

Creative Bengal

The Living Heritage of Craftsmanship



Department of MSME&T
Government of West Bengal

Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal

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Dated 17/11/2023

MESSAGE

Bengal possesses a wealth of cultural heritage and diversity, with traditional artisans and artists in rural areas serving as the custodians of this rich legacy.

To take their heritage products into new heights and ensure their sustainable livelihood, the Government of West Bengal has initiated the Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs (RCCH) Project.

The decade-long partnership of the Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) Department of the State government with UNESCO, New Delhi, has helped rural clusters develop and flourish and has provided invaluable support to our creative artists in the handicrafts, handlooms and performing arts sector. This has also helped the growth of cultural tourism in the State. We are happy to acknowledge that Rabindranath Tagore's vision of promotion of local skills and rejuvenation of villages has been suitably and appropriately highlighted in our efforts.

Our iconic festival Durga Puja is now enlisted in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The festival, besides celebrating traditional arts and crafts, embodies the principles of unity, diversity and inclusivity. Bengal's traditions of Baul Fakiri songs and Chhau dance are also inscribed in the UNESCO's Representative List. The publication 'Creative Bengal' highlights many such cultural treasures of Bengal, from the hills to the seas.

We look forward to closely working with our artists and artisanal communities in collaboration with UNESCO, New Delhi and other stakeholders to collectively realize the motto of preserving, safeguarding and promoting our living heritage.

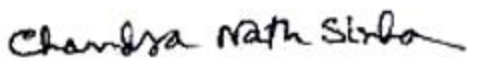

(Mamata Banerjee)

MESSAGE

It is great pleasure to inform that MSME&T Department is publishing one Coffee Table Book, named as "Creative Bengal" which is very informative about West Bengal's diverse cultural heritage. The Department of MSME&T, Government of West Bengal has been implementing the project of Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs (RCCH) across West Bengal in collaboration with UNESCO to unleash the potential of living heritages in driving sustainable development for the handicrafts artisans of Bengal, the tradition bearers. The initiative has created a strategic model to strengthen village economies by creating creative micro-enterprises. Cultural traditions at risk have been successfully revived through documentation of process of crafts, films on the art and craft villages, music and dance forms. The Book has tried to capture all the objectives and achievements in this regard.

I am thankful to the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of West Bengal under whose leadership such important document has been prepared.

I hope this book will help to draw due recognition for the creative and talented artistes of Bengal and widen their market and sustainability to great extent.


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“নবান্ন”

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GOVERNMENT OF WEST BENGAL


ক্ষুদ্র ছোট ও মাঝারি উদ্যোগ এবং বস্ত্র দপ্তর
পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকার

MESSAGE

I am glad to know that the MSME&T Department is bringing out one publication (Coffee Table Book) which offers rich insight into West Bengal's diverse cultural heritage. Through pictorial and textual narration, this book acquaints the readers with the cultural fabric of West Bengal with in-depth reference to the diverse handicraft and performing art traditions innate to Bengal.

It is an outcome of the Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs (RCCH) Project, a collaborative initiative of Department of MSME&T, Government of West Bengal and UNESCO, undertaken since 2013 to strengthen traditional cultural pursuits and improve socio-economic prospects of the tradition bearers.

The book offers insight into how culture is an investment and not an expense, endowed with the potential to steer the fate of our grass-root creative artistes to some bright future. I am confident that this book will generate interest among the potential buyers across the country and thus the market of the traditional arts of Bengal will reach a new high.



(Dr H K Dwivedi)

PREFACE

West Bengal, like all the other states in India, is home to some of the greatest repositories of living cultural practices and indigenous knowledge systems in the world. These include a broad range of sub-sectors including handicrafts, handlooms, khadi and village industries. Intangible Cultural Heritage, as defined by UNESCO through its 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, includes elements of traditional craftsmanship, performing arts, oral traditions and ritual events among others and it calls for their safeguarding for a sustainable future. Combined with our demographic dividend, our village industries have the potential to become one of the largest human resources in the world, with the prospect for millions of local, green and sustainable livelihoods.

MSME is the second largest sector in West Bengal after agriculture and a key priority for the State Government which has identified handloom, handicraft, khadi and village industries as specific categories to be promoted and safeguarded under its mandate. The Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs (RCCH) initiative has transformed the landscape of our creative economy and steered grass-root dynamics for empowering marginalized communities in a holistic way. In 2013, the Department of MSME & Textiles took a significant step to strengthen the creative economy and improve livelihoods of cultural practitioners of West Bengal by inviting UNESCO to initiate the RCCH project in West Bengal. The project has created a unique model in leveraging cultural heritage for local development and professionalizing traditional skills for livelihood generation. The Department also actively supports sustainable commercialization and facilitates market linkage through “Biswa Bangla” branding and through retail, fairs and festivals at state and district levels.

I hope this Booklet will be able to give a glimpse about what is happening in Bengal under the RCCH project ongoing since 2013.



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INTRODUCTION

Tim Curtis

Director of New Delhi Regional Office and UNESCO
Representative to Bhutan, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka

West Bengal is a culturally rich state with a vast and diverse array of both built heritage and intangible cultural heritage. The UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage underpins the central role that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, or living heritage, plays in providing individuals and communities with a sense of identity, and in promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

As we face the emerging challenges and opportunities of the 21st century, it is clear that living heritage is also a potent tool for sustainable development as the knowledge and practices that communities have developed over centuries are indispensable for achieving goals related to quality education, good health and wellbeing, sustainable agriculture and foodways, decent work and economic growth and more.

