
THE MYSTIC CONGREGATION OF THE
BAUL AND THE GRATEFUL DEAD IN
THE SUBLIME RENDERING OF MUSIC



TIBETIAN KALCHAKRA COSMOGONY MANDALA

THROUGH THE GREEN PASTURES OF
LIFE

Reach out your hand if your cup be empty

If your cup is full may it be again

Let it be known that there is a fountain

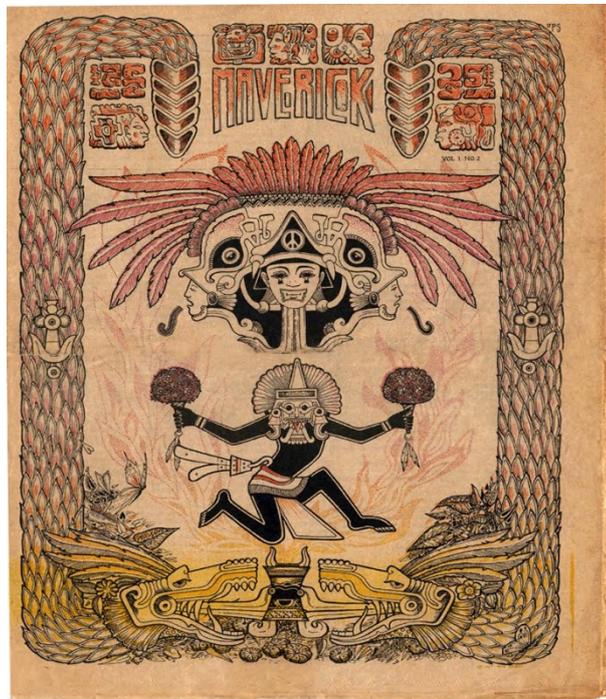
That was not made by the hands of men – Ripple, 1970, Grateful Dead



RED POPPIES AFTER RAIN

“BOX OF RAIN”/WORDS BY ROBERT HUNTER; MUSIC BY PHIL
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“Look out of any window
any morning, any evening, any day
Maybe the sun is shining
birds are winging or
no rain is falling from a heavy sky -
What do you want me to do,
to do for you to see you through?
this is all a dream we dreamed
one afternoon long ago”.



THE MAVERICK VOL 1 NO 2, 1967, SAN FRANCISCO &
HAIGHT-ASHBURY

'A box of rain' is a metaphor for life, for existence- the Grateful Dead in the US explored this through their own traditional sense of bluegrass, blues, folk, reggae, rock blending them into a musical pot that has infinite capacities to reinvigorate life into dead forms and deceased structures; on the other hand, the Bauls in Eastern India evoked a sense of the fluidity through the myriad contours of mystical tapestry in their songs that welled the real with the virtual, the obvious with the unknown into a melody of light diffraction as passed through nature's magnificent prisms. It's looking out of the soul's 'window' to see life as it is and observe the 'wave-particle' duality from an observer's point of view. This 'watching'/'observation' is actually the 'ripple' in the song, the musical form is the devotional finite-love that is offered in composing it, the emotions that are trapped in the process are the fruits that bear the freedom of this kind of music. These songs are snatches of both the finite and the infinite that makes our existence, more so they are variables that keep on changing as they seek the constants that keep changing as well. But the essential interweaving of the form with the substance- that process of mind-activity that attains enlightenment from the simple things in nature remains the same.

The devotional aspect, the infinite security of the senses in submission to the 'thing' or to that 'alter' which is the unknown-known, is one of the key elements in understanding these genre of music; another aspect is the spontaneous natural flow of rhythm that we have and the inner-stripping of the external man as a necessary subjective experience to enliven that rhythm is what makes this form of music so attractive and different. "What do you want me to do,/to do for you to see you through?" asks the singer, he knows that to see someone through he can sing and pray for his well-being through the song, it's the song that remains in the end, the melody can heal or empathize with the other as it is also the Other because it shares the same feelings of love and suffering, of longing and desire, of dreams and death. The only true gift that the music offers is that of love, the virtue here is packed in a 'Box of Rain' – which is this 'existence – consciousness-bliss' or 'Sat-Chit-Ananda'. That shared moment is 'beauty in truth' itself and blissful- the song offers that rare moment of transmutation, and through the interweaving of the words with the melody, the singer is harmonized with the recipient of the song and with other songs and other singers in a cyclical rondure of 'quantum rasa-Lila' where the kinetic movements are governed by purity of free-emotions that interact irrespective of any formal law or classical principle. In fact, in most cases, they are so much elevated in the degree of their conscious manifestations that they do question fundamental workings of a society that in-breed what Kierkegaard says 'Fear and Trembling' as a natural consequence and outgrowth behind seemingly artificial masks. The songs are not scathing commentary on life, they involve the essential paradoxes of the creation only to reject or renounce that such paradoxes do exist by unifying the real with the imaginary, the sacred with the mundane dread often juxtaposed as if suspended in an ether-cloud of madcap lyrics.

