PILOT SURVEY REPORT

EAP1247

SONGS OF THE OLD MADMEN

Time		
Period	Survey Trips	Survey Phone Calls
October 2019 to February 2020	November 2019 Kalna, Bardhaman Meetings with Bhaba Pagla Trust, Ambika Kalna Tempe Committee, family descendants and manuscript holders November 2019 Siuri, Birbhum district Meetings with lineage descendants of Nabani Khyepa Baul December 2019 Kolkata, Meeting with musician, lineage descendant, collection owner Choton Das Baul Siur Gram, Birbhum Meeting with gurus and musicians at Nityananda Ashram	Contacted Kanu Choudhury (Mej-da) and Soma Chaudhury to access the collection of songs manuscripts in Kalna Contacted late Sukumar Mistry to access the collection of Manuscripts in Kalna. Contacted Purna Das and Choton Das Baul to assess and discuss digitization of their family collection in Kolkata. Contacted Acharya Gopal Khetry and Sanjay Choudhury to access their collection and inquire about other endangered collections of songs lyrics.
February 2020 to December 2020	Kolkata Meeting with scholar and Baul Organization leader Dr. Shakti Nath Jha 17 th to 19 th November, 2020 Suripada, Bolpur and Ahmadpur Meetings with musicians and collection holders Debdas Baul, Uttam, Gautam, Rina Das Baul, Nityu Das Baul, Lakshman Das Baul, Nakshatra Das Baul, Sannyasi Das Baul, Shashti Dom, to discuss the EAP project and locate endangered collections. 25 th to 27 th December, 2020 Suripada, Bolpur and Ahmadpur Meetings with musicians and collection holders Debdas Baul, Uttam, Gautam, Rina Das Baul, Nityu Das Baul, Lakshman Das Baul, Nakshatra Das Baul, Sannyasi Das Baul, Shashti Dom, to discuss the EAP project and locate endangered collections.	Maintained contact with gurus and musicians in Kolkata and Birbhum, with regular phone calls to Khyepa Baba, Sanjay Chaudhury, Gopal Khetry, Choton Das Baul, Kanu Chaudhury. Maintained regular contact over phone with Debdas Baul, Dinobondhu Das Bairagya, Lakshman Das Baul, and Nakshatra Das Baul. Contacted Ananda Gopal Das and Chhoton Das Baul, trying to get access to their collections.
January 2021 to April 2021	February 10 – 15 Bolpur, Ahmandpur, Birbhum district	Regular telephonic conversations with Debdas Baul, Nakshatra Das Baul, and Dinobondhu Das Bairagya (the manuscript holders) Was also in touch with Ananda Gopal Das and Chhhoton Das Baul, whose collections we could not however access.
1 st – 2 nd March 2021	Utsab for the late Bishwanath Das Baul Ajodhya village, 11 miles, Bardhhaman dist.	Met many Baul masters and performers from several districts in West Bengal, who came to pay tribute through songs to this legend. Some of their collections can be traced and digitized in the near future. This event put us in touch with scattered family members who are taking care of the personal notebooks of late Biswanath Baba.

TIME PERIOD:

As part of the project EAP1247 the team has inquired about other collections of Baul songs manuscripts that could be endangered and might be the focus of future preservation projects. Throughout the course of EAP1247 (Oct 2019 – Apr 2021) team members have talked about the preservation project with Baul musicians, Baul scholars, singers, and gurus of the tradition. The in-person survey has been severely limited because of the Covid-19 pandemic. India had one of the strictest and longest lockdown periods of the planet. When transportation and travelling across districts of West Bengal had started to reopen, team members resumed their field visits. During the lockdown, team members have continued their investigation through remote ethnography and phone calls.

LOCATIONS VISITED:

The team members have tried to locate endangered collections by discussing the project with musicians, scholars and gurus in the region of Kolkata, in the district of Bardhhaman, and in the district of Birbhum. Because of the limitations imposed by Covid it was not possible to extend the inquiry to other promising regions - North Bengal, Nadia and Murshidabad.

