

RETHINKING ABOUT CHHAU DANCE, ITS VARIOUS ASPECTS, DIMENSIONS AND PROSPECT: A THEROTICAL STUDY ON PURULIA DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

Jayanta Kumar Mandal,
Assistant Proffessor of Political Science,
T.D.B College (W.B)

Abstract:

Folk culture separates Purulia from other districts of West Bengal. The different folk cultures enable Purulia to acquire a special place in the map of West Bengal as well as India. For example – Tusuparob (festival), Vaduporob, Chhou dance, Jhumur song etc. Chhau dance found at Purulia (West Bengal), Orissa (Mayurbhanj), and Jharkhand (Saraikela). In 1956 when the Manbhum separates and divided and Purulia became a part of W.B, the chhau dance of Purulia got the reputation of world famous dance. Now days the word 'Chhau' is very popular but actually it is 'Choo'. In later times Asutosh Bhattacharya, the teacher of Kolkata University had make the arrangements for its first performance in abroad, and he was the first to use chho dance as chhau dance. Modern from of chhau starts its glory with the hands of Madan Mohan Singh and Gambhir Singh Mura. They are very popular throughout the world. In the age of globalization, digitization and commercialization the cultural heritage of Chhau threaten most. It is very necessary to preserve our cultural heritage.

Key words: Purulia, Chhau, Dance, Popular, Native, People

Introduction:

It is think that dancing is such a thing that every human being as well as other creatures is accustomed to it. Whenever an individual gets success in any activity, he dances to celebrate his victory. Besides people also dance in functions, marriage ceremony etc, to draw attention of other people. In case of other animals, they couldn't get such facilities. But when they get favorable environment or whenever they find their partner or when find their old master, they perform dance to expose joy. Such cases can be found in animals like horse, dog, peacock, parrot, monkey etc. However here we shall discuss about dance of human being. In modern times people have created various types of dance forms like western, hip- hop, etc. Besides many others dance forms are performed by different musicals rhythms. It may be said that at present various forms are seen during marriage ceremony, festivals, and theaters and even in T.V serials. Different region creates

their own dance form and this form reflects the entire life style of the inhabitants. Such type of dance is called folk dance¹. Among the folk dance category one important and popular dance form is chho dance. It cannot be denied. All the characteristics of folk dance are available in chho dance and Purulia acquires first place in chho dance in popularity. Purulia has achieved such popularity. It represents the entire culture of Purulia. This dance form amazes not only a district, state, country; even it amazes the whole world. The characteristic which make the dance so popular are-its dancing style, magnificence dress and the unique mask. We have seen the popularity of the dance when this dance is rewarded with many titles. For example Delhi dance (Nritya) academy has given the best place to chho dance. In 2010, UNESCO has called chho dance as the Masterpiece art². The chho artists of Purulia have performed this art in America, Australia, Iraq, Iran, London, Paris, etc. and it increases the dance popularity worldwide. In Purulia about hundred teams are there who perform this dance. To entertain the people of this country as well as abroad this teams are booked. We even witness the themes of this art in puja pandels. The popularity has made chhau dance the king among the folk dances.

Objective of The Study: The objective of the study is to know the various aspects, dimensions and prospect of chhau dance of Purulia district, West Bengal.

Study Area: Area of the study is Purulia district of West Bengal, India.

Methodology: To done the study various primary and secondary sources used. Primary data collected as from of oral interview with the people of the study area. Secondary data collected from books, articles, internet sources. Historical, descriptive method and observational method use to done to the study. As the authors are from the study area authors' personal experience also used to done the study.

Types:

There are three type of chho dance according to its origin. These are chho dance of Mayurbhanj of Orisa, chho dance of Saraikela of Jharkhand and the chho dance of Purulia of west Bengal. There are mainly three types. The chho dance of Saraikela has its origin in the Kharsawan district of Jharkhand. The origin of Mayurbhanj chho dance is in the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa. And the chho dance of Purulia is in Purulia district of west Bengal. Though these are all chho dance, there is little difference in them. The difference is in the use mask and style. In the chho dance of saraikela and Purulia mask is used. But there is no use of mask in Mayurbhanj chho dance. Though mask is used in Saraikela chho dance it is not so much decorates that of the mask of Purulia. It will be no wrong to say that the chho dance of Purulia is much developed than the other two in use of dress, decoration, and mask. Choo dance of Purulia is more dramatic than the two. Beside Purulia, chho dance is also performed in the districts like west Medinipur, Birbhum etc of West Bengal but it has no separate characteristic. It is only a branch of Purulia chho.

From the above discussion it is clear that there are three main types of chho dance. We shall try to discuss something about the chho dance of Purulia.



