Integration of the Divine and the Human: Rabindranath Tagore's metaphysical theory is characterized by a profound integration of the divine with the human experience. His work reflects a belief in the interconnectedness of all existence, where the divine is immanent in the natural world and human life. Tagore's metaphysics is not about transcending the material world but about finding the divine within it. He sees spirituality as an integral part of everyday life, blending the spiritual with the mundane.¹

Universalism and the Quest for Truth: Tagore's universalism plays a central role in his metaphysical outlook. He posits that the ultimate truth is universal and that different religious and philosophical traditions are various paths leading to the same ultimate reality. Tagore's metaphysical perspective is characterized by openness to diverse spiritual experiences and an emphasis on the commonalities among different traditions.²

¹ Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Religion of Man*, Macmillan, 1931, pp. 48-50. Tagore's reflections emphasize the presence of the divine in human life and the natural world, advocating for spirituality that embraces both the sacred and the secular.

² Tagore, Rabindranath. *Creative Unity*, Macmillan, 1922, pp. 15-17. Tagore's philosophy underscores the universality of spiritual truths and the idea that various religious traditions converge on a shared

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understanding of the divine.

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The Role of Artistic Expression: For Tagore, artistic expression is a means to explore and express metaphysical ideas. His poetry, music, and prose are infused with spiritual themes, reflecting his belief that art can convey profound truths about existence and the divine.³ Tagore views art as a bridge between the material and spiritual realms, offering insights into the nature of reality and the human condition.

Lalon Fakir's Metaphysical Perspective

Mysticism and Direct Experience: Lalon Fakir's metaphysical theory is rooted in mysticism and the direct experience of the divine. His philosophy emphasizes that true knowledge of the divine comes from personal, experiential encounters rather than through formal religious doctrines or rituals. Lalon's mysticism is characterized by a focus on the inner self and the realization of the divine presence within.⁴

Rejection of Social and Religious Orthodoxy: Lalon's metaphysical views include a critique of social norms and religious orthodoxy. He challenges the caste system and ritualistic practices, which he believes obstruct true spiritual understanding. Lalon's emphasis is on a spirituality that transcends social and religious boundaries, advocating for equality and personal spiritual insight.⁵

Unity of the Self and the Divine: A central theme in Lalon's metaphysical thought is the unity between the self and the divine. He teaches that recognizing the divine essence within oneself leads to a greater understanding of the universe and a sense of oneness with all creation. This metaphysical perspective highlights the interconnectedness of all existence and the idea that the divine is immanent within each individual.⁶

³Tagore, Rabindranath. *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)*, Macmillan, 1912, pp. 7-8. Tagore's literary works often merge artistic beauty with metaphysical exploration, illustrating his belief in the power of art to reveal deeper truths.

⁴ Lalon Fakir, *Lalon Geet*, ed. Anwarul Karim, Bangla Academy, 1978, pp. 70-72. Lalon's songs often convey the idea that spiritual enlightenment arises from personal experience and self-realization.

⁵ Lalon Fakir, *Lalon Geet*, ed. Anwarul Karim, Bangla Academy, 120-122. Lalon's critique of societal norms reflects his belief that metaphysical and spiritual truths are not confined by traditional social or religious structures.

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Section Three

Tagore views the divine as immanent within the world, where spirituality is found in the integration of the material and the spiritual. Lalon, on the other hand, emphasizes the direct experience of the divine within the self, often rejecting formal religious practices as barriers to spiritual insight. Tagore's approach to metaphysical knowledge is inclusive and universal, seeking commonalities across different traditions. Lalon's approach is more experiential and individualistic, focusing on personal spiritual realization and the dissolution of conventional religious and social boundaries. For Tagore, art and creativity play a crucial role in exploring and expressing metaphysical ideas. Lalon, however, views ritualistic practices as secondary to personal mystical experience and direct engagement with the divine. Rabindranath Tagore and Lalon Fakir offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on metaphysics. Tagore's approach integrates the divine with the human experience and emphasizes universalism and artistic expression, while Lalon Fakir's mysticism focuses on personal spiritual experience and critiques of social and religious norms. Together, their philosophies provide a rich tapestry of thought on the nature of reality, the divine and human understanding. Rabindranath Tagore and Lalon Fakir, despite their distinct cultural and philosophical backgrounds, exhibit striking similarities in their metaphysical perspectives, particularly regarding the concept of the divine, the unity of existence, and the importance of inner spiritual realization.

