



CHHAU MASKS OF BENGAL:
BRINGING GODS AND DEMONS TO LIFE



MASKS, MYTH, AND MOVEMENT

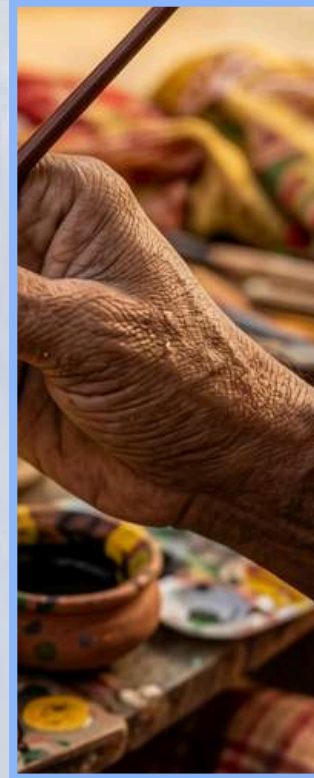
The Chhau mask of Bengal is one of India's most distinctive folk art traditions. Primarily crafted in the village of Charida in the Purulia district of West Bengal, these colorful masks are an essential part of the famous Purulia Chhau dance. The masks bring mythological characters, gods, demons, animals, and heroes to life during performances.



ROOTS AND EVOLUTION

The tradition of Chhau masks is closely linked with the evolution of the Purulia Chhau dance, a martial folk dance that combines storytelling, music, and acrobatic movements. Historians believe that the art form developed over several centuries, drawing inspiration from ancient religious festivals and local warrior traditions.

The village of Charida became the center of mask-making as generations of artisan families specialized in creating masks for Chhau performers.



MAKING - FROM CLAY TO MASK

Creating a Chhau mask is a labor-intensive process that requires exceptional skill and patience. Artisans begin by preparing a clay mold, which serves as the base for the mask. Layers of paper and cloth are carefully applied and allowed to dry before being removed from the mold.

The mask is then shaped, smoothed, and decorated with bright colors. Additional embellishments such as feathers, beads, sequins, foil, and decorative crowns are added to enhance its visual appeal.



A PERFORMANCE OF LEGENDS AND LORE

Chhau masks are more than decorative objects; they are powerful cultural symbols.

During performances, dancers rely on body language and movement rather than facial expressions, making the masks essential for character representation.



Storytellers: The masks help audiences instantly recognize different figures and understand the narrative being portrayed.

Display Art: Beyond dance performances, Chhau masks have gained recognition as valuable works of folk art. They are displayed in museums, cultural exhibitions, and private collections across India and abroad.

Craft and Livelihood: The craft also provides a steady livelihood to numerous artisan families, helping sustain traditional knowledge and skills for future generations.



GI TAG RECOGNITION

The Purulia Chhau mask, officially registered by the "Chow Mukosh Silpi Sangh," received its Geographical Indication (GI) Certificate of Registration, acknowledging its unique origin, craftsmanship, and cultural significance.

This recognition helps protect the authenticity of the masks, promotes the work of local artisans, and enhances the national and international reputation of this remarkable folk art tradition.



About RIPA

RIPA (Reinforce Intellectual Property Association) is a dedicated notfor-profit organization focused on the promotion and advancement of indigenous Intellectual Property (IP) in India, with outreach that extends to the international stage.

Our mission centers on addressing both current and future needs for the growth and development of indigenous IP, actively supporting the country's unique innovation landscape through local research and development initiatives. RIPA's commitment to the IP community spans every stage of the IP lifecycle—from idea generation to the successful commercialization of inventions.

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