

## LATIF SHAH'S AND MTV COKE STUDIO'S 'MILON HOBE KOTO DINE': A WORLDVIEW OF HIJACKING THE FOLK

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### Introduction

Even though folk songs sing of the simple rustics through vocalising their lives in various ways, such as, their dialect, language, style, etc., it is not so easily definable. Attempting to define this rustic phenomenon often takes several attempts.

'A reasonable statement that can be made of folk music is that it has no conscious grammar, even if it is a grammar which changes historically like classical music. It has no consciously guided history which controls its growth.' (B.C. Deva, 65)

He does not pause by pointing at this, he says-

'The most widely accepted definition of a folk song is that it has no known authorship.' (ibid.)

But one cannot take this as the yardstick to render it a complete definition, as this is followed after a few lines by-

'Yet sometimes the authorship of these does come to light; we could then not remove them from the class of folk music, for their music is still simple without intended and planned structure.' (B.C. Deva, 66)

The difficulty of attempting to define the characteristics of the simple lore itself makes one look at its simple-ness with a critical stance, to understand the importance of simplicity that underlies the seemingly simple lore. After several trials, B.C. Deva points us to folklores as- 'The greatest significant quality of folk music is its social relation... Ragas and talas, for example, have no connection with sowing, reaping, war, marriage, child-birth and so on. In contrast, folksongs have intimate associations with such group or individual activities. It is, therefore, easy to describe them in terms of functional categories.' (ibid.)

They are, thus, its 'social relations' and functionality that signifies folksongs, also while making it people oriented.

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Given this context of folksongs, this article will now attempt to analyze two different renditions of a Bengali folksong- '*Milon Hobe Koto Dine*' which was authored by the renowned *baul* of Bengal, Lalon Fakir- one that was sung by Latif Shah, with an accompaniment of chorus by Farida Parveen, Chandana Majumder and Rajiv Das. This song was sung for a movie - '*Moner Manush*', which was directed by Goutam Ghosh in 2010, that was based on the author's life.

The other rendition which is a presentation of the MTV Coke Studio (Season 4, 2015) was sung by Satyaki Banerjee, Anupam Roy. The mash-up with the Hindi translation was rendered by Anupam Roy and Babul Supriyo.

This article will focus on the reception and depiction of these two renditions; this focus also raises several concerns that impinge on the act of depiction. First, the conjunction of these two different performances of the same lyric provides an opportunity to explore the idea of cultural appropriation that result into the cashing of the minor's culture. Second, it would take into consideration the impact of the hijacking of the original and the ideas that relates it to the centre-margin status quo, the regional-global ideas and the impact due to a certain access of power in the 'culture industry'. Lastly, this article would bring into focus the variations in the musical sounds of the two renditions.

### **MTV Coke Studio**

In order to look through the MTV Coke Studio rendition of Folk Song, the onlooker must journey via three-dimensional realities to be able to grasp a bigger picture of the fractured and truncated realities that are at play. Speaking of the dimensions, our quest seeks for a look back at the initiation of MTV and its present contribution, followed by a ploy of 'The Coca-Cola Company' that sponsored the programme and, finally, at the nourishment and nurturing of folk songs that is taken up by the programme to render it in an altogether new form.

MTV which stands for Music Television is a cable-television network that began as a 24-hour platform for music videos, in the US back in the mid-90s, has been serving for a youth-oriented pop culture. This is the very platform that had brought videos of postmodernist popular music at the forefront through looping them continuously while giving birth to the stardoms of the day's new age super stars like Michael Jackson, Madonna or Duran Duran, through their sophisticated techniques to render as much importance to the visual elements of the video as the music.

"Pop music in recent years has demonstrated all the characteristics one might associate with postmodernism: a triumph of style over substance, a breakdown of the distinction between high and low culture, a series of eclectic mixings and ironic 'thefts' of past music, and an interrogation of the notions of authenticity and creativity." (Tim Woods, 202).

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But in the present-day context, the Coke Studio presentations calls to question its (MTV's) earlier creative genius.

