

# Cultural and Economic Significance of Chhau Masks and Dance: A Case Study of Charida Village, West Bengal

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**Abstract:** Chhau mask and dance, a distinctive form of traditional artistry originating from the Charida village in Purulia, West Bengal, hold profound cultural and economic significance. This study examines the cultural and economic significance of the Chhau Mask and dances in the Charida village of West Bengal. To conduct this study, empirical data were collected through the case study of Charida village. A total of 42 heads of households were interviewed to gather information about the cultural and economic significance of Chhau Mask and dance. Out of the total households interviewed, 31 heads registered to UNESCO's Geographical Indication Tag. Through an interdisciplinary approach encompassing ethnographic research, economic analysis, and cultural heritage studies, the research examines the historical evolution, symbolic meanings, craftsmanship techniques, and market dynamics of Chhau masks. This study reveals that the households who are involved in Chhau dance and making Chhau Masks, their income has increased nominally after receiving a Geographical Indication Tag.

**Keywords:** Culture; Society; Economy; Chhau Masks, G. I. Tag; West Bengal.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

West Bengal is an important state of the Republic of India. It is known for its rich culture and cultural heritage. Many cultural sects and customs developed here. Ramakrishna and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were the forerunners of cultural integration. It also holds rich cultural diversity within the state. Purulia is one of the poorest districts of West Bengal. Here, many tribes inhabit, and they have a rich culture and cultural diversity (Konar, 2010). Along with performing distinct cultures, customs, and rituals, the inhabitants perform the Chhau Mask dance. It takes place on various occasions like during the Vaisakhi festival or Chaitra Parva (month of full moon), on the day of Shiv Gajon (Gajan or Shiva Gajon is a Hindu festival celebrated mostly in the Indian state of West Bengal. It is associated with deities such as Shiva, Neel, and Dharmaraj. Gajan spans around a week, starting at the last week of Chaitra and continuing till the end of the Bengali year. It ends with Charak Puja on the last day of Chaitra, the last month in the Bengali Hindu calendar). The next day is Poila Baishakh, the first day of Bengali New Year. Participants of this festival are known as Sannyasis or Bhaktas. Persons of any gender can be a participant in this festival. The central theme of this festival is deriving satisfaction through devotion.

Chhau is a popular dance style, performed in the small parts of East India, principally in West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Orissa. During the Chhau dance, performers wear a mask known as the Chhau Mask. These masks are made of clay, paper, and ashes. Charida village of West Bengal is very popular for making Chhau Masks and therefore, the village is known as Mukhosh Gramm (Chattopadhyay and Das, 2022). It is a century-old practice. Chhau Mask holds three distinct styles, which include Purulia Chhau, Saraikela Chhau, and Mayurbhanj Chhau. The first one, Purulia Chhau, is very famous for its dance form and style. Saraikela Chhau is a popular dance in Jharkhand. The mask is magnificent comprising different use patterns, hues, and Bhava (emotions). It is performed generally to awaken the universal feelings – rasa (essence or taste of music or art), illumination, and flavour that a dance is meant to evoke among the audience members. The Mayurbhanj Chhau is the oldest mask dance among all three styles and is often hosted in the Mayurbhanj district of Orissa. It has a more poetic, aesthetic, and combines fluid, Odissi-style motions with rebellious folk movements (Choudhury, 2023).

This dance takes lots of time to prepare and perform. A boy who dances, learns this from his fathers and decorates himself as a princess. This is a perfect dance form. In 2010, UNESCO acknowledged it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) during the first intergovernmental committee session, which was held in Nairobi, Kenya. Each type of Chhau dance and mask-making technique is unique (Department of Tourism of West Bengal, 2018). Like how the Saraikela Chhau dance employs smaller symbolic masks that just cover their entire face. They typically employ their arm and leg movements as expressions to evoke a sense of rasa and bhava in the audience. The Purulia Chhau dance uses extensive evocative masks with vibrant colours paired with magnificent acrobatic jumps, manly gestures, shaking of the shoulders and head, and powerful somersaults (Chatterjee, 2019).

In the Purulia district, the indigenous communities including Mura, Bhumij, Kurmis, Mundas, and Santhals have been performing the Chhau dance since time immemorial. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, a renowned writer, folklorist, and professor at Calcutta University, popularised the dance form beyond borders and referred to it as "tribal war dance". Furthermore, he described various body motions used in dance, such as those involving the hands, neck, head, limbs, and legs. Fundamentally, the Chhau dance symbolizes the victory over evil.

The Chhau Mask is made by a distinct caste people, known as Sutradhar, whereas Santhals perform it on various occasions. Making these masks is an economic activity. The people who are involved in making such masks run their livelihood. Recently, the Chhau Masks got Geographical Indication Tag (GI Tag), which led to a substantial increase in the income of the people who are engaged in the practice of making Chhau Masks.