NUMBER OF INVOLVED PARTICIPANTS:

Team members have engaged 20 singers / gurus / spokespersons of the Baul tradition to discuss the future of the EAP1247 project and assess the possibility to locate and digitize other endangered collections in the future.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS:

Participants have been involved through informed consent and their contacts have been provided by previous connections due to previous research or work experience, mainly through the EAP1247 Principal Investigator Carola Lorea, Main Collaborator Siddharth Gomez, and Team member Pronoy Chakraborty. Participants have provided new contacts and new connections (snowball method). Dr Lorea has involved numerous Baul practitioners in her doctoral and postdoctoral research from 2009 until present. Mr Gomez has interacted with numerous Baul musicians while working for the ethnomusicological collection of the Baul Archive. Mr Chakraborty has worked with numerous Baul practitioners during his research on the Sahajiya tradition and his charitable activities of relief and events organization for Baul musicians during the Covid pandemic.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS:

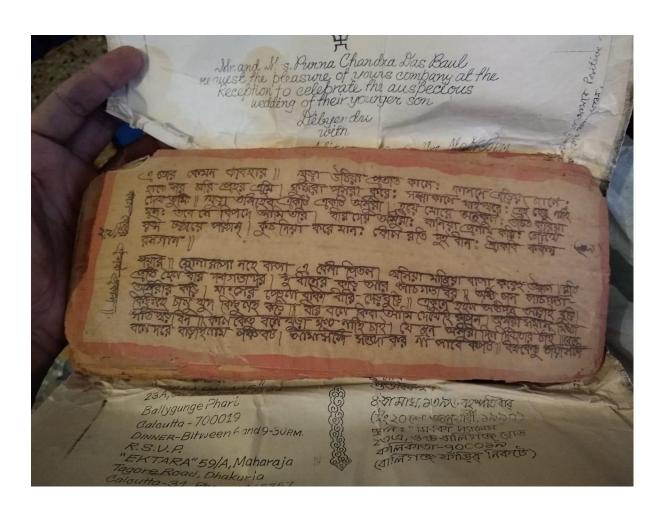
Through the pilot survey in Birbhum, we were able to locate and digitize three collections of Baul songs notebooks. These collections reveal that even very recent materials (dating 1980s, 1990s and even 2010s) are endangered and need preservation. This is due to the climate, the merciless effect of monsoons, humidity and termites in the Bengal plains, but also the negligence of the collection keepers, or lack of preservation awareness and skills among lineage descendants. Furthermore, because of pressure from the mainstream society and interruption in the transmission to the new generations, even recent collections might be considered endangered.

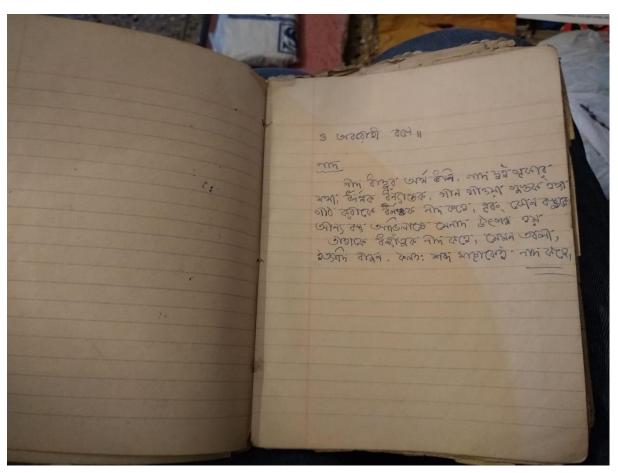
Through the pilot survey in Kalna and in Kolkata we were able to locate and digitize new materials (AGK and SC collections). Together with the collections located in Birbhum (DDB, DNB, NDB) these collections collectively reveal that Baul songbooks are often family rather than personal collections, compiled by several members of the same family, and collectively compiled through oral transmission from composite sources (e.g. from gurus and from various fellow performers met

during itinerant performances). Also, these collections reveal that Baul manuscripts are seldom mere notebooks. These collections are mixed and multi-layered, comprising notebooks that are also used as personal diary, journals of performers' lives and ritual events, containing numerous items, like photos, contacts, documents, newspaper articles, and personal correspondence, within their pages.

