

Myth... Wit....Satire....

GAMBHIRA

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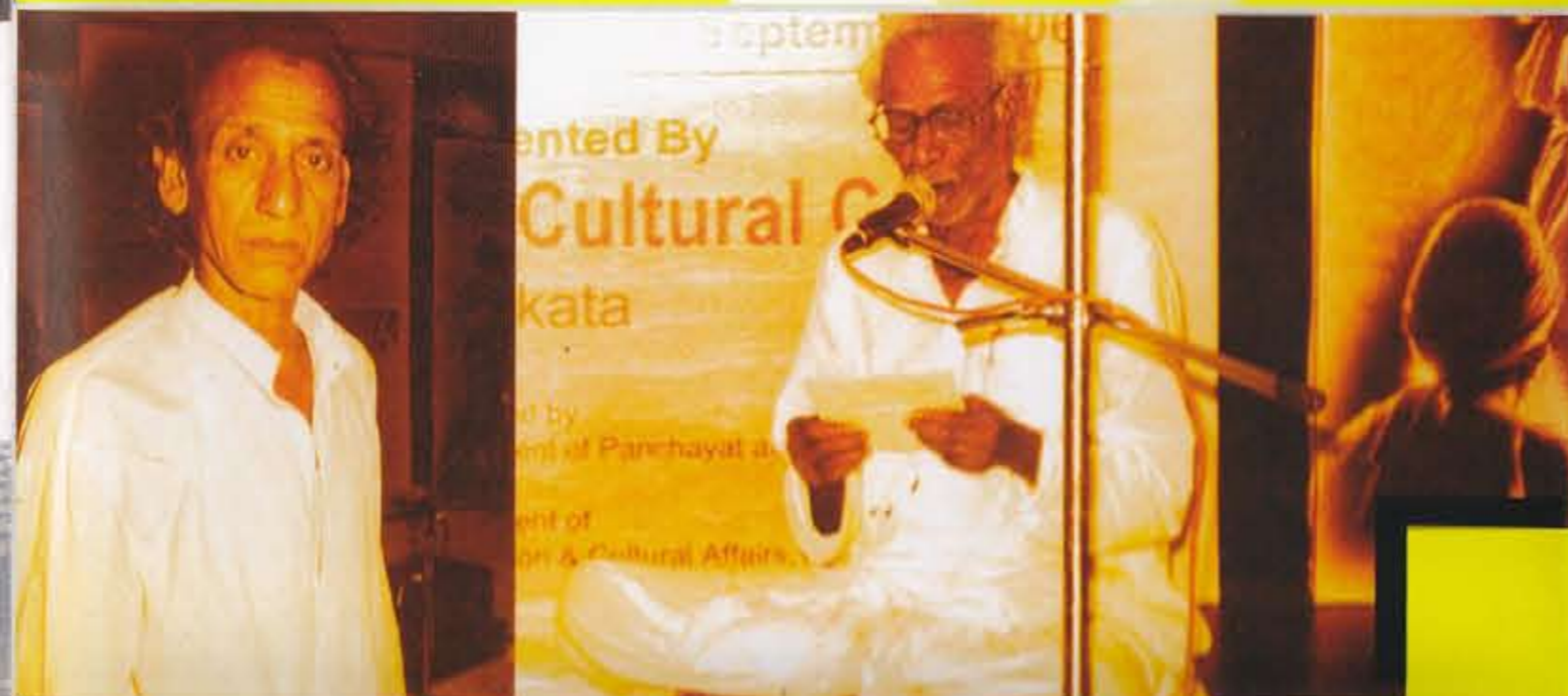


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Gambhira is a unique folk form of Malda region of West Bengal. It pertains to the Gambhira Utsav. Lord Shiva, the third God of Hindu Trinity, is worshipped in this festival. Gambhira Utsav became popular after the decline of Buddhism in the 7th - 8th century and was widespread in Malda during the reign of the Senas. With changing times, popular tastes and festivities are also changing. Gambhira Utsav is now celebrated only at five or six places in Malda and with much less aplomb. The current form of Gambhira folk drama emerged during the reign of Palas in 10th Century.

Gambhira performances have four parts. The *Mukhapad* or Introduction is followed by *Vandana* where Shiva is eulogised. One of the performers dresses up



as Lord Shiva. Shiva allegorically represents the feudal Lord or the Government in today's social context. The other characters wear torn and worn out clothes and use rags as wrist bands and head bands. They are the poor masses. Using a wonderful mix of song, dance and satire they tell Lord Shiva about their woes, concerns and worries. This folk form is thus a traditional tool of social communication used by the common people to voice their grievances and aspirations.

In the next part called Duet or *Charyaari* - meaning four friends, two or four performers through humorous dialogue, ridicule, derision and songs talk about social problems or political issues. Wit is used to convey disapproval or criticism in a sublime way. The last part is called Report where the performers elaborate events and happenings which took place throughout the year. The folk form uniquely manifests a traditional way of social audit.



Gambhira has been traditionally used for community education. Gambhira played a significant role in mobilizing mass involvement in our struggle for independence. Social and political themes became popular during the first and second world war. Gambhira became a critique of contemporary society. The folk art form is popular among Hindus as well as Muslims.

Today Gambhira folk form is dying. There are only a handful of artists in Malda district. The Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, has taken up a unique and ambitious initiative of reviving and revitalizing performing folk art forms as means of sustainable livelihood.



The project is supported by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. The Departments of Panchayat and Rural Development and Information and Cultural Affairs of the Government of West Bengal are also partners in this initiative.

181 folk artists of Harishchandrapur, Kaliachak, English Bazar, Old Malda, Gazole and Habibpur have formed 14 self help groups (SHGs). Gambhira artists are using their art form to educate people on importance of education, creating awareness on consumer rights and other social and developmental issues. The artists are making endeavour to give their art form a new meaning.