Although the Chhau Mask dance is very old and popular in Charida village, its development in terms of popularizing outside of the state is yet to be carried out. This paper tries to answer questions such as 'What is the cultural and economic significance of the Chhau Mask dance in the Purulia district of West Bengal and how it can be preserved as a cultural heritage? This study aims to examine the Chhau Mask dance and its cultural and economic significance in the study area. We hypothesized that conserving the Chhau Mask dance would enhance the cultural integrity of the region and it will enhance the economy and income of the people involved in making Chhau Mask and performing dance.

### Study Area

Charida is a popular village, located in the Baghmundi block of the Purulia district, West Bengal, approximately 2.3 kilometers from the sub-district headquarters, Pathardihi, and 71.9 km from the district headquarters, Purulia. The Ayodhya Forest and the Ayodhya range encircle this charming settlement, which occupies 909 hectares of land area. Land use comprises agricultural land, forests, hills, and human settlements. A river named Rabidh flows along the Ayodhya range. Ghorabandh village is located in the south. Ghorabandh village is in the south and Dhundikhap and Khairabera villages, which are called Dava Sangsad are located in the east. Nestled in the culturally vibrant Purulia area, Charida village is home to approximately 300 experienced mask makers, also known as Sutradhars, and a smaller number of non-Sutradhars, which comprises of Dutta, Pal, and Bhoumik. The main tribes are Munda and Santhal. The Santhals perform Chhau Mask Dance. The renowned Chhau dance, an acrobatic martial art-based form of dance listed in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), originated in this village.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was employed to conduct this study. The author visited the village several times to observe the socio-economic status of the people and the cultural activities they performed. A total of 2,568 people inhabit the Charida village. Out of the total 546 households, 308 are Sutradhar dwellers. A total of 42 households were surveyed. All surveyed households are involved in making masks. A structured questionnaire was constructed, and questions were asked about how many members of your family are involved in mask-making (Table 1). How many masks do you make in a month? Are you registered for GI Tag? What is your monthly income from Mask making? Is there any increase in the income level after you registered for GI Tag? Where do you sell the handmade mask? What was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mask-making and income? The collected data were tabulated, analysed and finally interpreted. A location map was prepared, and data were presented by graphs.

Table 1 depicts people involved in making Chhau Masks. During interview, it was noticed that an average of four persons are involved in making masks, and each household makes average 50 masks. Out of the total 42 households, which we surveyed 31 households registered for GI Tag. It was also observed that after registering for GI Tag, monthly income increased and now the average income from mask making is Rs. 7500/HHs/month. Most of the respondents responded that COVID-19 impact on Chhau mask-making was tremendous. Now, they sell the masks at national and international markets.

**Table 1: People involved in making Chhau Mask**

S. No.	Research questions	Respondents (42)
1.	Family members are involved in mask-making.	Average 4/HHs
2.	Number of masks made in a month	Average 50/HHS
3.	GI Tag registered HHs	31 HHs
4.	Monthly income from Mask making	Average Rs. 7500/HHs/Month
5.	Is there an increase in the income level after GI Tag Registration?	Yes (all)
6.	Market for Chhau Masks	At National and international level
7.	Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on mask making	Significant impact

Source: Primary survey

Table 2 depicts the number of people involved in the Chhau Masks dance. During the interview, the dancers who belong to some dance academies in Charida and surrounding villages, it was noticed average of 2 persons are involved in Chhau dance. They perform Chhau dance on average 4 festivals in a year. Their monthly income varies with different occasions but in average they get around Rs. 12,500/HHs per month. Most of the respondents responded that the impact of the COVID 19 was significant. They perform Chhau dance at national level mainly, but with increasing recognition some of the dancers do perform overseas.

**Table 2: People involved in the Chhau Mask Dance**

S. No.	Research questions	Respondents (34)
1.	Family members are involved in the Chhau dance.	Average 2/HHs
2.	The festivals in which they perform in a year	Average 4/HHs
3.	Monthly income from performing Chhau dance	Average Rs. 12,500/HHs
4.	Dance performance	At the National level mainly
5.	Increase in the dance performance after GI Registration	No (All)
6.	Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Chhau Dance	Significant impact

Source: Primary Survey

### Process of Making Chhau Mask

The mask-making technique was first popularized by Buddheswar, who was known to make the first Kirat and Kiranti, the male and female goddesses which is considered as Shiv and Parvati (Figure 1).