In 2013, recognising the potential of West Bengal's living heritage in driving sustainable development, UNESCO New Delhi and the Department of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T), Government of West Bengal joined hands to implement the Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs (RCCH) project across West Bengal. The project works with artists and craftspeople in villages across 20 districts of the state, with a strong focus on the creation of sustained green livelihoods in these clusters.

Through its initiatives, the RCCH project addresses the need for safeguarding West Bengal's living

heritage, by ensuring that the associated skills and knowledge are transmitted to future generations so that it can be a vector of sustainable economic development, in line with the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Creative Bengal takes readers on a visual journey of West Bengal's cultural fabric, while bearing in-depth reference to the diversity of handicraft, handloom and performing art traditions innate to the state. It showcases some of West Bengal's most striking forms of living heritage, linking each to its geographic context and history, as well as highlighting the creative journey of the cultural practitioners and the evolution of their craftsmanship.

UNESCO would like to congratulate the Department of MSME&T and the project's implementing partners for coming up with an illustrative catalogue as an initiative under the RCCH project to celebrate the vibrant repertoire of traditional crafts and performing arts. It provides a visual insight into the wide-ranging forms of living heritage that are practiced by local practitioners, and bears testimony to the sheer wealth of Bengal's traditional cultural forms.

On the tenth anniversary of the RCCH project, this publication will bring wider visibility to this unique undertaking and will help to reinforce the significance and continuity of West Bengal's cultural traditions in contemporary times.



Cultural Tapestry of West Bengal

“Culture helps us unite with all differences intact.”
—Rabindranath Tagore

A treasure trove of natural and cultural diversity, the state of West Bengal houses a diverse geographical stretch from the Himalayan mountains to the Ganges deltas and the world's largest mangrove forests of Sundarbans, to the western plateaus and highlands, and to the Terai and Doars wetlands. These are home to many different communities with distinct culture, traditions and ways of life. The people's culture forms the source of identity for both the state and her inhabitants. This *lok sanskriti* or culture of Bengal's people encompasses variety of aspects such as customs and traditions, practices, beliefs, language, oral traditions, festivals, fairs, music, and visual and performing arts. These are intertwined and their amalgamation is exemplary of Bengal's way of life, a signature mark of 'quintessentially Bengali'. They constitute the living expressions of the Bengali cultural heritage inherited from ancestors and passed down the generations through the ages.

Bengali lifestyle is often popularly referred to as a culture with *baro mashe tero parbon*, meaning more festivities than the number of months in a year. Agriculture being the backbone of West Bengal, farming practices and rituals have constituted the epicentre of many celebrations and customs of its agrarian society. The festival of Nabanna celebrates the time of crop harvest and the farmers' houses being stacked with grains. Nababarsha or Poila Baisakh, welcoming the Bengali New Year, is a major Bengali festival, along with Anandamela, literally translated into festival of happiness, a signature where festival earnings are donated for the betterment of the unprivileged. Some festivals also dedicatedly celebrate a particular culture and identity, such as the folk festivals of Karam and Tusu celebrating the collective spirit, beliefs and practices of the respective indigenous communities. The most popular religious festival of the state, the Durga Puja, transcends beyond its religious value and has evolved to become an avenue celebrating the art, culture, diversity, and the spirit of open thinking and inclusivity of the Bengali people. Kolkata's Durga Puja has been enlisted in 2021 in UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity as a festivity dedicated to celebrating the principles of diversity, equity and inclusivity. With its unique components such as the *dhunuchi naach* and *sindur khela*, the cultural activities and contemporary performances being held around it, the sumptuous culinary delights on offer forming an integral part of the festivities, and the people of all faiths, persuasion and strata participating in it, Durga Puja is the truly magnificent celebration of Bengali heritage.

As part of the larger Indian historical landscape of vibrant oral traditions, Bengal too has an intrinsic culture of oral traditions. These have been passed on from one generation to the next orally in the form of proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, charms, music, prayers, chants, songs, dance, theatre and many more. These traditions have held historical, functional and celebratory roles in sustaining the history of the place and its people and composition



Durga Puja of Kolkata inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the ICH of Humanity

of the state's culture. With the numerous rivers flowing through the state to the coast of the Bay of Bengal, the songs of boatmen and fisherfolk, such as Bhatiyali, are an enchanting component of West Bengal's folk music. Baul, the spiritual music of Bengal, enlisted in UNESCO's Representative List of ICH of Humanity in 2008, is transmitted through the *guru–shishya parampara*, where knowledge of the music and its philosophy is taught orally to the disciple by their guru. One of the folk dance traditions, Chhau, with origins in martial arts, has been inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of ICH of Humanity in 2010. Children of Chhau dancers are taught acrobatics from a tender age, which enhances the flexibility of their bodies and helps the dancers to master the somersaults of Chhau dance at a later age. The dancers receive their training from family and not through formal schooling. It is the wisdom of the older generation that motivates and penetrates in the youth, sanctioning cultural continuity. Many of Bengal's music, dance and theatre traditions can thus rightly be identified as oral heritages. From Bengal's folk music genres such as Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali to folk theatre traditions and performing arts such as Gambhira, Domni, oral means of transmission dominate the logic and operations of cultural dissemination, making these traditions transcend over time beyond cultural pursuits to symbols communicating the essence of Bengal and the evolutionary journey of its creativity.

