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Post-UNESCO Effect: The Journey of Chhau from Cultural Sentiment to Commercialization

Abstract

Chhau, a traditional masked dance form of West Bengal, was listed as an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity' by UNESCO in 2010. In 2015, UNESCO in cooperation with the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise of the Government of West Bengal developed a 'Rural Craft Hub' in Chorida village of Purulia district centring on Chhau. Consequently, tourism in the area was boosted both internationally and nationally. This phenomenon encouraged the commercialization of the traditional dance and craft form associated with Chhau as a result of heritagization. Unfortunately, the implication of the heritagization occurred in a flawed fashion which eventually led to folklorization and institutionalization while compromising their contextual significance. This paper explores how heritagization ensures the sustainability of an intangible tradition like Chhau while leading to folklorization and institutionalization of performance and craft. The paper also documents the history and ritualistic significance of Chhau to draw a lucid comparison between the traditional form and the form that results from folklorization. The paper establishes that heritagization, folklorization, and institutionalisation are intertwined with each other in the context of Chhau. From the interviews conducted with tourists and locals associated with Chhau, it is evident that any organization concerned with policy making should keep it in mind that an enormous distortion of craft and performance will be an obvious result when the target buyers in the market are alien to the traditional context. In such a scenario, the contextual significance of a craft form can be kept intact if the targeted buyers can be made aware of the contextual and functional relevance of the folkloric element that they are consuming in its modernized version.

Keywords: Chhau, Performing Art, Heritagization, Folklorization, Institutionalization



Introduction

India has a legacy of masked dance, representing an assimilation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. A varied range of masks with diverse physical aspects exists all over the world from Africa to Oceania, East Asia to Latin America. There is hardly any traditional culture where the existence of a mask cannot be seen. Mask is a form of art and sometimes, being abstract in appearance when placed out of context, its color and decoration also have semiotic significance.¹ It is widely believed, however, that anything that is a part of folklore has to have a functional value and such functions can be categorized into four groups amusement, education, validation of culture, and maintaining conformity.² This cross-generic performance is even mentioned in Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra* which dates back to approximately between 200 BCE and 200 CE in a segment titled 'Use of masks'. The ancient book notes that "Similarly different masks (pratisira) are to be used for gods and men according to their habitation, birth and age"³. The word "Pratisira" is synonymous with the Sanskrit word "Pratisirsak" which means a headcover and not the face cover.⁴ *Ramman, Chham, Bhaona, Danda Yatra, Prabhad Natakam, Gambhira, Mukhakebel, and Chhau* are the names of a few of the traditional masked dance forms that reflect their socio-cultural milieu in different geographical regions. Among all these, Chhau of Purulia district has gained substantial popularity worldwide which has elevated it to the platform of being a cultural identifier of Bengal. The reason behind such fame is its listing as 'UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 2010'.⁵ Since then, the Chhau mask-making village, Chorida has caught the attention of the West Bengal Government and it has been developed as a 'Rural Craft Hub' by the State Government's Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Textiles, in association with UNESCO.⁶

The initiative taken by UNESCO and the Department of MSME has attracted a large number of tourists to Jhalda Sub-division of the Purulia district as the locality is graced with the natural beauty of the Ajodhya hill and the heritage of the Chhau dance. With tourists flocking towards Jhalda, cultural tourism has proliferated in this area with a special focus on the Chhau performance. At present, Chhau is performed at the resorts 'on request' and

¹ Pollock 1995: 581–597. Proofreaders: Prof. Donald E. Morse – Dr. Balázs Venkovits.

² Bascom 1954: 333–349.

³ Ghosh 1951: 429.

⁴ Karmakar 2014: 96; Ghosh 1951: 429.

⁵ UNESCO 2010.

⁶ UNESCO 2015.

