

**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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**Key words:** Headgear, Costumes, Chhau dance

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 The unfortunate silence of historical documents about Purulia Chhau dance has heightened the mystery of this form.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

interviews of concerning people, filling up questionnaire, observation etc. All the processes have illustrated through photographs, graphs, pie charts etc. Some samples would also be collected for better understanding.

### EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURE

Making of Chhau masks is a multi stage process. It goes as follows:

– A clay model of a mask is first made and dried in direct sunlight to make it hard. This is the first step known as ‘Mati Gora’. It is then covered with powdered ash.



– Then layers of old newspapers moist with gum are pasted on this powdered layer. A thin layer of fine clay is applied known as “Kabij Lapa”. On drying, old torn cloth are pasted on it effectively. The mask is then polished, “Tapi Palish”, with a wooden spatula. With a small tool, “batali” the features of the face are defined and cleaned. This is known as “Khushni Khoncha”.



– A layer of clay water is applied on it. On drying a layer of zinc oxide or “khori mati” is applied on it. According to the characters the mask is painted and decorated. The artisans are well versed in the use of colours dark yellow or bright orange are the colours used for Gods and Goddesses like Devi Durga, Lakshmi and Kartik. White is generally used for Lord Shiva, Ganesh and Goddess Saraswati. Goddess Kali is painted black or blue. A talisman or a Tilak is applied on the forehead of Lord Rama and Krishna. The Asuras are painted in black or deep green with thick mustaches, protruding teeth and large eyes.



– Silver and golden foil cut in different shapes, string of beads, pith works, and coloured paper flowers, feathers of hens and peacocks are used for decorating the masks. A type of oil is applied on the mask for a fine finish. A

fished Chhau mask weighs up to 3kg and costs up to Rs. 2000.

### Problems:

Making only Chhau masks doesn't suffice a considerable lifestyle. Increasing costs of the raw materials, poor marketing and interfering middleman are some of the chief factors which cut off the profit percentage to make the Chhau mask makers poorer day by day. So, they have to make some other decorative masks which can be used as wall hanging. The workshops of all the artists are now full of such decorative masks staked together, ready to be marketed along with original Chhau masks.

Most of the times the artists want to perform this art in the other parts of India but the lack of interest and the corrupt administration make this unique art in loss day by day.

### Transportation:

The worse thing is that the work of mask and ornamentation are being done in the village known as Chorida which is 45 km away from the main market of Purulia which is Namopara .and there is no specific type of transportation available for the artisans to carry their heavy mask. On delivering to other places it also gets broken some times this in turn is a great loss to the artist which makes the individual in 15 days.

### Naxal region:

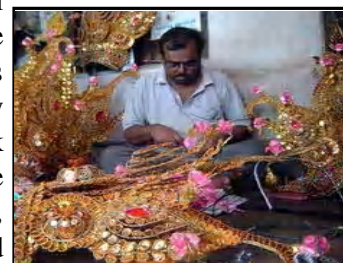
Since there is fear to have naxal in the region where it has being created, the people deny there work and some of the people left the craft field because it requires lots of traveling and more of naxal remain there in the roadway sector of Matha village which is in the Purulia district.

### Lack in resources:

People of Purulia also agree about the lack of resource in terms of equipments, raw materials, finance etc.

### Daker Saaj:

It is the traditional decoration done in the ornamentation of costumes of Chhau dance. It is very unique style of doing work by mixing the two three materials like clothes, pitha, sequences, mirror and



many more.

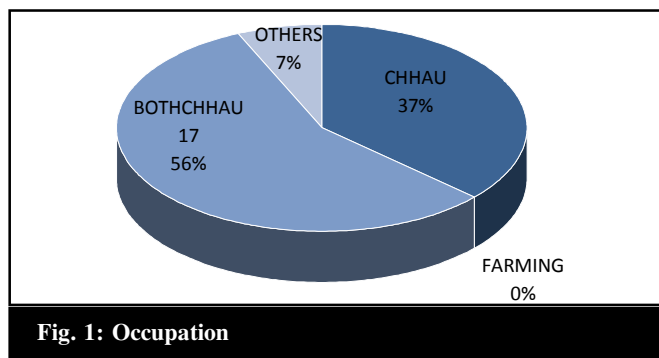
An artisan working with the mask decoration. They use several equipments like Topna, Kaachi, Palash, Thappi and Chairi. These are the essential instruments which are necessary to make mask decorations.



**OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS**

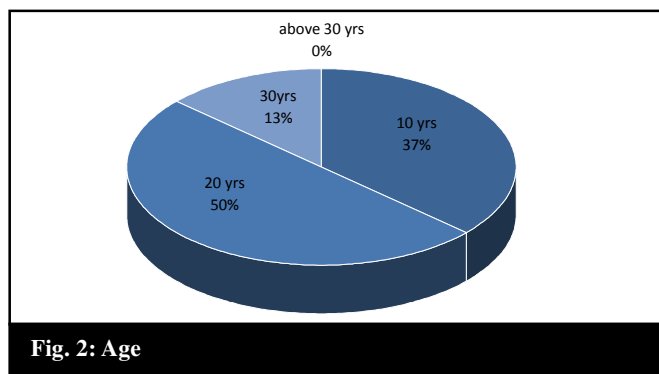
The report of data analysis is being prepared on the basis of questionnaire being asked from the artisans in Purulia district who were associated with the making of mask and ornamentalions of Chhau dance. It was filled by asking to each and every labour working for this art in Puruliya and Chorida village.

