

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal



Volume 7, Issue 7, July 2019

www.ijellh.com

Modhura Bandyopadhyay

Assistant Professor in English

Research Scholar

Department of English and Cultural Studies

Jamini Mazumder Memorial College, Patiram

The University of Burdwan

West Bengal, India

modhura411@gmail.com

Gambhira: the lost theatre of Bengal

Abstract

With the wake of postmodernist colonialism and capitalist economy several indigenous art forms have suffered a fatal blow taking down with it the micro-industries that supported the humble poets and artisans. Gambhira, is a ritual theatre that informs the popular festival of Gajan in the Malda and Dinajpur districts of Bengal, have suffered the same fate. These quirky, rebellious, socialist dramas were once observed with great flamboyance but contemporarily have waned with the rise of television industry.

The main purposes of this chapter are- firstly, to translate these Gambhira songs and interpret them in their context as an attempt to archive them under mainstream literature. Secondly, to establish that these songs provide entry points into the psychology and social perceptions of the lower strata and probe into their participation in the colonial modernity. Thirdly, as Anindita Gosh argues it is important to explore these songs “in the creation of ‘interpretive communities’ sharing common codes and expectations, themes and motifs” (113). Fourthly, the chapter analyzes how these songs have contributed to forming a new

audience and their increasing participation in these performances. These experiences facilitated the creation of a shared platform between the performers and the audiences.

Keywords: ritual theatre, Gambhira, socialist drama, *mudda*, implied audience, interpretive communities.

Gambhira Origin and Purpose:

Gambhira is one of the many iconoclastic variants of the ritualistic theatres that apprise the festival of Gajanⁱ. Suresh Aswati understands such indigenous Indian theatre in relation to a phrase- 'theatre of roots'. She further elucidates "the term probably denotes the trend of Indian theatre's return to indigenous elements" (Mahanta 9). She understands that concurrently there is a trend of transnational interculturalism that has influenced several ritualistic theatres so that they are able to participate in the postmodern scenario. In this chapter I propose to look at Gambhira as a 'theatre of roots' which attempts to reproduce ritualistic tradition as "an act of recreation and consequent transformation due to contact with present day cultural practices" (Mahanta 10).

Like Gajan, during the last four days of the month of Chaitra, Gambhira performances are observed, which are mostly dedicated to Lord Shiva. Gambhira songs are unscripted impromptu compositions by semi-literate masses, populating the fringes of the non-urban underbelly. In spite of its socialist undertone, the pseudo-rebellious traits are camouflaged by the abundance of commonplace wit and crude humour. Therefore the potentially grave and politically inciting issues dealt with, in these performances never betray its chief purpose of entertainment and lampooning.

Gambhira originates in the undivided district of Dinajpur what was once called Gaurⁱⁱ. Contemporarily it is popular in Chapainganj, Rajshahi districts of Bangladesh and in the

districts of Murshidabad, Malda, Dakshin Dinajpur in West Bengal. The Koch, Kshatriya, Rajbanshi and Deshipoli communities were majorly involved in this practice and were natives of this land- however, the Rajbanshi deserves a notable mention in preserving and propagating this art in modern times. It is rather challenging to conclude upon the exact genealogical structure of Gambhira because its evolution has died in the tracks of commercialized history.

The main purposes of this chapter are- firstly, to translate these Gambhira songs and interpret them in their context as an attempt to archive them under mainstream literature. Secondly, to establish that these songs provide entry points into the psychology and social perceptions of the lower strata and probe into their participation in the colonial modernity. Thirdly, as Anindita Gosh argues it is important to explore these songs “in the creation of ‘interpretive communities’ sharing common codes and expectations, themes and motifs” (113). Fourthly, the chapter analyzes how these songs have contributed to forming a new audience and their increasing participation in these performances. Witnessing these performances was no longer a passive act rather it was an experience. These experiences facilitated the creation of a shared platform between the performers and the audiences. This enabled interaction and scope for multiple interpretation and representation. Finally, the chapter enquires into the cause and effect of the decadence of such popular art. It would be befitting to introduce the art of Gambhira through a translation of an anthologized Gambhira song:

O Shiva! listen O father!

In great misery do I call upon you.

Listen with your ear and with your heart,

Listen to your poor son,

O great pashupati let these miseries be undone.

Leaving your heavenly abode descend to our land,
Our country is free they say yet I can see no freedom.
Everywhere there is corruption, guile and slavery,
All the layers and all the people and all administration.
India is in troubles great,
Pakistan shall leave Kashmir at no rate.
This ism will destroy the nation,
And destroy in name of devotion.
In this pain I sing to you Tappa Gan,
In order to keep up with foreign currency rate.
The rates of gold are revised,
All things are extremely high priced,
The gold smith's trade is about to die.
O listen! to their helpless cry.
The taxes are on high rise,
The whole market is overpriced.
Labours and farmers, who relentlessly toil,
Are stolen of their cryings and have no potatoes to boil (Singha 112).