**Figures 1 (a) and (b): Masks depicting Kirat (Lord Shiv) and Kiranti (Goddess Parvati) (b) Chhau maker Bhim Sutradhar making Chhau Masks**

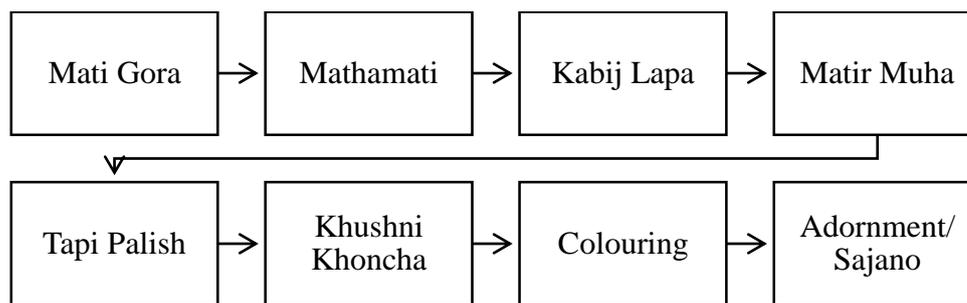
The process of making Chhau Mask is unique. These masks are of very heavy weight and large. Clay is collected from the local stream known as Rabidh River and its two respective streams – Badhtitola and Anandanagar. Mainly Sutradhar caste people are involved in making Chhau Mask. The other castes people who make masks are Kalindi, Roy, and Mahato. After these people registered for GI Tag for making Chhau Masks, no other one from the state or outside make them. The Chhau Mask maker and his family work for a week to complete the process of making masks. While men polish and paint the masks, women create the outlines and let them dry. Children do the embroidery since their small hands are suited for doing fine work. The artists are skilled in creating images of Gods and Goddesses such as Devi Durga, Lakshmi, and Kartik using hues like vivid orange or dark yellow colours. For Lord Shiva, Ganesh, and Goddess Saraswati, white colour is typically used. Goddess Kali appears in blue or black paint. Krishna and Lord Rama each have a tilak, or amulet, placed on their foreheads. The Asuras have big eyes, prominent teeth, and thick eyebrows and mustaches. They are painted in deep green or black. The masks are decorated with variously cut pieces of silver and golden foil, beads, pith works, coloured paper flowers, and peacock and hen feathers. For a smooth finish, a certain kind of oil and varnish is placed on the mask. A detailed process of making Chhau Mask is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Process of making Chhau Masks**

Methods	Materials Used in the Process	Details of the process
Mati Gora	Cotton Cloth, Mud/Clay	The Chanch (foundational base) of the mask is produced by the cotton cloth and mud
Mathamati	Entel/Sita Mati, Powdered Ash	i. A clay model of a mask is then dried in direct sunlight to make it hard. ii. Powdered ash is then applied to it layer by layer.
Kabij Lapa	Gum, Tissue/Newspapers, Old torn clothes	Traditional gum (rul-moida) made from rice-flour is used to paste old newspapers, and old torn cloth over the Chanch. Around 12 layers of paper have been pasted to make it a uniform structure. And dried it for more than 5-7 hours.
Matir Muha	Mud	A layer of thick loam is smeared on the surface of the mask to highlight the nose, eyes, and ears.
Tapi Palish	Natural Dyes/ Colors, Wooden Spatula, Thapi and Karnik	The mask is then polished, and the edges of the facial features are sharpened and defined with the help of a wooden spatula called Thapi and Karnik.
Khushni Khoncha	Khori Mati/ Zinc Oxide, Batali	The mask is then applied with Khori Mati or Zinc Oxide with the help of the tool Batali.
Colouring	Natural Dyes/Colors, Brushes (0.5-2.5), Varnish	The mask is then colored beautifully with various colors extracted from nature and finally, a transparent liquid called Varnish is applied to protect and coat the colour.
Adornment	Beads, yarn, bamboo sticks, jute, and Artificial Accessories for decoration.	According to the different characters the mask is decorated with beads, bamboo sticks, and ornaments.