‘in lieu of remuneration’. The heritagization of Chhau is evidently enhancing the livelihood opportunities of the craftsmen and the performers but the frenzy surrounding this folkloric performance is directing it towards ‘folklorization’. Therefore, this paper will examine how ‘heritagization’ ensures the sustainability of an intangible tradition like Chhau while leading to the ‘folklorization’ and the ‘institutionalization’ of this performance and craft.

To address this question, the article begins with describing the conceptual framework and how the concepts may be applied to the diachronic transition of Chhau. Second, the paper discusses the methods and methodologies that have been used to collect data and provides an analysis of them. Third, the paper introduces Chhau as a folk performing art form and finally, it discusses the process of heritagization, folklorization, and institutionalization in the context of Chhau.

Conceptual Framework

Chhau traditionally performed at the end of Chaitra month in the pretext of Gajan, is a folk festival associated with Shiva, whose worship is prevalent in West Bengal. However, the process of heritagization of Chhau started in the area at the beginning of the 21st century. According to Walsh, the process of heritagization targets the locals to bolster the sentiment that the relevance of the heritage is more to them than what it is to foreigners.⁷ When heritagization involves culture institutionally, as happened in the case of Chhau after being listed as a cultural heritage by UNESCO, tourism becomes an integral part of the endeavour. Authorities rely on the help of their tourism industry to decide how cultural heritage should be exposed and interpreted to underpin a certain political order.⁸ The process of heritagization recycles old ideas and rejuvenates them by transforming them according to the relevance of the present political system.⁹ But sometimes the aim of imbibing the idea of ‘more mine’ fails and there the process of heritagization leads to folklorization as the entire phenomenon becomes centred on commercialization.

In the case of Chhau of Purulia, the contextual relevance has diminished due to the commercialization of the performance. Hans Moser in his seminal lecture “Folklorism in our time” defined the term “folklorismus” or folklorism in English as “second-hand mediation and presentation of folk

⁷ Walsh 1992.

⁸ Nilsson 2018: 35–54.

⁹ Nilsson 2018: 35–54.

culture”¹⁰. Later Herman Bausinger elaborated on the concept of folklorismus as “the use of material or stylistic elements of folklore in a context which is foreign to the original tradition”¹¹. Therefore, folklorism along with UNESCO’s concept of ‘folklorization’ can be used to explore the bidirectional journey of Chhau.¹² According to Alan Dundes:

“the best definitions of the various forms of folklore will be based upon criteria from all three levels of analysis. For this reason, it is probably a mistake for the folklorists to leave the analysis of texture to linguists and the analysis of context to cultural anthropologists. The well rounded folklorist should hopefully attempt to analyse all three levels.”¹³

Though the word context primarily signifies social context, the contextu-
alists use it to give importance to another aspect which is the performance
context.¹⁴ Thus, the distortion of the performance context has been studied
employing Richard Schechner’s “Performance Theory”¹⁵. According to
Richard Schechner:

“As a discipline, performance studies takes actions very seriously in four
ways. First, behavior is the ‘object of the study’ of performance studies. Although
performance studies scholars use the ‘archive’ extensively – what’s in books,
photographs, the archaeological record, historical remains, etc. – their dedicated
focus is on the ‘repertory’, namely, what people do in the activity of their doing
it. Second, artistic practice is a big part of the performance studies project. A
number of performance studies scholars are also practicing artists working in the
avant-garde, in community-based performance, and doing performance is
integral.”¹⁶

Similarly, the masks of the Chhau dance are now primarily made to be
sold as souvenirs. The dimensions of the masks which are widely made to be
sold in Chorida village do not match the ones which are made as ordered by
the performers. This process of delineating an art form from its traditional
contextual background is termed ‘folklorization’. The term has been incorpo-
rated by UNESCO to be applied to Intangible Cultural Heritage but it goes
back to Hans Moser’s concept of Folklorismus (second-hand mediation of

¹⁰ Moser 1962: 180.

¹¹ Bausinger 1984: 1405; Smidchens 1991: 2.

¹² Seitel 2001; Newal 1987: 131–151.