Here it is specified that the majority of people of Purulia, involves in both Chhau and farming because by only working in this art doesn't give them a steady life. In Purulia district, mainly in Matha region, most of the people cater the shelter by farming and left with making Chhau mask because of unprofitable and high cost of raw material (Fig. 1).



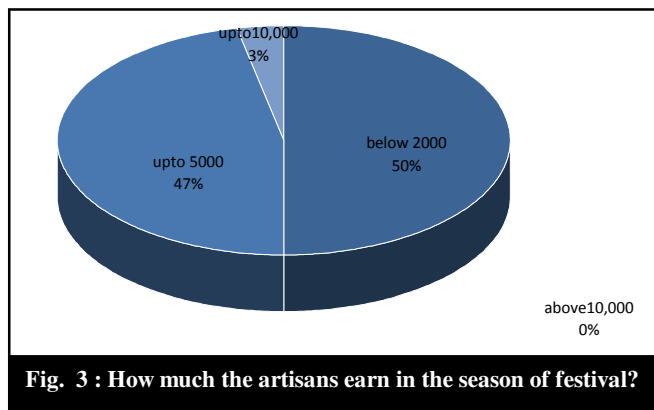
**Fig. 1: Occupation**

In this, it is specified that there is the involvement of artisans in this sector of more the 10 years which justifies the large mass people are getting money from this art (Fig. 2).



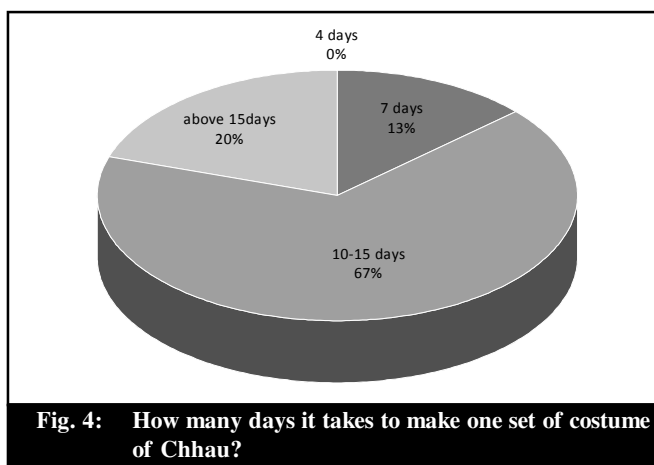
**Fig. 2: Age**

Here, the artisans, marjory (50%) earns below Rs. 2000 which is as unprofitable because day by day the cost of the raw material, transportation cost are increasing. Some of the artists work independently but most of the artisans work together to hold the financial bearings (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3 : How much the artisans earn in the season of festival?**

It almost takes half of the month to make a set of costumes which is time taking and less profitable. An artisan labour cost is also added by which it is up to Rs. 100 -150 per day, which also includes the various materials which are being decorated in the costumes such as Sitara, Moti, Jhalar, Chamcham and many more (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4: How many days it takes to make one set of costume of Chhau?**

Here its has been showing (Fig. 5) that the raw materials are being brought from Kolkata which is very far from Purulia district and it is being brought through the means of railways and road ways. Since the road ways of purulia are not good, it take several days to deliver the raw materials and thus the transportation cost rises and it also effects the cost of the mask and costume ornament but not so much because the materials are not so rich in terms of material which is being made by plastic and other metallic items.

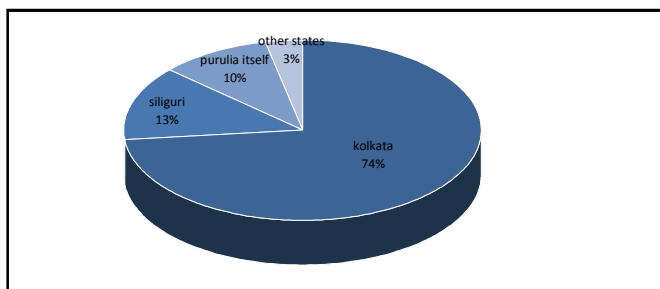


Fig. 5: From where the raw material are being brought?

The artist faces major difficulties in making masks and ornamentation and selling it (Fig. 6). The major problem are as follows:

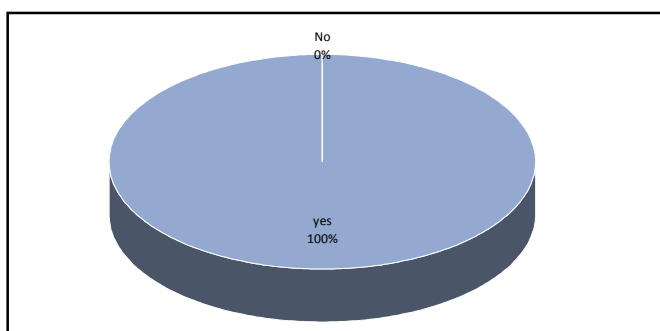


Fig. 6 : Do the artists face some difficulties in making them?

