

“Do-re-mi-fa-so-la, it’s not precise”: tracking the ‘demurral’ in the Bengali *Lebensmusik* of the 90s

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Abstract

This paper is on four song-texts from Kabir Suman, Nachiketa Chakraborty, Silajit Majumder and Anjan Dutt—the apostles of ‘Jibonmukhee’ Bengali songs in early 90s-- as a form of cultural negotiation with the changing political-social-economic milieu within the country. Set in the backdrop of economic liberalization, rise of right-wing Hindutva nationalism and a strong left regime in the state for more than a decade, Bengal in the 90s reacted to the vista of ‘change’ in myriad ways—‘Culture’ being one and ‘Jibonmukhee’ being instantaneously vocal within it, the four harbingers of the new language of ‘culture’—in four of their seminal texts arranged thematically and chronologically [1992-1995]-- show an ideological demurral of the urban, middle class Bengali intelligentsia in reacting to ‘change’—the ‘old’ is repudiated, the ‘new’ unacceptable. ‘Jibonmukhee’ posits a dilemma unique to Bengali literati: the journey from celebration→ trepidation→ rejection unhesitatingly culminates in escape: an escape from ‘what-could-have-been’ and not a refuge in ‘what-will-be’. This paper thus analyses the tortuous relationship between the 90s’ Bengali intelligentsia and its negotiation with the dwindling political vista it emanates from-- a journey from ‘left-liberal’ to ‘what-next?’

Keywords: Jibonmukhee, ‘Lebensmusik’, demurral, Kabir Suman, Nachiketa, Silajit, Anjan Dutt

1.0 Introduction: Lebensmusik and demurral-- ideology, lyrics, political axioms and the 90s

"...a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity... in which thinking originates"

John Dewey, in “How We Think”(1998), terms the state of hesitation as the likely sward for criticality. Philosophical determinism is effective, but staid; what grants reality its core progressive underpinning is not being able to take a stand. Hesitation can be translated into a multiple and virtual state of ideas. This paper takes ‘hesitation’ as the central motif of the 90s’ Bengali culturality, in the backdrop of an imminent shift in the otherwise passive political scenario of Bengal. We want to posit the emergence of ‘জীবনমুখী’ [Jibonmukhee]-- a genre of existential urban ballad that thrived specially through the first half of the decade-- as a cultural response to the dwindling left-liberal value system of Bengal’s urban populace. To achieve that, we have chronologically analysed song-texts from four major urban balladeers-- Kabir Suman, Nachiketa Chakraborty, Silajit and

Anjan Dutt: all at their creative peak from 1990-94.

‘Lebensmusik’ is what we call this trend of ‘musiculture’-- not merely to occidentalize a vernacular canon, but to touch upon the expanse ‘Jibonmukhee’ accessed in terms of aesthetics and politics. This word is a specialised German term only sporadically used in works on ethnomusicology by Elizabeth Grosz(2011) and Leo Dorner(1977) who used the term to anatomize popular music’s propensity to resort to an idealized past, before it goes through a revolutionary change. It is a last pandect before metamorphosis—a pastiche-drive that celebrates traditions past before it turns them upside-down, or completely subverts them. Grosz and Dorner, in other words, put ‘Lebensmusik’ as corollary to a transition that takes the listener through a rite of passage—

- 1. A nod to the extant tradition
2. A severance from the saturated present
3. An experiment with unique forms

. As might be obvious, ‘Lebensmusik’ cannot be imagined without understanding its temporal, and socio-political, reality. Hence, we imagine politics and ‘জীবনমুখী’ [Jibonmukhee] as fellows in this cultural creationism.

