

# Evolution of Chhau Dance A Theoretical View Point

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**Abstract:** The geographical vividness, variations in ecological conditions, races and their languages, the complex religious reliance and ritual exercises and uniformly tangled social mold have all the set to build the most colourful dancing panorama and drama dance traditions. Indian tradition of dance is very complex in nature. The modernised classical dances or the drama dances such as Bharatanatyam, Lavni, Kathak, Bihu, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Kathakali etc. In them Chhau the rare mask dances of eastern India are quite unique. The Recognition In 2010 the Chhau dance was inscribed in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. At present, the Government of Odisha established a Government Chhau Dance Centre in 1960 in Seraikella and Mayurbhanj Chhau Nritya Pratisthan at Baripada in 1962. In this theoretical paper, the investigators are looking into the evolution of Chhau Dance. Present phenomena or recognition and overall lookout have also focused in this paper. After overall discussion the conclusion would be stated by the investigators.

**Index Terms:** Chhau Dance, Evolution, Present Scenario, Theme, Type, Theoretical Study.

## I. INTRODUCTION

India is a diverse country where live many men in difference of language, religion and cultural perspective. They are able to carriage their own culture. In India Garcinia may difference between Geographical, Ecological conditions, multiplicity of races and their religious beliefs and ritual practices and in the same manner complex social structure have all avail in geating very colourful prospect of dance and drama traditions.

Among the new classical dance and drama like Bharatanatyam, Lavni, Bihu, Kathak, Kuchipuri, Odissi, Kothakali, and few more Chhau, the wonderful mask dances of eastern India are completely unique in this point of view.

### 1.1. Origin of Chhau

As there is no mention of Chhau dance the book of 'Kupland' entitled district Gazetier- Manbhum of 1911, many people think that the origin of Chhau Nach is after 1911. Purulia Chhau" is a folk dance which is being done from 250 years by the locals of Purulia area of Bengal in the praise of Goddess Parvati. The energized dance by the Purulia artists enchanted the audience. The origin of the Chhau Dance has many stories. Originated from the martial dance Phari Khanda Khela (playing with the sword and the shield), the Chhau Dance had been of interest to many rulers of Odisha during the 18th and the 19th centuries. It is believed that the word 'Chhau' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Chhaya' meaning 'shadow or image'. Hence, it is performed to influence the Sun God. However, according to some, 'Chhau' is a dialect that means six faces namely forehead, eyes, nose, cheeks, lips and chin. Ordinarily, 'Chhau' means 'mask' because the dance is performed by using mask. Most of the new theories state that Chhau is a pronunciation of the word 'Chhauni' which is a Military Barrack or Cantonment. The Raja of Bagmundi invented the technique of using masks and appointed the Hindu image-makers for the same. At its later and final stage, the themes of the Ramayana and Mahabharata were introduced. The dance hence, belongs to the Tandava form of Indian classical dance. There is also opinion that it is the combination of 6 dances i.e. 'bhakta', 'Panta', 'santhali', 'Nachani', 'Kirtana', 'Natua'.

### 1.2. Theme of Chhau Dance

It is based on different types of Mythological themes, for instance Puranas, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Ramleela, Krishna leela etc. These stories of Chhau nach are mainly based on the stories like – Battle between Ganesh and Parsuram, killing of Avimunyau, killing of Mahisasura, killing of Rakta Beej (Seeds of Blood) etc.

In Purulia, there is basically two Chhau dance form which is based on the area that are Bandowan and Bagmundi. Where Bandhoan Chhau story is based on the thought of seriousness and Bagmundhi Chhau story is based on the thought of Heroism.

## II. BASIC TYPES

Chhau Nach is a type of Indian aboriginal war dance. It is popular in the Indian states of West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha. According to the origin and development of Chhau dance, it has three sub classes, namely – Purulia Chhau, Saraikalla Chhau and Mayurbhanja Chhau.

### 2.1. Chhau Dance in Odisha

Chhau is one of the most traditional and popular dance forms in India which is originated from Nilagiri region of Baleswar district. These dancers enhance the movement of their dance, with the accompaniment of some instrumental music, and a large group of musicians is involve with this dance. The dancers usually try to accompany with the rhythm of Dhola, Mahuri, Bhumsa and Chanchandi. The Chhau dance in Odisha is well known as Mayurbhanja Chhau. In the Mayurbhanja Chhau is performed without masks and is technically similar to the saraikalla Chhau. There by adding facial expression with body movement and gesture. Here, traditionally the Chhau dance held in the mid march when one agricultural circle end and a new circle beings.

## 2.2. Seraikella Chhau

The Seraikella chhau developed in Seraikella, the present day Seraikella Kharsawan district of Jharkhand the Seraikella chhau's techniques and repertoire were developed by the erstwhile nobility of this region who were both its performers and choreographers, and in the modern era people from all backgrounds dance it. The Seraikella chhau it performed with symbolic marks and the acting establishes the role the actor is playing.

## The Purulia Chhau

The Chhau dance that originated from Purulia finds its inspiration from martial arts and combative training. The dancers perform a repertoire that explores a variety of subjects like mythological episodes from Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas, local legends and folklores and abstract themes. The traditional dance is performed at open spaces at the rhythm of various kinds of drums and other musical instruments. Indigenous drums like **dhol**, **dhumsa** and **kharkai** are used along with the melody of **mohuri** and **shehnai** to make the dance lively and striking. Over the centuries, this dance form was patronized by the royal families, rich landlords as well as by a few British Governors of the region. It is believed that the Raja (king) of Baghmundi in Purulia was the main patron of these dances. It was through his inspiration and patronage that the Chhau masks were made elaborately.