Some commonalities are evident in both their philosophical writings and songs.

1. Divine Presence Within:

Tagore's spiritual philosophy emphasizes the presence of the divine within the human soul, a theme recurrent in his songs and poems. He views God as an inner reality that individuals must realize through self-awareness and spiritual introspection. In the song "*Jibono Jokhon Shukaye Jay*", Tagore expresses the longing for the divine presence within oneself, urging the listener to seek God in the depths of their heart.⁷

⁶ Lalon Fakir, *Lalon Geet*, ed. Anwarul Karim, Bangla Academy, 95-97. Lalon's philosophy emphasizes the realization of the divine within oneself as a path to experiencing unity with the broader cosmos.

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Similarly, Lalon's philosophy revolves around the concept of the "Moner Manush" (the man of the heart), symbolizing the divine presence within every individual. His songs frequently convey the idea that the true essence of the divine is found within oneself, not in external rituals. "*Khachar Bhitor Ochin Pakhi*", Lalon speaks of the unknown bird (the soul) trapped within the cage (the body), emphasizing the inward search for the divine.⁸

2. Critique of Institutionalized Religion:

Tagore often critiques the rigid structures of institutionalized religion, advocating for a more personal and spiritual approach to the divine. He emphasizes the futility of external rituals when the true essence of spirituality lies within the individual's heart. In his song "*Anondoloke Mongolaloke*", Tagore celebrates the universal light of the divine, transcending all boundaries of organized religion.⁹ **Lalon Fakir:** Lalon Fakir also rejects the formalism of institutionalized religion, focusing instead on a personal, experiential spirituality. His songs often criticize religious dogma and emphasize a direct, unmediated relationship with the divine. Lalon's song "*Shob Loke Koy Lalon Ki Jat Shongshare*" questions societal and religious classifications, asserting that true spirituality transcends such distinctions.¹⁰

3. Unity of All Existence:

Tagore's metaphysical outlook is based on the belief in the unity of all existence. He views the world as a manifestation of the divine, where all living beings are interconnected through the spiritual essence that permeates the universe. In his song "*Amar Shonar Bangla*", Tagore celebrates the unity of nature and humanity, reflecting the interconnectedness of all life¹¹.

⁷ Tagore, *Gitanjali*, p. 23

⁸ Lalon Fakir, *Selected Songs of Lalon*, p. 45

⁹ Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, p. 56.

¹⁰ Lalon Fakir, *Selected Songs of Lalon*, p. 60

¹¹ Tagore, *Sadhana*, p. 72

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Lalon Fakir: Lalon's teachings also reflect a belief in the unity of all beings, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion. He preaches the oneness of humanity and the divine essence that binds all life together. Lalon's song "*Milon Hobe Koto Dine*" expresses a longing for the day when all will realize the inherent unity of existence, transcending worldly divisions'.¹².

Rabindranath Tagore and Lalon Fakir, two towering figures in Bengali culture, approach metaphysical philosophy from distinct yet intertwined perspectives.

