



Gambhira: Medium Of Bhakti Becomes Literature

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Abstract:

One of the most popular folk-art forms of West Bengal Gambhira is centered on religious and social importance. *Gambhira* is a combined product of dance, drama and song rather it is a manifestation of folk believes, rituals, emotions. This song expresses the social incongruity, outrages, prejudice through their performances. *Gambhira* being an age-old traditional art form, is performed in so many places in and around the district of Maldah, Murshidabaad, Rajshahi, Chapainabaganj in Bangladesh. In Maldah, *Gambhira* is performed at the auspicious occasion of *Gajan* puja in Chaitra, i.e., in mid-March to mid-April. The beauty of this art is in its language, lyrics, dialect, make up, presentation more over in its philosophy that makes the *Gambhira* a geo-cultural important component. In *Gambhira*, we can see *shiva-bandana*, considering lord shiva as the supreme of the feudal society where the common people can appeal or complain to him without hesitation or worry. The lyricist or writer of these songs always tried to focus on the contemporary issues like- anti-colonial movement, inequality in society, or modern social problems family planning, child health etc. that shows the sense of responsibilities among those rural, so-called backward people. After crossing a long path of social evolution, the *Gambhira* become an important phenomenon as well as those dynamic songs or verses are also a part of our literature. Here in this paper, we are going to discuss about this art of importance that is struggling for its existence and the ways of conservation.

Keywords: Gambhira, Bhakti, Malda, folk art, music, songs.

Introduction:

India, a land of diversity in unity in every sense, culture, ethnicity, politics as well as emotions. The folk arts always played an important role in shaping Indian culture. People's emotions, believes, rites and rituals, customs are embodied in folk arts. The regional folk arts made distinctive geographical identity by its characteristics and components. One of the most popular folk-art forms of West Bengal *Gambhira* is centered on religious and social importance. *Gambhira* is not only a folk song, it's a combined product of dance, drama and song rather it is a manifestation of folk believes, rituals, emotions. Mostly the folk songs were composed spontaneously on love but *Gambhira* is composed and performed with and for religious or devotions i.e., Bhakti. This can be considered as offering to God blend with devotion, emotion in one aspect. But in other, it's a social messenger, carrying responsibilities of social awareness. This song expresses the social incongruity, outrages, prejudice through their performances. *Gambhira* being an age-old traditional art form, is performed in so many places in and around the district of Maldah, Murshidabaad,

Rajshahi, Chapainababganj in Bangladesh. In Maldah, Gambhira is performed at the auspicious occasion of *Gajan puja* in Chaitra of Bengali year i.e., in mid-March to mid- April.

As G. E. Lambourn (1918) says, ‘By far the most popular festival, all the same, in this district is that of *Gambhira*. It is celebrated everywhere during the last three days of the Bengali new year, the end of Chait, though it is normally held over into *baisakh* and even afterwards. The following is taken from the census report- the *Koches* and their congeners worships the *Gramya devata* (village godlings) at the curious ceremony called *Gambhira*, when the young people of village disguise themselves, personating the ditties and dance. In this district, the ceremony is universal amongst low caste Hindus; it is said that it is a form of *Ban puja* introduced by King *ban*, whose capital was at *Dinajpur*, the king was a great worshipper of *Shiva* and used to review at the ceremony the acts done during the year which is passing. The ceremony consisted originally in the annual review of the acts of the year and penance of misdeeds. As now celebrated in this district a hut open on three sides put up and an image of *shiva* (*Mahadeva*) installed, before which there is dancing, singing, masquedering and general merriment’¹.

Being an age-old traditional art form, *Gambhira* is a reflection of so many phenomena of social evolution regarding economy, politics as well as religious what might be a brief but precised demands of discussion.