Chhau Style of Purulia, SaraiKela and Mayurbhanj(source: Google image)

Naming:

Many scholars name the dance in different way- if it is “chha” dance or “chho” dance or “chhou” dance and they have expressed different opinions on its origin.

According to Rajeshwar Mitra it has been named after the chham dance of Tibetan culture. Dr. Sudhir Kumar Karan said that the meaning of Chhu is Falshood and sang. The war was fought with guile or falsehood and the present name is perhaps taken from there. In entire frontier area of Bengal the word “chho” used severally.

According to Swapan Kumar six parts of our body like two legs, two hands, head and chest work actively in this dance. So it is called chha dance or chho dance. Some modern researcher said that the word chho has come from Sanskrit word chhaya (shadow).

The people of Jhalda (Purulia) called it as chha dance. It is said that the letter chha has transformed into chho. Again it is said that the six contexts of war are fura, ulka, digbaji, chal, chkkar, rangbaji, etc and from this chha the chhau dance was originated. They said that in the language of Purulia “chha” is called the action of jumping and it is believed that the present name is derived from there. From the above discussion it is clear that that the well-known researcher has entitled the folk dance of Purulia as chho. Later Dr. Asutosh Bhattacharya, the professor of Kolkata University made arrangements for its performance in abroad for the first time. He also called this chho dance as chhau dance in foreign land and from then this dance is known as chhau dance.

Concept:

Chhau dance is performed mainly by the people from lower community of Purulia. It is said that war is one type of dancing form of the native communities. Again it can be said that chhau dance is mainly practice or rehearsal for the beer dance. This dance was best on the everyday life

style of those native people. This dance was started in the hands of Bhumij sub caste of the native community. Later Santal, Singmura, Bhuiya, Dom also took part in this dance. It is noted that at present the “Mahato” (Kurmi) community also practice this art. At present the chhau dance has become so popular that people from various communities took part in this dance. It is maintain that Manbhum region (Purulia) is the birth place of chhau dance. In the past Purulia, was occupied mainly by native communities. It was surrounded with forest, rocks, mounts, hills, mountain, etc. Native people lived in those forests, hilly areas in groups. They live there and collected fruits, roots as food. They also hunted birds and animals. Another characteristic of those people was that they fight with one another. The winning group grabbed the land of the looser group and then they established a state there. They expressed their joy of winning through dancing. Their dance reflected their hunting style, the style of various birds and animals and even the skill of those people in war. They displayed all these in their dancing. Although no musical instrument was need. They used Nagra, Dhamsa, Dhol (traditional tribal instruments) etc and they danced in rhythm in the loud sound of this instruments. In later period this dance through which they expressed their entire life style transformed into chhau dance. This is the view of many researchers. The native people performed this dance to entertain themselves after the whole day hard work. Chhau dance requires hard skills. It requires much physical exercise like jumping and many other skills. The martial dance has been originated by the devotees of power as a course of worshiping of lord “Shiva”. The dance was performed primarily during the “Chaitrasankranti” which was a festival of lord “Shiva”.

Origin and evolution:

Ramkrishna ParamhansoDev said “jato mot tato path”. In the same way many researchers had expressed much different opinion regarding chhau dance and its origin. There are many controversies regarding its starting year and the place where it was originally originated. But it will not be wrong to say that it was originated in Manbhum (now it is purulia). On 1st November, 1956 (13th Kartik 1363 in Bengali year) Thursday Manbhum divided and one division Purulia was included in west Bengal. Since then this dance was recognized as a chhau dance of Purulia. Many people are of the opinion that the chhau dance was not originated before 1911. There was no mention of it in district gazetteer of Manbhum which was published by Coupland in 1911. Therefore it is presumed or hoped that chhau dance was originated after 1911. Thereafter it is exist⁸. But it is not true the dance still exist from immemorial. As we know Chhotonagpur plate is a pre historic region. Native peoples lived here from time immemorial. The dance evaluated from time by time. The modern version of the dance is not so much past. Till the early decades of the century this dance form and dancer were patronized by local rulers. After abolition of zamindari system it caused to run short to the source of income of the dancers. Professional dancer were included into different troupes and it initiated the occupation oriented dance form⁹. Now let us discuss about its inventor or creator of modern chhau dance. We have asked about it to some of the chhau artist of present time. They all replied that it was none other than Gambhir

Sing Mura. It would be undoubtedly said that it was due to his contribution the dance gets its present form or style. Some artist of the dance told us that Gambhir Sing Mura had created so many different characters, episodes and dance forms and through this he gradually popularized it. The chhau dance gets its present form or style due to him but its original inventor was Madan Mohon Sing, a member of the royal family of Bagmundi. It is also said that each and every part of this dance was decorated by this man. We invented this dance from in 1930 and it has been continuing since then. So we may say that Madan Mahon Sing was the father of chhau dance. Now days the themes have expanded to encapsulate the stories of Purans, hunting and social heroic story¹⁰.

