SHÂHJAHÂN MIAH

Chants mystiques bâuls
du Bangladesh
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PREMIÈRES HISTORIQUES
Dans le courant du 1er millénaire av. J.-C., de nombreuses tribus aryennes venues d'Asie Centrale déferlent en vagues successives sur l'Inde septentrionale provoquant l'effondrement de la civilisation dravidienne de l'Indus. Leur expansion vers le sud et l'est se poursuit pendant la première moitié du 1er millénaire. Cette période représente l'âge d'or de cette civilisation : stabilité politique, développement de la culture védique, renforcement du pouvoir des brahmanes, naissance de traditions épiques préréfligurant le Rāmāyana et le Mahābhārata. L'organisation sociale aryenne est fondée sur un système normatif qui règle la vie socio-religieuse de chaque individu. Ce système de castes trouve son origine au début de l'ére chrétienne au système des castes. L'expansion aryenne – ou indo-européenne – atteint la région du Bengale vers le VIe siècle av. J.-C. par rapport à une langue littéraire, le sanskrit, et une langue parlée, le prakrit, qui est à l'origine du bengali.

Cette époque, le nord de l'Inde compte environ seize unités politiques. Elles se constituent progressivement autour du centre politique de Patna, sur le Gange. Sous la dynastie des Maurya, le Gange est le fleuve le plus important du pays. Sous la dynastie des Maurya, le Gange est le fleuve le plus important du pays. Sous la dynastie des Maurya, le Gange est le fleuve le plus important du pays.
LALAN SHAH

On sait peu de choses de la vie de Lalân Shâh jusqu’à son installation à Sirîya près de Koshtia, dans la seconde moitié du XIIIe siècle, si ce n’est qu’il consacrera de nombreuses années en pèlerinages avant d’y tendre un centre religieux (akhira). Était-il hindou ou musulman ? Lui-même semble avoir attaché fort peu d’intérêt à cette question tant il lui important d’élever la gloire du divin au-delà des frontières religieuses.

Chacun demande : « A quelle religion appartient Lalân ? »

Lalân dit : « Comment le saurai-je ? Mes yeux n’en ont jamais vu les manifestations. »

Personne n’est prêt à accepter le chemin de la Vérité. Quand tu viens au monde, quelle était ta religion ? Quand tu te quittes, quelle sera ta religion ? Pourquoi créer au nom d’une religion venue à disparition ?

Une fois retiré dans l’akhira de Sirîya, Lalân Shâh se consacre à la méditation et à la poésie. Les scientifiques lui attribuent 600 chants métaphysiques et thaghânï qui furent recueillis par Rabindranath Tagore, M. Masunuddin ainsi que divers poètes et chercheurs de l’Université de Calcutta et de la Bangla Academy de Daca. Quant à la tradition populaire, elle lui en attribue de 2 000 à 90 000, nombre exorbitant qui ne se justifie que par les dons d’ubiquité dont se vit doté Lalân Shâh.

Selon les chercheurs bangladeshis, l’usage du terme bûla semble indifférent aux adeptes de cette confrérie. Et dans les villages où l’on compte de nombreux disciples de Lalân Shâh, ceux-ci sont couramment appelés “râdãr fakîr” (fakîr à la tête rose) ou “sunward fakîr” (fakîr irreligieux). Actuellement, l’onère Lalân Shâh compte environ 10 000 adeptes.

LA MUSIQUE

Sur le plan musical, les bûlas pratiquent deux styles différents selon qu’ils vivent en akhira ou sont itinérants. Dans le premier cas, qui est celui de Shâhjâhân Miah, les musiciens jouent assis, leur mélodie est douce, calme, intime. Dans le second, ils jouent debout et dansent dans un lieu en plein air, leurs voix sont fortes et leur style brutal et extraverti. Chaque chant commence par quelques notes instrumentales destinées à « asseoir » le mode musical, suivies d’une introduction chantée de rythme libre. Enfin, le chant proprement dit est entonné au moment où reprendent les percussions. Comme c’est très souvent le cas dans les traditions orientales, le chant s’appuie sur un cannebas médiéval qui laisserait une grande liberté aux interprètes.