Objectives of the study:

This paper has been studied with some objectives as given below-

- To explore the age-old *Gambhira* art
- To investigate the stylistic patterns of *Gambhira*
- To explore the lyrical patterns or literature of *Gambhira*
- To understand the reasons of tending of be obsolescence of this art
- To discuss about the ways of rejuvenations of this art form
- Last but not the least to get an essence of this art

Methodologies:

The conventional ways of studying any folk-art form have been employed to study the paper. Along with this, audio, video recordings, one to one interaction with artists, spectators, experts, organizers, village Pradhan etc. has been done. Study of census report, audio-video document study, library works also applied.

Historical background:

Looking back at the historical trace is very obvious to perceive the present situation of any folk-art as like *Gambhira*. So, before knowing that, the meaning of the word *gambhira* should be explored. Mostly the scholars like dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, Haridas Palit considered *Gambhira* as temple of God² in different ways. Dr. Sukumar Sen says in his book, ‘দেবমন্দির দুই রকমের ছিল, দেউল দেবকুল অর্থাৎ দেবতার ও তাঁহার ভক্ত সেবকদের আবাসস্থান। দেবকুল এ প্রধান মন্দির (নাম “গম্ভীরা”) অথবা দেবস্থান ছাড়া ভোগমন্ডপ নাটমন্দির রসুইসলা অতিথিশালা ইত্যাদি যেমন “রাজকুল” অর্থাৎ রাজবাড়িতে থাকে তেমনই থাকত’³

Again, some scholars say it is a ritual of Tibbeto-Chinese origin as it is celebrated by *Rajbanshi*, *Koch*, *Poley* people in different areas. On the other hand, it is described as, ‘*Chandimandap*’ used to be called *gambhiri* or *ganbhira*. During the period of *Dharmapala Dev* 2nd & *Govinda Chandra*, *gambhira* used to be that kind of house in some province like *Gour*, *Rangpur* and *Dinajpur*. The ‘*Gajan Utsav*’ of *Rarh* areas become “*Addyer Gambhira*” in *Malda* district.⁴ Some also assigned it with ‘*Sakta believes*’ or *Sakti Goddess*. Also, it is said that, looking at the ceremonial rituals of *gambhira*, it is mainly an occasion of *Sun god* worship. As *Sun* worship in one of the ancient religious occasions in our agriculture-based society. Looking at the time of this *Gambhira puja*, it has some relevance too. Main ritual of *Gambhira* is imbedding

¹ Roy, P. (2009), *Gambhira*, Loksanskriti o Adibashi sanskriti kendra, Kolkata, p.39

² Palit, H. (2003), *Addyer Gambhira: Banglar Dharma o Samajik itihaser ek adhyay*, Barendra Sahitya Parishad: Malda, p. 12

³ Sen, S. (2012), *Bangla Sahityer Itihaas*, part. 1, Ananda publishers, Kolkata, p. 39

⁴ Chakrabarty, B. (December, 2013), Communication Through Folk Theatre: A study on *Gambhira*, *Global Media Journal-Indian Edition*, (vol. 4/ No. 2).

'Haragaouri' idol. Our ancient treaties like Puranas and Sastras have so many evidences of this ritual and festivals. So, looking at that, it might be said that, gambhira is a 'Shiva Utsav' where lord Shiva is called 'Nana' which means elder or supreme of society sometimes pretending to be 'feudal lord' of ancient time or 'government' on present time. There were so many thoughts on origin of Gambhira, but one thing is axiomatic that Gambhira is a blended expression of religious values, devotion, and day to day life emotions etc. and bhakti here came out as an inspiration of art.

Structure of Gambhira:

Dr. Proddyut Ghosh says, 'গম্ভীরা গানের রূপের মধ্যে আছে সিব-বন্দনা, ডুয়েট, চারইয়ারী, পালাবন্দী গান ও বাউল গান। বিশেষত এবং প্রধান্তঃ এইসব গানের উদ্ভব ও ক্রমবিকাশ রাষ্ট্রিক ও সামাজিক অবক্ষয়ের ফলশ্রুতি।' (Ghosh:2003).