Indigenous knowledge of local flora and fauna and conventional healing systems, traditional ecological wisdom and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe are also ingrained in Bengal's cultural heritage. Interaction of traditional cultural practices with nature can be seen in the folk theatre tradition of Sundarbans, known as Banbibir Pala. It is a ceremonial rendition dedicated to appease the forest goddess and earn her blessings so that men can conquer the threats of the wild, especially the Royal Bengal Tiger, and have a peaceful co-existence with nature. Animal worship and protecting wildlife is also integral to the state's culture. The gods and goddesses of Hindu mythology have specific animals

as saviours such as the primordial goddess Durga, accompanied by the king of the forest, the lion. Respect and reverence for nature and biodiversity also gets reflected in totemic practices such as Manasa Puja, where snakes are worshipped, while Purulia's Santhal Patachitras are visual depictions of their beliefs regarding the origin of man and universe.

Traditional craftsmanship, across the subcontinent and in Bengal, can be traced back to the beginning of civilization. Craftspeople used the locally available materials to create objects of value used for a variety of purposes. From exotic textile weaves to vibrant temple architectures, from intricately carved dolls out of wood and clay to handwoven mats and spreads found in every Bengali household, all celebrate the spirit of Bengal's traditional craftsmanship and its journey through time. Over centuries, the craftspeople developed mastery over their chosen forms and evolved best practices and skills that sustained them and their crafts while safeguarding and preserving the environment through ages. Bengal's rich handicraft traditions are infused with both utility value and aesthetic appeal. They symbolise the cultural spirit of the region. Intricately carved bangles out of conch, known as *shakha*, are emblems of conjugality, marking the auspicious commencement of a marital union. A Bengali wedding remains incomplete without delicately carved Shola bridalwear, *topor* and *mukut* (headgears). While some cultural traditions such as Chhau or Gomira mask-making bring mythological characters to life, contributing to the evocative performances, traditions such as mat making, where reeds of diverse kinds are handwoven into utility and decorative items, echo the ethos of sustainability.

Construction of houses using bamboo, wood, hay, terracotta bricks and local resources have been a commonplace practice in Bengal, making even the mundane resonate with spirit of eco-friendly consumption. The vernacular architectural traditions are not just environmentally conscious but customised keeping in mind the climatic and weather conditions of different places.



(Left) Lac doll of Bengal—a rich legacy
(Right above) Dhan Roapon—the tradition of transplantation
(Right below) Shola *topor* and *mukut*—integral props in Bengali wedding rituals



Cultural heritages are indispensable in giving us our unique identities. Unfortunately, today's globalised world and its standardisations have successfully devalued many of the local and unique cultural traditions, products and processes. The rich cultural heritage is getting lost each passing day. Lack of prospect of traditional cultural pursuit in securing decent economic engagement has compelled many tradition bearers to go to cities in search of menial work. To strengthen this rich cultural heritage and creative enterprises, the Department of MSME&T, Government of West Bengal and UNESCO New Delhi Regional Office joined hands in 2013 to initiate their collaborative initiative RCH. Later renamed as RCCH, it is an ongoing project covering 50,000 rural cultural

practitioners across West Bengal. While Bengal is rich in living heritage, this project has taken into its purview around 30 craft and performing art traditions. The cultural traditions have been selected on the basis of their prospects in livelihood generation. The project has contributed to strengthen the creative landscape of the state by creating new markets and audiences, fostering direct market linkages for the tradition bearers, supporting transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, retaining youth in heritage pursuits, and promoting cultural tourism in the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to how cultural heritage contributes to sustainable development and upholds the spirit of diversity, equity, and inclusivity.



Crafts & Weaves

“The notion of education through handicrafts rises from the contemplation of truth and love permeating life’s activities.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

Handicrafts represent the culture and traditional skills of a community. Skills in traditional crafts are nurtured and influenced by the nature and reflect the aesthetics and values of the practitioner community. The products are rooted in their indigenous creativity and knowledge. Growth of civilisation can be rightly identified as a quest of human creativity in optimally using external resources to create objects suited to meet daily needs, and also having aesthetic appeal. Traditional craftsmanship includes hand-skills, knowledge of local natural materials, the creator’s expressions, and emotions, and is an integral part of driving economic activities, social functions, and religious performances. A kaleidoscope of diverse handicraft traditions ranging from textile and mat weaving, exquisite embroideries to metal craft, wood carving, pottery, and others shape the creative landscape and identity of West Bengal. Most of the craft traditions are home-based, community centric, and labour intensive. The eco-friendly handicrafts have great potential for livelihood and income generation.

Apart from their aesthetic appeal, traditional crafts are infused with utility value. Since time immemorial, these items have served to be the premise of society and economy. Weaving traditions, wood, metal crafting, clay modelling, and other handicraft practices initially started as family-centric endeavours, undertaken to meet daily needs.

Traditionally, handcrafted items followed a mode of subsistence production, where the makers mainly produced to meet their familial needs and the remaining surplus were sold in markets. But gradually with time, the utility quotient and aesthetic appeal of handcrafted goods secured a market of its own. The art of handcrafting, along with producing utility objects, also started incorporating within its purview creation of decorative and luxury items, to meet the ever-rising market demands. With this started the creation of apparels, sculptures, and other goods, whose aesthetic appeal precede their utility value. By optimally using locally available resources, traditional craftsmanship gave birth to goods, which not only reflected local beliefs, practices, and creativity but evolved as central props in many social rituals..

