

Satyapriya Roy College of Education

B.Ed. Semester - II (2021-2023)

ASSIGNMENT On

**Different Forms of Dance: Chhau
Dance**

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INTRODUCTION:

Chhau is one of the most popular dances in India, and it is also one of the most important dances in the history of folk-dance tradition in India. Today, three variations of Chhau dance are performed in eastern India – Serai Kella Chhau in Jharkhand, Mayurbhanj Chhau in Odisha and Purulia Chhau in West Bengal. However, it is believed that Chhau dance has its origin in Purulia, which is the western district of West Bengal. But unavailability of proper historical documents makes it difficult to determine the exact origin and antiquity of Chhau dance. In the past, parts of eastern India were inhabited by the so-called “hostile tribes”. However, during 12 – 14 A.D few Hindu rulers occupied small pockets in the region and established control. It was through the intermixing of the Hindu rulers and hostile tribes that Chhau became a part of the tribal life.

There are three different views regarding the origin of Chhau form. The oldest theory suggests the word “Chhau” originated from the Sanskrit “Chaya” (shadow), the second opines that the word is derived from the local dialect meaning “an army camp” while the third believes that the origin of the word may be rooted in the enthusiastic shout “cho...cho...cho” often echoed during hunts. The dance ranges from celebrating martial arts, acrobatics and athletics performed in festive themes of a folk-dance. The stories enacted by Chhau dancers include those from the Hindu epics like Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The dance is traditionally an all-male troupe but now-a-days both male and female dancers celebrate together in all regions. It is particularly performed during spring every year with a syncretic dance form.

TYPES OF CHHAU DANCE:

Chhau dance is found in three styles named after the location where they are performed i.e., the Purulia Chhau of West Bengal, the Seraikella Chhau of Jharkhand and the Mayurbhanj Chhau of Odisha. The Seraikella Chhau developed in Seraikella when it was under the rule of Kalinga's Gajapati Rule, the present-day administrative headquarters of the Seraikella Kharsawan district of Jharkhand, the Purulia Chhau in Purulia district of West Bengal and the Mayurbhanj Chhau in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. The most prominent difference among the three sub genres is regarding the use of masks. While the Seraikella and Purulia sub genres of Chhau use masks during the dance, the Mayurbhanj Chhau uses none. The Seraikella Chhau's technique 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 is performed with symbolic masks and the acting establishes the role the actor is playing. The Purulia Chhau uses extensive masks shaped in the form of the character being played. These masks are crafted by potters who make clay images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and is primarily sourced from the Purulia district of West Bengal. The Mayurbhanj Chhau is performed without masks and is similar to Seraikella Chhau.

WHERE CAN CHHAU DANCE BE PERFORMED?

Chhau, a form of tribal martial dance of India, is believed to have originated in the former princely state of Mayurbhanj. Today, three variations of the dance are performed in eastern India – Seraikella Chhau in Jharkhand, Mayurbhanj Chhau in Orissa, and Purulia Chhau in West Bengal. The Chhau dance is mainly performed during festivals in the region of Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha, especially the spring festival of Chaitra Parva and in which the whole community participates. The Purulia Chhau dance is celebrated during the Sun festival.

Purulia's Chhau Dance is usually performed during important ceremonies that have a strong religious significance, such as the Gajan Festival. They are also, at times, performed during weddings and on the Sun Festival. Mostly, these dances are performed on the floor, as opposed to an elevated stage, with the audience members sitting in a circle or a semi-circle around them to. The dance usually starts as darkness falls and continues till dawn. While performing in some show or on a wider platform, an elevated stage is used for the performance.

POSTURE ANALYSIS:

Chhau Dance is a form of dance that involves skills of martial arts, acrobatics and athletics performed in festive themes of a folk dance, to a structured dance with religious themes. As Chhau Dance can depict a story through its form of dancing and involves some skills of martial arts, the story of Maa Durga defeating Mahisasura can be portrayed through Chhau Dance very well.

The above snapshot of a Chhau Dance portrays the fight fought between Maa Durga and Mahisasura.

The one playing the role of Maa Durga has held a Trishula or Trident and is attacking Mahisasura, so his left leg is bend towards the one playing Mahisasura at the left. Due to this

the right leg is stretched to balance with the left bent leg and weigh the body towards left. As he is attacking, so the direction of his body is facing the one he is attacking on but not completely because the spectators watching them should also be able to see their postures properly. Hence the body is slightly angled diagonally but the direction of hand and leg is directed towards the left.

The one playing the role of Mahisasura is in defensive pose. So, his right leg is stretched and left leg is bent so as to balance and weigh his body towards left, away from the one who is attacking on him. Also, the right hand is bended towards himself which shows that he isn't try to attack but defending himself.

COSTUME ANALYSIS OF CHHAU DANCE

The costumes worn by the Chhau performers vary in colour and design. It primarily consists of Dhoti or Pyjamas in a deep green, yellow, or red shade worn by the actors portraying Gods, and loose trousers in a deep black shade worn by the actors portraying demons. Stripes of contrasting colours are sometimes used to make the costumes more appealing and unique

The costume plays a vital role in this performance as it is popularly known for its distinctive set and costumes. The male dancers wear brightly coloured dhotis with matching Kurta on top with a variety of designs. The Kurta is usually obscured by vast amount of costume jewellery that is worn in the form of necklaces. Female dancers, as well as male dancers portraying female characters, are known to wear vibrant sarees. Necklaces are the most common type of costume jewellery. These are large in size, not just in number, and extremely heavy. The style and variety of the dancers' costumes are heavily influenced by the characters they play. The masks worn during this performance are of vital importance as they are used to convey emotions and the nature of the character, much like the way Grecian Masks functioned in plays.

Characters are typically divided into three categories: Gods and Goddesses, Demons and Monsters, each with their own distinct costume and appearance. When depicting Gods and Goddesses, the colour red is prominent aspect of the clothing, along with elaborate costume jewellery around the neck and the headgear. The costume for Gods and Goddesses can also include a few extra sets of arms along with trademark weapons that a particular God or Goddesses was known for wielding. For instance, Maa Kali would be accompanied by a string of decapitated human heads. Demons, while also elaborately dressed, are most likely to have different coloured faces, for example, a blue face. Apart from this, the costume itself does not vary that much. For monsters and animals, suits made to depict an animal or monster along with appropriate masks are worn. For instance, while depicting a lion, a dancer would wear a lion suit along with a lion mask. This may or may not be accompanied by a weapon such as a sword.

Purulia Chhau costumes have been influenced to the extent of using more interesting clothes or fabrics to create the ensemble as well as using masks that are extremely creative. Over the years, it has become more and more acceptable to wear printed or embroidered costumes while performing this dance form instead of just bright, bold colours. Silk is the most commonly used material for costumes, followed by cotton.