Gambhira is performed for 3, 4 or 7 days at the end of Bengali year which is known as *Chaitra Sankranti*. Mainly 4 days performances are seen now a days. It is divided in four parts named as-

1st day: 26th Chaitra- 'Ghatbharā' or pouring pitcher

2nd day: 27th Chaitra- 'Chhoto Tāmāsā' or small drama

3rd day: 28th Chaitra- 'Baro Tāmāsā' or big drama

4th day: 29th Chaitra- 'Āhāra/Bolāi/Bolbāi' or feeding brahmins and young girls.

This is only celebrated in Malda district on those particular dates, but in different regions it is celebrated in different times like- baishakh, jaistha, sravan month of year.

The first day i.e., 'Ghatbhora' used to be decided by a meeting in village earlier. This ritual used to be performed four, seven even nine days before in earlier time. Now it is fixed on 26th Chaitra. On that day after sunset a brahmin pours a pitcher from nearby water source (pond, canal or river) and place it at a prefixed place mostly center of village. This ritual reminds our age-old tradition of worshipping the water source and goddess. Still date, most of Bengali people performs this ritual for almost every auspicious occasion which shows importance of water for agrarian people.

Next day, 'Chhoto Tāmāsā' or small drama consists of light jocular acts, enjoyment and shiva-bandana. 2nd day starts with worshipping 'Haragouri' idol. Young disciples or village young boys take a look of 'Bālvakta' or young monks sing the shiva bandana or praising bhakti geets for lord shiva. Here is an example given-

ঐ দ্যাখ ন্যাংটা বুড়া সংটা সাজ্যা চঙটা কোর্যা আছে বোস্যা।

বুড়া আস্ত খ্যাপা ভষম ল্যাপা বাঘের ছালটা পড়ছে খোস্যা।।

আছে বোস্যা।

বুড়া ষাঁড়ে চ্যাড়্যা এল্যা দ্যোব্যা গম্ভীরা খ্যাতে।

ঐ দ্যাখ রদবোদ্যা ঐ বাশুঁয়া বলদ আসছে রে ভাই ক্যামন শুঁষ্যা।।^{১৫}

It is a song where lord shiva is considered as a common man Moreover their homemade to whom complaining about the poor situation they are going through and asking to solve them.

On the third day i.e., 28th Chaitra is 'Boro Tāmāsā' is performed. On that day all the devotees of different ages takes part in "Shovā Yātrā". They give visit to *mandaps* in disguised as ghosts, witch, magician, firecrackerman, santhal etc. They play *Dhāk* loudly while move from one to another *mandap*. They dance at *mandap* holding a new branch of a native thistle plant along with weed plant, known as 'Phuldāñgā'. It seems to be a magico-ritualistic believe. 'Lanka Dahan' is also performed on that day after shova yatra.

Some scholars think this *chhoto tāmāsā' & boro tāmāsā'* is derived from "*mahajani Lokayat Budhha Utsav*" and so the Gambhira was used to be a part of Buddhism. Although, if we analyse all steps of this art, some of the rituals are purely has a connection with our ancient Vedic culture and sastras. However, one main thing here is devotion.

Last day is Ahara/Bolai/Bolbai, it is started with 'Mashan Nach' and ends with 'Bolbai' song known as a part of Gambhira drama or dance or performance. Mashan dance is performed in morning in a terrific women's disguise and becomes more horrific with 'Matan' (a special drum beat) and ends by fumigation. Here, disguise with mask as Kali or sakti goddess has a very important role in history of Gambhira. After that, brahman and young girls are feed. Lastly, a ritual of hanging a banch made with bamboo shoot or wicker, wild banana flower, mango, stone apple and crops finishes rituals for the day. In evening 'Bolbai' song is sang at stage. Also '*Samsol Chhara*', '*Dhekichuman*' or '*Dheki mangala*' are performed on the day of Ahara.

It is an interlacement of dance, drama and songs where the songs are only means of literary history. The dymism of folk art is inscribed in songs and and notion of devotion.