**Transportation:**

The worse thing is that the work of mask and ornamentation are being done in the village known as Chorida which is 45 km away from the main market of Purulia *i.e.* Namopara .and there is no specific type of transportation available for the artisans to carry their heavy mask. On delivering to other places, it also get broken sometimes this in turn is a great loss to the artist which makes the individual in 15 days.

**Naxal region:**

Since there is fear of Naxal in the region where it has being created the people to deny their work and some of the people left the craft field because it requires lots of traveling and more of Naxal remain there in the roadway sector of Matha village which is in Purulia district.

**Lack in resources:**

People of Purulia also agree about the lack of resource in terms of equipments, raw material, finance etc.

Though they know that Government is not supporting the art and now a days it has less in demand, so the art of

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making the mask is being incorporated in making the decorative items like wall hangings mask, pots, flower wash etc. It is beneficial of the artisans too because all types of people buy these kinds of product not only the people associated with the Chhau art (Fig. 7 and 8).

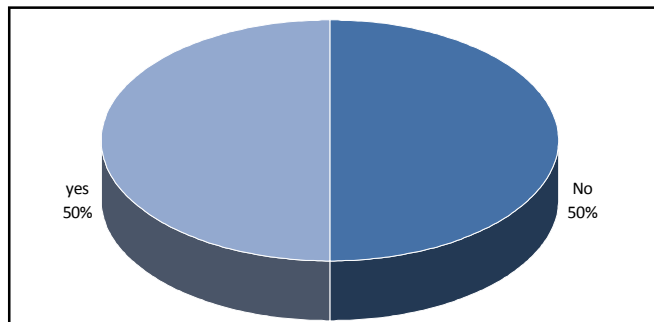


Fig. 7 : Are the artists also making some other items?

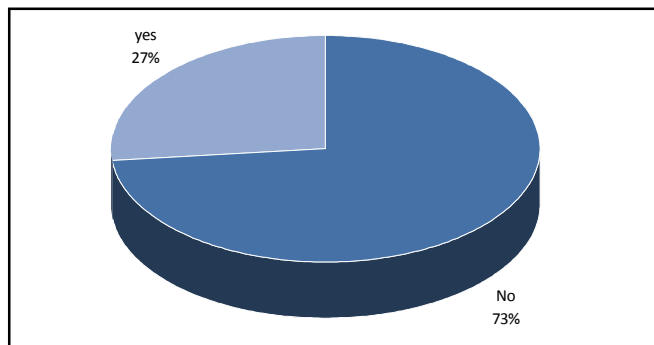


Fig. 8: Has Govt. of West Bengal done some projects to develop this art?

In this the pie chart (Fig. 9) is showing the uninterest of gov. of Bengal in the development of this art. Most of the times the artist wants to perform this art in the other parts of India but the lack of interest and the corrupt administration make this unique art in loss day by day.

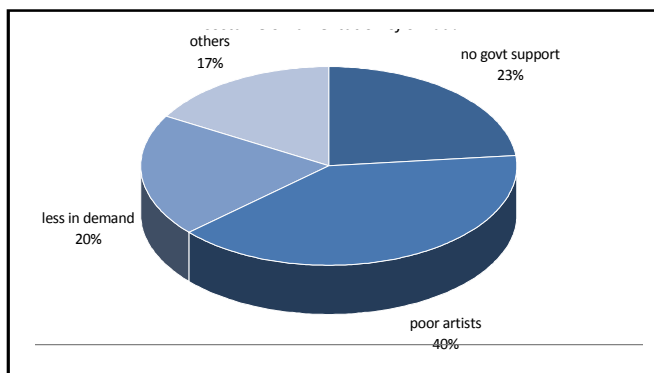


Fig. 9: What is the reason of day by day extension of making mask and costume ornamentation of Chhau?

### Conclusions:

The main facts that the researcher came to know about the struggle of this art is lack in promotion and government support. Here, it is simplified that there are very less steps taken by the government to develop this area where the art exists. And another main reason is the naxalite area where people generally afraid of doing things differently. So, they don't take any risk to be harmed by the naxals. The large area of the village is affected by this reason which in turn also affecting this art.

The suggestion for this is only that government has to take some steps to develop this valuable art of making mask ornamentation which is rare to see in the present world. They can develop this area so that tourist can visit this site to see this art. They can also develop the cluster projects so that their work goes to other parts of the country which in turn give them a promotion and chance of employment. They also develop some stage to perform in their and other places or cities. Because people of India don't know about Chhau which is the oldest of the dances in India.

If government of West Bengal doesn't take any steps to develop this art then sooner or later it will be vanished

because it is in its last phase, people generally who live in Purulia don't concern about the Chhau art and engage in doing different thing to make their life out of that like farming and other business. So, lots of development is needed to put this art in everybody's eye.

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