On peut donc décrire ces chants comme des semi-improvisations sommaires à des impératifs d’ordre mélodique et rythmique :

– une grammaire méloïque déterminée par la structure de chaque mode : hiérarchie des notes, les plus importantes étant les notes d’appui et de repos (figurations dans les transcription ci-contre des trous de flûte) ; division de l’échelle modale en un, deux ou trois tétracordes qui constituent autant d’espaces sonores que le musicien doit explorer avant de passer au suivant (ces tétracordes sont indiqués par des liens) ;

Sur le plan mélodique, Shâhjâhân Miah utilise trois modes musicaux empruntés à la tradition indienne :

– le mode “bûlare” basé sur la tonique mi (plage 2) qui transposes également sur le fa dièse (plage 4)

[Image à droite]

bûlare sur mi
LES INSTRUMENTS
Les instruments utilisés par l’ensemble de Shāhjāhān Mīyāh sont le luth dotara, le monochrome ektaśa, les clochettes juhri et, selon les pièces, les tambours midangam ou tabōli.

Le dotara est un luth à quatre cordes dont la caisse en bois est recouverte de peau. Le manche est lui-même recouvert d’une plaque de verre qui favorise le glissement des doigts sur la touche. Cet instrument n’est pas spécifique des bauls et on le retrouve dans toutes les traditions populaires du Bangladesh et du Bengale occidental.

Instrument emblématique des bauls, l’ektaśa tire son origine du gopīvantra, l’instrument des bergères (gopi) de Krishna. Unique en son genre dans le monde, il se compose d’un petit cylindre de bois recouvert à son extrémité inférieure d’une peau à laquelle est attachée une corde en métal. Cette corde traverse le cylindre et vient se fixer de l’autre côté à une tige de bambou fendue en deux. Le musicien pince la corde tout en pesant sur cette tige faisant ainsi varier la hauteur du son.

Le juhri est une paire de petites clochettes de métal reliées entre elles par une petite cordelette. Elles sont entrecroisées discrètement de manière à donner le rythme de base et le tempo.

Le midangam, dont le nom est cité dans le Rig-Veda (IIIe millénaire av. J.-C.) et l’invention attribuée à Brahman lui-même, est un grand tambour à deux peaux. Le centre de l’une des peaux est enduit d’une pâte faite de résine, d’huile et de cire qui donne à l’instrument une sonorité plus profonde.

Les tabōli sont un ensemble formé d’un petit tambour, le tabōli proprement dit, et d’une petite timbale à basson métallique ou tāyīli. Le tabōli joué à la main gauche rend un son aigu et précis, tandis que le tāyīli au plus grave permet par un subtil jeu du poignet droit d’emettre des sons glissés. Comme pour le midangam, les peaux des tabōli sont enduites de pâte.

LES INTERPRETES
Muḥammad Shāhjāhān Mīyāh vit dans le village de Tauta, sur la rivière Padma, au nord-ouest de Dacca. Il chante et joue du luth dotara depuis son enfance. Frappé de cécité à l’âge de 14 ans à la suite d’une typhoïde, il se consacre entièrement à la méditation et au chant. Son maître, le murshid Muhammad Danej Munsfi, lui transmet le superbe répertoire des poèmes chantés de Lilān Shāhī et de ses disciples. Si de nos jours ces chants sont désormais inclus dans les programmes de concerts classiques des chanteurs professionnels de Dacca, Shāhjāhān Mīyāh fait encore partie de ceux qui, par leur choix religieux, en restituent toute la force émotionnelle. Shāhjāhān Mīyāh est accompagné au chant et aux clochettes juhri par Jhohūrīn Mīnḍā, à l’ektaśa par Shāhāt Hossain et aux percussions par Badal Chundra Sarkar.