Now discuss about evolution of the dance and how it was performed in the past.

1. In the festivals of Chaitrasangkranti (the last of Bengali calendar), the young men decorated themselves by painting in their faces. It was called “kapjhaph” of Chaitragajan.
2. Then came “lone” dance which was called “ekoiradance” (lonely dance).
3. After that come “alapchhau”. It was called Mel cho. In this dance four or six or eight people dance together.
4. Besides there was another type of dance which was performed only by the members of the royal family. It was called Babu Dance. There was grandeur in dress of Babu Dance¹¹.
5. Next came story or plot dance (palanach) and it has been performed till now. Bagmundi's Golam Mahammad Khan had discovered a famous chhau artist. He was Gambhir Sing Mura. So it may say that Gambhir Sing Mura's appearance in chhau dance was in 1946. In 1953 he defeated Lal Mahato and in the next year he defeated Gobra Hari in chhaupalas and become most well-known figure of Purulia chhau dance. In 1981 he was awarded by “Padmashree”¹². It cannot deny that the present form of the dance contributed by the artist. In the later period another figure of chhau dance was Nepal Mahato. He was from rich family. He was also awarded by “Padmashree”.



Chhau Dance



Chhau dance of Purulia (source: Google image)

Characteristics of Purulia's chhau:

From the above discussion we have learnt a lot of things like its origin, naming, types etc. Now we are discuss about separate characteristic of Purulia's chhau which separated it from Mayurbhanj and Saraikela.

Mask: The most important characteristic of Purulia's chhau dance is its use of mask. It is sometimes called mahara, in Purulia. We can identify each and every characters of chhau dance, because of the use of separate masks. It is said that the people of ancient Greece use masks in theaters to make the characters more realistic. In the same way the artists of Purulia chhau dance use the mask. For different episodes they use different masks. For example in Ramayana episode they use different mask. Like Rama, Sita, Laksman etc and in Mahabharata episode the masks of Krishna, Arjun, Veem etc will be used. For Ganesh Bandana they will use the mask of Ganesh, Kartik, Shiva etc¹³. Similarly they used mask in Kirat Arjun episode. In modern episode like Kargilwar, Sipahi bidroho, Santal Bidroho, etc the artist also used mask. Beside of chhau dance these masks are popular throughout the world. People buy the masks of Durga, Kirat, deer, and tiger for home decoration. Charida village of Bagmundi (Purulia) is considered to be the birth place of masks¹⁴. Besides that Dumurdih (Joypur), Namopara town (Purulia) etc are also popular for the production of masks.



Chhau mask (source: Google image)

Dress: Dress is another thing that makes characters much more realistic. At the beginning there was not much use of dress as now. There is now separate dress for each character. For example the dress of the character like king is much more gorgeous than any character. It is the traditional decoration done in the ornamentation of costumes of chhau dance. It is a very unique style of doing work by mixing the two three material like clothes, pitha, sequences, mirror and many more¹⁵. Among this dress the important ones are socks, anklet, chest coat, back coat, belt etc. Besides the lather of the tiger is used for the dress of lord Shiva and saree is used for Durga. Most of the chhau dancer hires dress from the dress house where some of their own. These dresses are available in many dress houses in Purulia. Besides few dress houses some villages produce these dresses according to the need of the characters. Jammbad, Charida are some places where these dresses are produced.

Time: In many districts chhau dance is performing only for entertain people. But in Purulia it's treated as festival. Its starts on the occasion of Shivratri and continue upto Rabi festival (the festival of first seeding).

Place: The ideal place for chhau dance is an empty field but in town this dance is arranged in the halls. In the beginning this dance was perform on the "horribolmela" or in the empty field. The beauty of this dance is as its best when it is performed in an open platform. It is so because the chhau artist exhibits their various skills of jump on the plain field instead of marble field. Spectators can enjoy the dance while roaming in the open fields.

Songs: Melodious song and music is needed in each and every dance performance. In the same way a special type of song and music is needed in chhau dance. This special type of song is called Jhumur, the famous folk song of Purulia. For the different character different Jhumur songs are prepared by the Jhumur artists and these songs are performed in the episode of chhau dance to mark it more special. Jhumur and Bhadra Jhumur influenced the dance in its tune.