‘জীবনমুখী’ [Jibonmukhee] sounds trite if translated as ‘Music of Life’ or ‘Reality Oriented Music’-- as it is both and neither. Literally speaking, the Bengali term means ‘towards life’, which is inadequate because of the subliminal themes around ‘life’ it propounds-- as a lived experience, as a utopian fulfilment or as the life of the proverbial ‘other’. To touch upon such variant themes, we resort to ‘Lebensmusik’, which is the litany of a journey undertaken—social, political, aesthetic combined. Lebensmusik brings genre music to a Foucauldian discourse—it twists the performer/audience boundary, echoes Arnold Van Gennep by evoking ‘arungquiltha’ -- a deus ex machina endowed to an object to bid the latter to fulfil a certain task: hunting, transforming, melding. In this way, the history of the music can be read into its own body, especially if the genre is as lyrically significant as the ‘Jibonmukhee’. The verse of the latter transcends its aesthetic neutrality to reflect the changing nature of Bengali Lebensmusik in the backdrop of political mutation. A detailed analysis of such, ergo, is required.

To do that, we place our texts at the crossroads of variant political-cultural sentiments, and observe the myriad ways they react to the change imminent, and how the cultural demurral of Bengal is matched with the mutating political vista of Bengal in the 90s, as a new public language was emerging that “resonated with themes of collective empowerment, albeit in disquieting ways”, writes Arvind Rajagopal in “Politics after Television”(31-32). The early 90s’ rise of the right conservative (emblemized in cultural consciousness mostly through the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Dec 6,1992) plays a key role in the demurral, as the left liberal Bengali intelligentsia was costive to the tropes of Hindutva. The ‘Lebensmusik’ hesitated to take either side-- the Left was unliberal, the Right an elite pariah. A collective progress was more than welcome, but not along the Hindutva hardliners. Nachiketa Chakraborty, one of our key case studies in this essay, rather prefers the abortive Bengali modernity over the throes of religion that tries to find a surreptitious way into the collective consciousness: এদশেটা ফাঁকা আছে, বদিশেরে টাকা আছে./ ধর্ম না গ্রাস করে আমাদের পাছো। (“The Others have the dough, and we have miles to go/ What we don’t need are the bigots; Sir, No!”). The Jibonmukhee is heavily mnemonic

of this strain between extremes, and the paper looks at the ways it negotiated with it.

To better understand the validity of ‘Lebensmusik’ as concomitant to the 90s’ Bengali politics, we need to briefly look at the decade and the waning of the Left. Early 90s’ witnessed the liberalisation of Indian economy paving way for transnational capital and foreign investment. The subcontinental perspective-- economic, cultural and political faced censure by the Left which started organizing various pan-India movements and struggles to counter the economic policies (and the resultant cultural ramifications) of the union government (Das, 2013). However, internally, the Left was just as perplexed (Das, 2013): it was torn between its classical contra-centrism and accusations of inactivity and anti-developmentalism, summarized by Saifuddin Chowdhury (Central Committee Member, CPIM) as a “serious contradiction. They had to stick to the traditional slogan of capitalists being the class enemies, and yet find a justification for inviting them to the state”(Das, 2013). In effect, Bengali culturality, fostered by the Left, goes into the state of demurral. The core ideology of Bengali culturalism was consistently being failed by all the parameters-- by its own political metrics and humanist validation. The Left, politically and culturally, was at an aporia of exegesis-- it did not know which way would be the ‘right’ way.

Likewise, the Bengali culture came out to be sentient, impressionable and provocateur in response to the politics-- the texts we analyze here are all surreptitious and addled: they can feel the foundations slipping, they see the shape of an obfuscated posterity, but they struggle to express that sentiment. This moral dithering, stalling of a radical shift-- is what we call demurral; not as a charge but a gravid zone of ideas and ideologies. “It is the inbetween space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture”, and that is where “we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves”: however trite, lines from ‘Location of Culture’ (1994) still sound topical.

2.0 The first moment: caution and celebration

In the next section, we shall show how four primary lyrics from four ‘Lebensmusik’ figureheads describe the confusion entailing the first half of the decade. We shall see how the celebration of cultural aporia turns into lament over un-freedom, protest gives way to existentialism, cynicism turns into escapist hope. Briefly, this paper is a chronicle of a confusion-- we are simply trying to episodize the rapid shifts within five years to provide a commentary on ideology, rejection and creation within concurrent manifesto.