The Origin and literary archiving

The art of Gambhira is aptly captured in the observations of Baradacharana Mitra after witnessing a firsthand Gambhira performance at North Bengal Literary Conference in Malda. He said that Gambhira though apparently was a popular social entertainer with its tongue in cheek humour but possessed an immense potential of proletariat backlash. He emphasized that it essentially upholds the nationalistic spirit of the Bengalis besides enriching

the language, tone, and dialect. It was superior to the *jatra*, because it lacked the loud artificialities associated with this theatre but was sincere in its representation of the natural behaviour and environment of the rural Bengal and its woes. Taking the lead from Mitra , Kumud Lahiri stated that :

The Gambhira songs cover almost every department of human thought and activity, love, domestic morality, social satire, economic reforms, religion etc, and live on oral transmission for generations. They are the poets of the poor and the lowly, and have a position in our society something like that of Collins, Langland, Burns and Gray in England. The musical powers of the country poets have also displayed themselves through the Shiva cults as fostered by Gambhira. The songs of Gambhira have flowed from the hearts of village poets and have carried currents of devotion, love and poetry to the hearts of the mass...Many Ramaprasad and chandidasas have thus owed their origin to Gambhira (Sarkar 17).

The real challenge of researching cultural performances which have received little intellectual attention is its insufficiency of documentation and improper means of archiving. Gambhira is no exception in this regard. I have personally visited the districts of Malda and Murshidabad but found very scanty amount of information or recordings for a festival that has been in vogue over centuries. In Binoy Kumar Sarkar first published, *Maldohar Gambhira* (1907), an elaborate essay on the subject which later found elaboration and intellectual treatment in the book *The Folk Elements in Hindu Culture* (1917), which gained Gambhira a worldwide reputation. In Haridas Palit played pivotal role in the understanding of the subject with the publication of *Addyer Gambhira*(1913). Binoy Kumar Sarkar acknowledged the contribution of Haridas Palit who had spent decades of his life in District Council of National Education in Malda meticulously collecting and sorting data and information about popular culture, religion, songs, beliefs, arts and handicrafts and most importantly building association with the marginalized population dwelling in the fringes to

gain access into their private ceremonies and interpret from their perspectives without the subjective intervention of the intellectual researcher. Professor Pradyot Ghosh's *Gambhira Loko Songit o Utsob* and *Ekal O Sekal* were significant milestones in the subject, specially the latter as it was a first attempt to anthologize the orally transmitted songs of Gambhira. Many books followed later, few significant ones include- Puspajita Roy's *Gambhira* (2009) and Sachikanta Das's *Gambhirar Otit O Bortoman*. It would be significant to mention in this context that I had taken the liberty to interview various Gambhira troops during my field work and have visited their akhras which proved to be the most inexhaustible source of information and archives. I have attempted to translate their handwritten rough scriptures scribbled before performances which were often extremely flexible and adaptive. One is often astounded by the spontaneity of their creation, their capability of instant versification, the vastness of their knowledge in terms of current socio-political scenario and international affairs and their mastery in craftily using wit and humour in the most unlikely places despite having received very little formal education.

The Etymological Debate

The etymological debate regarding the word Gambhira has been very significant in understanding the origin and the religio-socio-political evolution of the festivities that it has come to undermine. Haridas Palit came up with a rather simplistic word root, he stated that Gambhira came from the word 'Gambhir' which in Bengali literarily translates into 'serious' and is also another name for Shiva, who is mythologically ascribed to have a grim demeanour. His claim finds testimony in Shiva Samhita and therefore he concluded that Gambhira simply meant a place related to Shiva. However, on interacting with the mask artisan of Kusmundiⁱⁱⁱ, I learned that according to their conviction the word Gambhira is derived from 'Gamar'. *Gamar* is a variant of a local tree, and its wood is specifically used to

make Gambhira mask. The artisans claim that this tree is unique to the geography of Dinajpur district, a greater part of which is now in Bangladesh.

Contrarily Benoy Kumar Sen during his field trips in Malda revealed that this term is the remnants of the Buddhist influence in Bengal and its gradual eclipse by the Shaiva and Shakti cult. He found that people during the time of Dharmapala II kept Buddha-pada or Dharma paduka at the innermost sacred chambers of their houses which were called Gambhira, a deep seated chamber in the house which impersonated the sanctity and protection of a mother's womb. It is not hard to conjecture the need to build such a secret place in the house to install the deity, the Buddhist lived in constant fear of being persecuted by the Hindus and were often reluctant in divulging their religious faith.