The ethos of sustainability is ingrained in Bengal's handicraft traditions and there is an inseparable bond between nature and these traditional craft pursuits. West Bengal has a variety of natural fibres, including Shola, Madur, jute, bamboo, Sabai, and

others. Since time immemorial, artists from Bengal are using these natural fibres to make a range of utility and decorative items, epitomising the motto of recycling and regeneration through artistic endeavours. Innovative usage of clay is also an integral part of Bengal's handicraft legacy. While a range of utility items such as utensils are made out of clay, clay is also used in Bengal to model a variety of dolls and deities. These clay figurines are customarily made by the potters residing in Murshidabad, Nadia, Dinajpur, and Bankura districts. Apart from making children's toys, realistic clay models of human figures, daily objects and deities are signature emblems of Bengal's handicraft. The dolls of Jhulan, Krishna idols of Janmashtami, clay figurines of Hindu deities mark the indispensable role of clay craft in Bengal's rituals and festivities. Kolkata's Kumartuli is the abode of idol makers. The locality has evolved into a popular tourist attraction site, where visitors flock to witness the traditional craft of clay modelling. While traditionally, the potters' wheel was used for clay modelling, with the advancement of technology, potters use moulds



Kantha—hand-embroidered expressions of Bengali women



Painting *alpona* during a folk festival

to make the craft making process time efficient. Using natural ingredients in handicraft traditions can also be traced in the folk painting tradition of Patachitra. The Patachitra artists, known as Patuas, use natural colours for painting their scrolls. Flowers, fruits, stones, and leaves are used for natural colour extraction. Apart from using natural materials in craft traditions, nature and its elements also feature as central themes in traditional creative pursuits of Bengal. Handcrafted wooden owls of Bardhaman, Bankura's terracotta horses are not only exemplary in this regard but also highlight Bengal's legacy of venerating animals as saviours of mankind and its reflection in traditional creativity.

Apart from nature and its elements' influence and reflection in Bengal's traditional artistry, the latter is also integral to many ritualistic practices of the state. Gomira masks are wooden masks made by craft

communities of the rural belts of Dinajpur districts, as ritual elements for the age-old ceremonial tradition of Gomira mask dance. The masks, locally known as Mukha, are objects of worship and devotion, representing different religious and mythical characters. These masks, along with ritualistic significance, also have immense aesthetic appeal and have evolved to become cultural emblems, glorifying Bengal's traditional creativity. Dashobotar Tash, depicting the ten forms of Lord Brahma in playing cards, is an important cultural tradition of Bankura. Historically, royal personnel played with these cards but in today's time, these cards are tangible emblems, where Bengal's creativity meets ritualistic aspects.

While the craft of Chhau mask making does not have ritualistic significance similar to Gomira masks, it brings mythology to life. The Chhau masks,

indispensible props of Chhau dance, represent many godly, demon, and animal characters and highlight the traditional creativity and beliefs of the practitioner communities. Mythological plot also happens to be premise of Patachitra paintings. Stories of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranic texts are beautifully manifested in the bold strokes of the Patuas, giving Patachitra the flavour of narrative art, bringing local folklores to life.

Metal craft is also integral to Bengal's creative legacy. Bell metal craft was signature to traditional Bengal, where the artists crafted metals to create daily utilities such as utensils. With the passage of time, the metal crafters of Bengal also started crafting luxury and accessory items out of metal, along with utility items. Crafting ritualistic, utility, and decorative items out of silver is innate to the hilly regions of the state. In the fertile plains, we can find the Dokra metal crafting tradition, an ancient practice using the technique of lost or vanishing wax casting method. Dokra artists of Purba Bardhaman and Bankura at present create a range of decorative items, which reflect the intricacies of traditional artistry dating back to the Indus valley civilisation.

Textiles, handloom, weaving, and embroideries are also integral to Bengal's cultural heritage. Nadia's *tant* and Muslin, Birbhum and Bardhaman's Kantha embroidery, Zari work of Howrah, North and South 24 Parganas, are not just handcrafted materials but reflect the stories, emotions, and the creative journey of rural women. Weaving Jamdani on Muslin although

was a rich tradition of undivided Bengal, now the practice is mostly concentrated in Bangladesh. Baluchor village in Murshidabad is believed to be the birthplace of Baluchari saree, famous for its illustrative themes exhibiting traditions and social life. Bengal's artistry can also be witnessed in several tangible heritages of the state. Bankura's terracotta craft finds its pristine place in architecting several temples and sacred spaces of historical importance. Bishnupur in Bankura is popularly known as the Temple Town and houses several terracotta temples—Jore Bangla temple, Pancha Ratna temple, Radha Madhab temple, and others. These architectures uphold vernacular design principles. The carved artistry of these architectures reflects traditional craftsmanship and has evolved to be tangible emblems glorifying Bengal's rich handcrafted heritage.

Bengal's traditional craftsmanship is not just infused with aesthetic value but are tangible expressions of emotions of the makers and cannot be separated from their creators. As Abanindranath Tagore rightly said, "Creation becomes art only when it is indebted to the creator's aesthetic imagination and existence". It is important to realise that the handicraft traditions are not just economic engagements for the practitioners but the very source of their existence. These practices are integral in transforming the essence of life and provide a purpose to it. That is why these handicraft traditions transcend beyond their aesthetic value and can be rightly identified as the lifeline kindling the cultural and creative spirit of West Bengal.