PIERRE BOIS

1. Pièce instrumentale.

2. Vieux, ô Mohammed, ô Saint Homme (poème de lijat).

Vieux, ô Mohammed, ô Saint Homme, viens en mon cœur. Ton serviteur t’appelle, donne-moi la paix du cœur. Soleil, lune, étoiles et planètes, ainsi que les anges, chantent jour et nuit et décorent ton cou de colliers de fleurs. Fakirs et devrives, abeilles reines, cueillent ces fleurs en boutons, eux qui habitent au pied des arbres, leurs besaces sur l’épaule. L’univers est vire du parfum des fleurs cueillies dans l’allégresse. Le pauvre lijat (1) pleure : "Où trouver la racine de ces fleurs?"

3. Vieux boire le nectar envirant du paradis (poème de Rajjab).


(1) Cette manière de « signer » un poème est également très courante dans toute la poésie indo-persane.
4. A force de lancer tout le jour ma ligne... (poème de Liân Shâh).

A force de lancer tout le jour ma ligne, j’ai perdu ma vigueur et je n’ai pas attrapé de poisson. Une fois, j’ai placé une mouche à l’hameçon et, à la première secousse, j’ai tiré sur le fil au hasard. Selon certains, l’océan d’amour où l’on va pêcher a trois bras, lui aussi. J’ai jeté ma ligne mais le poisson n’a pas monté à l’hameçon. Celui qui sait où se logent les poissons réussit à attendre le but de son voyage. Le fâche Liân dit : « Je voulais pêcher mais j’ai pu que raquî mon vêtement. »

5. Kâli ma rendu folle... (anonyme)

Kâli (1) m’a rendu folle, comment pourrai-je demeurer dans ma maison? Ô compagnie, je répète son nom sans cesse. Kâli est le collier de fleurs que je porte autour du cou. Le nom de Kâli est gravé en mon cœur. Son nom brille dans les ténerières: Kâli, l’or noir.

Dans l’eau de la rivière j’ai aperçu le reflet de sa beauté. Elle ne m’apparaît pas comme elle est. J’ai fait en sorte que personne ne sache à qui je pense. J’ai perdu le miroir de sa beauté. 

6. Tombé dans ce terrible malheur... (poème de Pâlîja).

Tombé dans ce terrible malheur, je n’ai personne qui me vienne en aide. Le malheur frappe mon cœur. L’homme est un enfant de l’illusion et le grand homme est un enfant de la réalité. Si je ne fais pas le malheur, je me fais les malheurs. Cet homme est sans pitié et s’il me fait du mal, je me fends de lui. L’homme est doux et bon. Mes amis sont mon tort. Si je ne suis pas heureux, je suis heureux et je m’ennuie.

7. Jour et nuit, j’accomplis des actes vils... (poème de Liân Shâh).

Jour et nuit, j’accomplis des actes vils, ô guerrou, vaste continuer à me garder comme ton esclave? Je n’ai pas su voir comment était ce guerrou. Je ne l’ai pas servi et je n’ai pas suivi ses enseignements. Je devrais à présent errer dans les enfers. Ai-je oublié que je suis venu sur cette terre un jour terrible dans les souffrances de l’enfance?

8. Ne plonge pas dans l’amour sans savoir... (poème de Liân Shâh).

Ne plonge pas dans l’amour sans savoir. Aime en connaissance de cause: c’est cela qui est bien en ce monde. Si l’on désire amir, il faut aller trouver les saints hommes, comme l’or au fond d’une grotte. L’amour de ce monde est pareil aux chants éloquents des esprits de l’au-delà: c’est quand la séparation, tantôt la réunion. Pour finir, la mort survient, et la tête tombe. Il existe un autre amour qui mène les uns au paradis, les autres en enfer. Devant ce spectacle Liân s’exclame : « Cet univers n’est que jeu! »

9. L’éclat du Sans Forme m’a rendu fou. (poème de Bachou).


10. Le feu flambe et je meurs... (poème de Bachou).

Le feu flambe et je meurs dans ses flammes, ô compagnie. Dans la société des hommes, je ne puis parler de la douleur brillante qui me consume. O amie, quelle sorte d’amour est-ce là pour qu’il me tue dans les flammes? Si je me dédie la poitrine tu verras les amarantes de mon âme, ô compagnie. Quand je m’endors je le vois dans mes rêves, il disparaît quand je m’éveille. Que vais-je faire à présent? Bachou, le fou, pleure en me voyant.

