Chhau Dance in Purulia: A Social-Cultural Perspective

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Chhau Dance is the Heartbeat of our Manbhum Purulia. This Dance is one of the most tough and critical dance in the History of the world Dance. But It’s also creates a greatest form of art and creative culture in the India and World.

Chhau Dance is one of the most renowned tribal martial dances of India. The dance is known as Seraikella Chau in Jharkhand, Mayurbhanj Chau in Orissa and Purulia Chhau in West Bengal. Since the dance is supposed to have originated in the Purulia district of Bengal, it is known as such in the state. Purulia Chhau dance differs quite a lot from its counterparts from other states of India and has distinctive characters of its own. It is internationally renowned for its beauty and perfection.

Purulia Chau is performed on the Sun festival, which falls in the Chaitra month (March-April). However, it is not limited to the festival; the dance can be performed on other occasions. e.g.-on Republic Day, Independence Day, National and International Cultural and sports events etc.

In the countryside performances of Purulia Chhau, there is no elevated stage and the dancer performs on the flat ground, with people sitting encircling them. While performing in some show or on a wider platform, an elevated stage is used for the performance. The dance is accompanied with loud beats and triumphs and instruments like drum and marui. It starts with a drum beat, followed by an invocation to Lord Ganesha, the Hindu God of Wisdom.
Paper, mud, and clay are used to make the Chhau masks. The masks are painted in pastel shades and have a frank, simple, and bold look. The effectiveness, originality, and beauty of the Chhau dance are dependant on the Chhau masks. Each mask represents a character from the epics, the Puranas, and from mythology. The eye- brows, mouth, and eyes are painted to give those special effects and give completeness to the looks of the Chhau dancers.

Masks of Charida village in Baghmundi block of Purulia, used in the martial dance “Chhau” which is internationally famous. Around 250 artisans of Charida village are involved in this craft.

The most popularly used themes (ragas) in Chhau are Vira and Rudra, symbolizing power and strength. Chhau dance is basically themed on the epical stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata, Purans, Mahisashurmardini and at present time on Swachh Bharat Avijan, Mission Nirmal Bangla, Anti Dowry movements, Prevention of Child Marriage and Child Labour, Wipe out Superstitions and Illiteracy, Education for all, Save Water, Save Environment etc.

Gambhir Singh Mura was an Indian tribal dancer known for his contributions to the tribal martial dance of Chhau. He was an exponent of the Purulia school of Chhau. He performed in many places such as England, France, Japan and USA. The Government of India awarded him the fourth highest Indian civilian honour of Padma Shri in 1981. Gambhir Singh Mura was the living legend, an international Icon in the History of Chhou Dance and it’s socio-cultural perspective.