Subjects of Gambhira:

Gambhira is not just a medium of bhakti or amusement drama. It is been taking the responsibility to show the dielemas of life, everyday struggles, hope, failures of backward rural people. Not only that, Gambhira played an important role in social awareness as well as mass media. Looking at the subjects of Gambhira it can be categorised as given below -

1. Religious matters
2. Social events
3. Different contemporary social issues like family planning etc.
4. Political matters (former Congress vs Neo Congress, Taskant agreement etc.)
5. Others contemporary issue, awareness like dowry system, bad effects of drinking alcohol, illegal business, education, superstitions, even the freedom movement etc. have become the subjects of Gambhira.

Usually this songs were written in local and native languages like- Bengali (with local dialect), bhojpuri, Hindi with English words etc. so that performer- spectator relations can be built up easily through jocular dialogues. People can relate, feel the emotions and find themselves in those performances.

Types of Gambhira:

Various types of subjects are narrated through Gambhira till date in different areas in Bengal. Haridas Palit had tried to find the root of the Gambhira gaan through analysing it's route. In "*Adyeer Gambhira*" he saw gambhira as a product of cultural milieu of "*Hinduism-Budhism-Jainism-Sahajiya*" religious practices where he described the different gambhira presentation in different areas.

Bangalese of Barendrabhumi:

The Koaches, Poles of Barendrabhumi or lower Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri and eastern Malda area perform gambhira in a very simple manner with local ingredients.

Rārhiya Gambhira:

It is found in Kurmun village in Bardhaman district. Where they different sings '*shiv gora bandana*' while they make shivlinga idol like- *Dwārmukta*, *Nidrāvañga*, *Dikbandana*, *Sadāshivapranām*.

Utkaler Gambhira:

In utkal i.e., in lower part of Medinipur district that culturally resembles with Orissa have same kind of occassion known as '*Sāhiyātrā*' like Gambhira. Three days festival at the same time of year celebrated. But one difference is that they don't worship any idol at '*Sāhiyātrā*' stage.

Also, Gambhira on Mahabharata, where lord Shiva is not the Vedic Shiva, he is very familiar to people.

Apart from this, there is a **division of area** within the district of Malda like-

- a. Engrej bazar town oriented gambhira
- b. Taal-diyara areas gambhira
- c. Barinda area gambhira

Still there is an age-old traditions in gambhira performance can be seen in Maldah, Gajol, Bamangola and Habibpur -these Barindra areas.

Analysis of Gambhira:

The musical instruments used for Gambhira songs are Dhāk, Juri. In later time, Harmonium, Tabla and flute were introduced in gambhira. The back vocal or side singers known as '*Dohar*' 6-7, 1 lead singer enacts as lord Shiva and some 3,4 persons enacts as common people and sings the Gambhira songs and other plays instrument at back side. Now it is performed as 'jātrā' i.e., the performer acts at the center of audience. Usually time duration of the Gambhira performance is 2 to 3 hours with 4 to 6 subjects of songs. The performers are decided according to the subjects. Sometimes 2 to 4 performers. Bhakti rasa was primarily embedded in songs but expression of bhakti is with *karun rasa*, *bir rasa*, *roudra rasa* etc. even sometimes with *hasya rasa*. The songs of Malda are divided as *Mukhapad*, *shiba bandana*, *duet*, *chaariaari*, *tonting*, *tappa*, *saltamami* and *palagaan*. Tune of this songs are very simple and has no specific patterns. It has taken tunes of other popular form of folk songs as well as others. As Dr. Prodyut Ghosh says, "বিভিন্ন সুরে গাওয়া হয় গম্ভীরা গান। মিলেমিশে গেছে বিভিন্ন সুর।...আলকাপ, রামপ্রসাদী, বাউল, কীর্তনের সংমিশ্রণে গম্ভীরা সঙ্গীতের উদ্ভব। এর সঙ্গে ভাওয়াইয়ার অন্তর্গত 'ক্ষীরোল' ও 'চটকার'-ও প্রভাব আছে।" (Ghosh:2003)

Although it is a compact mode of entertainment too, but annual as well as seasonal occasion. so, young generation loosing their keen interest on this kind of traditional art forms.