However, with the advent of the Sakti cult, the Dharma paduka was quickly replaced by Adya the primal goddess representing primordial unbridled energy, the alpha female who finds mention in the Shunya Purana and was later replaced by the goddess Chandi of the Mangalkavyas- *Chandimangal* and *Dharmamangal*. The sanctum sanctorum where the goddess was established was called Gambhira, which is popularly known by its Sanskritized version- Garbagriha or the womb chamber, thus still today in many places Gambhira is called as '*Adyer Gambhira*'.

When the Sen dynasty reached its watermark in Bengal, Shaivism was firmly established and Adya and Chandi got replaced by Parvati, the wife of Shiva and it slowly metamorphosed into the festival of Shiva. Now the temple dedicated to Shiva or any temple where the performances are supposed to be held is generally called Gambhira.

Gambhira-The structure of the artform

In the previous section, I have discussed the morphology of the Gambhira festivities; this section is dedicated to the study of the structure of the Gambhira songs. Like the multiple

rituals involved in Gambhira, the songs and performances are also multi-layered where each part uniquely contributes to making the organic whole functioning as a single unit. These songs are composed with a strong socialist *mudda* which elucidates a burning current issue and aims at educating the audience while entertaining them. A detailed investigation of the songs might provide an entry-point into the mental framework of the underbelly, providing an alternative historicist perspective of the social cityscape of the *bhadrolok*. The themes of the songs are varied and hints at the subjective interpretation of the non-intellectual masses regarding matters like- unemployment, elections, corruption, agriculture, taxation, education, women liberation, child health, etc.

The Gambhira songs can be categorized into five parts (Ray 20). i) Mukhopado-the thematic initiation of the theatrical performance and the introduction of main characters ii) Shiv Vandana,-the holy invocation of Shiva, who appears on stage to address the issues raised by the performers of Gambhira iii) Duet – a dramatic exchange of dialogue between two characters pitched against each other engaged almost in a pseudo-debate on any one of the themes raised during Mukhopado. iv) Charyari- the friendly congregation, who come together on stage to emphasize and empathize with their shared experiences as members of the same community v) Report-the anti-climactic conclusion where a performer imitates the style of journalistic reporting and informs the audience about any relevant news or development. It must be mentioned in this regard that this Report that is delivered at the end of the performance is not always necessarily linked to the issues raised during the previous sections of the song.

Each part is distinctive in tone, intensity, characterization, the order of performance, content, spontaneity, the scope of improvisation, the sanctity of address. One must remember in this context that though these are termed as songs but are contradictory to the general attributes associated with the song. These songs are meant to be a part of the theatrical

performance for a set audience, not to be enjoyed in the comfort of privacy. The songs involve a significant amount of dramatic action and find meaning only through the participation of the target audience who can decode the context of the songs. The songs are replete with riddles and puns decipherable only to the people who share the pre-conceived discourse by being a part of the local lexicon. The composers and performers don't aspire to achieve artistic excellence; contrarily the success of these songs largely depends on the active involvement of the audience, the strength of the 'mudda' and the honesty of its presentation. Contemporarily many facets of Gambhira have evolutionized to participate in colonial modernity but the songs retain its quintessential rustic humour mixed with the bravado of political dissenters.

Mukhopado: the Propaganda

The first part is called Mukhopado, and is designed to attract the audience by engaging them in small talks and craftily introducing the main characters of the ritualistic theatre. There is no pre-determined design or pattern of the Mukhopado. The main character enters the stage and facilitates the audience to settle down while addressing the audience directly and sometimes dropping some personal touches here and there. Once the audience has settled and the ambience is set for the performance to begin, he first introduces the central argument or 'mudda' for the evening. His entry is somewhat prosaic but he ensures the dramatic entry of the rest of the characters. His declaration of the mudda is comic yet stern, stating clearly the social or political agendas that are about to feature in the performance. Since it is essentially an open theatre the introductory episode is very crucial in setting the tone right. It vocalizes the protests and complaints unapologetically gradually building the tempo of the performance yet maintaining throughout its quirky comic delivery of dialogues.

The most original aspect of Mukhopado is the performer's initial attempt to interact with the audience so that the artistic distance is completely erased, leaving no scope for defamiliarization effect to set in. It is the sole purpose of his office to build the trust of the audience and take them into confidence by reinvigorating the bond of kinship and lived experience fuelled by the spirit of the common good. This is in keeping with the secular tradition of Gambhira that Mukhopado is preceded by the Vandana or holy invocation, which in any other orthodox religious ceremony would have found natural precedence. It symbolizes that Gambhira prioritizes community over religious belief.