"The simple has thirty million strings

Whose mingled symphony ever sounds.

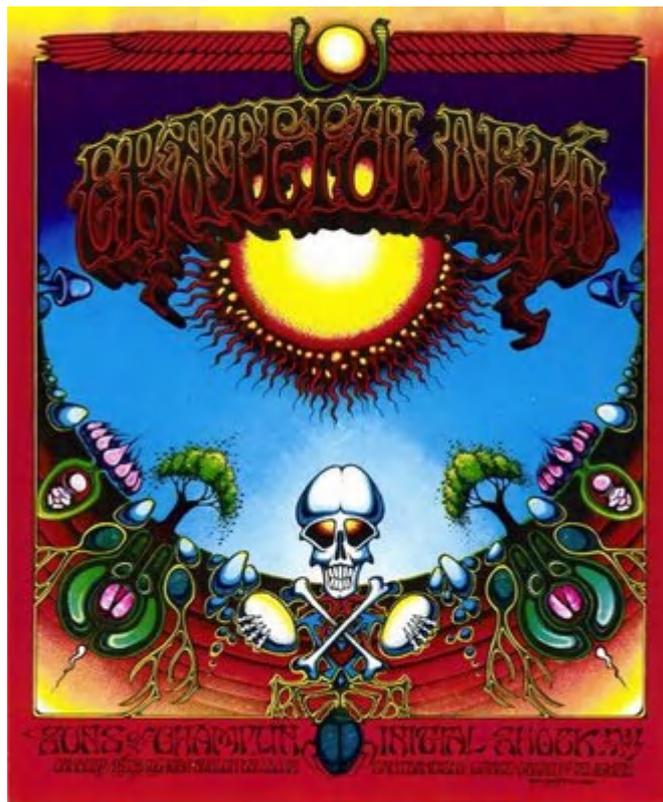
Take all the creatures of the World in to yourself.

Drown yourself in that eternal music". (A Baul song, The Baul Singers of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore)



BAUL MELA INDIA POSTAGE STAMP

“Walk out of any doorway
feel your way, feel your way
like the day before
Maybe you'll find direction
around some corner
where it's been waiting to meet
you “. (Box of Rain lyrics)



AXOMOXOA, GRATEFUL DEAD, 1969

The ‘direction around some corner’ is a bus of thought in the mystic purity of love, light and bliss. It binds us to the essential human spirit of emancipation at the heart of nature, a process of evolution of consciousness that we all undergo through the generative, sustainable and destructive phases of an infinite series of time-vectors that sum our existence in this creation.

Phil Lesh who conceived the idea of the song, was only trying to explore the emotions he shared at that time when he had to drive to see his own father at the hospital succumb to cancer. That poignant real feeling of watching death come and take your nearest one, can create a lasting moment of self-realisation on the essential paradox of life-death, and give inspiration to songs that share with other songs the infinite possibilities within the finite frame that man represents in his journey towards immortality.

The concept of the inner-man which predominate the Bengal Bauls in their musical tradition was actually the string that was knotted with Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534) who was the pure embodiment of love in its highest form with the union of Radha-Krishna. Historically the tradition of Bauls are linked to two epochal seminal texts, the 'Chaitnya Bhagavata' by Vrindavana Dasa Thakura and the 'Chaitanya Charitamrita' by Krishnadasa Kaviraja. Pure love or ecstasy is what is expressed through these songs as experienced by individuals as they 'see it, and, feel it' through the glass prisms of nature. And the 'Box of Rain' encapsulates innumerable droplets of water that are diffracted by sunlight to produce the seven colours of the rainbow. The rainbow is the halo of love that the Bhakti movement in India explored as it assimilated all the seven colours or faith into one belief in the existence of the 'in-dweller'/'maner manush' and all his relations within the finite frame of the infinite possibilities that do exist in this creation. The song is the 'universal teacher' or the 'murshid' or 'sai' who teaches when it's sung and therefore implores us to follow its home which is the infinite-body residing inside the physical that we try to recognize, understand and attain to. The Bauls or the 'wandering minstrels' as they are called, believed that this world-teacher or Sai is the Guru or Murshid as he pours down his blessings on the body which can be seen as the original tree (Shariyat) or da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man' that bears the fruit (Marfat). The tree is the song as well as the 'Song of Songs' (Canticle) that bears the fruit that encase the seed of another song.