Wooden masks in the process of making

Craft Hubs of West Bengal



BASKETRY
 Birbhum, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda, Paschim Bardhaman, Purba Bardhaman, Purulia, Uttar Dinajpur

Artists **2690**

SABAI
 Bankura, Jhargram, Purulia

Artists **4730**

MADURKATHI
 Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur

Artists **6680**

SITALPATI
 Cooch Behar

Artists **3810**

SHOLA
 Alipurduar, Birbhum, Dakshin Dinajpur, Purba Bardhaman, South 24 Parganas, Uttar Dinajpur, Malda

Artists **480**

DHOKRA
 Dakshin Dinajpur, Uttar Dinajpur

Artists **4100**

KANTHA
 Birbhum, Purba Bardhaman

Artists **3610**

RABHA HANDLOOM
 Cooch Behar, Alipurduar

Artists **20**

KENJAKURA HANDLOOM
 Bankura

Artists **880**

DOKRA
 Bankura, Purba Bardhaman

Artists **370**

WOODEN DOLL
 Purba Bardhaman

Artists **160**

WOODEN MASK
 Dakshin Dinajpur, Uttar Dinajpur

Artists **170**

PATACHITRA
 Bankura, Birbhum, Paschim Medinipur, Purba Medinipur, Purulia

Artists **970**

HILL PAINTING
 Kalimpong

Artists **24**

TERRACOTTA
 Bankura, Uttar Dinajpur, North 24 Parganas, Birbhum

Artists **300**

CLAY DOLL
 Nadia

Artists **310**

CHHAU MASK
 Purulia

Artists **380**



Natural Fibre Craft

The biodiversity of the state of West Bengal is bountiful of different kinds of natural fibres that grow in different regions of the state. These plant and grass based fibres include bamboo, Sabai, Madurkathi, Sitalpati, Shola, Dhokra. The local communities have been using these fibres since the age-old times for making home utilities and even building houses. Every fibre has some unique features associated with its strength, smoothness, density, colour, fragility that the user communities understand fully. They therefore process the fibres accordingly to get the desired materials to craft their products which showcase their cultural traditions as well. Handcrafting of these fibres require knowledge of nature, technical know-how, and high levels of skills which mark the distinctiveness of the maker communities. With time, they have started using these natural fibres to make a vast array of beautiful handicraft products for home decor and fashion resulting in robust green micro industries led by rural craftspersons. The following sections provide an overview of the natural fibre crafts.



Weaving bamboo into a variety of products

Bamboo

Bamboo, a natural fibre, has been used since time immemorial by people to craft a range of utility items. Owing to a wide variety of bamboo species grown here, and their easy availability, basketry is one of the most popular crafts. Rural communities have been traditionally handcrafting baskets, winnow-trays, sieves of different shapes and sizes to suit their local needs. Bamboo craft is integral to the ways of life of these communities as the products are used for household chores, house-building, cooking, daily living, rituals, and ceremonies such as marriages. Bamboo is also known as the Green Gold of the 21st century.

Bamboo is mostly procured from Malda and other parts of North Bengal. Different categories of products are made from the appropriate bamboo species because some breeds are softer or harder than the others, about which the communities hold indigenous knowledge.



(Above left) Slicing the bamboo into fine strips



(Above right) Dyeing the bamboo strips



(Below) Making decorative patterns by the intertwining method





Rich repertoire of traditional and contemporary bamboo products

Products are handcrafted with simple hand-tools, after curing the bamboo with natural ingredients. The bamboo is either carved into definite shapes or sliced into thin strips that are woven to create beautiful patterns and shapes. Azo-free dyes are used to add vibrant colour. More than 2600 makers of bamboo products across the districts of Dakshin Dinajpur, Uttar Dinajpur, Malda, Purba Bardhaman, Birbhum, Kalimpong, and Purulia are part of the RCCH project. Communities engaged in this craft belong to different ethnicities of Byadh, Mahali, Rajbangshi, Kurmali, and Lepchas. The project has facilitated capacity building and skill development of the bamboo craftspersons. The initiative has significantly enriched their repertoire, enabling the makers to bring innovations in their creative offerings.



(Above) Bamboo lampshade
(Below) Bamboo basket





Bamboo masks of Dakshin Dinajpur



Intricate carving on bamboo pole

Bamboo masks are signature creations of Dinajpur, inspired from the Mukha masks used in Gomira folk dance tradition. These decorative items reflect the intricate craftsmanship of the makers and are tangible emblems signifying the rich handcrafted legacy of Bengal.



Sabai

Sabai is a grass that grows in abundance in the districts of Purulia, Bankura, and Jhargram in the state of West Bengal. It is known for its smoothness and strength. Making handicraft items from the mature stem of Sabai is a skill of the village women. Women belonging to indigenous communities of Santhals and Sabars, (Scheduled Tribes of West Bengal) living in the forest fringe areas of the three districts, weave a wide range of products with Sabai, which have captured the attention of contemporary markets owing to its inherent eco-friendly properties.

The women, who now weave diversified Sabai products, traditionally used to make only ropes from Sabai grass and sell them in local markets. They were marginalised and poor. Upgradation of their skills in crafting Sabai for contemporary markets have empowered them economically

Women Sabai weavers of Purulia

and socially. Leaving behind a life steeped in abject poverty and hopelessness, they are now self-sufficient and optimistic, with a marked improvement in income and living standards. More than 4700 women across Bankura, Purulia, and Jhargram are earning a livelihood from Sabai craft.



Sabai craft making process
 (Above) Drying the Sabai grass in the sun
 (Centre) Processing and braiding dry Sabai grass
 (Below) Handcrafting products out of braided Sabai strips



Women of Purulia have transitioned from making ropes to handcrafting a range of innovative products out of Sabai grass

Product making differs slightly between the different regions. Some entwine Sabai grass and date palm leaves to make products, whereas others make braids of Sabai grass with which they craft products. Handlooms are also used to weave Sabai grass in parts of Bankura. The State Government has set up a centre of excellence to enhance creative practices with Sal and Sabai at Jhargram. The centre is run by Aranya Sundari Mahila Mahasangha, a Self Help Group (SHG) federation of the district. The centre promotes research and development, facilitates direct sales of Sabai crafts, and works towards empowerment of the women artists. Rural artists are provided with regular training on innovation. The centre has a museum of Sabai handicrafts.