2.1 Kabir Suman: the celebration of a hybrid time

The ‘Jibonmukhee’-- the nebulous term popularized in the early 90s with the rise of Kabir Suman-- showed a striated attitude towards the ‘demure’ political reality of West Bengal. As the lyrics of the Big Four shall reveal, the urban Bengali culture, notwithstanding the tremendous gripe it had against the State power, always found it difficult to completely surpass the freckled shadow of left-liberalism-- hence, the demurral. Bourdieu forecalled

it somehow in ‘Theory of Practice’(2017), as “social actors” often start to renegotiate with social norms after they agree to play by the rules of the society, and thereby social change emerges, gradually. In other words, although owing their emanation to the dwindling effect of left-centrism, the music of the time was yet to speak in terms of realpolitik-- one may discern the traces of an alternate reality, but the refrain was of an overtly ideological ‘Not This’ (in favour of ‘what’, left undecided). They seem to be in a state of constant renegotiation, much like the life around them. The liberal core had to be retrofitted to a non-Left structure— যুগটাই দমকা হাওয়ার, হাওয়া দিয়ে হঠাত তড়ে/ বলা ক’ যায় হে কখন, থাক্কাবে ঝড় যুগরে (“Such is the time of storm, such is the time of change/You know it won’t hold on, You’re gonna feel estranged”).

Zygmunt Bauman in “Liquid Modernity” (2015) holds such culture-at-the-traverse-of-social-change at a hybrid aporia; it is ‘about change as much as about monotony of reproduction, about unexpected as much as about the predictable’. In other words, texts from a changing culture always have complex fealty: they are adamant not to fall back into the orthodox grind, but the convalescence is yet to take effect. Result-- the creative hybridism. Our argument shows a similar arc: a basic chronological study of some of the cross-album flagship singles of this genre might prove its harlequin connection to the governance, its ideology and demurral. The Left is untenable, but the Right is not an option. Where to, then? We will see the celebration of the chaos of renegotiation “আমাদের জন্ম” [amader jonyo] (1992), the favoring of the empire of rust over a radical shift “এই বশে ভাল আছি [Ei besh bhalo achhi] (1993), the loss of faith “ব্রিগিডে মটিং” [Brigade-e meeting] (1994), and an escape to Neverland from sterile modernity টিভি দেখে না” [TV dekho na] (1995).

To move chronologically shall help us understand how the theme of demurral matures in ‘Lebensmusik’. “আমাদের জন্ম” [Amader Jonyo] (“It’s All for Us”), composed and performed by Kabir Suman-- in his now-iconic 1992 album “তোমাকে চাই” [Tomake Chai] (“All I Want Is You”)-- discovers itself at the very crossroad of the Bengali cultural-cleaving, and it raises-- as if in a copybook gesture of celebratory hybridism-- a toast to the clash of Old/New, Glitz/Banal:

বদেম ট্র্যাফিক জ্যাম, ঠান্ডা স্যালামি হ্যাম,
চকলেটে, ক্যাডবরো, মাদার ডয়োরী,
আমাদেরই জন্ম। সব আমাদেরই জন্ম।
বাজারের দরাদরি, রুটিভাত তরকারি,
সা নধি পা মা গা রে সা মাদার টরোসো,
আমাদেরই জন্ম। সব আমাদেরই জন্ম।

The city square, the media bytes

The power shades in the endless nights

The traffic jam, the salami ham
 The foreign brands of Uncle Sam
 The bread and rice, the market-crise
 Do-re-mi-fa-so-la, it’s not precise

All for us. It’s all for us.

Suman is actively courting the speckled confusion of a hybrid time-- rather, a hybrid cityscape. The words are quirky, workaday, incongruous and aggressively rhyming, evoking the motifs of ‘Supersensible Writing’ by Eugene Thacker (2015) where disjointed words come together to impressinate a vaguely familiar reality-- in this case, the quotidian life in the city. Yet there is an ideological demurral in it. The binaries are pretty clear: traffic jam/ salami ham, media bytes/ endless nights, bread and rice/market crise. Suman is gloriously unsure about the reality to follow, as layers of modernity transform the 90s’ Calcutta into a Carnival. What is noteworthy is Suman’s thinly veiled cynicism towards the very carnival he so enthusiastically celebrates. It’s all for us-- undoubtedly; but Suman takes himself away from the barrage of axioms during the last stanza of the song. As evident in much of Suman’s other songs in his early-mid career, (Baisya, Ray, 2017) Suman prefers to move away from contentive realism in search of an evanescent ideology. His body is the field of the hybrid, his mind searches for unification:

আমার জীবন থেকে উঠে আসা সুর
 তোমাকে শুনিয়ে আমি যাব বহু দূর।
 ফরিঙে আসবো আমি তোমার সুবাসে,
 থাকবো তোমার বুকে আর আশে পাশে।
 আমাকে পড়লে মনে খুঁজো এইখানে,
 এখানে খুঁজছি আমি জীবনের মানো।

The lyric of life-- I’m leaving it in your palm
 A final song-- I fade-out into the calm
 Come back I shall in a whiff of earthlike scent
 Don’t look for me, and don’t you ever repent
 You may look to the sky, to the grasslands beneath the feet
 That’s where I rest, I search, I repeat, repeat

2.2 Nachiketa Chakraborty: Caution of the ‘Right’

A support-- albeit sardonic-- to this carnival is lent by Nachiketa Chakraborty in “এই বশে ভাল আছি” [Ei Besh Bhalo Achhi] (“It’s Really Not That Bad”), the single from Chakraborty’s eponymous breakout album in 1993. The lyrics are deeply burlesque, hinting of a sterility prevalent before Bengal would plunge for a tangible political change, but Chakraborty prefers it to the rise of the pan-Indian Saffronism. This life is not exactly ‘good’, but the muck of religiosity makes a strong counter-argument:

এই বশে ভাল আছি, ভাবার সময় আছে, তবুও ভাবনা নাই,
 পারকতে ঘোঁরা নাই, সনিমোয় যাওয়া নাই,
 উঠতি জুবকদরে যাতনার সীমা নাই,
 শহিরণ আনে প্রমে এমন বাতাস নাই
 যুবতীর কতাক্ষ, চরিয়ে দিয়ে এ বক্স হায়রে এমন দনি
 সেই অবকাশ নাই, চাল নাই, ডাল নাই, পয়সার দাম নাই,
 তবুও টিভিরি স্ক্রীনে খেলোর বরিাম নাই।
 নাই নাই কছু নাই, তবুও তো আছে কছু, বলতে যা বাধা নাই।
 দুয়নে ভয় আছে, মনে সংশয় আছে
 ঐ ধর্মেরে বাঘ হসে, আবার উঠোনে এসে,
 আশ্রয় চয়ে যায় মানুষেরেই কাছ।

This life is so fine, this life has no grot
 I don't have no worries, nor time of a thought
 No walk in the park, no free-time end-week
 The youth is a-wasting, the larders do reek
 The banks all default, the show must go on
 This life is so fine, it might be a con
 (BUT)

The Others have the dough, and we have miles to go
 What we don't need are the bigots; Sir, No!

Chakraborty reconstructs his sterile reality minutely-- his satire does not isolate any political element as the source of the mouldering, it is just the fatigue and emptiness of the quotidian life that makes him pensive. Nothingness is all around Chakraborty-- he does not have work, hence no free time; he misses the keen sting of love, because the city is frigid; there is no food in the market, and inflation is extreme; yet the television is not short of the weekly pettifogging. Yet this reality irrefusable to him, as to choose the other is to commit the unthinkable in the Bengali elite psyche. A look at other stanza of the song will elucidate the matter further.