## III. TIME OF CHHAU DANCE

Chhau dance is an integral part of these communities binding the people from different strata. The Purulia Chhau is usually celebrated during important ceremonies having strong religious sentiments. Purulia Chhau dance follows the Tandava form of Indian classical dance and the performers were mostly Shaivites (followers of Lord Shiva). Chhau is mostly performed as veneration to Lord Shiva mostly during **Gajan festival** and other **Shaivite festivals**. They are also performed during weddings and the sun festival. The Chhau mask of Purulia is registered under geographical indicators as the basic of character of mask unique and traditional. The Purulia chhau is occurred of the open sky or open fields.

## IV. PRESENT SCENARIO

The Recognition In 2010 the Chhau dance was inscribed in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The Government of Odisha established a Government Chhau Dance Centre in 1960 in Seraikella and the Mayurbhanj Chhau Nritya Pratisthan at Baripada in 1962. These institutions engage in training involving local gurus, artists, patrons and representatives of Chhau institutions and sponsor performances. The Chaitra Parva festival, significant to the Chhau Dance, is also sponsored by the state government. The Sangeet Natak Akademi has established a National Centre for Chhau Dance at Baripada, Odisha. Purulia Chhau Dance is listed on UNESCO's world heritage list of dances in 2010. In 2014, its tableau portraying Chhau dance of Purulia, which is a popular genre of Indian tribal martial dance, had won the top prize. In recent years, this dance form has started gaining more recognition as people are again trying to associate themselves with their roots. Bollywood has tried to capture the beauty of Bengal in two of its movies, Barfi and Lootera, where they have shown this dance form in play.

Of late the Chhau masks are getting a lot of attention. The Chhau masks have also been presented with the Geographical Identification (GI) tag by the Geographical Indication Registry and Intellectual Property India along with other handicrafts like Dokra, Pattachitra and Madurkathi.

Sidho- Kanho – Birsha University in district Purulia introduces the Diploma Course on Chhau. The main motto of this Course on Chhau is to preserve and continue of age old cultural heritage and to promote various researches on ethnomusicology. Syllabus has been prepared by external university professors and experts in the field. The vision of university on Chhau is not only to conserve the folk dance recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO but to blossom it as an established Art discipline. 50 students have been selected out of total 200 applicants for this course which reflect the increasing demand of the course. A MoU with Back Class Welfare (BCW) Department is going to be signed for establishment of Chhau Academy on the land of BCW Department, Govt. of West Bengal. Our student share stages in various programme including Govt. programme.

The Great Artist who lead the Chhau dance and mass publicized, who is Padmashree Gambhir Sing Muda. This Statue is situated at his areas of activities in village Chorida, at Purulia District. He organised, developed the Art and spread the fame of this Chhau Dance. He received Padmashree in the year 1981 and farther received Academic Award in the year 1982. He toured with his troop in London, Paris & Spain in the year 1972, N. America, New York, Los angles (1975), Paris & Europe (1986) and Japan, Osaka, Tokyo (1991).

The Artist, the philosopher and creator is Mr. Malay Choudhury (age 69) at the middle who is encouraging and keeping alive this Art in this area by his continuous efforts. He is also creating syllabus and courses in the Sidho – Kanho-Birsha University, upgrading the Art of Dancing, Mask preparations and Musics .He is in touch with almost all the Artists of this area.

## V. THE OBSTACLES

Although the Chhau Dance is popular all over India and in the part of the world and well accepted by UNESCO, it is remained in the periphery within some localities in the Purulia district. Like other classical dances where both the Arts and Artists are considered to be at higher standard, the Chhau dancers are yet to come to that upper standard of the society. It is because- 1. The Artists themselves are happy with this humbleness. 2. There are no such thoughts or Research by the Organisers, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, ICCR (Indian Council of Cultural Research, Govt of India), Sangeet Natak Academy, Ministry of Culture (Govt of West Bengal) etc. However, the High-performer woman Trainer is coming to upgrade the skill of the Female dancers from the Ravindra Bharati University, Kolkata. The Legend of the Chhau dance Mr. Malay Chaudhury accepts that certain unnecessary actions can be curtailed keeping the theme and some

decorative arts can be added to make it more attractive. More and more topic can be added but they are afraid to take any risk. The internal rivalry among the troupes also discourages to go for the new innovations. They have their own cooperative group, but the activities are very poor. The influential groups only come in the touch of the higher authorities and get chances to visit other states and in the foreign countries. They do not get any support from the local MLA, MP, and Ministers for the financial help and publicity. There is also nepotism is playing main role. The Mask makers need advertisements, support from the Handicraft Board and encouragement from the local bodies which are too low. Because of their humble background, poor representations, they remain within tradition arts.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The performers are from the very humble families of the villages and consider this as a hobby and are satisfied with the presence performance and remuneration. The Mask Makers are also from the humble families and earn bread from this handicraft Industries all throughout the year. In both the cases their education standard is up 11th or 12th standard and hardly anyone leaves their ancestral and tradition profession. Their learning method is from their families or “Ustaad” or neighbours. Although the Educational institutions are established in Purulia and in Odisha, the standard of the Chhau dance is yet to come up. Poor support from the Govt Officials, Politicians and poor representations from the performers themselves the Chhau dance is considered as a dance of unqualified people. Till it is growing slowly, the troupes are going abroad and visiting other states and we hope for a better future of them and conquer of all obstacles.

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