Style of Chhau Dance of Purulia: It has already been discussed that in Purulia, "Chhau" mean to jump. In later times this jumping is gradually transformed in to chhau dance. The experts prepared various jhumur songs for the characters and the musicians performed these in musical rhythm. The musician of chhau dance is called Bayen. The chhau dancer dances with the musical rhythm. In this way chhau dance is performed. Some of the steps of chhau dance are somersault, uranjum, hantupotka etc.



Place and style of chhau in purulia(souce:google image)

Episode: Another characteristic of Purulia chhau dance is its various episodes. A specify incident or story is presented through this dance form. In the beginning there was no episode in chhau dance. There is only jumping, single dance, Babu Dance etc. But at present this dance acquires its popularity mainly because of the various episodes. Some are remarkable chhau episode are taken from the story of Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. In the most of places chhau dance is introduced with Ganesh Bandana.

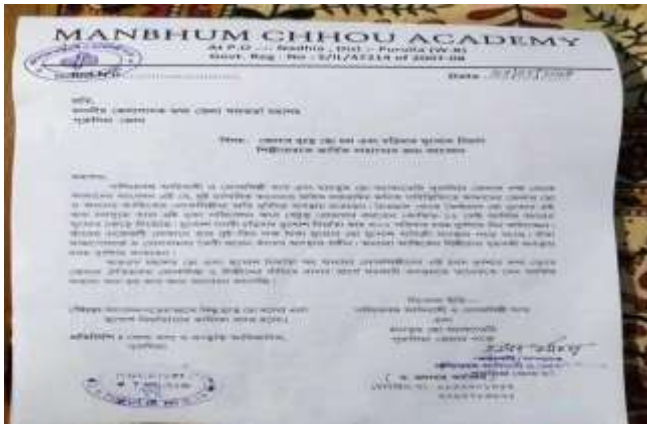
Musical instruments of Chhau dance:- The important musical instruments used in chhau dance are Dhol, Dhamsa, Madol, Jhunjuni, Casio, mice etc. The above characteristics are all present in this dance. But at present some modern tools like light, dress, and sound are used in chhau dance.



Musical instruments of chhau dance(source:google image)

Obstacles of Chhau: It is said that an empty stomach stands as an obstacle in the process of gaining or distributing education. In the there are few obstacles in chhau dance. Although at present the demand of chhau dance is at high level. It has some certain problems is there from a long time. Although this dance started as a festival but now many families depend on this as they earn their livelihood from here. They earn by dancing or making masks. Most of the people prepare dancing instead of making masks. But they fail to run their household through these meager earnings. So they gradually lose interest in chhau dance. Recently Subraprakash Mandal, a journalist, wrote in Anandabazar Patrika (8th february 2018) that Festival fails to fulfill your need. He said that a chhau artist Sailto, run his family through chhau. But he did not fulfill his household demands¹⁸. So some artist has to work as daily worker. So it may be said that one important problem of this dance which artist paid a meager wages. It may be again said that although the higher class people love to watch this dance they do not want to engage their children in it, because its future is not secure. So I think that this dance gradually loses its value due to lack of money and no certain future of the artists. chhau is a seasonal

dance. Artists did not earn money throughout the year. Ongoing lockdown due to covid19 pandemic they are suffered a lot. Manbhum Chhou Academy gives a deputation dated 27.05.2020 to the D.M of Purulia to help the artist and mask makers¹⁹ economically. Present secretary of Manbhum Chhou Academy, Mr. Jaladhar Karmakar depicted how their condition is in present in the deputation letter.



(Deputation letter of ManbhumChhou Academy to D.M of Purulia, source: JaladharKarmakar's facebook wall)

Steps to solve the problems: Discussing about chhau dance we have already discussed a lot about this dance and even its problems. The two most serious problems are- money and insecure future. But if the artist is given adequate amount this problem might be decreased. Keeping this problem in mind Mamata Banerjee, the CM of W.B govt. has started allowance for the folk artists¹⁹. For this the folk artist will get a certain amount every month. The chhau artists also will get allowance. But all of them don't get this allowance. Few artists of every team get this opportunity. But it is hoped that in future the govt. will give this allowance to all. In Lipinia village of Raghunathpur subdivision, Debamoy Chattopadhyay, S.D.O of Raghunathpur subdivision, has started a training camp. The training is about how to make mask. About thirty families are under the training. About 250 families of Lipania village are engaged in chhau dance. So, the subdivision ruler has made arrangements for the woman training. He also made arrangements for the selling of the masks. The subdivision ruler has informed that those women engaged in training get financial help from self dependent organization. Sidho Kanho Birsha University was setup in 2010 and a diploma course on chhau dance has started there²⁰. So many students can choose this as alternative education. Getting inspired many students took admission in the diploma course and are engaged in this dance.

