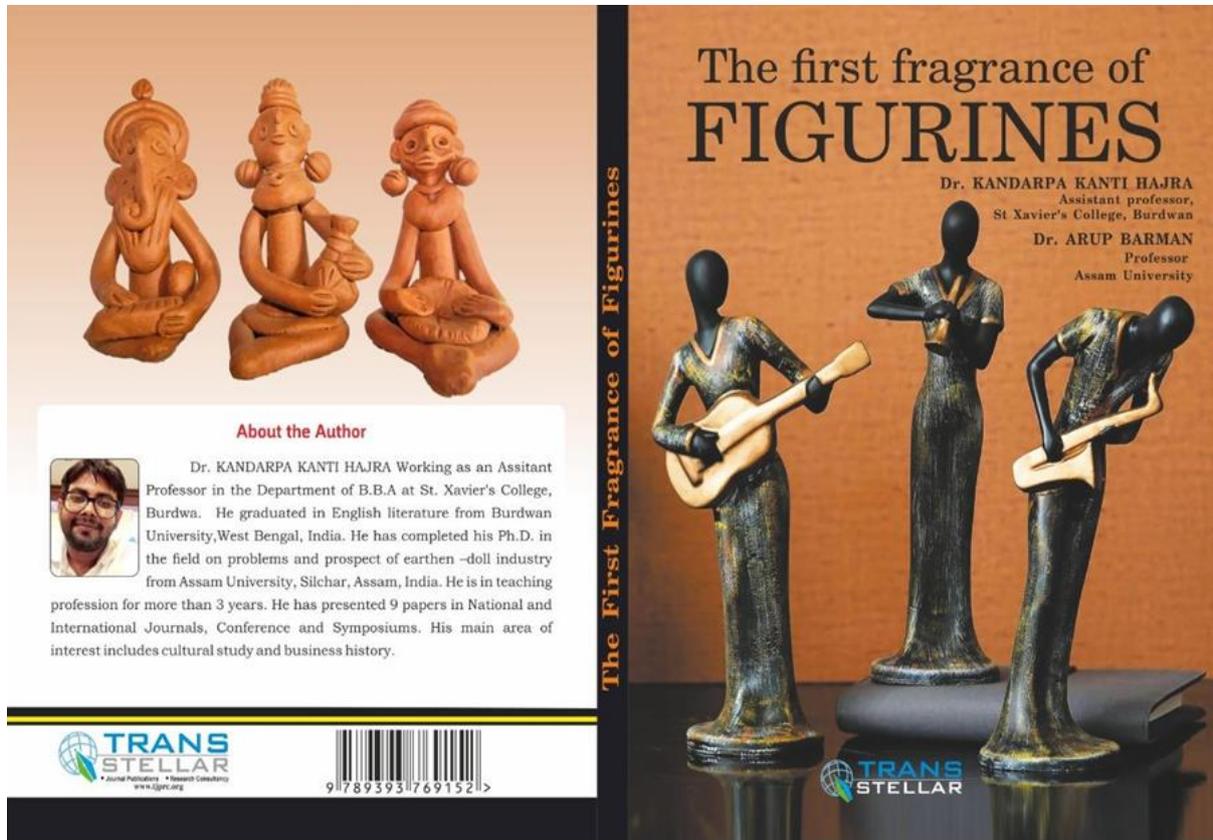


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Unveiling the Music in the Margins: Sociological Study of the Women within the Baul-fold in Birbhum

ARATRIKA BHATTACHARYA

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the existing scholarship on Baul studies, the term ‘Baul’ has been used by various scholars to denote a sect, a tradition, a community, a cult, an order of singers, a spirit, a class of mystic, a religion, so on and so forth.¹ While I am aware of the existing inherent pluralism and fluidity in the term, the paper accommodates all or most of the above denotations. Furthermore, although I am fully aware of the subtle internal and external heterogeneities between the various iconoclastic esoteric traditions such as the Shahebdhoni, Kortabhoja, etc. it is undeniable that the vast majority of members of these sects do occupy a very similar social position in rural society. It is worth clarifying that I do not use the term social location, here, as being synonymous with class. While the vast majority of Bauls were recruited from the rural peasantry, there are examples of a handful of non-peasant Bauls as well. From my perspective, however, by becoming ‘Bauls’ these latter