I have attempted to translate a part of an elaborate version of Mukhopado from the famous Motor Babur Gambhira, a famous troupe from English Bazar of Malda district. I have purposely chosen a very contemporary version because it is very relatable in the current tumultuous political scenario of Bengal. The emergence of a new political party after a prolonged communist rule had made Bengal quite unstable as is clearly portrayed in the Mukhopado especially in the context of job prospect. This poem that I have translated is an extract of a performance collected in Malda during my field work at English Bazar (2018). It clearly brings out the various aforementioned facets of the Mukhopado, and its relevance as a propagandist declamation of the performance that follows, besides exposing the facades of change and progress that the new government epitomizes.

(1)

Brothers listen please, all ears turn to me

I sing alone of what rots within but is not felony

My stomach is sticking to my curving spine

Hunger and thirst fed by taxes and fine

Brothers listen please, I have marched in rallies in hope of change

I have sat in dharna in front of employment exchange

I am called for interviews, but opportunities are few

I have come home empty and undone

Yet slogans scream developments have begun

Good days are about to come

Good days are about to come!!

(2)

O Nana listen please, even at home there is no peace

Even there I am a big misfit

Am my wife's culprit

Snow powder^{iv}, shoes, clips and clothes

Her demands my income outgrows

My mother and wife are forever grumpy

Everybody turns deaf ears to a poor man's plea.

(3)

Behold my brothers, here comes Madan,

He has a second hand Maruti van

Shameless fool scampers under his wife's petticoat

He too smirks and on my misery gloat

I have finished my school and everyday toiled hard

Madan shouted slogans and at night played card.

Shiva Vandana: the holy invocation

The second part or the Shiva vandana is a kind of invocation ascribed to Shiva so that he would descend on earth and patiently address the woes of the inhabitants of the non-Brahmin, lower social strata. This is rather the most pontifical episode of the entire

performance offering very little scope for improvisation. Unlike the preceding or following segments, this is almost entirely devoid of sarcasm and lampooning. Paradoxically it is religious in the most secular way, as Shiva is stripped of his bourgeois image and is disembarked from his Sanskritized -Brahmin avatar to belong to this alternative cultural image. The moment the prayer ends, the character of Shiva enters the stage as a kind of modified *dues- ex- machina* wearing a tiger skin. In the right hand, he keeps a *trishul* (holy trident) and the left hand he has a *damburu*. In this simplistic demeanour, he addresses the devotees, not from his high altar but seated amongst them, and instantaneously the bridge between the sacred and the profane disappears. His reassuring presence is a source of great psychological purgation for both the audience and the devotees. They seek consultation from his human avatar and trust him with their complaints believing firmly that he will free them from all kind of repression. The image of Shiva is an alternative impersonification of the absent authoritarian figure at the apex of the power grid who has failed these people at several levels- economical empowerment, educational emancipation, political representation, and ethnical identification.

As previously mentioned Shiva is no longer conceived as one of the primordial Godhead of the holy trinity of the Hindu pantheon, rather, he is addressed as Nana or the maternal grandfather. In this counter-culture, he is perceived primarily as a loving father, a toiling farmer, a weaver, an integral part of the kith and kin. He has very little to do with Hinduism, he is rather more geo-politically positioned, possessing the shared experience of the agrarian sub-strata. Significantly, he is addressed in the local dialect in a colloquial tone giving the impression of an easy conversation with closely knitted family, not that of elaborately complicated worship, involving Sanskritized mantras and Brahmin priests. This domestication of Shiva could be probably influenced by the image of Shiva as represented in *Shiva Purana*.

The invocation though primarily offered to Shiva does include deities of all the cults that have shaped the contemporary structure of Gambhira. The genealogical morphology is evident in the invocation itself which include Adya-the primordial goddess of Shakti cult, Niranjana- the formless creator of the Dharma cult, besides the domesticated image from *Shiva Purana* and the predominance of the Shaiva cult.

(1)

O hail the water! O hail the earth! All hail the Shiva's Gambhira!

Hail the elements of life and death ! All hail the notes of Saraswati!

O here comes the lord adorned with snakes, O bow down to his holy aura

O hail Maheswar, O hail Shiva, O great Nana of all Nati

(2)

The Chambers of Adya are purified hence

In the darkness is seated Shiva in deep meditation

His speech reverberates and the energies condense

Adya rises from the divine elation

(3)

The seat of Dharma is where the holy lotus blooms

And Niranjana floats in his infinite gloom

Seated in front *gosai* meditates on the lotus

What truth resides in eternity's womb.