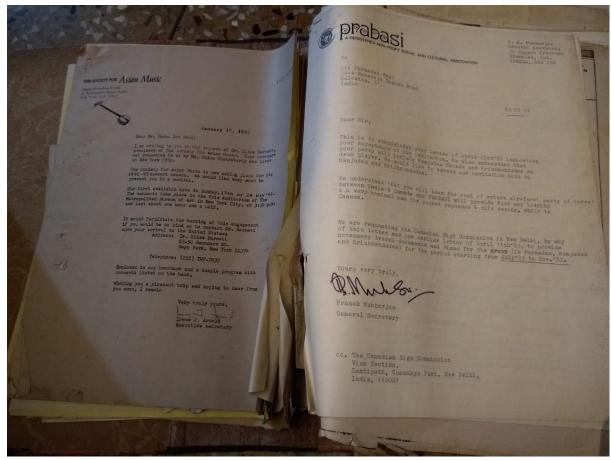
Through our field trips and phone calls we have gathered information about the collection of manuscripts composed by Bhaba Pagla. Whereas previous ownership was attributed to the eldest grandson Sanjay Chaudhury, because of a family quarrel that has fragmented the descendants, the collection is now scattered among several owners. We have secured access to digitization of one of the notebooks from Sanjoy Chaudhury and one of the notebooks from Acharya Gopal Khetry. Some of the notebooks might be located with the Swamiji of Sukhchar temple – founded by Bhaba Pagla – according to these collection owners. The rest of the notebooks (11 items) is located in the Kalna temple, Bardhaman district. Because of animosity and ongoing legal cases between the descendants who are in charge of the temple and the research collaborators who have granted us access, it was not possible for the team to gain access to the collection in Kalna, despite numerous attempts and numerous meetings (which took much time and energy between November 2019 and February 2020).

With our field visits and remote capture in Siuri (MDB collection) we were able to locate the family collection of the descendants of Nabani Khyepa Baul. Besides the items digitized in Siuri, part of the collection was allegedly taken by music producer Sally Grossman, in the USA. A large collection of manuscripts from the family descendants of Nabani Khyepa Baul is located with Nabani Khyepa's son Purna Das Baul in Kolkata, Dakuria. The collection comprises ancient Vaishnava manuscripts and philosophical texts as well as notebooks of songs and a suitcase full of photographs. The manuscripts are kept in a metal trunk without any particular order or arrangement. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic we had to stop in-person visits to see Purna Das Baul and his son. The collection is yet to be digitized and is severely endangered.









IMAGES 1, 2, 3, 4, 5: Snapshots of the family collection of Nabani Khyepa's son Purna Das Baul, 87 years old, located in Kolkata, Dhakuria. The images were taken during a visit on 4 March 2020 by EAP1247 collaborator Siddharth Gomez.

During the last phase of our research project, Professor Sudhir Chakravarty passed away. Our team has been trying to locate Prof. Chakravarty's collection for several months. Prof. Sudhir Chakravarty has conducted extensive research among Bauls, Sahebdhanis, Balaharis and affiliated lineages. In his books (in Bengali) he reveals that he has been paying research participants in exchange for their lineage collections of manuscripts, which he has analysed in his academic publications. It is likely that Prof. Sudhir Chakravarty's family members are interested in preserving his collection of songs manuscripts. The EAP1247 team intends to continue the search for Sudhir Chakravarty's relatives to inquire about access and open up future possibilities for a digitization project.

During pilot survey in Birbhum district our team was alerted to the fact that musicians in North Bengal preserve a wealth of songs manuscripts. Musician Nakshatra Das Baul has proposed that he can accompany us for a field trip to North Bengal to explore the possibility of preserving endangered archives from his contacts in Uttar Dinajpur. The EAP1247 team suggests to integrate this field trip for in-person survey after the restrictions due to the Covid pandemic are uplifted.

Towards the end of our research project, during our pilot survey in Birbhum, famous singer and respected practitioner Biswanath Das Baul passed away. The family of Biswanath Das Baul was already aware of our project and engaged in discussion with our team members when Biswanath Baul passed away. Being busy with last rites, ritual mourning and burial activities, the family was unable to maintain contact with EAP team members. However, relatives and family members have

ensured their collaboration and their interest for the preservation of Bishwanath Das Baul's collection of songs texts. This is a possibility that needs to be further explored for a future project.

Well-known Tantric guru and Baul songs composer Khyepa Baba has given consent to access his personal collection of notebooks in December 2019. Because of the Covid pandemic the team was unable to visit in person and assess the conditions and the volume of the materials. The collection is located in Kalimpong, Darjeeling, West Bengal.

