



Department of MSME&T
Government of West Bengal

Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal

Rhythm & Soul

PERFORMING ARTS OF BENGAL



“It is culture that has the potential to transform birth (often without purpose) into life (meaningful existence)”

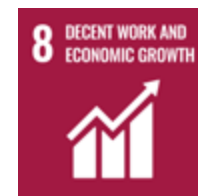
Rabindranath Tagore

Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



West Bengal is a treasure trove of natural and cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage of Bengal is an exemplary instance of the aesthetic lineage of Bengal. Utilitarian lifestyle items like basketry made with date palm leaves and Sabai grass, hand spun and hand woven jute rugs (Dhokra), mats made with cane slips (Sitalpati) or Madurkathi (Madur), pottery, Kantha-spreads, decorative and ritualistic items made out of Shola and others, reflect a curious fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and utility. Bengal's art and craft reflect cultural history, ethnic roots, and lifestyle in-tune with nature. Variety of masks, Dokra and metal work, range of indigenous weaves and embroideries, dolls, masks and figurines curved out of wood are examples of Bengal's artistry. Culture of Bengal is enriched by the mellifluous tunes of the Baul, Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali singers, rapturous dances of Chau, Raibenshe and Jhumur, storytelling traditions like puppetry and Patachitra, and folk theatres like Gambhira, Banbibir Pala among other folk forms.

The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) Project is an initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) and UNESCO aiming to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal and strengthen rural creative enterprise. The journey started in 2013 and the RCCH project currently covers 50,000 handicraft and folk artists across the state. It has strengthened the ecosystem supporting the transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, fostered direct market linkage, engaged youth in pursuing their traditions, and promoted cultural tourism to the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to sustainable development, social inclusion and also to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





Baul

Soul Music of Bengal: Celebrating Peace, Love and Brotherhood

Baul is a philosophy and music. It is the soul of Bengal and is essentially the music of self-searching. Chaitanyadev's Bhakti Cult movement, which is regarded as the first social reform movement in Bengal, may be the basis of the evolution of Baul music. Living an esoteric life, denouncing the material world, Baul music urges people to rise above the narrow divides created by caste, creed & religion and to opt for love, peace and harmony. Spreading love is the essence of Baul music. Bauls use a variety of folk musical instruments including *Ektara*, *Dugi*, *Dotara*, *Dubki*, *Dhol*, *Manjira/Khanjani*, *flute*, *Khamak*. The term Baul may be derived from 'Ba,' meaning air. Controlling air is part of their meditation and spirituality.

Baul music is inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in the 2008 (done by Bangladesh with a mention of West Bengal). Baul is an oral tradition where the musical heritage gets passed on from 'Guru' to his disciples. As an outcome of the RCCH intervention, Baul music got strengthened, young ones got benefitted through the training delivered over the project period, Baul music reached globally, and got acceptability in World music circuit. Baul music is premised on three major genres

- *Dehatattwa* refers to the reverence towards human body, which epitomises the ultimate truth
- *Atmatattwa* upholds the importance of soul in guiding the body and hence an aspect of worship
- *Gurutattwa* celebrates the Guru or the Supreme Being who has attained divine grace through austerity and preaches to follow the path shown by the Guru.



Baul hubs of Bengal

Bauls mostly reside in Nadia, Birbhum, Purba Bardhaman, Murshidabad and Bankura districts of West Bengal. Gorbhanga, Asannagar, Chapra, Nabadwip, Majdia in Nadia; Jalangi, Sagarpara, Hariharpara, Khagra in Murshidabad; Joydev Kenduli, Bolpur- Shantiniketan, Siuri, Ilambazar in Birbhum are major clusters hosting many Baul Akhra(s) (seats of learning for Baul music). Baul resource centres developed as part of the RCCH project are located at Jalangi and Hariharpara in Murshidabad.