The life force that emanates from creation's foetus

(4)

In the month of *Baishak* Shiva weaves *karpas*(cotton)

The farmers also tills the land with the advent of *Baishak*^v

In *Ashar* he takes his weave to *Kuchnipara*^{vi}

He has responded to the calls from every akhara
 He then presents his weave to his wife the goddess
 And together what wonder they possess
 She knits the thread and he weaves the tat
 He can make clothes from cotton at the drop of a hat
 His greatness could sweeten the salty slime
 O Nana, the saviour, the sublime.
 His holy feet are washed by *Netai dhopani*^{vii}
 I sing of the lord and listen to his *bani*(oracle)

Duet: the dramatic torque

After the completion of elaborate introduction and religious formalities, the Gambhira performances slowly gathers into culmination and eventually, the real plot begins to unfold. The first part of the main performance is presented in the form of Duet, where two characters embodying two contrasting ideological standpoint argue for or against the particular case in point. Interestingly, they are unable to take a final stand, which is a part of the pre-conceived theatrical design, purposely introduced to provide the audience a chance to get absorbed and involved in the controversy. The audience initially begins to hoot and shout to communicate their agreement or disagreement, then as the duet grows more intense, the audience breaks into full-length dialogues and comments. The characters of the duet are also very carefully selected ranging from the archetypal pairs like- master-slave, king-subject, good-evil, man-wife, bourgeois-proletariat, to more localized ones-minister-voter, mother-in-law-daughter-in-law, sarpanch-farmer, seller-consumer etc. The duo must be positioned on either end of the power grid to make controversy more engaging and convincing. When the two antagonistic ideas publicly collide, it creates an immense torque which crystallizes and takes the form of a

visual theatrical metaphor. This provides the audience several entry-points into antagonistic and alternative approaches often challenging their linear social syntax and ideological indoctrination.

Man: Come let me take you, mother of my Bela^{viii},

And get you admitted to the nearest Patshala

So that reading and writing you may learn

So that money and respect they may earn

The government has set up special schools

Centres to educate ignorant aged fools

O Bela's mother, let's go, let's go

In the name of Saraswati don't say no.

Wife: Mother of three children am I, not a girl sucking candy

My life isn't like yours spent in pretending dandy

My going to school will bring the family only mockery and shame

Your mother will sneer and neighbour's will jeer for participating in the government's game.

Audience: She has children to feed, and a husband to care?

Preferring Education to docility no fool must dare

Man: Education will groom you and modernization spread

It will revolutionize the future generations ahead

You could stand on your own feet, build a solid foundation

O great are the powers of the government of collation^{ix}.

Charyari: the friendly Council

‘Charyari’ translates into English as a council of four friends. As the Gambhira performance gradually gains momentum, the audience slowly warms up to the ideas presented through the songs and the characters. The stage so far has been occupied by a single or the duet performers. The consortium of the four is introduced next, whose purpose is to gradually build the democratic tempo of the audience. These characters slowly stretch the dimension of the stage towards the audience, who are continuously provoked to join the *adda* and voice their standpoint. The Charyari works on the principle of ‘interpretive communities’. Stanley Fish in his ground-breaking book on Reader Response Theory- *Is there a Text in the Class?* introduced the idea of interpretive communities which applies to the context of these performances that comprise Gambhira. According to Fish Interpretive communities are formed by those readers who possess shared discourse and cultural codes. They have a pre-assigned set of community assumption or interpretative strategies which facilitates meaning making in a particular context. Similarly, the full potential of the *Charyari* can also be realized within the intended community whose shared knowledge and response are quintessential to write meaning into the performance. Interpreting these performances beyond the context of the intended audience is a challenging task. The conceptual schemes, the subtle sarcasm, the crude humour becomes incommensurable beyond the trajectory of such an interpretive community. The intensity of the context and delivery of the performance dwindles if it has to be translated or mediated between two communities.

The case in point can be justifiably argued by the translation of a *Charyari* episode from Motor Babur Gambhira being performed in Malda during the Naxal period in 1972. The performance delved into the controversial political strategies of Sidharta Shankar Roy, who was then the Chief Minister of Bengal and his corrupt cabinet ministers. Gani Khan

Chowdhury was the Minister of Power and Non-conventional Energy resource and hailed from Malda. The people of Malda district had high hopes from him but he failed them miserably. This song was a political jibe directed toward those in power where the voice of Motor Babu represented the common man. This particular performance was very popular as the audience got easily carried away and spurted out their grievances in public. As can be conjectured this performance is politically and historically indexed. It would hold little charge for those not affected by the political strategies in the context. As they would be unable to respond consequentially according to the demand of the performances.

Siddharta Shankar Ray^x: I have sat in the cursed throne of Bengal

In unanimity

I have taken the pledge to control all

Ghani Khan Choudhury^{xi}:

(Minister of Power and Non-conventional Energy resource)

I am the son of Amir Mincha.

All hail the soil of Sujapur.

Gautam Chakraborty (MLA): After making my opponents taste defeat

I have won from the constituency of Harischandrapur.

With me all of you rejoice and repeat.