এই বশে ভাল আছি, কর্ম কাজ নহে, গাড়িঘোড়া কছু নহে,
 অফিস কাছারি নহে, হাজিরা কামাই নহে,
 শব্দ বা পরিশে দুষণ বালাই নহে,
 সময় দহে না বলে তলে বগুনো জ্বলে গনিরি রাগ নহে,
 টেলিফোনে ডাক নহে, শহরতে কারফিউ, লোকজন কটে নহে

This life is so fine, this life has no stress
 No chore, no job, no calls, no mess
 No family, no fight, no friends, no light--
 In this city of curfew nobody repressed

Chakraborty is willfully misleading the audience. Much in the vein of Suman, he feels indebted to the chaos and the pulsating life of the city, but conceals his true feelings by imagining it as a zone of persistent non-availability. It is not that the things Chakraborty describes are not *really* there, yet they don’t coalesce into an epiphany. The theme of ‘It’s Really Not That Bad’ is the frigid loneliness one feels at the centre of more-of-the-same. Hiding this rather unbearable fact, the lyrics mean the exact opposite of what they say. Everything is there, but they are ephemeral—যুবতীর কটাক্ষ, চরি দেয়ে এ বক্স, হায়রে এমন দিনে/ সেই অবকাশ নহে. What Chakraborty is desperate to feel is some basic human contact-- love, lust, fight, conversation, even some abortive office hours. The curfew is not really in the city, but in the domain of creationism-- an accusation repeatedly levelled by ‘Lebensmusik’ against the general political reality of the 90s.

And yet, Chakraborty is definitively more politically pragmatic than Suman. The latter wants to fade while basking in the glory of hybridism, Chakraborty is clear about what he prefers in this waking life. The refrain of the song is দু’নয়নে ভয় আছে, মনে সংশয় আছে। The fear, as per Chakraborty, is never irrational-- ভঙে গলে জোড়া যায় মন্দির-মসজিদ, /ভাঙা কাঁচ, ভাঙা মন যায় না। Chakraborty would rather prefer sterility and despondency to the destruction of religious equipoise-- You could rebuild the mosque, or the temples of yore/ But the shards of the glass, they gore us within. ‘Lebensmusik’'s demurral becomes apparent at this juncture, as the Bengali literati clearly shows its tremendous reserve to align itself to the religious Right. At this point, even the Left-taboo-- liberal economy-- seems preferable to Chakraborty (The Others have the dough, and we have miles to go!). But “What we don’t need are the bigots; Sir, No!”

3.0 The second moment: rejection and flight

What we see so far is the first moment of the entire thesis of ‘Lebensmusik’ we aim to propound. The Jibonmukhee starts from a celebration of the demurral it originates from, yet swithers further when it comes to a ‘choice’. The intangibility of the political ‘choice’ in ‘Lebensmusik’ brings it closer to the second moment-- Rejection. Suman was the proponent of a synthetic political-economic climate, Chakraborty renders it inutile but

ultimately prefers it over radical religiosity. Irrespective of however change-incumbent the situation might seem to us, we will see in the next section that ‘Lebensmusik’ was yet to let go of the creative oscillation. This is the empire of rust which has to be left behind. ‘Lebensmusik’ is curiously silent about what comes next.

3.1 Preface of a Rejection: Silajit's critique of the Left

ভিআই পি রোড যত্নে মোড়া
আমার গলির রাস্তা খোঁড়া
জীবন নামক গোঁদরে ওপর
ধর্মঘাটের বসিফোঁড়া
ফ্যাশন রশেন কাঁকর চাল
রাজনীতিতে নোংরা চাল
ধুলো ধোঁয়া এ জঞ্জাল
তবুও হাল ছাড়ছি না
বতোল বচোল লেনিনিকাল

The causeway shines, the by-lanes stink
'We strike'-- they scream, it's just one blink
Before it dies. It's all one haze
They lie, they cheat, pollute, a maze
In this city of eternal Leninist craze

The days a-maze, Lenin-craze-- flagship single of Silajit Majumder's (better known by his stage name-- Silajit) “ভূমিকা” [Bhumika] (“The Preface”, 1994) is a song eschewing much of the poetic obfuscation of Suman-Chakraborty. Silajit is strongly dismissive of the ‘Lenin-craze’, and his anti-Left sensibilities emanate from each line. The lyrics are almost a waking reference to the lived experience in Kolkata during the first half of the decade-- the freshly paved thoroughfares glitter, while the by-lanes in Silajit's locality languish in disrepair; the urban life often comes to a standstill for the frequent union strikes; the *comida gratis* foodgrain is substandard; and the city suffers from pollution and chaos. These days amaze Silajit, who, unhesitatingly, rejects the contemporary political vogue:

জ্যান্ত ভূতের ক্লান্ত স্লোগান
মানছি না আর মানব না টান
জ্যান্ত ভূতের ক্লান্ত স্লোগান

মছিলা জনগণেরে যোগান
এই আঁধারে আলোর বান
সুমন নচরি টাটকা গান
তাইতো এ হাল ছাড়ছি না

The canon fodder (the zombies) say
'Down with the devil'-- they croak for a day.