"Look into any eyes

you find by you, you can see

clear through to another day

I know it's been seen before

through other eyes on other days

while going home –"

This essential subjective experience of "something seen before through other eyes on other days while going home" is something of an objective-correlative where one small event explains a string of other events well-connected despite the space-time gap between them and in a way they are quantum entangled with microcosmic leptons and quarks as well with bigger macrocosmic phenomena like the movement of the stars and constellations and the supernovas. Interestingly the Bauls/Fakirs were doing similar things talking about the liberation of matter/man in the form of a bird (Lalon's quintessential 'Ochin Pakhi')- the essential liberation of the inner-being too taking place over an 'event-horizon' and radically collapsing boundaries to effect a micro-gravity experience.

Lalon says the bird can find its way out of the bamboo-cage one day and fly elsewhere, so, the mind may experience a similar event in its journey through life.

“Walk into splintered sunlight

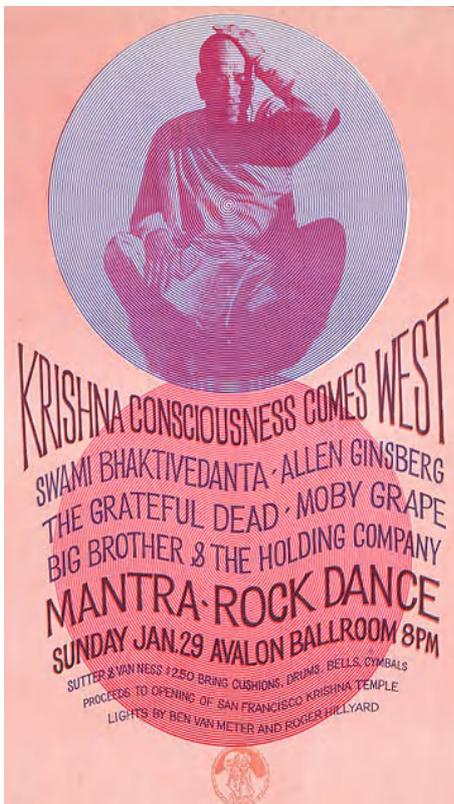
Inch your way through dead dreams

to another land...

A box of rain will ease the pain

and love will see you through”.

The essential unity of the song lies in the phrase ‘love will see you through’ and we traverse back in history to the early the 15th century to meet ‘Gaura’ the golden one, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who is the symbolic trinity of love in the super-plane of the soul. But this love intoxication is a physical thing as well, to be experienced through the virtue-gates of nature via the sense organs. But the ecstasy is such that senses don’t limit themselves to perceptible reality that is palpable but beyond that into a higher existence where one can feel the Sat-Chit-Ananda by consciously eliminating temporal desire-attachments thereby moving into a free-energy state of timeless existence. The symbolical song-tree is the murshid/the sai who helps in attainment of enlightenment, the music is the ‘body-vehicle’ that consents to that feeling of love and oneness and sees one through. The great Sufi mystics talked about this science of leaving the body (the transitory physical/vital state) for the One Living Divine body that has manifold



AVALON POSTER, 1967

manifestations and each of these are vehicles that enact the ‘ratha-yatra’ or the festival of the spirit where music is the car that takes us back to the bliss/’ananda’ of life-processes. Al-Biruni has said that the root of the word Sufi comes from the Greek word called ‘Sophia’ meaning ‘wisdom’.

The songs by the Bauls /Fakirs are experiential wisdom, they don’t try to teach anything like a doctrine but present the infinite possibilities of looking at an event in reality and how like beads in a string they are connected too other events in a hyperspace. So, the Box of Rain says “Believe it if you need it,/if you don't just pass it on” – a kind of open hyphen that connects matter with spirit, the temporal with the timeless. It ends with the lines “it’s just a box of rain/or a ribbon for your hair/such a long long time to be gone/and a short time to be here” – they embody the paradox of human immortality, the words foretell that truth is to be realized in the final consummation of love when the song is both the beloved and the lover in the kriya-karma of the yoga which is this union with the consciousness that permeates every

objective color of the rainbow.

In 21st century when the environmental problems baffle every community that wants to thrive and exist, the Box of Rain is an iconic image for energy conservation, channeling of green energy to sustain natural resources and most importantly the rain water harvesting to protect our natural surroundings. This being fundamental to our existence- the consciousness is the life-line to our generative and regenerative creative impulses to sustain what we already have, and, to create new systems that can advance our growth and further development. It's very unusual the way Phil Lesh composed the song and how it actually happened, the unknown things are present before us every second of our life and time only teaches us to unlock the secret by gazing at the rainbow quilt hanging in the sky through the words that make a 'Box of Rain'. Solutions to problems are best understood and solved if we try to take reveal the 'nature' in us in conjunction with the great creating nature that gave us this very important life.

-Joy Roy Choudhury