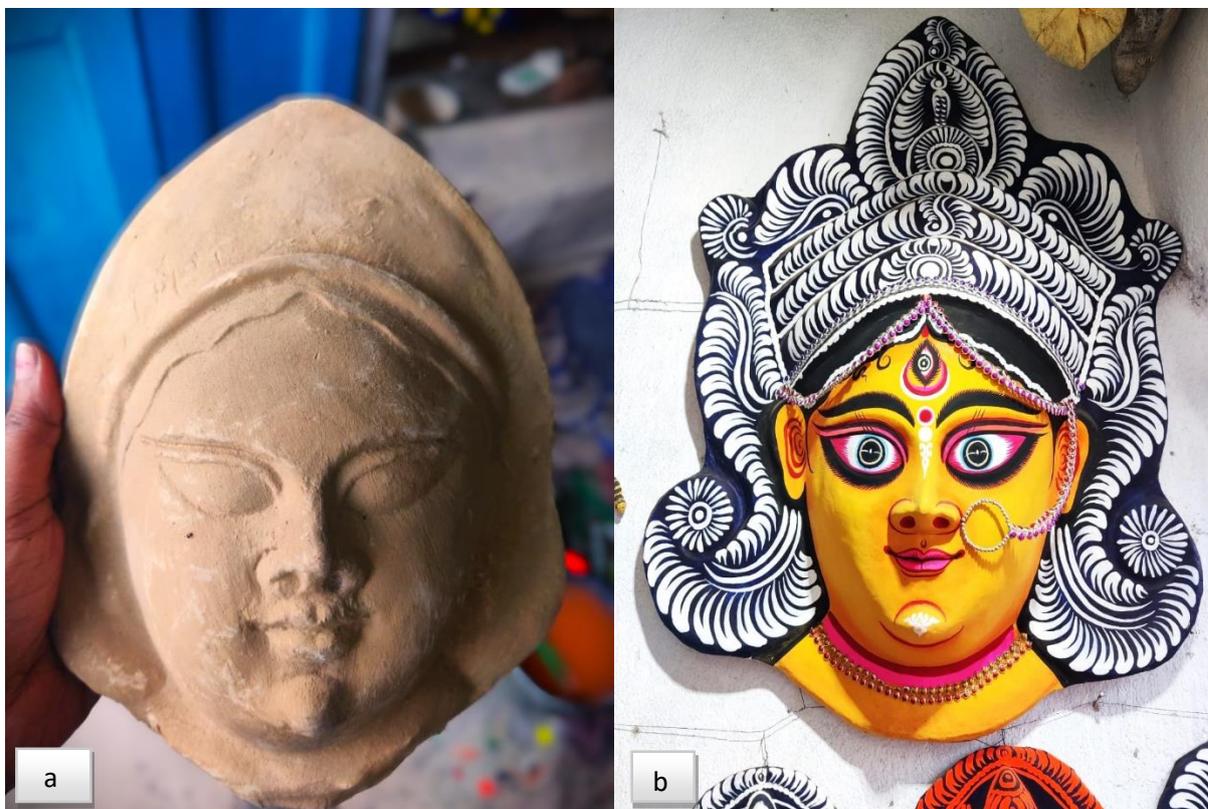
Source: By survey

Mask-making is a process, which goes linear through several stages from the beginning to end products (Table 3). Every mask maker has a specialty at every stage of the mask. Thapi and Karnik – A kind of wooden tool the makers used to sharpen the edges of the Chhau Mask.



**Figure 2: Step-by-step process of making the Chhau Mask**

The eight-step process of making Chhau masks. This comprehensive illustration with details (Table 3 and Figure 3) of each stage, beginning with the initial design and clay modelling, followed by moulding, drying, and refining the mask's shape. Subsequent steps include applying layers of paper and clay, drying again, painting, and finally, the intricate decoration. Each step requires the meticulous craftsmanship and dedication to create these beautiful traditional cultural artifacts.



**Figure 3: (a) Matir Muha has been done to highlight the eyes, nose and lips. (b) Finished look of Goddess Durga after coloring and adornment.**

The only substance that has been applied on the cotton fabric chanch or the base is the mud. Matir Muha is the term for this procedure (Figure 3a). The Chhau Mask's eyes, lips, and nose are pushed out to draw attention to its features. After a week in the sun, it is prepared for the Kabij Lapa procedure, which involves applying 10–12 layers of mud and fabric again to harden the surface. Vibrant hues including yellow, pink, orange, white, and black have been used for coloring. Various kolka, designs and patterns have been created. Necklaces and nose rings have been used for adornment (Figure 3b). The mask appears extremely beautiful due to the goddess Durga's glowing crown. The workers paint the masks as per the dresses and colour of the folk deities. After drying them they hang them on the wall for sale (Figure 4). Their price varies as per their sizes and material used. The creators of the masks also create a variety of animal masks, such as lion, zebra, cow, bird, and boar masks.



Figure 4: Masks of folk deities hanging on a wall of a shop in Charida village. (Photo by author)

Chhau mask-making has a complex system. After extracting raw materials from nature, it is shaped as the folk deities and then various colours are applied (Table 4). The prime colours used are: Red, Yellow, Blue, Green, Purple, White, Black, and Orange.

Table 4: Colour, extraction, and their association with Folk Deities

Colours	Natural Extraction (Scientific Names)	Folk Deities
Red	Red colour is extracted from the Hibiscus flower ( <i>Hibiscus Rosa Sinensis</i> ), Alta ( <i>Alkanna Tinctoria</i> ) which is used for colouring the feet and from some insects which are found in the barks of the tree.	Some of the demons like Hiranyakashyapu depicted by the red colour.
Yellow	The yellow colour comes from the marigold flower ( <i>Tagetes Spp</i> ) and turmeric ( <i>Curcuma Longa</i> ).	Goddess Durga maa and Lord Kartik is represented by the yellow colour.
Blue	It is extracted from Aprajita flowers ( <i>Clitoria Ternatea Linn</i> ) and Indigo ( <i>Indigofera Tinctoria</i> ).	Blue colour represents Lord Rama and Krishna.
Green	Green color is extracted from wood apple ( <i>Limonia Acidissima</i> ) and some leaves.	Green often represents demons like Mahishasur and Kansh.
Purple	Purple colour is extracted from Blueberries ( <i>Vaccinium sect. Cyanococcus</i> ), Blackberries ( <i>Rubus subg. Rubus</i> ), and Black Palm ( <i>Astrocaryum standleyanum</i> ) trees.	Often Lord Shiva and Lord Rama are depicted by the purple color.
White	White color is extracted from Khori mati ( <i>Borassus</i> ) and conch shell ( <i>Strombus</i> ) powder.	White often depicts Maa Lakshmi and Saraswati. White colour symbolizes peace and serenity.
Black	Made by ashes and black ink. Also, after burning rice the ash is mixed with a natural glue called sap.	Goddess Kali and Demon Raktabej and other demons of Ramayana and Mahabharata are depicted by the black colour.
Orange	Is extracted from the Gulmohor ( <i>Delonix regia</i> ) trees.	Lord Ganesha is represented by the colour orange.