From the above discussion it may say that although chhau dance has many difficulties, some have been reduced due to the efforts of our respected CM, Mamata Banerjee and the local authorities. It also hoped that in future these problems will reduce with a great extent and hope that the chhau dance of Purulia will maintain its glory in this country and abroad. Some of the people of Purulia have participated in this chhau dance and many people earn their livelihood through this chhau dance. Almost 250 families of the Charida village are engaged in mask making. The inspiration of respected Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of W.B govt. has started "shilpibhata". In Purulia almost 1800 people get this opportunity. It is hoped that in future all chhau artists will get this opportunity.

Conclusion: in the conclusion it may be said that Purulia chhau dance undergone with many changes. Purulia chhau displays athletic skill to an amazing degree. The performers exude raw energy and sheer acrobat skill to entertain the spectators²¹. The great artists of the dance were Gambhir Sing Mura, Rasu Hanri, GopalSuri, Bibhuti Sing Sardar's forgotten, but their contributions are still alive in the hearts of the artists. Their own creation of chhau dance is still great impact in the districts, country, and even in abroad. In the age of globalization and digitization it is very difficult to save our cultural heritages. The new generation is not so much interested on the special dramatic dance form. Commercialization and digitization affect the traditional form of chhau. It is need to preserve the traditional form of the dance, its style and heritage. People of the district might be aware of it. Govt. should enacted separate copy right to save the traditional and heritage dance form of Purulia. More and more allowance may be arranged for the chhau artist and other peoples who are involved in the dance. Artists and mask makers belonging to weaker section of our society. So it is need to proper govt. action to save them. In the age of globalization we suffer from actual value crisis. It is very urgent to save our cultural values. From every section of our society might be united on this matter. Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that inherited from past generation. So it is very necessary to protect the cultural heritage of Purulia for the upcoming generations.

Referances:

1. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki>folk dance](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/folk_dance)
2. A report published in the Hindu news paper (English daily) on 16th November, 2010.
3. W.W.W.trinetrachhaudancecenter.org
4. Dr. Karan, Sudhir Kumar: Simant Banglar Lokjan, E. Mukherji, Kolkata, 1965, P-221
5. Mahata, Rahul: The Journey of Purulia Chhau Dance: From Vague to Vogue (a term paper), Published in m.grin.com, 2017
6. Goswami, Dilip Kumar: Simanta Rahrer Loksanskriti, Parijat Prakashani, Purulia, 2014, pp-148-149
7. Mishra, Mukunda: Globalization and Folk culture; A qualitative study on decaying heritage of Chhau dance of Purulia district in West Bengal , India (an article), Published on AJRSH, volume 2, Issue 3, March 2012
8. Coupland, H Gazzattear of Manbhum District, Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1911
9. Mishra, Mukunda: Globalization and Folk culture; A qualitative study on decaying heritage

of Chhau dance of Purulia district in West Bengal, India (an article), Published on AJRSH, volume 2, Issue 3, March 2012

10. Maity, V: Chhou dance in Purulia preservation of Bengal (an article), Published in Indian Journal of applied research, volume-5, Issue-8, 2015, pp-221-23

11. Goswami, Dilip Kumar: Simanta Rahrer Loksanskriti, Parijat Prakashani, Purulia, 2014, pp-157-158

12. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gambhir Singh Mura](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gambhir_Singh_Mura)

13. Saha, Biswajit: Societal representation of Manbhum Chhou; A case of Chow mask makers of Charida village, Purulia district (an article), Published in IJAR on October, 2017

14. Ghosh, D: Banglar Mukhosh, Ananda Publisher, Kolkata, 2012

15. Singh Neha, Lahane Prasanta Dev: A study on headgear and costumes of Chhau dance (an article), Published in Asian Journal of Home Science, volume-6, June, 2011, pp-64-68

16. Karmakar, J: Purulia Lok shilpo O Sanskriti Prasange (an article), Published in Paschim Banga, Purulia Zilla Shakha, Dept. of information and cultural affairs, Govt. of West Bengal, June, 2017

17. Purulia Chhau- Asia Pacific on intangible cultural heritage, Published in <https://WWW.accu.or.jp>

18. A report published in Anandabazar Patrika (a Bengali daily) on 8th February, 2018

19. A report Published in the Times of India (a English daily), Kolkata, 18th October, 2012

20. <https://skbu.ac.in>

21. Acharya, Indranil: Aestheticizing without agenda: A counter reading of the western approach of Chhau dance (an article), Published in Rupkatha Journal, volume-5, 2nd November, 2013