LIMITATIONS DUE TO COVID-19

The pilot survey has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. After the first phase of the EAP1247 project (training workshop and 2 digitization sessions of remote capture – Nov 2019 to Feb 2020), PI Carola Lorea has been stuck in Singapore (where she is still currently stuck) without the possibility to travel to India and conduct pilot survey in person. With the help and collaboration of other team members, we could nonetheless locate new collections and indicate further avenues for promising preservation projects. Due to social distancing and health protocols we also had to shift much of the pilot survey activities to the medium of phone calls. While this has been productive in some cases, some regions are not well connected by phone network, thus limiting our range of action. Many among our Baul interlocutors are elderly men and women over 60s and 70s, they are not familiar with mobile phones, or do not own one, and they are not comfortable with engaging in long conversations over the phone.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic we have been unable to access the collection of Purna Das Baul in Kolkata. Purna Das Baul is 87 years old and he is yet to receive his first dose of the Covid vaccine. Due to the (justified) fears of his family members we were not able to digitise through remote capture the collection at his place of residence. We hope to be able to do this in the future.

Limited travelling, suspension of public transportation, and cancellation of major Baul fairs and festivals throughout the state of West Bengal in 2020 have severely impacted the results of our pilot survey. Participation in-person at Baul gatherings and festivals would have been the easiest way to discuss the aim of our preservation project and inquire about endangered collections whose holders might be interested in digitize through an EAP grant. Unfortunately, we had to rely upon pre-existing contacts and snowball contacts, sporadic visits (in the utmost respect of safety protocols) and phone calls.

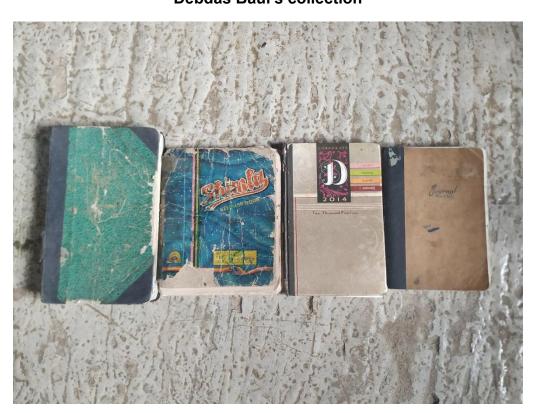
FUTURE AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND PRESERVATION

In view of the limited yet meaningful results of our pilot survey, the EAP1247 team can suggest some promising avenues for future preservation projects.

- 1) Future projects could include not only notebooks of songs but also mixed items that are inseparable part of Baul family collections photos, drawings, paintings, correspondence, etc. Songs texts could extent to incorporate also philosophical and ritual texts in verses (*karca*, *padavali*, *punthi*) which are often part and parcel of Baul collections for those musicians who are initiated in a spiritual tradition.
- 2) Future preservation projects could complete the digitization of the family collection of Nabani Khyepa Bauls' descendants. We have obtained oral consent from Purna das Baul's son Choton Das Baul to access the collection and preserve through remote capture in the future. The collection is located in Kolkata, Dakuria.

- 3) Future projects could attempt to complete the digitization of the endangered corpus of Bhaba Pagla's compositions located in Kalna temple, Bardhaman district.
- 4) Future projects could assess and preserve the personal collections of Professor Sudhir Chakravarty, the notebooks of late Biswanath Das Baul, and the manuscripts of question-response songs (*proshnottor gaan, palla gaan*) Baul songs in North Bengal with the collaboration of collection holder and Baul practitioner Nakshatra Das Baul.
- 5) Future projects could address the collection of well-known Tantric guru and songs composer Khyepa Baba, whose collection is located in Kalimpong, West Bengal. We have obtained informed consent to access the materials and digitise them as open access content.

At the end of this survey report, we attach some field trip pictures of the material that we have found and ultimately preserved through remote capture under the EAP1247.