Source: By Survey

Natural colors have been extracted from a variety of plants, leaves, and fruits through soaking, boiling and solvent method. The origin of the color extraction and the connections between the hues and Hindu gods, goddesses, and demons are explained in (Table 4). These techniques are far more environmentally friendly, conventional, and herbal. Little children can also color without any worries because the colors are natural. Different hues represent various gods and feelings, such as righteousness, wickedness, and harmony. The symbolic aspect of Chhau dancing is particularly fascinating because it involves purely body language rather than speech. Therefore, the masks are essential in representing sentiments and bhava of the character and the performance.

### Performing Chhau Dance

The Chhau dance is an outdoor dance of Purulia. There is no elevated platform or stage of any type; the concert is usually taking place on bare ground which is known as 'Akhada' or 'Asar'. The dancing area is an open space measuring roughly 15 feet in length and 25 feet in width. The performers' entrance and exit are designated by a 25-foot-long by 5-foot-wide passageway. The hallway also becomes a part of the stage, and as soon as one artist enters the hallway from the farthest corner, the dance begins. Purulia has rough, pebble-filled soil. The ground must be firm and strong since the dancers frequently leap into the air and land on their knees. Around 160 years back during the rule of King Madan Mohan Singh Deo of Baghmundi block, the tradition of making Chhau masks started. Chhau Dance is an acrobatic martial dance form of Purulia. The Chhau Mask is traditionally associated with this age-old dance form of Purulia, where the performers wear masks of various mythological characters and also different animals. In Purulia, Chhau dancers wear large, stylized masks while performing and hence it evolved the art of Chhau Mask making. The king of Baghmundi and bhumiji chieftains who had acquired the status of Kshatriya had a striking influence on the Chhau dance. The present-day themes of the mask and the narrative styles are passed from generation to generation. The tradition of Chhau dance with the Chhau mask is going on for a century in Purulia. Due to a lack of sustained patronage and guidance, Purulia Chhau shows very little evolution since its hunting or warfare origin, performed by the early inhabitants of this dry region. Till the early decades of this century, these dancers and the form were patronized by the Baghmundi ruler, but due to unproductive land and ever-failing rains, the ruler could hardly provide the necessary support. The performers too were forced to migrate to nearby urban cities like Calcutta in search of living.

The Chhau dance starts with the Ganesh Vandana (solicitation of Elephant headed God), then the slaying of Mahishasur by Goddess Durga (the 10-handed goddess killing the demon), destroying Kansh by Lord Krishna, the assassination of demon Ravan by Lord Rama, Raktabheej by Goddess Kali, etc are very well depicted through body movements, vigorous acrobatic jumps, along with the music. The dancers wear dramatic bright-coloured clothes to attract the audience. They also use different types of weapons and armaments as props to give the characters a realistic look. The Chhau dance ends with bowing the heads of the dancers and they lastly unmask themselves for the realization that they are not gods or goddesses; they are only humans. Three main religious themes that we can find in Chhau dance are 1. Shaivism (worshipping the Supreme being Lord Shiva). 2. Vaishnavism (worshipping Lord Vishnu and his other incarnations) and, 3. Shaktism (Goddess-centric worship of Hinduism). There are some musical instruments that are used by the musicians accompanied with the Chhau nritya (Table 5). The musicians play local folk style Jhumur music with high-pitched reed instruments like Shennai pipe, and drums like Dhol, Dhumsa, and Chad chadi. The dholidhar (dhol drum player/s) strikes the sticks on the drum head to announce the beginning of a performance at times accompanied by the Tabla players. The vocal or the musical script of the play is unique for each plot and sections of the play. Usually musicians are seated at one side of the performance, although in the past drummers used to accompany the dancers within the playing space. (Chatterjee, 2019)

**Table 5: Use of local musical instruments**

Local Musical Instruments	Explanation
Mohuri	It is considered as Mangal Badya.
Shennai	Shennai, double-reed conical oboe of North India. The shehnai is made of wood, except for a flaring metal bell attached to the bottom of the instrument, and measures about 12–20 inches (30–50 cm) in length, with six to eight keyless finger holes along its body.
Dhol	The Dhol is a double-sided barrel drum played mostly as an accompanying instrument in regional music forms.