Resource Centre : Gorbhanga, Nadia | Jalangi, Murshidabad | Hariharpara, Murshidabad

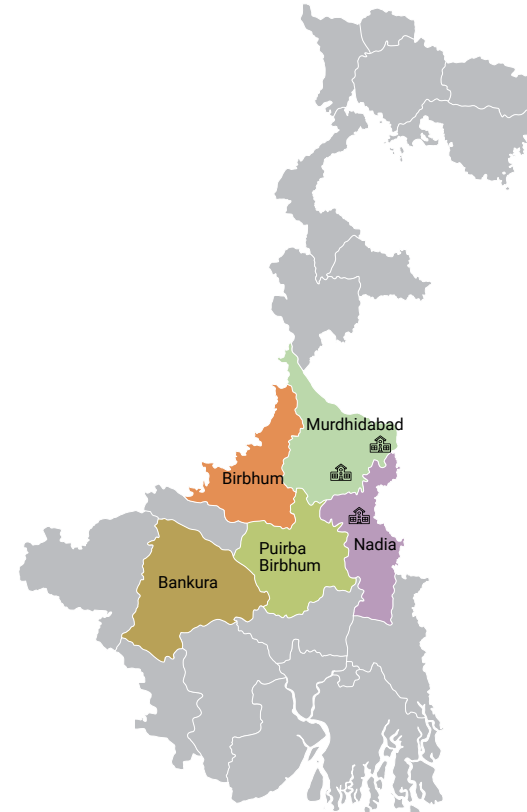


Number of Artists

Bankura	183
Birbhum	272
Murshidabad	790
Nadia	739
PaschimBardhaman	14
PurbaBardhaman	137

Contact

- **Nadia**
 - Babu Fakir: 9733948841
 - Arman Fakir: 9733956858
 - Khaibar Fakir: 9647190624
 - Ranjit Sarkar (Kartick): 9732123965
 - Subhadra Baulani: 9932205548
 - Arjun Mondal: 9732799811
 - Ananda Sarkar: 7797541636
 - Prafulla Biswas: 9932754206
 - Uttara Baidya: 6295019652
 - Shyam Khyapa: 9635726835
- **Birbhum**
 - Rina Das Baulani: 9800120227
 - Rabi Das Baul: 9614196848
 - Nityapriya Mandal: 9609031427
 - Anath Mal: 8001294718
 - Sadhu Das Baul: 9732892002
 - Bama Prasad Singha: 9732008599
 - Prodyut Bala: 7477543941
- **Bardhaman**
 - GirishMondal: 8637549294
 - Pijush Baul: 8637549294
 - Bhajan Das Bairagya: 9733907558
- **Bankura**
 - Chandan Roy: 6297110496
- **Murshidabad**
 - Chote Golam: 9732917198
 - Mallika Akar: 8617835245
 - Rashidul Islam: 9775229425
 - Shyamsundar Das: 9635714002



Bhatiyali

Songs of the boatmen

Bhatiyali music is inspired by the confluence of nature and life. The word 'Bhatiyali' originates from the word "Bhati" – low land, and "Bhata" – low tide. It is linked with rivers and biodiversity of the Sundarban region of India and Bangladesh. Boatmen sing Bhatiyali songs while sailing. This folk musical form gained popularity mainly in the Mymensingh and Sylhet districts of undivided Bengal (now in Bangladesh), as well as in the Sunderbans area. Legendary Singer Abbas Uddin Ahmed made the genre popular.

Bhatiyali songs express joy, pain of separation, harvesting and the lifestyle of the boatmen in their own language. The lyrics reflect the daily challenges and hardships the boatmen face in their everyday life. Bhatiyali is also part of local folk drama Banbibir Pala and Gazir Gaan. This genre of music is accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as *dotara*, *flute*, *ektara*, *tabla*, *dhol* etc.

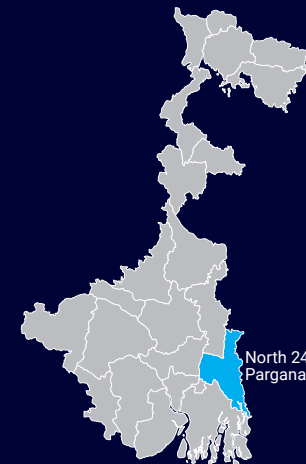


Number of Artists

North 24 Parganas 188

Bhatiyali hubs of Bengal

Bhatiyali is the song of boatmen, mostly found in the deltas of Sunderban, North 24 Parganas. Most of the Bhatiyali singers stay in Hingalganj block of North 24 Parganas. As this is also part of Banbibir Pala, singers are also there in South 24 Parganas of Sundarban particularly in Gosaba and surrounding areas, but they are not identified as Bhatiyali singers.