Long live its meadows and moors.

Common man(Motor Babu): In the pack of 52 cards you are the three aces.

With your schemes and luck you have won all races

You have forever changed our fate

You sat in your chair and whispered stale mate.

S. S. Ray: I will change the tracks of Bengal politics

In which failed Atul and Prafulla with their tricks^{xii}.

G. Khan: I swear on Allah and pledge,

All the clogged drains I will dredge

G.C: I ask only for your blessings and support

Politics is my only sport.

Common Man(Motor Babu): O my mockingbirds of Bangladesh

This whole satete is diseased

When widowed women with their jewelleries deck

All the neighbours are ill at ease.

SS Ray : I will curb the state from all things corrupt

Nothing I will let my plan disrupt

I pledge to destroy all nuisance that may erupt.

G. Khan: till i sit in this powerful chair

I have no worries, I have no cares

G.C.: All hail democracy!

Long live democracy

All hail! O hail!

The sweet fruit of independence

This democratic ascendance .

Common Man(Motor Babu): Equality and Freedom are like slang words now.

O how will this democracy survive! O how!

Corruption and exploitation are what it has begotten.

All the tall claims of their predecessor forgotten.

By shaking the tree of the Planning Commission

Squandering Gouri Sen's^{xiii} wealth is their vision

Autocrats and democrats, same side of the coin

All corruption here conjoin

How long will you fool us with these development myths?

The public has had enough of your shit.

We are illiterate don't mistake us for fools

We will decide who in future rules(Singha 168)

Report: The conclusion

By the end of *Charyari* the audience are so absorbed and provoked that the aesthetic distance is blurred. The arena of theatricality has now been stretched to the audience who almost become indistinguishable from the characters. It is their spontaneous reaction and comments that lend individuality to each Gambhira performance. If there are delicate issues dealt with during the course of performance the audience gets violent and agitated. Thus to cool the tempo down and bring back the aesthetic distance the last episode is introduced- Report. This operates as a kind of safety valve which moderates the audience by adopting a neutral journalistic tone from a non-subjective perspective.

As the name Report suggests it is delivered as an elaborate news report about the main events and its probable causes and consequences, which has occurred throughout the entire calendar year. The topics range widely from – national and international relations, politics, religion, economy, agriculture, transport and communication; to corruption, festivals and fairs. It is a great deviation from the previous segments that define the Gambhira performance. The mirth and humour, the subtle sarcasm, the participation of the audience, the blatant sexual metaphors, and the presence of Shiva as Nana go entirely missing. The bonding with the audience is suddenly snapped and they are pushed back to their role as passive spectators. The secular approach of the Report is intriguing as it is supposed to conclude upon an elaborate ritual theatre entirely dedicated to the worship of Shiva. Some

Gambhira troops take the liberty to use this tool as an agent of commercial or political propaganda, owing to the immense influence that these performances have on the spectators. Capitalism or nepotism camouflaged as religion is indeed a very dangerous weapon to tamper with, especially if the target audience is mostly semi-literate or illiterate.

I have translated some parts of reports from various historical time frames to bear testimony my argument. The first three report dates back to the last quarter of the 20th century when post- Independent India was grappling with epidemics and dilapidated administration in the public health sector in Malda district. The mention of a few local names like Radhakaranjan Pramanik, Mohanto Baldev Giri, Anandalal Basu^{xiv} holds little significance as of now and the entire discourse of the report seem obsolete and displaced. But they were immensely popular and influential in their contextual matrix.

The fourth report is rather a recent phenomenon, illustrating an accident reported at the Malda Municipal Corporation in 2012. In 2011 the thirty four years of Communist government was usurped by Trinamul Congress, but there were still many vehement supporters of the Communist party. They did not leave any opportunity to expose the scandals of the local Corporation. Thus small accidents flared up and took political dimensions. The last report is placed in the 1980s elucidating the turmoil in international relation with the Vietnamese occupation of America and the growing hostility between Israel and Syria. These alternative angles and kaleidoscopic historicity that these songs offer are in transgression with the myopic linear tracks of officiated history.

(1) Malaria has infected the state,

Everyone is suffering the same fate.

Go from door to door, nowhere will you find peace,

Only the dead corpses are at ease.

(2) Next came Cholera and spared none,

The Government said there is nothing to be done.

Cholera has claimed the beloved of Radhikaranjan.

(3) The doctor *babu* has become one of our gods,

He has singlehandedly fought all the odds.

Day and night he has served every patient,

Rich and poor alike he served without being complacent.

(4) In order to moisten the dusty road,

The municipal corporation did water tankers load.

Like the mythical chariots huge tankers were built,

By the corrupt officers, free of shame and guilt.