Dhumsa	A traditional instrument with a deep bottom tone that is necessary for Chhau dance performances is the Dhumsa ( a large kettle-drum). Professional Dhumsa players are some of the community's specialist artists. In contrast to dhol, it has a half-circular appearance and is rounded on top.
Kartal	This is a small hand cymbal often used in kirtan and traditional tribal dance and songs.
Madol	Also known as the Tamak, this single-headed kettle drum is shaped like a large bowl and is typically made from cowhide. It's usually 14–18 inches in diameter and is played by striking it with two sticks. The Madol is used in Santal festivals and religious ceremonies, and it sets the rhythm for Santal dances.

The local musical instruments establish a feeling of identification and togetherness among many communities and are an essential part of traditional music. They also serve as a means of transmitting cultural beliefs and customs from one generation to the next. In tribal dances such as Adivasis and Santhals, native instruments are highly recognized in village dances. The main musical instruments utilized in the Chhau dance performance are the ones listed above (Table 5). Certain instruments have religious connotations and special significance of their own.

### Cultural Significance of the Chhau Mask and Dance

The Chhau dance symbolizes Hindu mythological stories from ancient scripts like Ramayana and Mahabharata, stories of Puranas, and other Indian literature. These masks are very well depicted in the characters of those stories. Every mask represents (Figure 4) the idol of folk deities (Devas) such as Lords Shiva, Rama, and Krishna (male deities) and Goddesses Durga, Radha, Kali (female deities). Among the demons (Asuras), the idols of Mahisasur, Kansh, Ravana, Raktbeej, and Hiranyakashyapu are depicted on the masks. The folk deities are well integrated into the culture, customs, and rituals of the people. Chhau Mask dance is mainly performed by male candidates within the 18-35 age group. They perform dance of different male and female deities. While dancing, Gods and Goddesses appear in their bodies. They perform body movements and do not sound anything. Other people played musical instruments such as Dhole, Dhamsa, Tabla, and Flute. The folk dance is also integrated with nature as it is celebrated during different seasons. During these dances, people make various dishes and beverages and serve them to the community people after the dance is over. These dances are also associated with the sowing and harvesting of the crops. The people are very fond of these dances, and they live and grow with them. The dancers wear different types of dresses, when depicting gods and goddesses, they wear dresses, especially of red colour and the masks are of different colours like green for depicting Lord Rama, and black for the goddess Kali. The Purulia Chhau dance originated from the martial arts of the Kurmi and Santhal tribes in the area. It also takes cues from women's dance known as nachni and folk dances performed during harvest celebrations, such as Bhadu and Tushu. (Chatterjee. D, 2019). The Chhau dance brings together people from different socio-economic backgrounds irrespective of their caste and creed. They are all united by the festive and religious spirit.



Figure 5: Chhau Dance depicting Mahishasurmardini. Source: Dastkari Haat Samiti (Arts and Culture, Purulia)

### Economic Significance of the Chhau Masks

The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, of 1999 governs the issuance of GI tags. The Geographical Indication Registry, a division of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Department of Industry Promotion and Internal Trade, is responsible for issuing this tag. (Giovannucci et.al 2009; Török 2020) The GI Tag is specially used for preserving ancient and authentic art and crafts. Chhau Mukhosh Shilpi Sangha is the only organization that applied for the Geographical Indication Tag, they filed for the registration on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 2017 and finally got the registration on the date of 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018, which will be valid up to 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2026, almost for 8 years.



**Figure 6: Detailed decoration in progress on a full-face Chhau mask, showcasing the intricate artistry and vibrant colors of this traditional craft. (Photo by the author)**



**Figure 7: Interview with a Chhau Mask maker in Charida village, discussing traditional techniques and cultural significance of Chhau mask making. This artisan has been crafting these masks for 12 years, providing insight into the detailed and complex process of the art form.**

### Benefits of GI Tag

There are several benefits of GI Tag (Figure 8). GI Registration helped the Chhau makers to sell more. It ultimately increases their revenue and profits. The Chhau makers who got the registration, their socio-economic conditions are much better than the Chhau makers who didn't get registered in the Geographical Indication Tag. It indirectly increases their confidence level and assertiveness in demanding optimal rates for the Chhau masks. As it is a fully handmade craft, they get their deserved profit out of it and financial growth takes place. Because of the GI tag the sales of the Chhau masks increased and also got recognition globally, the Chhau makers started getting clients from overseas. It has increased gradually since 2018. Ultimately, it rose in exports. They also get proper certification for the Geographical Indication Tag. For which the people can have trust in buying the product. The Purulia Chhau dance also got recognition for its vibrant masks and its acrobatic movements. Dances have started to take place in various other states of India for cultural exchange and experience. It also started to take place in foreign countries too, which ultimately boosted tourism globally. There is another benefit in getting Geographical Indication Tag that it discourages exploitation in the means unfair use of GI Tag products and market practices. Competition in getting the registration has been increased between the Chhau makers. Until now, only 31 Chhau makers were able to get the registration. In fact, all the news and notifications regarding the GI Tag the registered Chhau makers get it from their individual portal. Technologically they became advanced and hence digital development took place.