Having had a glance at one of the multi-dimensional planes, it is time to look at the next, the sponsorship. It is "The Coca-Cola Company" that has sponsored the current MTV Coke Studio programmes that are under discussion. It is critically wonderful to think that it is the same company that earns capital by selling sugar-carbonated drinks that are targeted at the youth that has brought in the sponsorship for the MTV music-video programme. It, then, does not require much thought to claim that the targeted audience for this programme is the same as that of the beverage that advocates sportiveness and adventurous spirit that is, also, momentous, sensory, and a call for happiness in the modern context!

Now, bringing the third plane of the dimensional trio which is the modern rendition of folksongs by the MTV Coke Studio platform to the fore is to first reflect on what folksongs were meant for. This will help in foreseeing the dark curvature that lays between the two- original and the adaptation. Folksongs, contrary to other art music or classical music, has a significant social relation and is best described in terms of its functionality, as discussed earlier.

Since they take as inspiration the life events, it is evident that they change over periods of time to capture the changing circumstances. Put simply, it means, that, the folk songs at the time when agriculture was under landlords, for instance, would vary from the present-day context when they experience a privatisation of agriculture, along with a shift from selling them through individual accord to sales through supermarkets (like 'More', 'Big Basket', etc.) These changes in production-consumption relations are evident to be reflected in today's folksongs as a nature of its functionality.

But, our spectatorship of the CS rendition comes as a shock as it is not only far from reality, it does nothing more than sensorily appealing and appeasing its listeners/spectators, falsely engrossing their minds in easy dwindling all the while, rendering a simulation of the original.

### **Coke Studio- A Space of Cultural Appropriation**

Cultural appropriation which is not restricted to the discussions of issues, such as, colonialism is brought into the debates of disparaging relationships between majority and minority groups. A community faces cultural appropriation when 'a member of a majority group (is) profiting financially or socially from the culture of a minority group.' (Britannica) The Coke Studio rendition of the folk song corelates such nuances as it incorporates the rustics' dressing style, instruments, more importantly, the lyrics which hugely profited the MTV group while cashing out the minor culture.

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Not only this, 'a member of a majority group oversimplifying the culture of a minority group, or treating the culture of a minority group as a joke, is cultural appropriation' (Britannica). Focusing on the two renditions that are under discussion through this lens would allow us to see the MTV Coke Studio's adaptation of the folk lyric into an audio-visual treat that leads to an oversimplification of the original, in a way that is 'not a product of the original indigenous culture' (ibid.) Along with rendering a visual treat with the ornamentation of the closed space as stage, the auditory is not left bereft of artificiality with the incitement of varying musical instruments (like the guitar, drums, violin) with a bi-lingual mashup which the folk world does not have the access to. This process of taking the making and mutation of the original, all the while oversimplifying it, makes it a vivid instance of cultural appropriation.

### **A Power Relation**

The rustic folklore is seen to be at the centre in Shah's simplistic rendition that gave the lyrics its valuable presence. But, in case of the MTV Coke Studio performance, the lyrics and its rusticity which would otherwise have been expected to be at the centre, is vividly shoved to the margins by the Coke Studio composers by the arrangements of the other accompaniments, like- ear worming modern day music, popular artists, modern instruments, vibrant background, dim lighted and extravagantly decorated set, and the like. All of these come with a connotation of elitism and commerciality of artistry that is unknown in the 'other' world.

This capturing of the centre does not come alone, it comes with a largesse, one of transgression- from the regional to the global. The original which is now the marginal remains regional, while the Coke Studio composers get the access to capture the power centre- the fame and the capital.

### **Performance- the Recordings**

The song is about the speaker's yearning and awaiting the union with the one who resides in his heart. He defines his wait as that of a thirsty cuckoo who is thirst stricken every day and night just as the moon stares every time even when absent from plain sight, to surrender himself at the feet of the one who resides in his heart. But, this much awaited union is not so readily availed. The unison does not take place as much due to destiny's interventions, as much, perhaps, it stresses on the incapability of a mere favourable destiny to witness the great meeting. Then he goes on to say that he draws such picture of unison in his crystal mind as one who has lost sight of divine externally, as it would be when a thunder hidden in the clouds makes search impossible. Such is the union that he imagines and keeps on yearning for the same.

