

Research Paper :

## A study on headgear and costumes of Chhau dance

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### ABSTRACT

Purulia, a district of west Bengal is famous for the unique style of dance form called "Chhau" in which the use of headgear and costume ornamentation is rare to see. This unique art of making headgear and costume is main source of attraction. There are different kind of technique which are being used in making mask and ornamentation which can be beneficial in learning and incorporating in other forms of decorations. Now, day by day this unique art of making head gear and costume are in the phase of extinct. This research was conducted to know about the reason behind the extinction of this unique art.

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Chhau is a dialect which means six faces viz., forehead, eyes, nose, cheeks, lips and chin, and a mask bears the six parts of the face. The word "Chhau" ordinarily means mask and because the dance is performed by use of mask, it is called "Chhau dance".

Chhau dance is a genre of Indian tribal martial dance, which is popular in the Indian states of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa. Chhau is originally performed on the occasion of the sun festival towards the end of the month of Chaitra (March - April). It is done and originated from Matha tribal community which exists in thick forest in Purulia district.

Purulia Chhau is a vibrant and powerful folk dance form with an inclination towards theatre. Use of mask in the dance makes it more attractive for the audience. The unfortunate silence of historical documents about Purulia Chhau dance has heightened the mystery of this form. This form is declining due to various reasons and it needs to be preserved.

The story or theme contained in each number in Purulia Chhau is not narrated in words but depicted only through dance movements. Therefore, Chhau is essentially a form of non-verbal theatre, in which actors express themselves in movements, not in words. To compensate the absence of the verbal element, the dance has developed a stylized mimetic language and a well-knit grammar.

The use of mask in Chhau not only determined the

line of its growth, but remained its focal point even after the form fully crystallized. The making of these masks is an independent art altogether. It needs a gifted artist to visualize the mask and then give shape to it. Masks were earlier made of wood, but presently these are made of papier-mâché or clay.

The Purulia Chhau, masks vibrate with quality of earthiness and their function is more or less limited to effectively stylized representation of mythical dramatic personae. With the use of masks, Chhau takes the fantasy of its audience to the summit of poetry, where beauty is distilled from a world of magnificent dreams.

Dancers wear traditional ornaments and richly decorated costumes. Music of Chhau is predominantly instrumental. Percussion is both powerful and dominating because the expression in movement is governed primarily by percussive music. The rhythmic pattern and tempo of the music is designed to go along with the development of the theme. It creates an appropriate atmosphere with the help of melodic content in the accompanying orchestra, which has practically no vocal element. The musical instruments, used in Chhau are Dhol, Dhumsa (big drum), Pepti and Janjh.

Objective of the investigation was to study the use of headgear and costumes in Chhau dance and to observe the problems faced by the artisans and performers. To study the fact that why Chhau is called "A lost art".

The study was done through the field visit, personal