Contact

District
North 24 Parganas

Location
Hingalganj

Artist Contact
Sourav Mondal
9830710713

Bishnupada Sarkar
8159845715

Nabanita Mondal
9002587309





Bhawaiya

Lifestyle music of North Bengal

Bhawaiya songs reflect the experiences of rural life. The term may be derived from “Bhava,” meaning “emotion.” Some believe that the term originated from the word “Bhawa,” which means low lying grasslands. Another opinion suggests that the word comes from the word “Bao/”, meaning breeze. Lifestyle music, the themes of Bhawaiya compositions are premised on the lived realities of common people. The RCCH project had an immense impact on Bhawaiya music, creating a bridge between the practitioners of different districts and locales, which have helped the Gurus and experts to come together to create a Bhawaiya curriculum & spread it amongst the local Bhawaiya training centres and also developing a quality supply line to the generated demand of good folk music.

The project also helped the artists in reaching out to various places in India and abroad. In recent time, many young artists mostly women have been the bearers of this musical tradition. New and traditional songs are being composed regularly and sung by the artists. Many of the Bhawaiya songs attract millions of viewers in digital media. Traditional musical instruments, which accompany Bhawaiya music includes *Dotara*, *Flute*, *Dhol*, *Khol* and *Sarinda*. Renowned Bhawaiya artist and Sarinda player Mangalakanta Roy was honoured with Padmashree in 2023.

Bhawaiya hubs of Bengal

Bhawaiya is the most popular folk music genre of North Bengal based on nature and lifestyle and is mostly found in Alipurduar, Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri districts. Major Bhawaiya hubs include Maynaguri, Jalpaiguri and Dhupguri block in Jalpaiguri district, Tufangunj, Dinhata, Coochbehar 1 & 2 block in Cooch Behar district and Alipurduar 1 & 2, Falakata, Salkumar and Majidkhana block in Alipurduar.

Number of Artists

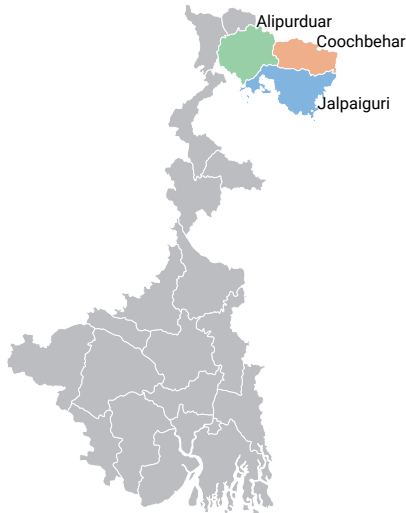
Alipurduar	1186
Cooch Behar	2549
Jalpaiguri	1176



View documentary
on Bhawaiya

Contact

- Alipurduar**
 - Kaushalya Roy: 8597332070
 - Pradyut Roy: 6295745322
 - Nityananda Adhikary: 9564168770
- Coochbehar**
 - Najrul Islam: 8670918772
 - Himadri Dewri: 9434885357
 - Sanjay Roy: 7550931556
 - Tumpa Barman: 9733007844
- Jalpaiguri**
 - Dipankar Roy Dakua: 9932257022
 - Anindita Roy: 8617481902
 - Sipra Roy: 9932209479





Chau

An acrobatic folk dance

Chau is an acrobatic mask dance form. Colourful masks, rhythmic drum beats, powerful acrobatic movements and somersaults (locally known as ulfa) are characteristics of Chau dance as practiced in Purulia district of West Bengal. Purulia's Chau dancers enact stories from the epics of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranic texts and other known/ local stories. The dancers wear ornate costumes and elaborately crafted mask that portrays the character of the dancer. The masks are made by a community of mask makers living mostly in Charida village in Baghmundi block of Purulia, who make masks of deities, epic and also of tribal/ other characters as per storyline/pala. The masks are of different sizes starting from small to large ones. The tradition of making Chau masks started in Charida around 150 years back during the rule of King Madan Mohan Singh Deo of Baghmundi. Purulia's Chau dance is inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity in 2010 and Chau mask has been accredited with the tag of Geographical Indication (GI) in 2018.

Purulia's Chau dance style and steps are traditional, based on rhythm not on melody. Later, with the introduction of palas, each character got associated with specific dance style & steps, which are still followed and passed on from Gurus to their disciples.