Sabai wall decor



Madur in natural and vibrant hues

Madur

Madur is an integral part of the Bengali lifestyle. It is a generic term for woven floor mats which are made up of a kind of local reed of the rhizome-based plant (scientific name: *Cyperus Tegetum* or *Cyperus Pangorei*) harvested in Bengal. These reeds are called 'Madurkathi'. Masland, which is the finest version of Madur, dates back to the Mughal period, when these mats of exquisite variety with fine cotton in the weft were produced under royal patronage. Traditionally Masland used to be a part of the bridal trousseau. Historian and academic administrator, Kalinkar Datta, recorded how Madur mats were collected as revenue in the Jagirdari (land management system) during the reign of Nawab Alivardi Khan in the 1740s. Madurkathi of West Bengal has been certified with Geographical Indication (GI) in 2018.



More than 6600 Madur weavers live in Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts, majority being women. They are organised under two collectives—the Purba Medinipur Pajankul Madur Bayan Silpi Kalyan Samity and Paschim Medinipur Madur Bayan Silpi Samity. The Madur reeds are processed for weaving different types of Madur—the finer ones are used to weave the expensive and delicate Masland, also called Mataranchi, and the thicker ones are used to make daily use mat items.



(Above) Madur weaving—a way of life in Medinipur

(Below) Weavers in Sabang, Purba Medinipur, processing the reeds for production



(Above) Colourful mats being woven on a floor loom
(Below) Weaving mats on stand looms



A Masland is known for its superfine quality.

The reeds are woven on handlooms including floor looms and stand looms. Number of warp threads and thickness of reeds per inch determine the quality of Madur mats. Innovations in traditional Madur has now led to a large repertoire of diversified products, such as table mats, curtains, boxes, stationeries, bags, wall hangings, etc. Popular designs include flowers, honey comb, rhomboidal, and cascading motifs. The mat can also be coloured for which the sticks have to be dyed before weaving. Previously, natural and vegetable dyes were common but now environmentally-friendly dyes are mostly used.

The State Government has developed a Madur centre at Sarta, Sabang. For improving the quality of production and work environment, eight production sheds have also been established at the units of leading entrepreneurs at Sabang and Pingla, thus improving the production management process.



A Sitalpati mat

Sitalpati

Sitalpati is a form of mat, woven with fibres from the *Maranta Dichotoma* plant, which is locally known as Murta, meaning pearls, because its fruits resemble pearls. It is called Sitalpati (literally meaning 'cool mat') because it provides relief during hot summers. The historic origin of 'Sitalpati' is from erstwhile Bengal. The Murta plant mainly grows in its water bodies of Sylhet, Sunamganj, Barishal, Chittagong, etc. This mat is used by people all over Bengal as a sitting mat, bedspread or a prayer mat. After the partition, this tradition travelled to India with the migrants who settled in and around Cooch Behar region and continued their age-old occupation of weaving and selling Sitalpati.



Sitalpati crafting process
 (Above left and right) Collecting and sorting the Murta plant
 (Below left) Cutting out fine strips
 (Below right) Crafting Sitalpati products by hand

There are more than 3500 skilled craft-persons engaged in weaving Sitalpati across rural Cooch Behar. They are organised through the cooperative society named Cooch Behar 1 Block Patishilpa Samabay Samity. In West Bengal, Sitalpati are woven dominantly by the members of the Kayastha caste. Among the areas in Cooch Behar where Sitalpati mats are woven, Sagareswar, Ghughumari, and Pashnadanga are important centres.

Sitalpatis are often soaked in dew and dried in sunlight. This helps in smoothening the fibres, making it easy to weave. Typically, the patterns of the weaves are diagonal or straight. Simple geometric patterns



are made using coloured slips of Sitalpati. Very fine slips are used to create delicate and intricate designs. The Kamalkosh and Bhushnai are the finest, with smooth textures. The colour variations of the slips are derived naturally from the Murta stems. Some of the traditional motifs are those of temple spires, birds, trees, fruits, flowers, animals, and religious symbols.

A folk-art centre with a community museum has been established at Ghughumari in Cooch Behar I block under the RCCH project by the State Government. Ghughumari village is one of the most prominent hubs of Sitalpati, where a Sitalpati *haat* (wholesale market) takes place twice a week. It is the largest market of Sitalpati, where traders come to purchase directly from the makers.

Sitalpati products have also diversified over time through capacity building and upskilling of weavers. Today, the craftspersons make different products such as bags, folders, hats, mobile covers, coasters, and home décor items.



Sitalpati artist in Cooch Behar

Facing page
(Above) Traditional Sitalpati motifs and colours
(Below) Diversified products of Sitalpati



Intricately hand-carved
Shola flowers

Shola

Shola pith (Indian cork) is a delicate ivory coloured reed that grows on marshy lands in West Bengal. Shola traditionally represents the auspiciousness in life, and has therefore been a significant ritualistic craft. A range of intricate, decorative objects are made from the soft, supple, porous, and lightweight core of the Shola stem by highly skilled artists. This community of artists are known as Malakars (literally meaning makers of garlands).



(Above) Shola plant
(Below) Peeled Shola
stems ready for carving



The origin of Shola dates back to the mythology of Shiva's wedding in which he wanted to wear a pure white headgear. Shiva created the Malakars, a community capable of working with the soft and delicate material. Shola is thus associated with the traditions of Bengal, starting from the wedding headgears to the ornamentation of the idols. The local communities use Shola craft in their ritual practices such as the worship of the local serpent goddess, Manasa.



Shola is traditionally a ceremonial craft extensively used in community rituals. Seen here is a ritual of Manasa puja where handcrafted Shola cuboids or boas are floated in rivers as part of worshipping the snake goddess, Manasa.