In Latif Shah's enactment of the lyrics, we find a tone of rusticity that underlies the performance. This is understood, more so, through his choice of dialect, his keeping

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away from unnecessary melodies. His heavy voice acts as a compliment in rendering the folklore, without the ploy of any excesses- tunes, instruments.

Coke Studio's version of the song (the Bengali part) that is sung by Satyaki Banerjee and Anupam Roy by turns, has an accompaniment of rhythm and melody that bounces over the lyrics, all through. Their pronunciation of the rustic lyrics varies greatly from the other (Latif Shah's).

Shah uses a coherence in pronouncing the sentences while beginning them with stressing the consonants, and ending them with an elongation of vowels. It is as if the power of union is rendered through the sound of the solidity and liquidity of the consonants and vowels; or a cycle of union and separation is brought into play through the softness and the toughness of the sounds. The Coke Studio rendition infiltrates an uneven distribution of vowel elongations, as noticed in the stresses of Os and A (in *hobo, chorono, dasi*) in the sentence '*Hobo bole choron dasi*' in which Shah has stressed the H and Bs at the beginning, followed by liquifying the vowel- A (in *dasi*) towards the end.

This again is clearly distinguishable in the songs through the line- '*Megher bidyut meghei jyamon*', as Shah (at 01:55 mins) following the pattern of stress, stresses the consonant 'gh' (in *meghei*) and elongates the vowel A (in *jyamon*) towards the end. Coke Studio's rendition, on the other hand, unlikely stresses more vowels- E and A (in *meghei* and *jyamon*, at 04:27 mins).

However, an equilibrium between the meaning and stress is found in Shah's rendition in the line '*Lukale na pai onneson*' (at 02:00 mins), as the inability in the quest of search that underlines the content of this line, is presented through the continence of pronouncing elongated vowel sound, unlike in the other lines. In Coke Studio's performance, the vowels in this line (at 04:34) are elongated as usual as in the other lines.

In Coke Studio's rendition of the line '*Milon Hobe Koto Dine*', (at 03:42) the pronunciation of the vowel- I in the last word is presented with a dramatic drop with accompanying instruments. This unusual drop, unlike in Shah's singing (at 02:32), does nothing other than making a sensory appeal which keeps the listeners drawn to its rhythmic earworming influence, all the while evading the depth of the line.

These differences in the renditions play a dramatic role in the ploy of inception of the two renditions, while the Coke Studio's soothing music attracts a very large group listener/spectators, the other is left with a handful in the comparison.

### **Concluding discussion**

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This article has examined two renditions of a Bengali folksong, 'Milon hobe koto dine': one which is rendered with the folkloric charm, and the other that is in vogue. They are by Latif Shah and Coke Studio (Satyaki Banerjee and Anupam Roy) respectively. Each rendition features its own unique qualities which follows its own distinctive impression. These distinctive qualities also influence the attitudes towards imprinting an impression on the listeners' minds. Shah's rendition which maintains the charm of folklores is not so much in vogue among the new-world listeners. On the other hand, the Coke Studio rendition that is a 'grilled' product of the original, by the way of mashing up other music, instruments, languages, popular artists, is vogueish among the youngsters.

In more than one way, the grilled Coke Studio composition becomes a product of cultural appropriation- by cashing the minor culture and also by oversimplifying the borrowed original- that does not in any way aid the indigenous but sucks it out of its identity. Other than this, the vogueish product also conjoins in a play of power, where it uses the regional/local (folklore) to reach the global and in the process, acquires the centre; thus, the original which is now the marginal remains regional/local. This shift of the original to the marginal not only makes us see only the tip of the glistening popular light of the grill but also shoves the original into the shadow under the lamp.

Even then, there are varying distinctions that distinguish the two renditions. They are distinct in the ways in which they are rendered- through different word stresses- on the consonants and the vowels. These contradistinctions that create varying impressions on the minds of the listeners, make them popular or not, or likable or not. While Shah's is rustic in tonality, the Coke Studio composition renders an earworm effect that makes the listeners cling on to the music shell. These come with effects that affect the qualities of listening, but it rests upon the listener whether- to hum it or to objectify!

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