TRADUCTION.

LOKENATH ET FRANCE BHATTACHARYA

Collection dirigée par Françoise Grund.


(1) Kâli est l’un des noms de Krishna. Ce poème est placé dans la bouche de Radhâ, son amante. (N.d.T.)
De gauche à droite
Joinudin Mridha, jhuri
Badal Chandra Sarkar, tablā

Shahjalal Mia, dotara
Shahadat Hossain, ektara
SHAHJAHAN MIAH
Mystical Baul songs of Bangladesh in the tradition of the Lalai Shahi order

At the time India was partitioned in 1947, Bengal was divided into two states: West Bengal with a Hindu majority – a member of the Indian Union – and what is known today as Bangladesh, with a Muslim majority(1). These two states however share the same language – Bengali, and the same culture, the result of several years of common history.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
In the two thousand years before Christ, numerous Aryan tribes from Central Asia came to northern India in successive waves bringing about the collapse of the Dravidian civilization of the Indus. Their expansion southwards and eastwards continued during the first half of the first millennium which represents the golden age of this civilization: political stabilization, development of Vedic culture, strengthening the power of the Brahmins, the birth of epic traditions, prefiguring the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Aryan social organization is founded on a system of norms regulating the socio-religious life of each individual and in the first Christian era was to give rise to the caste system. Aryan (or Indo-European) expansion reached the Bengal region around the 8th century B.C., bringing with it a literary language, Sanskrit, and a spoken language, Prakrit, which is the origin of Bengali.

At that time, northern India was divided up into about sixteen political units. These were progressively absorbed into a single great kingdom, Magadha, whose political centre was Patna, on the Ganges. Under the Maurya dynasty, Magadha stretched from the Indus to the Ganges delta. It reached its peak under the reign of Ashoka (250 B.C.). After a long period of conquests, Ashoka was converted to Buddhism and abandoned his expansionist policy to devote himself to the pursuit of virtue (Dhammanivayav). On his death, the Magadha empire disintegrated and broke up into small kingdoms.

In the 4th century of our era, the Gupta dynasty built anew an empire worthy of that of Ashoka. Under the Guptas, India enjoyed political stability, administrative unity and religious tolerance, conditions that fostered an intellectual and artistic flowering(2). This period is considered the classical age in Indian civilisation. Under pressure from the White Huns, the Gupta dynasty collapsed at the start of the 6th century and India fell back into division and political confusion, without however its culture being disrupted. Around 750, Gopala was raised to the throne of Bengal thus founding the Buddhist dynasty of the Palas whose capital, Varendra, became one of the greatest and most prosperous centres of North India. Throughout the 11th century, the Palas managed to fend off invasions by Turkish ghaznawids, but they were overtaken a century later by the Sena who restored Hindu orthodoxy.

The 7th century in Bengal represents the start of a rich civilization marked in particular by the emergence of Sanskrit literature which already bore Bengali characteristics. Composed between 950 and 1100, the Charya Buddhist poetic texts, are the earliest works written directly in Bengali. Proverbs governing daily life have also come down to us from the same period. But one of the most important texts is the Gita Govinda composed in Sanskrit in the 12th century by the poet Jayadeva. An account of the love adventures of Krishna and Radha, three centuries later, the Gita Govinda was destined to become one of the founding articles of Vaishnavism from which, in part the Bhul tradition descends. In 1198, Bengal was conquered by Muiz ud-Din Maimamad, head of the Iranian Ghurides clan. On his death in 1206, his general Qurb ud-Din Aibak proclaimed himself sultan of Delhi and founded the first Turkish dynasty in India. Under Muhammad ben Tughlaq (1325-1351), the sultunate of Delhi embraced almost all India. But in 1341, Bengal seceded and became an independent sultanate. In 1526, Babur Shah, grandson of Tamerlane and ruler of Kabul, seized the throne of Delhi and founded the Moghul empire. His grandson, Akbar, acknowledged as one the greatest Moghul emperors, annexed Bengal in 1576.