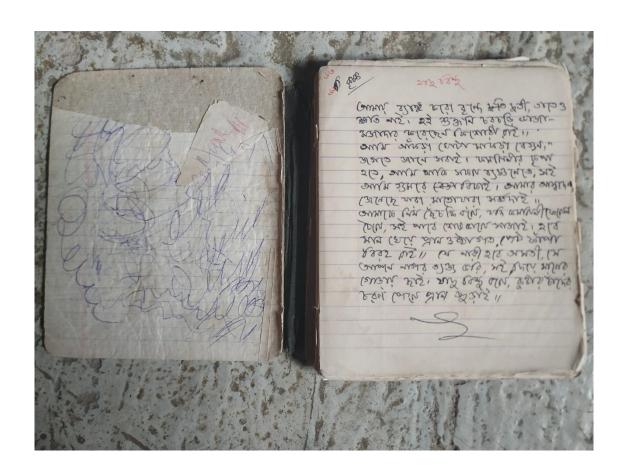


Debdas Baul's collection

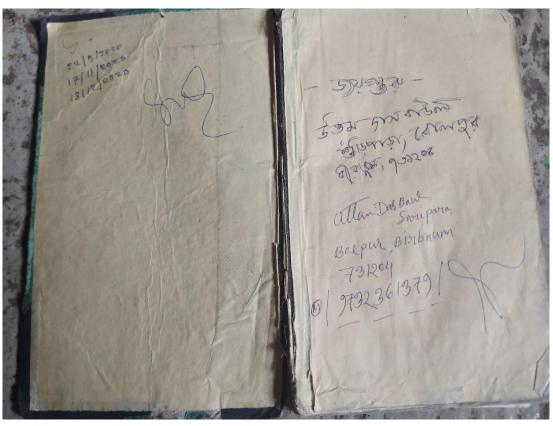


Debdas Baul's old notebook: 6 inches x 7 inches, old tattered (has around 50 Mahajani songs, archival notes, drawing by Paban Das, some loose photographs and drawings etc.)

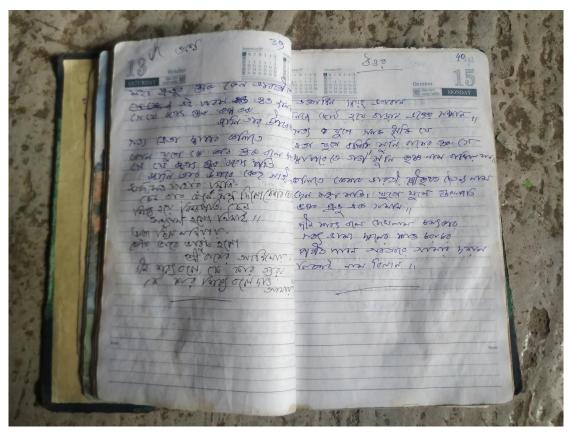


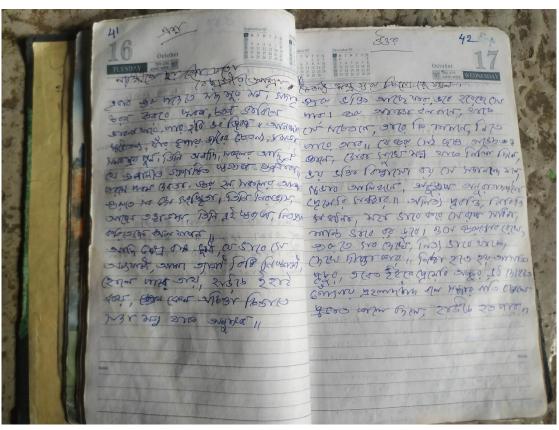






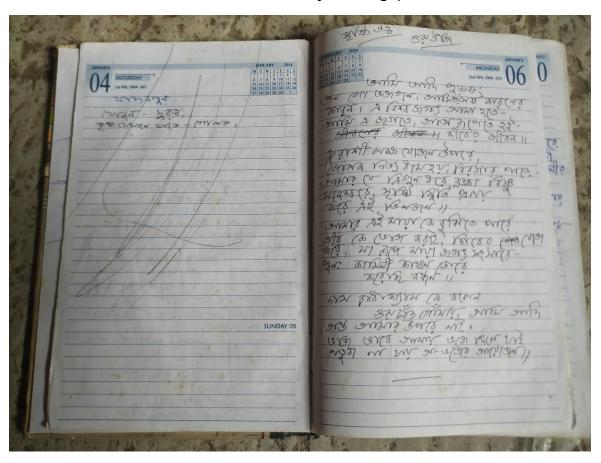
Uttam Das Baul's old notebook: 6.1 inches x 9 inches (has around 20 Mahajani songs)