Shola flower making process;
 (Above left) Slicing strips of Shola from the peeled stem
 (Above right and below left) Rolling and cutting the sliced Shola strips
 (Below right) The Shola strips are tied with a yarn, which is tightly pulled to make the flower.

Shola is a signature craft traditionally practised by hundreds of artists in Bengal. About 450-500 craftsmen reside in the villages of South 24 Parganas, Purba Bardhaman, Alipurduar, Murshidabad, Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, and Birbhum. The intricate carvings found in Murshidabad resemble the age-old ivory tradition. Mathurapur, in South 24 Parganas, has weekly village markets, where traditional and innovative Shola products are sold.



Even with extraordinary contemporisation of Shola craft, the traditional carvings of gods and goddesses continue to hold a special place in people's hearts, making Shola an essential material for Hindu rituals. Masan is a demi-god made by Rajbangshi communities out of Shola.

The tradition of puppetry is integral to Bengal's culture. A range of puppets are carved out of Shola by artists of Muragachha village in Nadia district.



(Above) Figurines of gods and demi-gods made out of Shola
(Below) Shola puppets



Shola work in ivory crafting style



Weaving jute yarns on back-strap loom

Dhokra

Dhokra is a handloom tradition of weaving jute mats in the rural areas of Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur districts. More than 4000 women weavers are engaged in this craft. The jute yarns are hand made and weaving is done on home-based back-strap looms. Jute, the golden fibre, is available locally. Dhokra weaving provides livelihood to hundreds of women in the area, thereby serving as the vehicle of empowerment.

Traditionally, coarse mats were woven for household use. Realising the market potential of their eco-friendly sustainable products, weavers have now started producing innovative items such as bags, jackets,



Dyeing and preparing jute yarns for Dhokra weaving

pouches, table runners, along with floor mats of varied sizes. Previously, the women wove only jute, but with diversification of products, they are combining other natural materials, including cotton, banana fibre, wool to create a unique range of items for home and fashion industries. They also use environmentally-friendly colours to dye their products.

Dhokra weaving involves a long and tedious process. The fibres are extracted from home grown jute which is cut, soaked in water, left to season, and then dried in the sun. These extracts are then hand rolled in the required dimensions. The rolled strands are then dyed, sun dried, and used for weaving mats.



Dhokra weaving process
 (Above, left and centre) Drying and dyeing jute yarns
 (Above right) Arranging the jute strips in the spindle to give it a finer touch
 (Below left) Setting the fine jute strips in the loom
 (Below right) Weaving the jute strips in back-strap loom

Diversified products of Dhokra

Traditionally, women used to make mats out of Dhokra to meet their familial needs. Now, they have transcended beyond this subsistence mode of production and make a range of lifestyle and home decor items to meet the rising demands of the market.



Textiles

Bengal is famous for its high quality weaving and refined thread work. Textiles have been one of the oldest crafts of India with a worldwide renown since the times of ancient trade. The natural landscape of the state endowed with rivers and rich agricultural lands have provided for the raw materials, especially cotton which is of one of the finest qualities in the country. The local communities weave on handlooms, known as *tant* in Bengali and also engage in surface ornamentation with beautiful and elegant thread work. Their quintessential aesthetics is reflected in the simplicity of the weaves and embroideries that also manifest the simple lifestyles of the maker communities. The following sections highlight the unique Kantha work, as well as the lesser known handloom practices of the state.



Kantha

Kantha is a traditional form of embroidery practised by the women of rural Bengal. In this embroidery tradition, rural women reuse old, worn out clothes to create something new and extraordinary. Kantha epitomises recycling and sustainable fashion in today's day and age. More than recycling or reusing clothes, the value of keeping something that has travelled through generations and signifies family heritage becomes important. The women embroider beautiful motifs that narrate stories of the family, the community, and the dreams and aspirations of the women.

Village life depicted in Kantha embroidery



Bonding while embroidering stories and emotions

While traditionally, Kantha embroidery was a leisurely pursuit, at present it has reached new heights, as the practicing artists have transformed their passion of Kantha embroidery into a profession. They are transcending boundaries to present their craft to a varied range of national and global audiences. Under the purview of the RCCH project, at present 3610 women from rural Bengal are actively pursuing Kantha embroidery and redefining it through their amazing creativity.

Sujni Kantha is considered as the original form of this craft, in which specific images are embroidered together to tell a story. Another form of Kantha with complex and fine embroidery is called Nakshi Kantha, *nakshi* meaning intricate designs. These traditional forms have their exclusivity in terms of aesthetics and skills. Nakshi Kantha has been certified with the label of GI.



(Left) Rural women work together and lead grassroots enterprise.
(Right) Women with their Kantha embroidered products





(Above) Cushion covers with Kantha embroidery
(Below) Lampshades with Kantha embroidery



Kantha work on indigo dyed fabric

The districts of Birbhum and Purba Bardhaman are major Kantha hubs of West Bengal. Around 3600 women are actively pursuing Kantha as their primary livelihood. Many women run their own micro-enterprises and have become leaders in their community, enabling women empowerment and girl-child education, which had seemed impossible less than a decade ago.

Contemporisation of Kantha embroidery has been happening in recent years with more and more designers wanting to work with this unique skill of creative thread work. Kantha as a craft also upholds the sustainable aspects of reuse and recycling that has made it a sought after craft in modern markets. Kantha work has also found new applications in various home utility products such as cushion covers, lamp shades, etc.

Conventionally, Kantha embroidery has been used in apparels. But with the passage of time and evolution of aesthetic imagination of the artists, Kantha can now be seen on a range of items, including lifestyle, decorative and utility products.