In the early days of the Turkish occupation of Bengal cultural life was annihilated, priests were persecuted, monasteries destroyed, and Sanskrit became a dead language for ever. Three centuries and the political stability of the Moghul empire were required before a cultural renaissance in this region could come about.

ISLAM AND VAISHNAVISM
Turkish rule was accompanied by widespread conversion to Islam. Nowadays, Bangladesh historians are at pains to point out that it was traders, writers and men of religion, rather than soldiers who brought about these conversions. This Islam, suffused with the esoteric traditions of Sufism, was open to the undercurrents of Hindu thought and to Vaishnavism in particular. Vaishnavism arose in the 16th century around Chaitanya, a holy man and saint. Although he was a member of the Brahmin caste, guardians of Hindu orthodoxy, Chaitanya neither recognized this system nor the beliefs and rites attached to it. He advocated a religion of love, basing himself on the Gita Govinda written in the 12th century by the poet Jayadeva. This famous work describes the love of Krishna (Vishnu’s avatar) for Radha, “she who meditates”, a love symbolizing union between the human and the divine. This spiritual theme inspired the poets, a number of poems and songs composed in Bengali, as well as the works of Chandidas, one of Bengal’s greatest poets.

Vaishnavism and Sufism meet up through three essential tenets of their thought: equality of men before God or the divinity; the quest for ‘love-fusion’; music, dance and poetry considered as the privileged vehicle and the ideal means for attaining exstasy.

Muslim mystics of Bengal thus also began to compose pala in which one finds various symbolic

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(1) When India was partitioned in 1947, Bengal opted for union with Pakistan thus forming its eastern wing. However, Pakistan’s political hegemony over Bengal brought about a serious political crisis which, in 1971 resulted in a bloody war of secession. This conflict ended in 1972 with the proclamation of the sovereign and independent Republic of Bangladesh. The total land surface of Bangladesh is 55,600 sq. miles. Capital: Dhaka formerly (Birgu). Population is currently estimated at 122 million. 90 % of whom live in the country. This population is divided up as follows: 80 % Muslim, 12 % Hindu, 8 % Buddhist, Christian and Anect.

(2) The country’s main resources are jute and rice with a little tea being grown in the north. Abundant waters coming down from the Himalayas (Ganges and Brahmaputra) deltal results in the southern half of the country being regularly swamped by seasonal floods which occur in cycles of 1,10 and 100 years.
elements of Vaishnav thought. Krishna and Radha, Krishna's gopinis or shepherdesses, the Kadamba tree under which the two lovers indulged in amorous play, etc.

That certain theoreticians today argue over whether Bengali Islam was influenced by Vaishnavism or, on the contrary, the latter draws on Sufism, need hardly concern us here. What is important to know is that, as Vaishnavism was declining at the end of the 17th century, this syncretism led to the emergence of Bauls in both Muslim and Hindu communities.

Bauls

Baul is a Bengali term, derived from the Sanskrit word vatul, meaning « enlightened », « lashed by the wind to the point of losing one's sanity » and by extension « God's madcap », « detached from the world », « seeker of truth ». It describes mystics, originally Hindu or Muslim, who consecrate their life to meditation, music and song. As Vaishnavism declined towards the end of the 17th century through excessive literary conformity, Bauls took up the challenge of this all-embracing fervour in spite of their having less polish and a more rustic style.