¹³ Dundes 1980: 32.

¹⁴ Sen 2008: 90.

¹⁵ Schechner 2002.

¹⁶ Schechner 2002.

folk culture) published in 1962.¹⁷ Defining ‘folklorization’, John H. McDowell claims that it is “a processing of local tradition for external consumption”¹⁸. Albert van der Zeijden explains that “Folklorization forms a part of a dynamic process of giving heritage a new meaning by transforming it into a museum piece”¹⁹. According to Mateja Habnic, “folklorization is not a specific character of socialist times; it is a part of the more general project of modernization”²⁰. In the International Round Table on “Intangible Cultural Heritage’ – Working definitions”, Peter Seitel defines folklorization as “the re-stylization of traditional expressions so that they become less complex aesthetically and semantically”²¹. Hafstein in his famous article on folklorization writes that folklorization is an approach to keep the ghost of authenticity alive.²² Each of these properties of folklorization as discussed by scholars can also be seen as occurring within a tangible cultural heritage. Additionally, it can be aptly stated that ‘folklorization’ is about restyling an element of folklore to match the demand of modernization while encouraging heritagization of aesthetical and semantical archetype form.²³ Therefore, this research argues that Chhau has been experiencing folklorization as an aftermath of heritagization by UNESCO. Moreover, the research discusses the process of institutionalisation of Chhau which somehow harmed the basic folkloric characteristics of Chhau as a folk-dance form. The term institutionalization seen in a sociological perspective stands for the process by which beliefs, norms, social roles, values, or certain modes of behaviour are embedded in an organisation, a social system, or a society as a whole.²⁴

Methodology

This case study focuses on Chhau of the Purulia district in Bengal. Repeated field visits have been conducted in this area following an in-depth case study.²⁵ To understand the archetypal form of Chhau performance and the process of heritagization, archival research has been conducted in museums

¹⁷ Hafstein 2018: 140.

¹⁸ McDowell 2010.

¹⁹ Zeijden 2015: 195–197.

²⁰ Habnic 2012: 185–196.

²¹ Seitel 2001.

²² Hafstein 2018: 127–149.

²³ Hafstein 2018: 127–149; Zeijden 2015: 195–197; Habnic 2012: 185–196; Seitel 2001.

²⁴ Sabnam n.d.

²⁵ Flybjerg 2006: 219–245.

and using documentaries. As there is limited research available in this respect, further studies are needed to understand the process of folklorization of Chhau. Empirical data for the study have been collected by using semi-structured interviews with the purveyor and consumer.

I made two rounds of field visits to Purulia. First I visited Chorida on 20th September 2020 and spent around seven days interviewing, talking to the mask maker and observing the folk performances. Second, I made another round of field trip in December of the same year to complete the interview process. In total I interviewed 15 performers, six craftsmen and six NGO and other Governmental authorities. The 15 performers whom I interviewed were of various ages ranging from 14 to 62 years. Each interview took somewhere between 45 minutes to one hour which focused mainly on understanding the altering values and approaches of the performers towards the dance form. The questions were open ended in nature to allow flexibility. The questions included, for example, the following: *How have you seen the plot of the dance form changing? How do you feel about the change in the context of the dance form? What changes have you seen after the coaching centres were opened? Do you feel that it is important to make alterations in the dance form to attract urban tourists? Who are the prime viewers of Chhau at present?*

Additionally, six craftsmen of Chorida have been interviewed in an effort to understand the resettlement pattern, market structure, organizational endeavors, socio-cultural background and contextual significance of the mask in the market. Using the same pattern the craftsmen were asked questions, including the following: *Who are the primary buyers? What ratios of the product are manufactured for the performer and tourists? Which of these masks are real characters of Chhau? Which are improvised and included from other cultures and are not connected to Chhau at all? Have you taken training from an institution or has the skill been acquired from the previous generation?*

Six NGO and Governmental officials were also interviewed in order to understand the process of heritagization that had been planned at different levels. Also, ten tourists were interviewed in Chorida in various resorts of the area to collect data about the market demand for the performance and the craft form associated with it.