It came crashing down unable to bear the water's weight,

An innocent child was crushed beneath, that's all beggars' fate.

(5) So many dreams are martyred in election,

All parties working hard with vehement conviction.

Everyone aspires to become the minister-

But on reaching Delhi things get sinister.

Their barking for vote are no longer heard,

All politicians hatched like a cuckoo bird (Roy 167).

(6) If there is a third world war for Vietnam,

The whole world will be gone, goddam!

Who will win if there is only dust?

To stop more war, do everything you must.

Anglo-American nation happily smokes Syrian weeds,

Yet provoked Israel, to do the horrific deeds.

Egypt immediately has joined hands,

Everywhere there is unrest in South Asian lands.

But we don't need humungous wars to destroy our nation,

Communalism, poverty, unemployment are enough to build agitation.

The prices are sky-rocketing and the shares stumble,

O hear! O hear! My humble rumble (Roy 167-8).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have effectively established my argument that how these lopsided narratives of the subaltern community attempted to displace the centrality of the Bengali *bhadrolok* in the discourse of Indian history. It provides a dramatic reconceptualization of the Bengali socio-political matrix and cultural codes. As Ghosh remarks, "In this sense, the songs represented certain dexterity, a canny manoeuvring for space in the highly contested social landscape" (113).

My purpose of translating these songs was to provide them a wider readership and to decontextualize it so that its potential could be realized and universally let known. By translating these songs I have also clarified, that these blatant, robust compositions qualify to be classified and archived along with mainstream literature. These songs are not only contestation for the socio-cultural space but also the set parameters that defines the literary classical prototypes. These songs are exponents of an alternative impromptu literature, with a rhythm that is quintessentially homespun and close to the soil. The language is dialectically varied and lexically unique, which adds natural rhythmic quality to the songs, sparing the use of artificial rhetoric. The ability to instantaneously address such varied themes in rhyming couplets, with such tremendous brevity and precision by those devoid of formal education is inspirational. Voicing the silences and fissures of power these songs render 'a reinforced sense of belonging to certain communities' (Ghosh 113). By asserting multiple power

position on the marginalized population like-the women, the fishermen, the farmer, the colonial native, the illiterate voter- it questioned the non-negotiable compartmentalization of the hegemony.

Its decadence began with the rise of globalized capitalism. Since the world turned into a global village, the real villages could no longer uphold or assert their cultural distinctiveness in the race of homogenization. Entertainment was industrialized, performances like Gambhira stood no chance against the soaps and serials designed to fetch higher Target Rating Points. The television and advertisement industry entirely captured the target audience of these performances. Another probable reason could also be the lack of innovation in these performances. Since it is a part of ritual theatre, inspite of the variety in subject and quasi-secular approach, the form itself has undergone very little modification. Thus it has trouble fitting in the contemporary commercialized scenario.

Endnotes

i The festival of Gajan is performed on the last 11 days of the Bengali calendar. The performance of generally takes place every evening after the worshipping of Shiva is completed by the ascetics. This festival is informed by various ritual theatres in various pockets of the state. In the district of Malda and Dinajpur it is known as Gambhira. These performances provides a sort of comic relief to the sanyasis that have spent the day observing privation rituals of Gajan. Deprived of food, sleep, sex ends the days ordeal in a kind of carnivalesque riot.

-
- ii Gaur is a historical city which was once capital of Sena and Pala dynasty. Its geographical radius encompasses the districts of Malda and South Dinajpur in West Bengal. Though now it's completely fallen into ruins, it was one of the main centres of Buddhism in Bengal.
- iii Kusmundi is situated in the border of North and South Dinajpur districts. Mahisbatan is a village in Kusmundi, globally known for its masks and even recognised by organizations like UNESCO. It is home to generations of artisans who make masks for various religious rituals-chiefly Gambhira. I had visited the cooperative society at Mahisbatan, where I collected the aforementioned information.
- iv Snow powder refers to a popular brand of cosmetics that was in vogue amidst the women folk at the 19th century before the advent of foundation creams in Bengal.
- v Asar, Baishak and Chaitra are the months of the Bengali calendar. Where Chaitra is the last month of the year and Baishak marks the beginning of a Bengali new year. Asar on the other hand is usually the rainy season..
- vi Kuchnipara refers to the episode of Netai dhopani in *Manasa Mangal*. According to the narrative of *Manasa Mangal*, when Behula was fighting to get back the life of her husband, Lakhinder who had died of snake bite, she met Netai dhopani at Kuchnipara ghat. Netai dhopani was a devotee of goddess Manasa who provided her with much need food and shelter and guided her in future endeavours. But Netai dhopani belonged to a low caste and kuchnipara was the area of untouchables. It was very unlikely for gods worshiped by high caste Brahmins to be associated with such places (Bhattacharya 75).
- vii Refer to the previous one (vii)
- viii It is a Bengali cultural code where the husband and wife refer to each other in terms of their relationship with their children.