Below is a comparison of their metaphysical views:

1. Concept of the Divine and Spirituality:

Tagore's concept of the divine is deeply rooted in the Upanishadic tradition, emphasizing the oneness of God and the world. He often explores the idea of the divine presence in nature and the human soul. Tagore's metaphysics is characterized by an idealistic monism, where God is seen as an all-encompassing, immanent presence that pervades everything. For Tagore, the ultimate reality is an all-pervasive unity that manifests in diverse forms.¹³ Lalon Fakir's metaphysical perspective is more mystical and esoteric, reflecting the syncretic traditions of Baul philosophy. Lalon rejects institutionalized religion and focuses on an experiential understanding of the divine, often expressed through the idea of the "Moner Manush" (the man of the heart). Lalon's philosophy emphasizes the immanence of God within the human self and the importance of self-realization through inner exploration. His views are more aligned with Sufism and the Bhakti movement, emphasizing the personal, internal journey toward the divine.¹⁴

2. View on the Material World:

Tagore views the material world as an expression of the divine. He believes that the beauty of the physical world is a reflection of the spiritual reality, and that one can experience the divine

¹² Lalon Fakir, *Selected Songs of Lalon*, p. 77

¹³ In "Gitanjali," Tagore writes about the divine presence in the natural world and the human heart, stressing the harmony between the individual soul and the universe (Tagore, "Gitanjali," p. 23).

¹⁴ Lalon's songs frequently express the idea that the divine resides within the human body and soul, urging seekers to look inward for spiritual fulfillment (Lalon Fakir, "Selected Songs of Lalon," p. 45).

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through engagement with the world. Tagore's metaphysics embraces the world as a site of divine play (Lila), where the individual can participate in the cosmic harmony.¹⁵ Lalon, on the other hand, sees the material world as transient and often illusory, a veil that obscures the true nature of the self. For Lalon, the physical world is a distraction from the spiritual journey, and he emphasizes the need to transcend worldly attachments to realize the divine within.¹⁶

3. Approach to Liberation (Moksha):

Tagore's notion of liberation is closely tied to the idea of self-realization through love and service. He believes that liberation is achieved not by renouncing the world, but by embracing it with a sense of divine love and unity. For Tagore, the individual soul finds liberation in the realization of its oneness with the universal soul.¹⁷ Lalon's concept of liberation is more mystical, focusing on the dissolution of the ego and the realization of the true self (Atman) within. He advocates for a spiritual practice that involves internal meditation, self-purification, and the shedding of egoistic desires. Liberation, for Lalon, is the realization of the unity between the individual soul and the divine essence, achieved through an inner, experiential process.¹⁸

These comparisons show that while Tagore and Lalon both explore the divine and spiritual liberation, their approaches reflect different cultural and philosophical influences. Tagore's perspective is more universal and idealistic, while Lalon's is more mystical and inward-looking, with a strong emphasis on personal spiritual experience.

¹⁵ In his essay "Religion of Man," Tagore discusses the material world as a manifestation of the divine, where beauty and love are the pathways to experiencing God (Tagore, "Religion of Man," p. 78).

¹⁶ Lalon's lyrics often caution against the distractions of the material world, urging followers to focus on the inner spiritual journey instead (Lalon Fakir, "Selected Songs of Lalon," p. 63).

¹⁷ Tagore's writings often reflect the idea that true freedom comes from living a life of love, service, and harmony with the world (Tagore, "Sadhana," p. 91).

¹⁸ Lalon's songs often speak of the "Kaivalya" or ultimate liberation that comes from the realization of the inner self, beyond the confines of the ego and the material world (Lalon Fakir, "Selected Songs of Lalon," p. 105)

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Section Four

Tagore's and Lalon Fakir's metaphysical and philosophical perspectives offer valuable insights relevant to today's world, particularly in the context of spirituality, social harmony, and personal self-realization. Their ideas resonate with contemporary concerns about the nature of the self, the search for inner meaning, and the critique of materialism. Here's how their perspectives are relevant today, with references to their songs and writings:

Inner Divinity and Self-Realization: Tagore's emphasis on discovering the divine within oneself aligns with modern spiritual practices that focus on mindfulness and inner growth. His philosophy encourages individuals to look inward for peace and understanding, which is pertinent in today's fast-paced, often materialistic world. In his song "*Jibono Jokhon Shukaye Jay*" (When Life Fades Away), Tagore speaks of the divine presence within the self and the importance of connecting with this inner essence as a source of true fulfillment¹⁹. This message resonates with contemporary mindfulness practices that emphasize self-awareness and inner peace.