Yet I hold on, I feel that pulse...
This Lebensmusik, my only avulse

Silajit sees the 90s' Calcutta as a city of zombies-- the mind of the mass is held captive by the rehashed Leftist agenda of non-cooperation. We may momentarily revert to the early 90s' incendiary political climate at the centre, when the Congress government's unprecedented economic reform drew the ire of the opposition. The paranoia of a late capitalist wasteland gripped Indian politics, and West Bengal witnessed its share of protests. Silajit, amongst other things, lambasts the bread-and-roses approach of the State towards every political impasse, as 'Lebensmusik' grows impatient of the perennial non-performance. Interestingly, the only thing that keeps hope afloat is the music from Suman-Nachi. Silajit pays a homage to his musical compradors while taking the thesis forward: celebration→ trepidation→ rejection. Escape is the inevitable conclusion of this path.

3.2 Escape to the unknown: A middle ground of not-belonging

Escape is a problematic notion. 'Lebensmusik', so far, has displayed all the copybook symptoms of a cultural demurral: it celebrates its own fragments, but cannot be quite 'happy' about it; it violently rejects the scenario it is originated from, but refrains from birthing a greener pasture. Our thesis conclusively rests on this point that rejection begets a flight into multiplicity. In "A Thousand Plateaus" (1987), Deleuze and Guattari speak of 'escape' not only as a spatial departure to a safer point, but also as a vanishing into the multitude. The *ligne de fuite*--the line of flight--is finally untraceable: it indeed has a map, but not a destination. In that sense, the last phase of 'Lebensmusik', as we see it, is in a state of constant departure-- from the 90s' reality, and from whatever that followed.

Anjan Dutt, in "টুভি দেখে না" [TV Dekho Na] (Switch Off the TV) from the album "শুনতে কি চাও" [Shunte Ki Chao] ("Still Feel the Song?") in 1994, has a curious way of achieving this escape for Jibonmukhee. From the gravelly path of realpolitik, we enter the mellow ambience of an upper class Calcutta household. Dutt critiques the very class Jibonmukhee aspires to represent, and he is armed with an orthodox anti-consumerist approach to achieve it. "Do Not Watch the TV"-- croons Dutt, to a supposedly pre-

pubescent child who is left alone at home by parents busy socialising in the city:

বাপি আর মা, গছে সনিমো
 তুমি একা
 ভয় যদি হয় আজ টিভি টাক খুলে
 ভুলে থাকা
 মা গছে বলে ওই টিভি টাক খুলে তুমি রেখে না
 আমি বলি কি একটা চানাকি করে দেখে না
 জানালা দিয়ে ওই আকাশটাকে দেখে
 টিভি দেখে না

Mum and Dad to the movies
 It's lonely-- you feel?
 The TV is on, it plays some spiel
 I say, switch off, come out, see now,
 The sky is a-callin'-- be lost, somehow

The parents are away, leaving an empty home to an agoraphobic child who resorts to his only ally-- the television. The economic liberalisation of early 90s-- as Suman described in “It’s All For Us”-- popularised a certain chic urban lifestyle amongst the upwardly mobile middle class of Calcutta. Leela Fernandes in “India’s Middle Classes and the Post-Liberalization State” speaks of the state-aided rise of an affluence-aspirant section nationwide, stating how in the post-liberalisation period “ideological practices construct the middle classes as a product of the privatised realm of the market” (88). Bengal was no exception, and fuelled by the sudden boom Indian television industry with its variety of kitsch-offering witnessed a cluster of outgoing, nuclear middle-income families thriving within the cities. In other words, the celebration of hybridity also attracted the direct opposition of an idealised spartan lifestyle the left liberal elites once admired.

