



Chhau as A Tribal Culture : A Context of a land of Vivid Culture, Purulia

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Abstract :

Chhau dance is the pride, honour and cultural identity of India. It is the most ancient practicing tribal ethnic culture that has been continuing today. In our Manbhum vis-à-vis Purulia district the people can't think a day without it. In 2010 the UNESCO has declared the Chhau dance as the 'Pride of India'. This honour is not only for its colourful and successful representations throughout the passages of time but also it is an honour and dedication to those hard workers chhau artists whose tireless efforts make this position possible. It is the collective unconsciousness of the Purulians. This paper attempts to show the importance and effect of it in as a tribal culture and its approach through the contextualized picture in Purulia in the present day scenario.

Keywords :

Chhau dance, Cultural tradition, Ancient ethnic culture, Folk Culture, Spiritualism

Introduction :

India is the oldest and spiritually cultured pilgrimage in the world. Centuries old this India is known for its civilization, culture, language, behaviour and all the happy expressions of the Indians. The sages of Rhig-vedic times had been keeping the culture of India with passages of time, so that the Indian culture has become the oldest and great. This culture was rooted in spiritualism and self-actualization instead of only tradition and self-satisfaction. The aims of which are peace, toleration, unity, truth, non-violence, honesty and so on. In order to establish them into humanity and human behavioural tradition some cultures are introduced like *Palagan*, *Brata Katha* etc and some which

are suitable for that particular age and tradition, so that the spiritual development would be possible for each of them. From the ancient age we like to consider the literature as the mirror of society and the instrument which portrays the social characteristics to the public. In the present time we become conscious through various medias like newspaper, television, internet etc. In comparison to the ancient time it was stated that there was no trace of these medias at all. So in that time people had been served their enjoyment and natural flourishing through the reading of *Brata Katha*, reading of *Ramayana and Mahabharata*, presentation of street dramas and the greatest of all the exhibition of the Chhau dance.

Origin of Chhau :

It is tough to trace out the exact time of the origin of Chhau. Centuries old this cultural dance form had been changed in various ways. It originates in the Purulia district in West Bengal and draws inspiration from martial arts and combative training. This form of dance is a means to portray stories to the audience, which is why elaborate masks and headgear associated with battle and war are worn during the performance. Basically the story or the *Pala* revolves around the two great epics of Indian mythology – *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Chhau dance was widely endorsed by patrons belonging to the royal families, rich landlords and British governors in the region. These performances are predominantly put up during the *Gajan* festival, which takes place to honor the god of destruction according to the Hindu mythology Lord Shiva.

Types of Chhau :

It has been regarded that the Chhau dance forms is of three types according to their geographically origins in India – The Chhau of Purulia in the state of West Bengal, The Chhau of Seraikella in the state of Jharkhand and The Chhau of Mayurbhanj in the state of Orissa. Among them the Seraikella chhau is the oldest of all but with its magical power and decorated presentation with coloured dresses and beautiful huge masks the Purulia chhau has been gaining the fame and prestige all over the world. The difference among the three types lies in the use of masks. The Purulia Chhau has the bigger masks where the Seraikella chhau has smaller masks and while the Mayurbhanj chhau has no use of masks at all except the painted faces at some cases.

Concept of Indian Tribal Culture :

According to Raymond Williams, a 21st century literary critic defined Culture as to how ideas and meanings are expressed in ordinary behaviour, learning and art. He also said that culture could be categorized in three ways : social, ideal and documentary. The Chhau dance as a cultural identity is mainly associated with the tribal people at first though in the present time it has been associating with all the cultures and castes of India. The tribal or *Adivasi* refers to heterogeneous groups across East, Central, West and South India. They somehow are attached with the natural surrounding most. The practice and culture of Chhau is one of their cultural diversity.

Landmark and Achievements in this Culture :

Gambhir Sing Mura who is called the emperor of Chhau dance had been honoured the *Padmashree* award in 1981 and the award of *Sangeet Natok Akademi* in 1983 by the Govt. of India and in the same year i.e. 1983 another great Chhau artist Nepal Mahato was also honoured with the

Padmashree award. Apart from these achievements, recently in the year 2023 another Chhau artist Bhuban Chandra Kumar has been awarded the *Sangeet Natok Akademi* for the Chhau dance by the honourable President of India, Smt. Draupadi Murmu.

Chhau as a Dance art form :

Full of diversity the Indian ethnic culture is seen as various arts, movements and dance. This dance art form was born according to geographically located specifically regions and as specifically in the form of social consciousness. The tradition of the *Arya-sages* still exists in deep rooted Indian dance art form. The main flow of Indian culture rooted in showing respect to the divine power and in reading psalms in order to propitiate god and through dance form where also god is invoked.

Importance of Chhau as a myth and Culture :

It is not only the folklore or cultural myth of Purulia but it also is the sweet fragrance of that vivid cultural flower that is nourished and practiced by the people of whole India as well as the world. The effect of Chhau dance on human lives specially the lives of Manbhum people can not be explained in mere words. It is more than that. It worths much more. Now the human lives is totally incomplete without Chhau dance. If we go through the times before independence the Chhau dance was mainly used for entertainment cum celebrating the "Shiv Gajan" at the bengali months Chaitra and Baishakh. But at present it has reached day to day activities of human lives. We all are familiar with the sweetest taste of this special culture. Our lives have been rectifying regularly by this dance.

Social Issues Dealt in Chhau :

Various social issues are dealt with by it to make conscious us. As for example it can be said that at pandemic times, many Chhau parties had been exhibiting the dos and don'ts through it. Actually the chhau dance is the special identity of us now. It is our pride, our honour and an collective unconsciousness throughout the centuries that we want to make part of our daily lives. A son or daughter of a Chhau artist automatically becomes the more valued Chhau artist now even if he or she is not properly guided or taught. In our rural life the effect is much more self satisfying and interesting. In any festival, if there is Chhau dance at the end of the day or at night, all are concerned regarding that and that becomes the central focal point of everyone.

Conclusion :

It seems that Chhau is not the part of life, it is the everything and part and parcel of an individual. The mythological familiar events are exhibited through this dance drama but in a world of various musical accomplishments. In the ocean of culture of Purulia, Chhau is the most valuable pearl or gem that can be nourished by severe hard work and dedication. In the world as long men can see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Chhau will live in the lives of men being a part of culture and this will give rebirth to the legendary chhau artists. 'Where whenas death shall all the world subdue, the Chhau will live and makes the later life fresh and renew'.

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