The term « baul » is applied to mystics who are not fully accepted by any of the major religions (Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism) even though they remain attached to the religion of their ancestors. This attitude is most often translated by the search for a master (guru) for Hindus, murshid for Muslims who must initiate them and satisfy himself as to their vocation before recommending them as disciples. This master-disciple link suggests a relationship in which individuals participate freely in a brotherhood. According to an anonymous writer, a Baul describes himself as « wholly dedicated to his own nature. He laughs or cries, dances or begs as he wishes. He lives a strange life, almost insane, with values of his own but contrary to others. His home being under the tree, he moves from district to district, all the year round, as a dancing beggar who owns nothing in the world but a ragged patchwork quilt. »

Bauls usually come from lower caste or the socially deprived classes and live mostly in the countryside. They do not visit towns very much, preferring to go from village to village, thus remaining in a world in which they know well and whose language they speak, even if this is mixed with archaic expressions and poetic imagery sometimes incomprehensible to Bengali villagers.

In the 19th century, Bauls in western Bengal developed considerably. There were five main orders: Kartabhaj, Sibedhat, Khushi Bhashali, Balardal and Lalital Shal. Their songs ask questions about the divine nature, sing of the quest for union between the human soul and God and of the searching to attain the state of « man of the heart », they exalt detachment from the material goods of this world and the rejection of social barriers.

Lalit Shah

Little is known about the life of Lalit Shah except that he spent a number of years on pilgrimages before founding a religious centre (akhra). He settled in Suriya near Kushtia in the second half of the 18th century. Was he Hindu or Muslim? He himself seems to have attached little or no importance to this question, convinced that the quest for the divine should be carried beyond religious boundaries:

Each one asked : « To what religion does Lalit belong ? »
Lalit said : « How should I know ?

My eyes have never seen revelations. »
No one is prepared to take up the way of Truth. When you come into the world, what was your religion?
When you leave it, what will be your religion then? Why cry out in the name of a religion destined to disappear?

Having withdrawn into the akhra, Lalit Shah devoted himself to meditation and poetry. 600 metaphysical songs or bhajans attributed to him were collected by Rabinarnan Tagore and M. Manasuddin as well as various poets and researchers from the University of Calcutta and the Bangla Academy of Dacca. Popular tradition credits him with between 2,000 and 10,000 songs, an innumerable number arising no doubt from the universal gifts Lalit Shah was said to possess.

According to Bengali researchers, followers of the akhara appear indifferent to the use of the term Baul. And in villages where there are many disciples of Lalit Shah, these are commonly called nadi rakh fakir (fakir with shaved head) or beshara fakir (religious fakir). At present, the Lalit Shakti order has approximately 10,000 followers.

THE MUSIC

As far as the music is concerned, Bauls practise two different styles depending on whether they live in an akhara or are itinerant. In the first case, which applies to Shajahan Miah, musicians play seated, their melody is soft, calm, intimate. In the second, they play standing and dance in the open air, their voices are loud and their style rough and extrovert.

Each song begins with a few instrumental notes intended to « set » the musical mode, followed by a sung introduction in free time. Finally, the song properly speaking is intoned just as the percussion instruments make their entry. As is often the case in oriental traditions, the song reposes on a melodic

canvas which allows the performers a great amount of freedom.

These songs may thus be described as semi-improvisations subject to melodic and rhythmic imperatives:

– a melodic grammar set by the structure of each mode: hierarchy of notes, most important being the support and rest notes (illustrated in the transcriptions that follow by round notes), division of the modal scale into one, two or three tetrachords which constitute the same number of sound spaces the musician must explore before moving on to the next (these tetrachords are indicated by red notes).