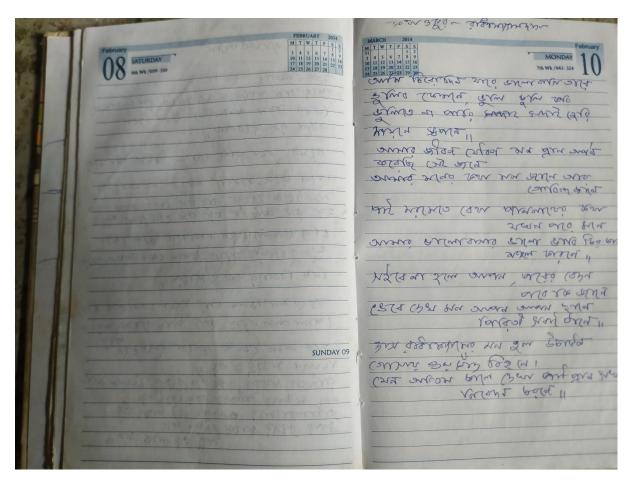






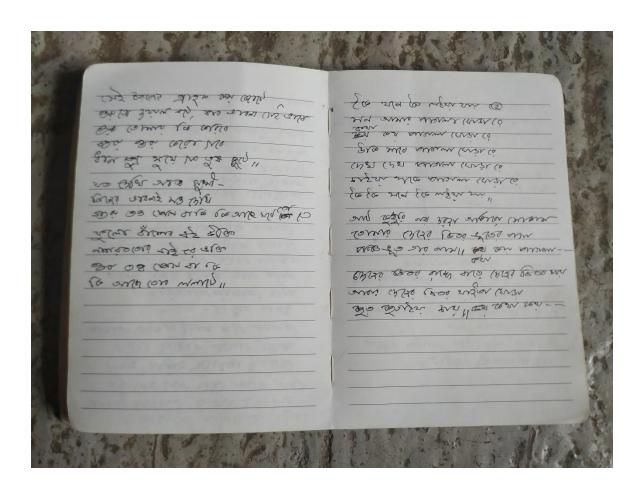
Uttam Das Baul's newer notebook: (1/4th complete) 5 inches x 7.6 inches (has around 15 Mahajani songs)







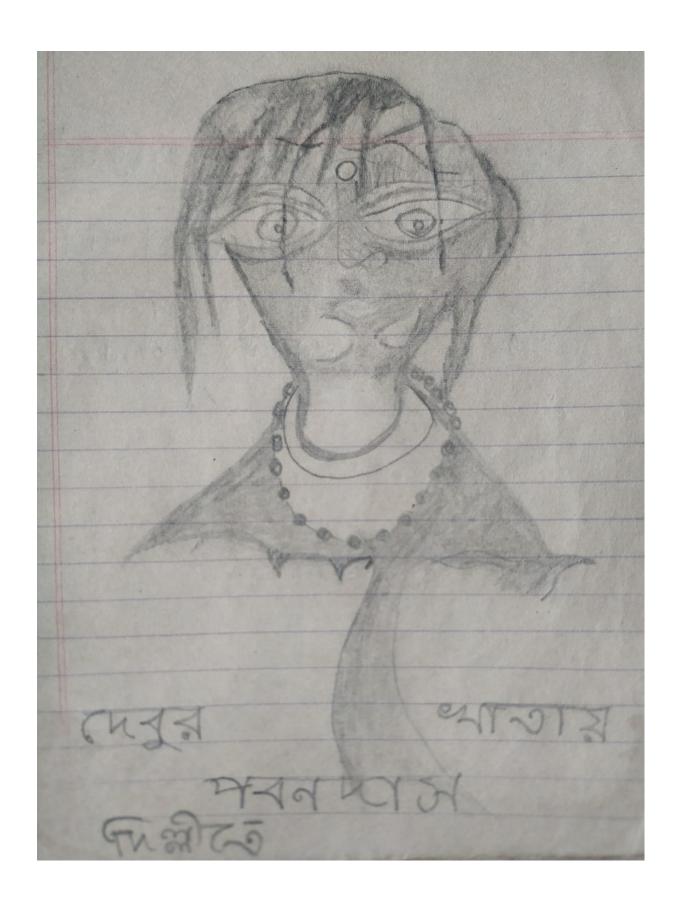
Uttam Das Baul's newer notebook: 5 inches x 7 inches (around 10 Mahajani songs and some other modern songs of Loknath Baba etc)