The traditional musical instruments used in Chau dance include *dhol*, *dhamsa*, *charchari*, *tikra*, *nagra*, *sanai* and *flute*. Chau dance as a living heritage has given a cultural identity to the district of Purulia, where over the last decade, Purulia has grown to be a vibrant cultural tourism destination. Chau dancers are now transcending boundaries to present their dance form, where leading dancers have travelled to various international destinations like the UK, China, Japan, Sweden, Germany, France, Bangladesh, Singapore, Lithuania. While Chau was primarily a male-dominated folk form, over the past few years, female dancers have also become involved with the folk dance form, and today there are quite a few female Chau dance troupes in Purulia. Leading Chau guru Bhuban Kumar got Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 2023.



Scan to know more
about Chau dance steps

Number of Artists

Purulia 5005



Resource Centre : Maldih, Bamnia

Contact

- **Purulia**
 - Biren Kalindi: 8972679889
 - Jagannath Chaudhury: 9933409339
 - Binadhar Kumar: 9434655963
 - Sougata Mahato: 9932283541
 - Bhuban Kumar: 9932530321
 - Baghambar Singmura: 9735163475
 - Kartik Singmura: 9800938965
 - Sanjay Mahato : 7001968527





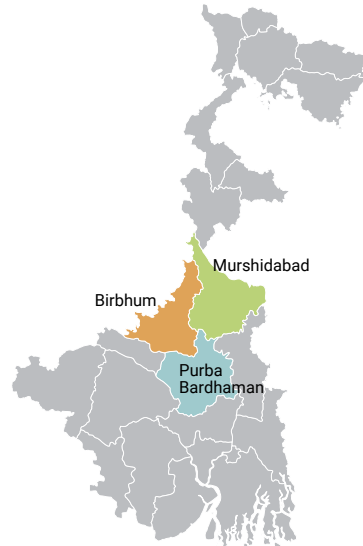
Raibenshe

Folk dance celebrating the art of balancing

Raibenshe is a folk martial dance form which evolved from ancient martial art practised by the bodyguards of the kings and the Landlords (Zamindars) of Bengal. The dance form is characterised by rigorous body movements and balancing acts. Along with the energetic movements, it involves acrobatics by the dancers with Raibansh which is a long bamboo pole, from which the term Raibenshe has originated. The reference of Raibenshe is found in old texts like Annadamangal, Chandimangal and Dharmamangal. Although one can still trace the attacking postures of the warriors of earlier period from the vigorous movements of Raibenshe dance, but it may better be positioned as the Balancing Act. The accompanying musical instruments include *Dhol*, *Flute*, *Cymbal* and *Sanai*. Eminent folklorist and writer, Gurusaday Dutta was instrumental in popularising the dance form. Although historically, it was a male dominated dance, but today we also see female dancers.

Raibenshe hubs of Bengal

Raibense can be found in Baharampur, Bharatpur 1, Burwan, Jiagunj, Kandi and Nabagram block of Murshidabd, Mayureshwar 1, Labhpur, Rampurhat, Nanoor, Saithiya of Birbhum; and Katawa 1 block of Purba Bardhaman.



Number of Artists

Birbhum	63
Purba Bardhaman	56
Murshidabad	169

Contact

- Birbhum**
Rakkhakar Pramanik: 8016474415
- Murshidabad**
Gopal Chandra Sarkar: 9474078276
Basudeb Bhalla: 8170808528
Sentu Bitter: 9064426950
Ajit Konai: 9733686835
Prokash Bitter: 9609285367
Kajal Bitter: 9564155048
Shakti Doloi: 9734585234
- Purba Bardhaman**
Rajesh Hazra: 8101045372
Bablu Hazra: 8768185220
Aloy Pandit: 9735342737





Gambhira

Satirical folk theatre

Gambhira is a satirical & protective folk theatre of Malda district of West Bengal. This art form voices the common people's grievances, aspirations, joys and sorrows. It became popular after the decline of Buddhism in the 7th-8th century and was revered in Malda during the rule of the Sena dynasty. The current form of Gambhira emerged during the reign of the Pala kings in the 10th century. In Gambhira, one of the performers dresses up like Lord Shiva and represents the feudal lord or government. In a wonderful mix of songs, dances and satire, it conveys the people's woes, concerns and worries to Lord Shiva.