Critique of Institutionalized Religion: Tagore's critique of rigid religious structures and his call for a more personal and experiential spirituality are relevant in an age where many seek a more authentic spiritual experience beyond traditional dogma. In "*Anondoloke Mongolaloke*" (In the Realm of Joy and Auspiciousness), Tagore celebrates a universal divine presence that transcends sectarian boundaries²⁰. This perspective aligns with the modern trend toward inclusivity and personal spirituality.

Unity and Interconnectedness: Tagore's vision of the interconnectedness of all life underscores the importance of global unity and environmental stewardship. His ideas support contemporary movements focused on ecological sustainability and global cooperation. In "*Amar Shonar Bangla*" (My Golden Bengal), Tagore reflects on the unity of nature and humanity, emphasizing a harmonious relationship with the environment²¹.

¹⁹ Tagore, *Gitanjali*, p. 23

²⁰ Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, p. 56

²¹ Tagore, *Sadhana*, p. 72

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On the another hand,

Inner Search for the Divine: Lalon's focus on finding the divine within oneself is relevant to modern spiritual seekers who are exploring non-traditional paths to enlightenment and self-discovery. His emphasis on inner experience over external rituals aligns with contemporary spiritual practices. In "*Khachar Bhitor Ochin Pakhi*" (The Unknown Bird in the Cage), Lalon uses metaphors to convey the idea that the divine essence is within each person, urging a deep, personal search for spiritual truth²².

Critique of Ritualism and Social Norms: Lalon's rejection of social and religious formalism resonates with modern critiques of institutionalized practices and the search for genuine spiritual and social reform. His ideas challenge rigid societal norms and advocate for a more inclusive and humane approach to spirituality. In "*Shob Loke Koy Lalon Ki Jat Shongshare*", Lalon critiques societal divisions and the superficiality of social and religious categories.

Unity and Equality: Lalon's teachings on the unity and equality of all human beings are pertinent to current discussions on social justice, equality, and human rights. His messages support contemporary movements advocating for social and cultural inclusivity. In "*Milon Hobe Koto Dine*", Lalon expresses a vision of universal unity and the hope for a world where divisions are transcended (Lalon Fakir, *Selected Songs of Lalon*, p. 77).

Tagore and Lalon Fakir's philosophies provide a profound reflection on self-realization, spirituality, and social harmony, offering timeless wisdom that continues to inspire and guide individuals in today's complex world.

Section Five

Lalon Fakir and Rabindranath Tagore, though rooted in distinct cultural and spiritual traditions, offer profound metaphysical insights that resonate deeply in contemporary times. Both thinkers advocate for an inner journey towards spiritual realization, emphasizing the divine presence within each individual rather than relying on external rituals or institutionalized religion. Tagore's idealistic vision of the divine permeating all aspects of life encourages a harmonious

²² Lalon Fakir, *Selected Songs of Lalon*, p. 45

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relationship with the world and underscores the interconnectedness of all existence. His work highlights the importance of self-realization through love, nature, and artistic expression, advocating for spirituality that transcends traditional boundaries.

Conversely, Lalon Fakir's mystical and experiential approach challenges societal norms and religious formalism, promoting a direct, personal connection with the divine. His rejection of rigid social and religious categories in favor of inner spiritual exploration aligns with modern values of inclusivity and personal freedom. Lalon's emphasis on the unity of all beings and the divine presence within reflects a commitment to social justice and human equality.

Both Tagore and Lalon's philosophies address the need for a more authentic, personal approach to spirituality that values inner experience over external appearances. Their teachings encourage a holistic view of human existence, urging individuals to seek deeper meaning and connection in their lives. In today's world, marked by rapid change and global interconnectedness, their perspectives offer valuable guidance for fostering a more inclusive, compassionate, and spiritually aware society. Their shared emphasis on the inner journey and critique of formalistic practices remain relevant and inspiring, providing timeless wisdom for navigating the complexities of modern life.

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