-
- ix Refers to the government of Moraji Desai, the first non-Congress government of 1977-79.
- x Siddharta Sankar Ray was the Chief minister of West Bengal from 1972-77. He took his office in a very delicate political situation. During that time West Bengal was faced by two major problems – illegal immigrants from Bangladesh after Bangladesh Liberation War and the curbing of Naxalite by the state power.
- xi Gani Khan Chowdhury was a cabinet Minister under Siddharta Shankar Ray and hailed from Malda district. He was overtly criticized for his corruption charges and numerous scandals. The disappointment this generated amongst the people of Malda is reflected in the Gambhira songs.
- xii In 1957, Shri Bidhan Chandra Roy was the Chief Minister of West Bengal. In his tenure Siddharta Shankar Ray was the judicial Minister in his Cabinet. However, his tenure as the law Minister lasted only for thirteen months as a result of his crossing with then Congress stalwarts-Atulya Ghosh and Prafulla Chandra Sen. While reading his resignation letter in the Assembly he made it a point to clearly emphasize on his disregard and growing bitterness for them.
- xiii Gouri Sen was a 17th century Bengali businessman. He inherited great wealth from his forefathers and freely donated it to random strangers in dire need of money to repay debts. Thus his kindness became legendary and till today he is remembered through a common Bengali proverb that says “whoever requires money will be given by Gouri Sen”.
- xiv Radhikaranjan Pramanik was a highly reputed and honest advocate. He was deeply revered by the people of Malda for his intolerance of injustice. Mohanto Baldev Giri was a social worker with a golden heart. His entire fortune was spent in building public libraries, primary schools and fought vigorously for education and empowerment of women. Even a

very important street was named after him in Malda and remains unchanged till today.

Anandal Basu was a famous surgeon at Malda Medical College and hospital. During this time Cholera and Malaria had taken the shape of epidemics and claimed several lives. The public health sector was very weak and did not have any infrastructure to cater to the needs of an increasingly throbbing number of patients. In such dire crisis, he was considered god like for the service and treatment he rendered to his patients. These local legends of the first half of the twentieth century were celebrated in these local verses and lyrics (Roy 168).

References

- Bailey, Peter. "Conspiracies of meaning: music-hall and the knowingness of popular culture." *Past & Present* 144.1 (1994): 138-170.
- Bhattacharya, Bijanbihari. *Manasamangal*. Sahitya Akademi, 2005, p.75-9.
- Bhattacharjee, Austosh. *Bengali Loknritya*. Vol.2, A.Mukherjee and Company, Kolkata 1993, p.79.
- "Bishu Pandit arekbar fer(Bishu Pandit once again)." *Ganashakti*, 5 Sep1991,p.6.
- Ecbproject. "Accountability in Emergencies Gomvira." *YouTube*. 28 May 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKRv9BqhWYU&t=236s . Accessed on 31 Aug 2016.
- Fish, Stanley Eugene. *Is there a text in this class?: The authority of interpretive communities*. Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Ghosh, Anindita. "Singing in a new world: street songs and urban experience in colonial Calcutta." *History Workshop Journal*. Vol. 76. No. 1. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Hardy, Adam. *Indian Temple Architecture: Form and Transformation: the Karṇāṭa Drāviḍa Tradition, 7th to 13th Centuries*. Abhinav Publications, 1995
- Mahanta, Pradip. "Tradition and Transition in Indian Drama: An Overview ". *Indian Drama: Tradition and Transition*, edited by Gitali Saikia and Subrat Jyoti Neog, Booksway, 2014.
- Mahapatra, Piyush Kanti. "Rain Compelling Ceremonies in West Bengal" *Indian Folk Lore*, Vol. 1, no.3, 1958, pp. 75-79.
- Palit, Haridas. *Addyer Gambhira*. Krishnacharan Sarkar Publisher, Malda,1913.
- Rai,Pushpajit. *Gambhira*. Lokosanskriti O Adibashi Sanskriti Kendra, Government of West Bengal, 2009.

Ray, Taniya. *Gambhira Dance and Festival: Communication With Our Past and Present*.

Presidency University, M.A Dissertation, Kolkata, 2001

Sapner Jagat. "Maldar Gambhira Gaan". *YouTube*, 8 Sep 2018

www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeHJZGYXWq4&t=549s. Accessed on 15 Dec 2018.

Sarkar, Benoy Kumar. *The Folk Elements in Hindu Culture*. Oriental Books Reprint

Corporation, New Delhi, 1972.

Singha, Pulikendu. *Madhya Banger Loko-Sangeet*. Murshidabad: Shilpanagari Publication.

2012.