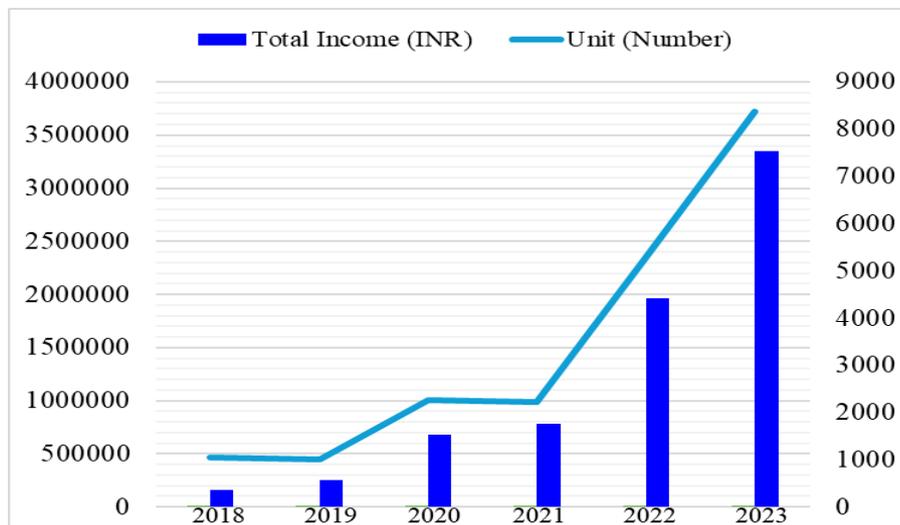


**Figure 8: Benefits of the Geographical Indication Tag (GI Tag)**

### Revenue of the Chhau Masks after getting GI Tag

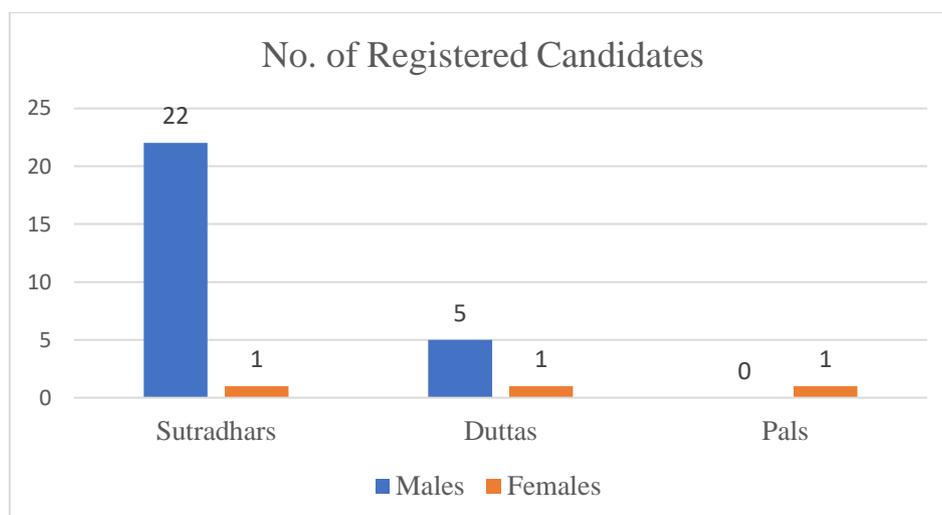
Figure 9 presents that there is a continuous increase in the Total Revenue of the sellers and producers of the Chhau Masks in Charida Village, Purulia. The producers of the Chhau Masks got recognition through the GI Tag in the year 2018. Gradually, with the fame and recognition the revenue, sales and the profit is also increasing. But we can also observe the difference between the revenue of the COVID-19 period that is between the year, 2019-2021, to be exact, we can see that both the sales and revenue are less compared to the sales in the year 2022-2023. Chhau makers also faced a huge impact during the COVID-19 Pandemic because of the huge loss of mask selling has happened. The outcome of closing the fairs and festivals suddenly affected their daily profits and revenues. The sudden drop of selling the masks due to the lockdown affected them both mentally and emotionally. To cope with that the Sutradhar community mainly explores the art in a quite different way. Dharmendra Sutradhar said, he was trying to explore new ideas and making the Chhau masks in a more vibrant and attractive way. The skills of making the Chhau masks also increased. They also explored new types of natural colors and the art of making them, like, viridian green, new shades of blue, and oranges. They also made new tools to make the Chhau masks. The Bhawanipur 75 Palli group stepped in to save the day. They made every effort to boost the Chhau masks' sales. In the years 2020 and 2022, they conducted sarbojonin durga puja over three days in a row, which aided the Chhau makers in selling their masks to the dancers. A crucial part of the Durga puja is the Chhau dance. The creators of

Charida Village, Chhau, expressed their relief and gratitude to the club members for taking this action, which allowed them to finally deal with the expected loss resulting from the lockdown. In addition, a few mask makers changed careers to agriculture in order to deal with the pandemic's effects (Halder, 2020). In Figure 8, the data reflects the growing recognition and protection of this cultural heritage, signaling, a positive trend in preserving traditional craftsmanship and cultural identity.