The themes of Gambhira are always based on social and political issues. The characters wear torn and worn-out clothes and use rags as wrist bands and head bands. Main accompanying instruments used are *dhol*, *harmonium*, *tabla*, *trumpet*, *cymbals*.

Number of Artists

Malda : 293



Contact

Malda
English Bazar
Adwaita Biswas
7001684334

Domni

Unique folk theatre

Domni is a unique folk theatre form of Manikchak region of Malda in West Bengal. It presents social satire through which common people voice their grievances and aspirations. The drama portrays the joys and sorrows of the poor and common people. Domni is said to have evolved from a region called Diyara in north western Malda and was practised by migrants from Jharkhand.

Number of Artists

Malda : 142



Contact

Malda
Nazrul Islam
9733088168

Sachin Mondal
9647749763

Abhiram Mondal
9932962785





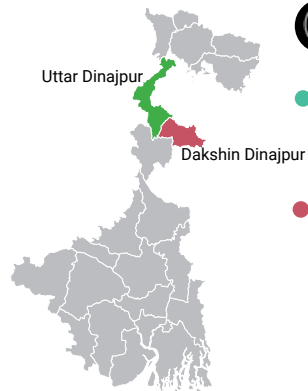
Mukha

Ritualistic dance

Gomira (locally known as Mukha Nach) performances or Palas (musical folk theatres), are ritualistic dances. The performers treat each mask philosophically by considering it as the Mukha (face), rather than a Mukhosh (mask), believing it comes alive as soon as one puts it on. Traditionally, the Rajbanshi community is engaged in the dance. The performances are held during the months of Chaitra – Ashad (April – July) according to their convenience, at a central location which is usually the village temple. The dances are organized to appease the village deity, Goddess Chandi and to embrace her blessings.

Number of Artists

Dakshin Dinajpur	49
Uttar Dinajpur	26



Contact

- **Uttar Dinajpur**
Sachindranath Sarkar
9932530517
- **Dakshin Dinajpur**
Jagadish Sarkar
7407149938

Puppetry

The dancing marionettes

There are three different styles and formats of Puppetry in West Bengal, viz.

- Beniputul (Glove puppet): the Puppetry where a puppet is moved with hands,
- Dang putul (Rod puppet): moved with a stick and
- Taarputul or Sutoputul (String puppet) where a puppet is moved with string.

In the RCCH Project, String puppeteers of Muragacha, Nadia are included. String puppets are made locally by using scrap cloth, paper mache and Solapith to make them lighter. Depending on the character, the puppets are of 1ft to 3 ft, suspended with black strings and operated from the top. The puppets are made out of Shola. String Puppetry is presented on stage, where the audience sit in front of a stage of usual dimensions 7-8 ft wide, 4-6 ft in height and 3-4 ft in depth. A typical puppetry group comprises of 10-12 members; including music composer, lyricist, story writer, light man, sound man, instrumentalist, decorator and puppeteers.



Number of Artists

Nadia 181

Contact

- **Nadia**
Ranjan Roy
9609095941





View documentary
on Chadar Badar

Chadar Badar

Indigenous puppetry tradition

Chadar Badar or Chadar Bandhani is an indigenous Santhal puppetry. This art form is seen mostly in Ausgram block of Purba Bardhaman. Created with intricate workmanship, the puppets are carved out of bamboo or wood and are about 8 to 9 inches in height. Carving is done on light wood available in the area and once the puppets are made, they are adorned with clothing, colours and accessories. The puppets are controlled with the help of the twisted string on the puppeteer's fingers. For the performance, the puppets are placed on a small platform with a canopy or hung inside a wooden box, open on three or all four sides. The puppeteer narrates stories from ancient Santhal culture using words and verse and use the puppets to enact the correct gestures to bring out the essence of the story.

A combination of traditional musical instruments, like *Banam*, *Nagara*, *Tirenya* or *flute*, *Khorkuto* and the *Tunda* or *Madal* accompany the performance. The performance is a display of indigenous animation and simplicity. The RCCH project has rejuvenated the art form. The artists now get invitations to perform in different functions.