Chhau as a Cross-Generic Dance Form

Chhau is currently considered an integral part of the identity of Purulia district because of its heritage. Although Bagmudi is referred to as the romantic land of Chhau because of its legacy in the performative tradition, the dance tradition is now scattered all over the district along with Jharkhand and Odisha. Historically, this part of the plateau used to be called the Manbhum. The name is believed to be derived from the rulers of the Mana family.²⁶ The Chhau dance originated in Purulia around 250 years ago. Gambhir Singh Mura, a Chhau dancer of Purulia is considered to be the bearer of the prosperity of the Chhau dance. Concerning the Chhau dance diachronically, the period of Jipa Singh Mura, father of Gambhir Singh Mura may be considered as the 'Period of Blooming' and Gambhir Singh Mura's period as the 'Period of Prosperity'²⁷. Ever since then the dance form has prospered in various dimensions. Though Gambhir Singh Mura, as well as his son Kartik Singh Mura, said that Gambhir Singh had not learned the dance from a guru or teacher but rather he acquired it by seeing others as happens in the case of folkloric performances. Currently, the dance form is taught in formal coaching centers in Purulia. Nowadays, Chhau is mostly practiced in Baghmudi, Bandoan, Jhalda, Burrabazar and Arsa. This is traditionally a martial art-centric acrobatic dance form but with time and place, alteration and evolution occur. The text of this dance form centers on various fragments of different Hindu mythologies like Mahabharata, Ramayana, Bhagvat Purana, etc. The dance form was traditionally dominated by male dancers but recently female dancers have also been performing.²⁸ Simplification and modernization can be observed in Jhalda, while the Bandoan area has a conservative pattern of dancing. Arsa has no particular uniqueness in its style. Traditionally, Munda and Bhumij people used to participate mostly in the Chhau dance form but later the Kurmi and the Mahatos also started participating in the performance. Today, apart from these people the Dom, Hari, Santhal, Oraon, Sunri, Khasi, Rajowar also take part in Chhau performances. The Dom, Suri and Hari communities are considered to be the most skilled instrument players. The majority of the Chhau dancers are Hindu but some small participation can also be seen in the district at present.²⁹ Chorida, the most prominent mask-making village in India has a history of three hundred years or more. The Chhau dance was first introduced by Gopal Singh, the king of Baghmudi. Later King Madon

²⁶ Karan 1371.

²⁷ Roy 2017: 242.

²⁸ Barik–Mukherjee 2021.

²⁹ Roy 2017: 230.

Mohan Singh, son of Gopal Singh, spread this ceremonial dance form over all of Purulia.³⁰ Along with that, it is believed that the Sutradhar community engaged in mask making in Chorida was invited from Burddhaman district by the royal family to make clay idols of the gods and goddesses.³¹ According to Dipankar Ghosh, the royal family of Baghmundi was converted to Hinduism in the first half of the 18th century, the ancestors of the recent mask makers of Purulia settled in Chorida village near Baghmundi around that time³². Although the mask makers of Chorida began with clay idol making, to enrich the aesthetical properties of the Chhau dance form masks were also introduced. The population of Purulia has typically a dark complexion with a broad nose and blunt features as the majority of the population belong to Proto Australoid tribal communities. Scholars argued that as most of the performers of the Chhau dance have facial features that are not aesthetically pleasing, to make the dance form more beautiful, masks were introduced in Chhau.³³ Thus Chorida, the Sutradhar village became a mask maker's village. After the inclusion of Chorida as a Craft Hub by MSME and UNESCO more Sutradhar families have been migrating towards this village in hopes of a better livelihood.