As for the melodic plan Shajahan Miah uses three musical modes borrowed from the Indian tradition:

bhairavi mode based on the tonic e (band 2) which he also transposes on the F sharp (band 4)

bhatalav mode whose pentatonic anhemitonic structure emerges clearly throughout the song (this structure is illustrated here in round notes). This mode is based on a (band 3) or e (bands 6 and 7).

bhatalav on a

bhairavi on e

1. Instrumental piece.

2. Come, Oh Mohammed, Oh Saintly Man
   (poem by Ijaz)

   Come, Oh Mohammed, Oh Saintly Man. come to my heart. Your servant is calling you; give me peace of heart. Sun, moon, stars and planets, as well as the angels, sing day and night and place garlands of flowers around your neck. Fakirs and dervishes, queen bees, will gather these flowers and buds, they who live at the foot of trees, their beggar's pouch on their shoulder. The universe is intoxicated with the perfume of flowers picked in gladness. Poor Ijaz (1) weeps: "Where are the roots of these flowers to be found?"

3. Come drink the heady nectar of paradise
   (poem by Rajab).

   Come drink the heady nectar of paradise. See how the message of the Koran has come down to us. Its call rings out in this song. This nectar goes out to every man and his entire body draws benefit from it. Open wide doors and windows, unlock your spirit. The sun enlightens the heart of the believer. The garland is ready, bound with flowers whose nectar is eternal love. Fakirs and dervishes drink some drops of it. Allah, the friend of the poor, mediates, overcome by the extasy of this ambrosia. See how Rajab, he too intoxicated, speaks in an incoherent way, absorbing Knowledge like a Wise Man, he who the unknowing treat as a fool.

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The dotara is a four-stringed lute with a wooden body covered with skin. The neck is itself covered with a sheet of glass which makes it easier for the fingers to glide. This instrument is not specific to Bulus and may be found in all popular traditions in Bangladesh and West Bengal. Theektara, emblematic instrument of the Bulus, is a descendant of the goplyastra, the instrument of Krishna's shepherdeesses (gopis). Unique in its kind in the world, it consists of a small wooden cylinder covered with skin at its smallest end to which is attached one metal string. This string crosses the cylinder and is attached to the other side by a piece of bamboo split into two. The musician plucks the string while pressing on the piece of bamboo to vary the height of the sound. Jhuri is a pair of small metal hand bells tied to one another by a small piece of string. They are discreetly knocked together thus providing the basic rhythm of the tempo.

The mridangam, whose name is quoted in the Rig-Veda (2nd millennium B.C.) and an invention attributed to Brahma himself, is a large drum with two skins. The centre of one of the skins is coated with a paste of resin, oil and wax to give the instrument greater depth of sound. The tabli is a set of drums formed of a small one, the tabli properly speaking, and a small metallic kettle drum or ballyal. The tabli, played with the left hand produces a high, precise sound, while the ballyal, which is deeper in sound emits glissandi by means of subtle movements of the right wrist. Like the mridangam, the tabli skins are coated with a paste.

PERFORMERS
Muhammad Shihjahhn Miah lives in the village of Taota, on the river Padma, north west of Dacca. He has sung and played the lute dotara ever since he was a child. Stricken with blindness at the age of 14 following a typhoid outbreak, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to meditation and singing. His master, munsif Muhammad Danej Munshi, passed on to him the superb repertory of the sung poems of Lalain Shih. While nowadays these poems are regularly included in the programmes of classical concerts by professional Dacca singers, Shihjahhn Miah remains one of those who, because of his religious choice, restores full emotional fervour to these songs. Shihjahhn Miah is accompanied in song and on the small hand bells jhuri by Joinuddin Miruda, on theektara by Shahadat Hosain and on percussion instruments by Badal Chandra Sarkar.

INSTRUMENTS

Instruments used by the Shihjahhn ensemble are the lute dotara, the single stringedektara, clochettes or small hand bells jhuri and, depending on the pieces, mridangam or tabli drums.

[1] This way of "signing" is often found in all Indo-Persian poetry.
4. By dint of casting my line all day... (poem by Līlān Shāh).

By dint of casting my line all day. I have lost my vigour and I have caught no fish. Once, I placed a fly on the hook and, at the first jerk, I pulled on the line just in case. Some would say, the ocean of love wherein one fishes, it too has three currents. I have cast my line there but the fish did not bite on the hook. He who knows where fish dwell will succeed in reaching the end of his journey. Fakir Līlān says: «I wanted to fish but all I did was to redder my garment.»