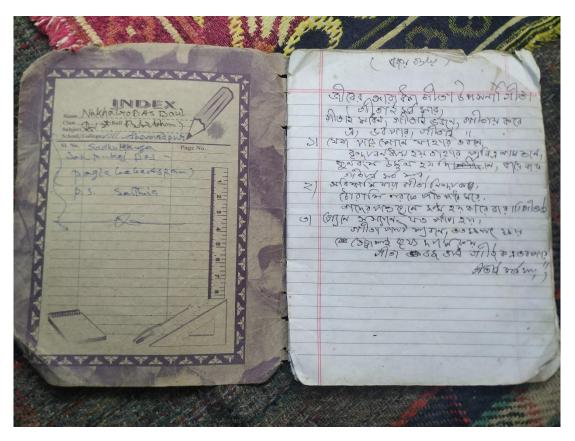


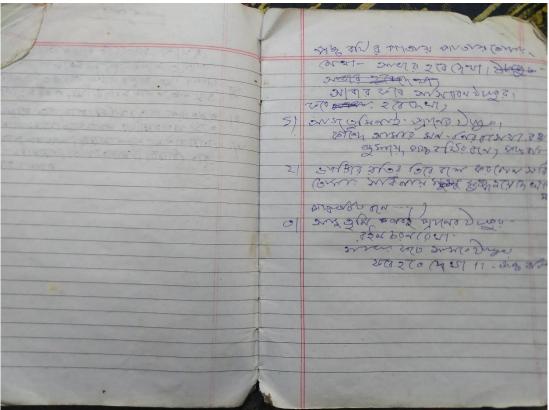
Some photographs kept inside Debdas Baul's old notebook



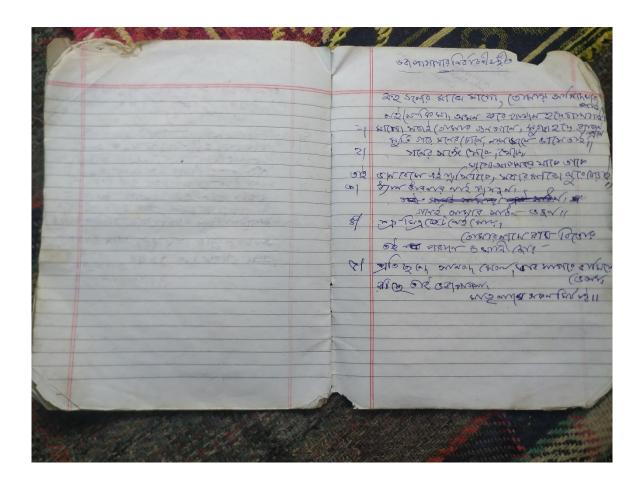
Drawing of Paban Das Baul in Debdas Baul's old notebook

Nakshatra Das Baul Collection





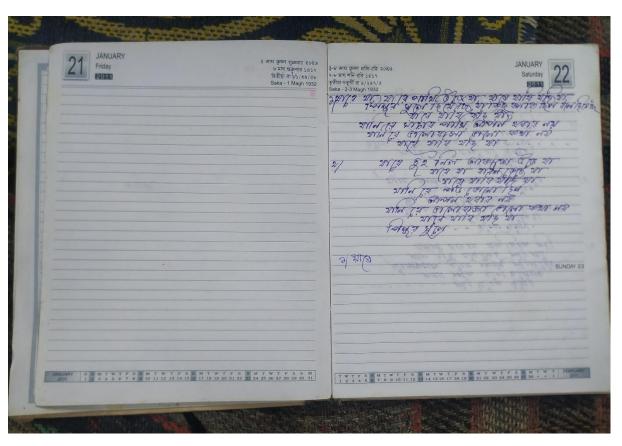
Nakshatra Baul's old notebook: 6 inches x 9 inches (around 13 mahajani songs written by Nakshatra Das himself,)