Extensive research has already been done on the different aspects of Chhau. Historiography, aesthetics, performativity, community and tourism associated with Chhau have been studied by various scholars. Ashutosh Bhattacharya documented Chhau as a dance form in his books.³⁴ Mani Bardhan's "Bangla-r Lokonrityo O Geetiboichitro" offers a detailed description of dances of Bengal, briefly touching upon Chhau as well.³⁵ Chhau as a dance form has been documented in "Bangiyo Lokosanskriti Kosh"³⁶. U. K. Banerjee's *Chhau Dance Traditional to Contemporary* explores the transition of the Chhau dance in Purulia, Seraikela and Mayurbhanj. This book covers multi-dimensional aspects of contemporary Chhau.³⁷ Badri Prasad's "Bharatiya Chounritya: Itihas, Sanskriti Aur Kala" documents the historiography of tri-regional versions of Chhau.³⁸ In this context, it should be noted that Chhau as a dance form can also be found in two other regions of India which are Mayurbhanj or Odisha and Seraikela of Jharkhand. Although these three versions of Chhau differ from each other on the

³⁰ Saha 2017: 1732.

³¹ Sarkar–Mistry 2015: 83–96.

³² Ghosh 2012.

³³ Sarkar–Mistry 2015: 83–96.

³⁴ Bhattacharya 1972; Bhattacharya 2011.

³⁵ Bardhan 2004.

³⁶ Chowdhury 2012: 178–179.

³⁷ Banerjee 2020.

³⁸ Prasad 2013.

basis of dance posture and mask aesthetics, the origin of these three are the same as broadly discussed in Badri Prasad's book. Mita Baxi Ghosh mainly focuses on the community associated with Chhau.³⁹ Another book titled *Purulia Jela Lokosanskriti Porichoy Grantha* analysed and documented Chhau from the perspective of performance and craft and also employed a comparative method in three separate essays written by Shantanu Roy, Mita Baxi Ghosh and Achintya Majee.⁴⁰ On the other hand, masks used in Chhau have been documented in two books.⁴¹ Ananya Bhattacharya discusses the sustainable tourism prospect of Chhau along with a few other folkloric forms of Bengal.⁴² Mrityunjy Karmakar documents the mask-making craft of Chorida along with many other craft forms but the researcher failed to conduct an extensive study.⁴³ Although extensive research has been conducted on this particular dance form, its diachronic journey through the process of heritagization, folklorization and institutionalisation have remained unaddressed by scholars.

Cardinale Stephane in "Intangible heritage and livelihoods: a case study on the heritage of Purulia Chhau dance from India" documents the impact of heritagization of Purulia Chhau on the livelihood of the performers and the craftsmen.⁴⁴ She talks about the modernization of Chhau in the chapter "A Discussion on Intangible Heritage Revitalisation as Modernisation" but the information provided remains insufficient. She documents a theatrical performance of Chhau adopting Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as the modernized version of Chhau. However, the theatrical form is nothing but an amalgamation of Chhau masks and postures with kathakali masks in a proscenium theatrical setting.

In the context of the existing scholarly literature, my research aims to document the decontextualization of Chhau from its religious pretext and the mask from the dance form. It explores how the archetypal form of Chhau has been musealized while the simplified version has taken over the market to meet the demand of the external consumers. Similar research has been conducted on different intangible heritages of the world but Chhau has remained untouched in this context.⁴⁵ Therefore, my research intends to help in policy making to safeguard the Chhau dance and to ensure its survivals along with its contextual significance.

³⁹ Baxi Ghosh 2008: 229–331.

⁴⁰ Roy 2017: 227–255; Baxi Ghosh 2017: 133–148; Maji 2017: 152–154.

⁴¹ Ghosh 2012; Sarkar 1990.

⁴² Bhattacharya 2011.

⁴³ Karmakar 2014.

⁴⁴ Stefania 2019.

⁴⁵ Hafstein 2018: 127–149; Berdslee 2016: 89–101; Moisala 2019; Foster 2011: 63–107.