It used to be sang with religious value but now flowing through folk life it became a part of folk life what gave the folk people an identity.

But in later time, popularisation of jumur, tappa, kheur types of songs left behind the Gambhira. The light, jocular mode of those songs easily replaced the traditional devotional songs of Gambhira.

Gambhira played major role in freedom fight through folk arts, but it is not been proclaimed as much. The Gambhira artist late Gobinda Seth and his team got arrested by British govt. but could not top the spread of Gambhira. But 20th century is considered as the revolutionary time for Gambhira. Baladebanand of Malda established '*Adarsha Gambhira Utsav*' organisation to maintain the quality of Gambhira songs and performance.

The effort towards rejuvenation of Gambhira has to be more impactful that this age-old art stay ins its own glory.

Artists of Gambhira:

The earlier artists and composers were not known due to lack of documentation. But there are artists name found from last decades to present. Not only hindu composers also muslim composers are found what lifts Gambhira to beyond the religious peripheri to emotions. They are- Mohammad Sufi, Harimohan Kundu, Gobindlal Seth, Morajuddin Abul Hossain, Akbar Khalifa, Sarat Pandit, Daranidhar Saha, Brajalal Pashari, Satish Dasgupta, Srirup Khalifa, Dharmadas Mandal, Baman Bihari Goswami, Mrityunjay Sharma, Madhusudan Khalifa, Basanta Majumder, Dukarilal Choudhury, Gadadhar Mandal, Dhankrishna Adhikari, Madhai Goshai, Sudarshan Seth, Radhanath Kundu, Haridas Das, Asutosh Gosh, Kalua-Bishua, Kinu Halder, Gostha Bihari Banijya. Very famous gambhira composer Biswanath Pandit of Malda got 'Lalan Puraskar' from govt. of West Bengal in 1993.

Inference:

Here, as we discussed on the literacy base i.e, songs of Gambhira performance, the well known description of folk dramatic makeup, dances and mask used for the performance are not discussed. Previously the scholars have contributed their effort on the Gambhira drama and mask used in the drama etc. But only focusing on written literature or oral history of Gambhira songs has not been discussed in details. Though it is not possible to discuss this huge bouquet of cultural literature in this short extent. still will tried to focus on different aspects of Gambhira songs. So, uses of tunes, rhythmic patterns, philosophical ideas, illustrative analysis of literature of Gambhira songs are a matter of further research and a different study of concern. Looking only at the song literature some efforts to preserve has been taken, but technical conservations are needed, as well as growing interest in young generation is also needed. Some people of Malda are trying to carry this tradition with pride. But to some extent it is just become a religious ritual out of devotion. But there are so many people showing lack of interests. But any folk art is nothing with out folk, so there has to take some measures to prevent it like-

- Spreading awareness through the media
- Educating rural people about conservation of folk art
- Research and documentation on Gambhira as a whole art
- Training program for young generation that used to be a part of Gambhira previously
- Recognition of Gambhira artists
- Tagging that folk art as geo-cultural component
- Employment of artists
- Collecting materials of Gambhira at rural level collections
- Digital library inclusion of Gambhira art
- Audio-video collection
- Showcasing at global platform
- Making a part of cultural tourism
- Popularisation of Gambhira by using it in modern industry music. And others

Acknowledgments:

Researcher would like to show her gratitude towards her guide prof. Basavi Mukerji for her ceaseless encouragement on the way of thinking bigger and better. Also, she would like to thank the persons who helped in collecting data regarding this study. Apart from this researcher is indebted to the Asiatic Society, Kolkata; National Library, Kolkata; and my departmental library of Sangit Bhavan, as well as central library, Visva Bharati University.

Funding:

No funding were taken from any funding agencies to complete this work. The author and researcher (both same) has done this work on her own expenses.

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