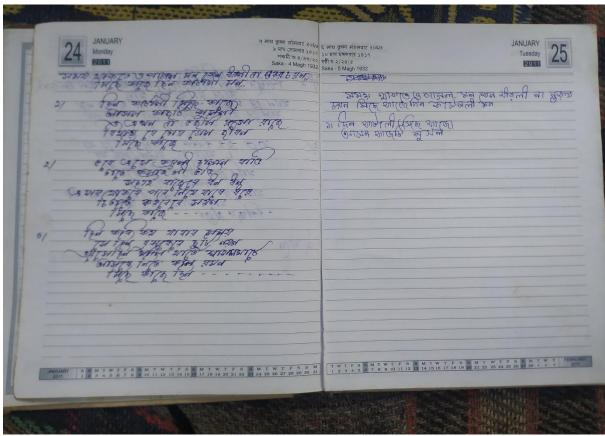


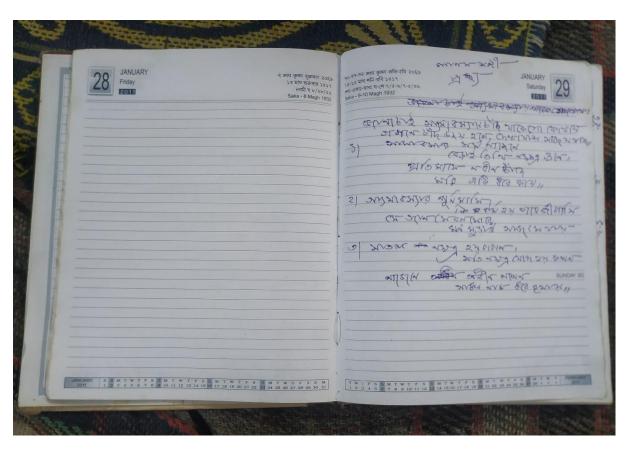


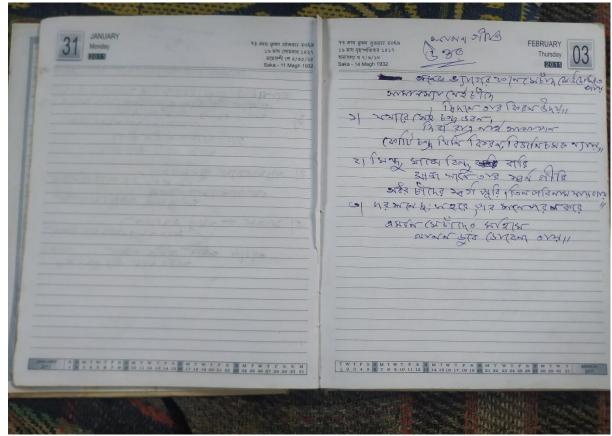


Nakshatra Baul's newer diary: 7 inches x 10 inches (has some songs written by Nakshatra himself while some by his son Shankar (around 20 Mahajani songs in total); some songs have only the opening lines; some are modern (19th century) songs by Jasimuddin and Rabindranath)

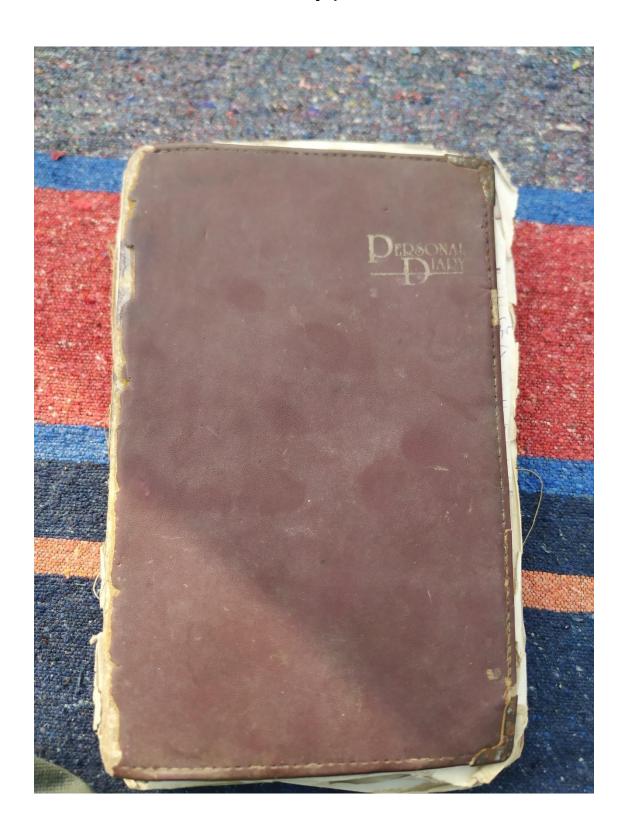








Dinobondhu Khayapa's notebook



Dinobondhu Khyapa's notebook: 5.5 inches x 8.5 inches (more than 70 songs, in fragile condition, pages from two diaries stitched together very loosely, some pages coming apart, poor handwriting)