Bringing the Past into the Present

The concept of heritagization refers to “a mode of cultural production in the present which has recourse to the past”⁴⁶. Park, Tae, Ok and Kwon in *Heritagization and Institutionalization of Taekkyeon* state that heritagization refers to the process whereby various pasts are constructed in the present to address a contemporary need, issue or circumstance.⁴⁷ The post-UNESCO inclusion stages of Chhau justify the claim of Park and his co-investigators. Following the enrolment of Chhau as a semi-classical dance form in the list of the ‘UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, 2010’ the dance form began receiving increased attention from different parts of the world as a cultural heritage.⁴⁸ Consequently, various Non-Governmental Organizations and Governmental Organizations have become interested in Chhau. The state government used the heritage classification as a basis for creating a tourism industry surrounding it. Thus, Charida has been developed as a ‘Rural Craft Hub’ by the State Government’s Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Textiles in 2015. The village was reconstructed in such a way that the Chhau mask selling shops were constructed along both sides of the main road in a linear pattern. (Pic. Nr. 1.) In no time the entire district has become a tourist destination because of this international heritagization of a tribal-dominated folk-dance form. Similarly, innumerable hotels, resorts and tourism cottages have emerged in and around the district to provide accommodation for tourists. Around these resorts, a new variant of Chhau performance has also emerged. This variant is performed in an alien space that is contextually disconnected from the traditional form of Chhau but created with the intention to fulfilling the demands of a globalized market. This variant is locally called “Call Show”⁴⁹ (Pic. Nr. 2.). Here the tourists contact the hotel management to call Chhau performers on the lawn of the hotel in the evening to perform the Chhau dance. Moreover, the masks of Chhau also went through episodic alteration to meet the demands of the urban tourists flocking Purulia. Chorida as a rural craft hub earned immense popularity over the past decade which eventually inspired many more mask makers to settle in and around the village, resulting in a rise in the production of masks. Although the entire phenomenon of heritagization of Chhau brought an increased scope of livelihood for the performers and the artisans, the tourism-centric approach of the government led to the condition

⁴⁶ Krisheblett–Gimblett 1955: 369.

⁴⁷ Park, Tae, Ok, Kwon 2019: 1555–1566.

⁴⁸ UNESCO 2010.

⁴⁹ Roy 2017: 234.

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where the contextuality of this performing art is at stake. The performance, as well as the craft form have been simplified to meet the demands of the urban consumers in a way that the functional value has been compromised to a great extent.



Pic. Nr. 1.: *The porches of the houses on two sides of the road in Chorida village have been transformed in to Chbau Mask Selling shops.* (Photo by Ayantika Chakraborty)



Pic. Nr. 2.: *Lawn of a resort Purulia where Chbau is performed for tourists as a 'Call Show'.* (Photo by Ayantika Chakraborty)

Decontextualization of the Folkloric Element

Innumerable intangible cultural forms which have experienced heritagization have also gone through folklorization even though the period needed for folklorization to manifest itself varies with every folkloric form. It differs depending on the culture, the response of the governmental and non-governmental agencies and the approach of the people who are associated with it, including the performers, craftsmen, buyers and viewers. In the case of Chhau, the process of folklorization gathered momentum in a decade. Since its selection as a UNESCO Cultural Heritage, the documentation, preservation and musealization of the performance have been managed by individuals and organizations to keep its heritage status intact. However, Chhau is presently performed all through the year as call shows in hotels. To be precise, not only for tourism purposes but also in Rite de Passage ceremonies Chhau gets performed as an element of entertainment. Traditionally, Chhau has the religious ritualistic context of Gajan parab but presently it can be divided into two types based on their context: i) religious sphere and ii) entertainment sphere. In the recent scenario, it can be seen that Chhau presently is performed mostly for entertainment purposes all through the year whereas the ritualistic religious performances remain restricted from March to mid-June. The traditional ritualistic performance of Chhau begins on the last day of the Bengali calendar and the performance continues for four days.⁵⁰ However, in the present scenario, the dance is performed for an hour or two and does not involve any opening or closing rituals. According to Richard Schechner, "Because rituals take place in special, often sequestered places, the very act of entering the 'sacred space' has an impact on participants. In such spaces, special behaviour is required."⁵¹