5. Kālā has driven me insane... (anonymous).

Kālā(1) has driven me insane. how shall I be able to remain in my house? Oh companion. I repeat his name unceasingly. Kālā is the garland of flowers I wear around my neck. The name of Kālā is engraved in my heart. His name shines in the shadows: Kālā, black gold. I caught a glimpse of his beauty reflected in the water of the river. Do not bear off his image to your bed or you will become like me. I let my eyes rest on his solemn beauty; at once, I lost my dignity and the esteem of my near ones. They call me « the one who has lost her way » and no one respects me any more. What is to be done? Where can I go? I am lost. Oh my companion. As soon as my eyes had contemplated his beauty, I lost all sense of shame. Oh friend, what kind of love is this that denudes me off all modesty? The brightest jewel of my heart burns like straw, at times it crackles. I can no longer preserve my honour nor the prestige of my line. I have nothing more than this shame that rents my heart in two. Such is my fate. Oh companion: subject to the love of my beloved, I spend my life weeping. Who can understand my pain? A love such as mine is not of this world. Suffering like mine does not exist on this earth. Kālā has driven me insane by inflicting this suffering on me, how shall I be able to remain in my house?

6. Fallen into this terrible misfortune... (poem by Pāṇiṭa).

Fallen into this terrible misfortune, there is no one to come to my aid. I am held prisoner by the meshes of the web of illusion. Hoping to obtain his protection, I invoke the Lord. He created me from his substance, and I know not for what fault He has abandoned me into the hands of Time. Coming to this earth, He has revealed His merciful name to the land of misery. The wise man told me: «Invoke the name of the True of wishes and have no fear.» If He grants me His protection, He will merit His glorious name of the Compassionate. The Master has punished the ungodly and the sinful, then he granted them His forgiveness. Am I then such a great sinner, a being so vile, so wretched, that is should not be granted to me? The gosains and gurus weep, deprived of His protection. This is why Pāṇiṭa says: «Invoke his name.» if he does not protect me, this human life will fall to pieces in vain.

7. Day and night, I perform vile acts... (poem by Līlān Shāh)

Day and night, I perform vile acts. Oh guru, are you going to be keep me as your slave for ever? I failed to see what this guru was like. I have not served him nor followed his teachings. For the present, I must wander in hell. Have I forgotten then that I came on this earth one terrible day in the suffering of childbirth? Oh guru, he to whom you grant your protection obtains you at the end of his ascetic. Līlān says: «Oh my heart, you have made a sinner of me, will you keep me as your slave?»

8. Do not fall into love without knowledge. (poem by Līlān Shāh).

Do not fall into love without knowledge. Love is understanding: that is what is good in this world. If one wants to love, seek out holy men, like gold from the depths of a cave. The love of this world is like the hymns of spirits from another world: sometimes separation, sometimes meeting. In the end, death appears, and the head falls. There exists another love which leads some to paradise, others to hell. Before this sporting Līlān exclaims: «This universe is nothing but a game!»

9. The brilliance of the Formless One has made me insane (poem by Bashu).

The brilliance of the Formless one has made me insane. Come, Oh friend of my heart, and show yourself to me. Oh friend, what is this way of behoving? You give your heart here and there, and you create love. That love has been the ruin of my life. What beauty you have shown me! To whom can I speak of my pain? I travel the world and I do not see you. With what can I extinguish the burning fire of my heart? Bashu the fool replies: «May no one loves thus in this world. He loses life, that which the fire engulfs.»

10. The fire blazes and I am dying... (poem by Bashu).

The fire blazes and I am dying in its flames. Oh companion. In the society of men, I can not speak of the burning pain which consumes me. Oh friend, what kind of love is this that kills me with its tears, if I rent my breast you will see there the lovers of my friend. Oh companion. When I fall asleep, I see him in my dreams, he vanishes when I awake. What am I going to do? Bashu, the fool, weeps on seeing me.