 Number of Artists

Purba Bardhaman 76



 Contact

● **Purba Bardhaman**
Dilip Murmu 7585888991
Lakhiram Kisku 7863929829
Som Soren 7908230373
Fagu Hansda 8293529166
Sunil Tudu 9832271038

Jhumur

Celebrating lived realities of common man

Jhumur is an indigenous lifestyle music and dance of the Chotanagpur plateau region covering parts of West Bengal, especially Purulia & Bankura. We can also see Jhumur dance in Sundarban due to migration of labour long time back. Jhumur songs soulfully express happiness, sorrow, love and loss of the people of these regions. Jhumur is a vital part of local festivities like Karam, Bhadu, Tusu, Badhna and rituals centering harvests, marriage etc. Jhumur songs have a strong rhythmic component. Jhumur songs once known for celebrating the union of Radha-Krishna. Farmers sing Jhumur while sowing paddy. The simple lyrics depict the joys and sorrows of the rural people and are traditionally based on mythology. Since 20th century, poets have written Jhumur songs reflecting daily life, social and political issues. The songs are sung in local languages like Kurmali, Santhali, Bengali etc. Accompanying instruments for Jhumur include *Dhol*, *Dhamsa*, *Kartal*, *Tabla*, *Madal*, *Gypsy*, *Harmonium* and *Flute*.

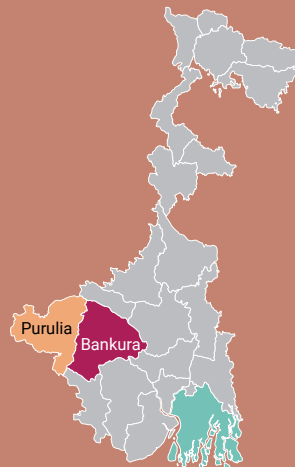
The RCCH project has significantly contributed in reviving and rejuvenating the folk tradition of Jhumur and even Purulia's current poets have started writing new Jhumur compositions reflecting Purulia's natural beauty as well as its lifestyle and culture.

Jhumur hubs of Bengal

Jhumur hubs of Bengal is mainly found in Purulia, Bankura, and Sundarban region.

Number of Artists

South 24 Parganas	220
Bankura	1127
Purulia	1596



Contact

Bankura	
Fatik Sahis:	9474047098
Sunil Pal:	9474668582
Purulia	
Muktinath Mahato:	8116173646
Tarapada Singh Sardar:	9932185205
Ashimananda Kumar:	9933428688
South 24 Parganas	
Sujit Sardar:	8670529984
Shila Sardar:	8348635188
Gautam Sardar:	6290350178
Bandan Sardar:	8348854904
Bablu Sardar:	8001490685



Adivasi Dance

Choreographed beliefs and practices

The characteristic feature of this dance is its perfect synchronization of movements to the beats of drums celebrating life where both men and women participate.

During the spring festival, the dance is performed to the glory of nature. Dang dance is performed during marriage. Sohrai, a harvest dance, invites all villagers to participate in the festivity. Dasai dance is performed after the Durga Puja, when the Santhali men go out to the neighbouring villages.

Number of Artists

Jhargram	29
Paschim Bardhaman	1349



Contact

Paschim Bardhaman	
Mugli Hembram:	9382471519
Caran Hembram:	9064893534
Bholanath Murmu:	9475149533
Panmani Mardi:	7719213803



Rabha Song and Dance

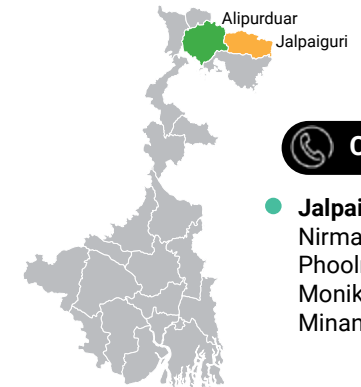
Indigenous rhythm

Rabha is a minor ethnic community residing in parts of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts of West Bengal. Their occupation and livelihood is dependent on agriculture, forest department jobs and daily labour. They also grow rice, jute, vegetables, and corn.

The Rabha community has a unique tradition of folk song and dance. Everyday activities like fishing, farming, stories of battles fought happen to be thematic premise of Rabha song and dance. The RCCH project support has contributed to this performing arts tradition of Rabha community to reach out to a wider audience, and this may help in motivating the community to strengthen the art form.

Number of Artists

Alipurduar	209
Jalpaiguri	15



Contact

Jalpaiguri	
Nirmal Rabha:	9932635226
Phoolmati Rabha:	9064982728
Monika Rabha:	6296585576
Minanti Rabha:	8207076567



www.rcchbengal.com



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