In the present context, this ritual time and space have been compromised to meet the market demand. The ritualistic special behavior automatically occurs in the unconscious of the performer while performing in a ritualistic context. This context creates the essence of a ritualistic performance. However, due to the market orientation and compromising context, the ritualistic contextual essence becomes obsolete, leaving the performance in a condition that is simplified just as a commercial performance.

Performance space that validates the texture of performance has also experienced an alteration in the present entertainment-centric Chhau dance. Chhau is performed traditionally on an open stage which can be subdivided into land-based or stage-based spaces. Every folk dance form has its certain stage arrange-

⁵⁰ Roy 2017: 227.

⁵¹ Schechner 2002: 71.

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ments according to which the green rooms are assigned, the entrance and exit of the performers, the sitting arrangement for the instruments players are assigned but presently Chhau is performed anywhere and everywhere ranging from processions to resort gardens. The simplification or the folklorization have taken over this performing art form to such an extent that the contextual and the textural functionality of the performance have been completely distorted.



Pic. Nr. 3.: *Souvenirs of Chhau Masks being sold in a shop in Chorida village.*
(Photo by Ayanika Chakraborty)

Chhau as a cross generic performance builds on the significance of the mask as performance prop. Traditionally, masks of the Chhau dance used to be of mythological characters which include Gods and Goddesses, ogres, animals, birds and tribal couples. However, presently the Chhau masks are not confined to the mythological characters, which the textual characters of Chhau demands, rather the inclusion of Kathakali face painting and Buddha masks can be seen. Interestingly, the dimension of Chhau mask has altered to such an extent that the functional relevance of the mask has come into jeopardy. The Chhau masks which are made in Chorida on a large scale are made with the intention of selling them to the tourists so that they can buy the masks as souvenirs to decorate their walls. Consequently, to avoid the heavy weight of the pompously decorated masks, the size of the facial part of the mask has been decreased to such an

extent that it does not fit the human face. If a Chhau mask is seen on a wall in any part of the world without knowing the functional relevance of the craft form, it may be assumed it is only a home décor piece. The context of Chhau has been completely detached from the original Chhau masks to create a larger market for the craft piece. This detachment of the craft piece from the traditional performance context validates the concept of folklorization which advocates the restyling of the folkloric element to meet the demand of modernization while encouraging heritagization of aesthetical and semantical archetype forms.

Chorida as a village has seen a lot of change since the beginning of the process of heritagization of Chhau. Previously, Chhau masks used to be produced in different villages of Purulia but after the establishment of Rural Craft Hub in Chorida village, an increase in population of the Sutradhar community and the mask maker community can be seen. This on the one hand, led to the increased production of the masks, while on the other hand, the functionality of mask has changed.

Institutionalization of Folklore

Institutionalization goes hand in hand with heritagization; the entire approach to heritagize a cultural phenomenon is an institutionalised endeavour. An individual can never institutionalize a cultural performance, it needs a group of educated individuals to institutionalize a cultural element to preserve and disseminate it. In the case of Chhau, the cross generic art form has become institutionalized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO with the aim to preserve it. However, apart from this international institutionalization, a series of local institutionalizations took place with Chhau.

On the governmental level, the initiative was taken by the State Government's Department of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Textiles, in association with UNESCO to establish Chorida as a 'Rural Craft Hub'⁵². Clustering has been an age-old phenomenon in India. Clusters have existed in India for centuries and are known for their products at the national and international levels. India has more than 6,400 clusters. These have been typified as industrial, handloom, and handicraft clusters. When available literature, among them government documents and reports, are carefully analysed, it becomes obvious that sometimes mask-making activity is considered as a 'craft hub' or 'handicraft hub'. A study completed by Singh classifies clusters as SME clusters, handloom clusters and handicraft clusters and he includes the mask-making cluster in the

⁵² UNESCO 2015.