Dutt’s song is posited at this very juncture. Suman was for the celebration, Chakraborty practised caution, Silajit administered rejection-- Dutt, however, prescribes escape. ‘Lebensmusik’ in the mid 90s clearly can not digest the Left regime, but the other end is either too conservative or too sybaritic for the literati’s taste. Hence, “Switch off the TV”, watch the sky outside instead. The child must grow in a world of frugality and simple joy. He misses his family, feels depressed of his inevitable home-cooked dinner, but the TV must never be the panacea of such anguish. Dutt advises what he feels to be a perfect nostrum-- the unpretentious joys of a child’s mind:

মঘে দেখলে ভাল্লুক মনে হয়,
 নাকি তুমি দেখনি
 তোমার হাতের ছায়া দিয়ে দেওয়ালে একটা হরিণ নিয়ে খেলে ন

খাটটাকো মাঠ ভবে একটু উপুড় হয়ে থাক না
দখে ডাকছে তোমায় আকাশটা
টভি দেখেনা

The shapes in the clouds, you see, they run
Play with the shadows on wall, it’s fun
The room is a world, the bed-- a field
I say, switch off, come out, be thrilled.

To repeat, the brand of ‘Escape’ Dutt represents here works on a multiple level, especially as a conclusion to the graduation from celebration to the more austere response to the political miscellany of the 90s. Fed up with both ends, ‘Lebensmusik’ seems to take refuge in fancy-- apolitical, inconsequential, steeped in pre-pubescent innocence. If the land of unicorns is indeed the final sanctum for this particular genre of Bengali lyrics, we should also remember there might be a Maurice Sendak-version of such a-reality. It is possible that Dutt’s escape is actually a clandestine rejection of not only the Left, but every possible political dimension that could and did follow in Bengal. It is also likely that lyrically the mid-90s is the final bastion of ideological orthodoxy of the urban bourgeoisie, which attempted to jettison applied politics from the value system the same politics once endowed. The appreciation of the success of such endeavour is certainly the topic of a larger essay, but the moment of the final stand from a phase of Bengali high culturality is worth analysing, even if ostensibly.

4.0 Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has traversed the tortuous relationship between the 90s’ Bengali politics and flagship lyrics from the Jibonmukhee genre. The confusion brought by the nationwide economic liberalisation created an ideological impasse in Bengal’s mass psyche, we have analysed the effect of this on a particular cultural section of the urban society. Music and performance have always been intricately related to Bengal’s liberal politics, and the ‘Lebensmusik’ is an apt medium to track the graduation from incertitude to indemnity against a lingering paranoia of political shift. ‘Lebensmusik’, at the end, might be unsure of a tangible political surrogate, but it knows that it wants to escape, and what it wants to escape. Add with it a tinge of melancholia for an idealised ‘could-have-been’, and we come back to Kabir Suman in “ব্রিগিডে মটিং” [Brigade e Meeting] (“The Meeting at the Brigade) in the album গানওলা [Gaanola] (The Song Seller, 1994)

ব্রিগিডে মটিং হবে রাস্তায় যানজট
ব্রিগিডে মটিং শেষে ফুরায় না সংকট
ব্রিগিডে মটিং হবে অনেকে উঁচুতে মাচা
ব্রিগিডে মটিং শেষে বড় নচিত্তে বাঁচা

ব্রগিডে মটিং হব মানুষ উত্তজ্জ্বলিত
কি করে বাঁচবে লোক
কউ যদি বল দেতি!
কউ যদি বল দেতি!
কউ যদি বল দেতি!

The brigade-meeting's due,
City on a road-block
The brigade-meeting's done
It ends on a big talk
The brigade-meeting's due
The hopes on a high-mast
The brigade-meeting's done
The reality contrasts
The brigade-meeting's due
The dreams all run high
The pain- suffering-alienation
End is but nigh
The end is but nigh
The end is but nigh.

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