**Figure 9: Graph showing Total Revenue of the Chhau Masks (2018-2023)**

Figure 10 depicts that there is no discrimination between the males and females in making the Chhau masks in fact, the females are being encouraged and appreciated for their efforts. However, the numbers of females are much less compared to the males who are engaged in the making of Chhau Masks. Females are mostly engaged in doing household chores and looking after their kids. Also, there are only three communities which are Sutradhars', Duttas', and Pals' who got the Registration in the Geographical Indication Tag. However, the majority of the people who belong to the Sutradhar Community are engaged in mask-making techniques. Out of the total 42 household heads surveyed, 30 households (71.43%) have obtained Geographical Indication (GI) registration, while 12 households (28.57%) remain outside the GI certification framework. This indicates a relatively high level of participation in GI registration within the study area. Community-wise distribution reveals that the Sutradhar households dominate GI registration, constituting 76.67 percent of the total registered households. The Dutta's account for 20 percent, while the Pals represent only 3.33 percent. The concentration of GI registration within the Sutradhar community suggests a stronger institutional engagement, possibly due to traditional occupational specialization and greater awareness of certification processes.



**Figure 10: Graph illustrating the total number of registered candidates for the Geographical Indication Tag for the Chhau mask.**

### 3. DISCUSSIONS

In the current discourse surrounding the cultural and economic significance of Chhau Mask dance, as well as the significance of the Geographical Indication Tag, we learn that Chhau dance plays an important role in disseminating societal messages pertaining to Hindu mythology and in eliciting emotions and sentiments from the audience. Through the various legends of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Mahishasurmardini, or "Akali- Bodhan," Chhau dancing connects and unites people. Chhau dancing is a way to convey ideas and emotions. The performers primarily portrayed various story characters, such as gods and demons, with acrobatic body motions. It consistently highlights successes over setbacks and teaches us to resist evil and carry out good deeds in life.

The Chhau mask makers exclusively use natural substances and products, which also reflects their awareness of the environment. The Chhau producers benefited from increased sales and recognition after receiving the GI Tag. Additionally, it contributed to the global promotion of Chhau dance, which increases exports and tourists. In the end, it contributes to the financial development and socioeconomic advancement of the Chhau manufacturers. Compared to the unregistered candidates, the registered Chhau creators have far greater well-being. The Sutraddhar community has also seen a rise in the desire to be included on the GI Tag list. Because of the high demand and getting the desired value and cost of the product, market competition is very high. As well as it is seen that there is an unfair use of market practices and the GI Tag. As a result, customers will be misled and lose their money in terms of frauds and also the authenticity and uniqueness will be lost. In fact, we can also see, there have been production of Chhau masks and other GI products illegally by outsiders also after getting the GI tag verification and certification. They are being made and sell in the market in the name of that it has been made at the place of origin. Just like Darjeeling tea is being made in Nepal and some other places and sold as the name that it is Darjeeling tea. (Lakshmi Prasad, 2023)

As we already know, GI goods are becoming more well-known, and their makers are reaping the benefits of increased recognition and well-earned income from the products. Observing that other producers desire attention and to be included on this GI list. And as a result, there is more rivalry among the clients, which encourages the improper use and manufacture of GI goods like Chhau Masks (Figure 11).



**Figure 11: Some adverse impacts of Chhau Mask making after GI Tag**

People are becoming more and more interested in this firm that produces Chhau masks because of the high demand and expanding prominence. Eventually, this leads to conflicts, resentment, and competitiveness between the original producers and market sellers. Rivalry can occasionally result in heated arguments, which has an impact on the surroundings and, in the end, makes things chaotic and uncomfortable for the customers. Additionally, they sense that something is off in the area where the Chhau masks are made.

### 4. CONCLUSION

The glamour business, new media, industrialization, and other economic factors have led to a gradual decline in the involvement of Chhau dance and mask-making at various festivals and fairs. Additionally, subsequent research conducted during and after the pandemic have shown that fairs and celebrations in India have rapidly declined. However, several NGOs are working with the dancers to encourage and assist them. They encourage the dancers to participate in their cultural programs and other events, which eventually helps the Chhau makers create the masks. In addition, some women are in charge of the Chhau dancers and inspire and motivate young females from Purulia and the other villages to participate in

the male-dominated traditional dance traditions. The Charida village's Chhau mask producers take great satisfaction in having a Geographical Indication Tag. As a result, younger designers, decorators, and artists are therefore inspired and have the capacity to keep creating, releasing, and exhibiting their work. An increasing number of folk-art centres are opening up in Purulia every day, giving budding artists the chance to study Chhau dance with their Chhau gurus. The Bannia, Balarampur, and Charida art centres are currently operational. Ultimately, the Chhau masks and dance symbolize a sustainable economic model that combines history and modernity while maintaining the community's vitality and resilience. They also embody the cultural essence of Charida village.

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