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handicraft cluster category.⁵³ At the same time, the Government of West Bengal refers to Chorida, a typical artisan village with 300 mask makers, as the 'Rural Craft Hub'. However, Silpigram Yojna in Odisha defines clusters in the following way:

“A cluster would be a village or groups of contiguous villages within a radius of 3-5 kilometres, having at least 100 traditional artisans practicing the same craft for non-KBK districts and 50 traditional artisans in KBK districts. In case of KBK districts, the inter village distance could be relaxed up to 15 Kilometres”⁵⁴.

In the present study, the term 'Oligopolistic Artisan Clusters' is more appropriate to describe mask-making activity. It is an 'artisan cluster' because in this kind of cluster the producers belong to the same traditional community of skilful artisans producing the long-established products for generations.⁵⁵ This cluster is 'oligopolistic' because it fulfilled the characteristic of an oligopoly market: homogeneity of the product, no price competition, seller interdependence, entry and exit barriers, imperfect competition, chances of collusion, few major sellers and rivals are aware of what others are doing.⁵⁶ A mask-making village has a multidimensional significance in an economy. This oligopolistic artisan cluster can also be considered a significant part of cultural economy as it generates and manufactures 'cultural products' in a specialized industrial cluster and distributes them on the global market through the native and international customers. However, the MSME has broken this organic oligopolistic structure of the market by implementing the institutionalized idea of a Rural Craft Hub in the village.

Similarly, a Bengal-based NGO, 'Bangla Natok Dot Com' has helped the craftsmen to establish an artisan's union, which on the one hand has surely supported the artisans in establishing their claims to the Government, but on the other hand, the entire process makes the craft form market-oriented to an extent that the traditional contextual functionality has been compromised while leading to folklorization. Presently, Chhau is taught and practiced in private coaching institutions which again deprived the genre of its folkloric essence of automatic transmission from one generation to another.

⁵³ Singh 2010.

⁵⁴ Government of Odisha 2005–06.

⁵⁵ Sarkar–Banerjee 2007.

⁵⁶ Machlup 1952.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the study that heritagization, folklorization, and institutionalisation are integrally related to each other. In the context of this study, heritagization is ideally done to create a sentimental integration of the local with a cultural element of the area and to revamp that cultural form in a contemporarily relevant textural and contextual form. However, sometimes there remain faults in the implementation of heritagization by the authorities of organizations and as a consequence certain cultural elements become the substance of commercialization for better livelihood. In such a scenario, the cultural element experiences folklorization and institutionalization. Unfortunately, Chhau has experienced this disadvantage in heritagization which led Chhau as a dance as well as a craft form to experience such a condition whereby the cultural-identity-oriented sentiment has been compromised to focus on commercialisation. Consequently, folklorization or the simplification of the craft form, disintegration from its contextual background has taken place. To make Chau tourism-worthy institutionalization has also taken over this folklore form.

It may also be claimed that in the present scenario when the majority of the traditional cultures all over the world are on the verge of becoming obsolete due to cultural convergence, multiculturalism, and globalisation at different levels, in order to preserve and disseminate folkloric culture it has to go through heritagization, folklorization and institutionalisation. The change in the culture which may come about as a result of these processes must be accepted as part of the dynamics of cultural existence.

However, in the process of policy making the relevant organizations should be alert to the alienation of the target urban buyers towards the traditional context. In the majority of the cases, this alienation leads to the misrepresentation of the craft and performance. In such a scenario, the contextual significance of a craft form is kept intact if the targeted buyers can be made aware of the contextual and functional relevance of the folkloric element that they are consuming in its modernized version. Otherwise, the motive behind the concept of heritagization will become meaningless in no time as the preservation of the traditional form will be implemented in such way that the archetypal form will be lost.

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