A Rabha woman weaving a traditional fabric

Rabha handloom

Rabha is an ethnic community residing in parts of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar districts of West Bengal. Their primary livelihood is dependent on agriculture and forest produce. The Rabha community has a generations-old weaving tradition. They weave their own clothes consisting of a wrap around skirt called Kemlet, and a stole known as Kambang. Other than their own consumption needs, they also cater to local markets.



Rabha women preparing yarns and setting up loom at Mendabari in Alipurduar





They weave a wide variety of bright colourful motifs which are mostly geometric and symmetrical, made with extra weft techniques. Previously, the Rabhas used to weave on back-strap looms, but with the gradual advancement in technology, they have shifted to pit looms.

Rabha weaving has caught the attention of the modern markets for its vibrant colour schemes and unique motifs, comprising a perfect combination of tradition and modernity. Rabha textiles are thus woven into sarees as well as yardages for cushion covers, and other utilities.



Cushion covers made of Rabha fabric

Facing page
(Above) A typical Rabha design
(Below) Handwoven Rabha sari



Weaving Kenjakura on handloom

Kenjakura handloom

The vibrant weaves of Kenjakura tell a story with beautiful patterns of checks, lines, repeats, and floats. Traditionally Kenjakura has been well-known for weaving high quality *gamchhas* (finely woven thin soft towels) in a number of different styles and sizes. While *gamchha* has been the signature creation of Kenjakura, at present the artists have diversified to add other apparel and utility products to their repertoire. The interesting use of float structures in simple products, with natural fibres of cotton and silk, creating a beautiful inherent character, is what makes them distinctively different from other handloom products. The craft is practised by more than 800 weavers, carrying forward the weaving traditions of their ancestors who came and settled in the village 150 years ago.



Honeycomb pattern on a Kenjakura weave

The weavers are now empowered in designing and weaving products that respond to the changing needs of today's markets, essentially building on the strengths and uniqueness of the traditional weaving patterns and practices.



Preparing the yarn



Women weavers from Kenjakura in Bankura flaunting their weaves

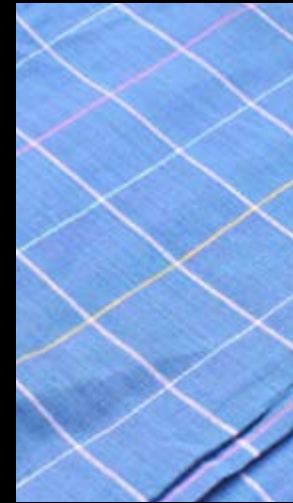
Kenjakura weaves and patterns in colloquial terms



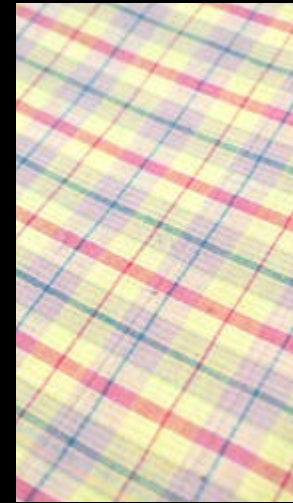
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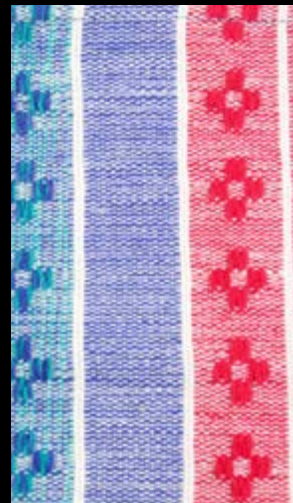
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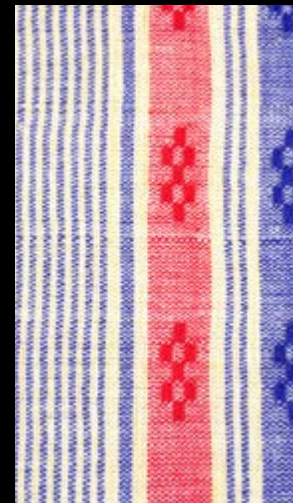
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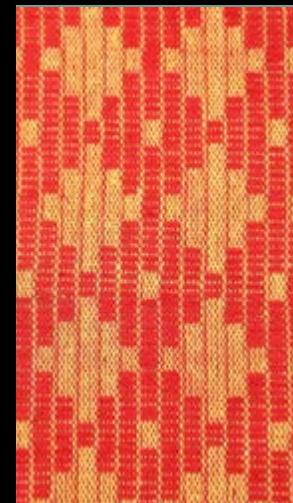
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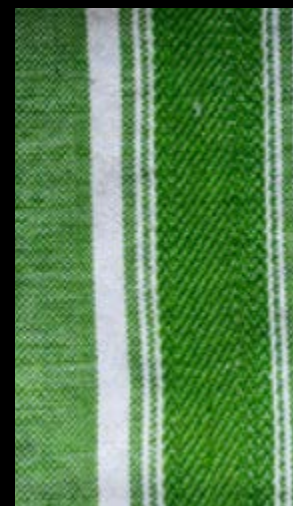
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Kenjakura products



Honeycomb



Aanki



Aanki Buki



Alpona



Wood Craft

Hand crafting wooden products have been an integral part of the lifestyles and cultural traditions of some of the indigenous communities of West Bengal. Wooden dolls and wooden masks are common handicrafts which are customarily associated with ritualistic needs of the makers. The traditional wooden owls for example are worshiped across the state to seek the blessings of goddess Lakshmi. Goddess Kali is also beautifully represented in the local art form of ceremonial wooden Gomira mask. Even the eternal love of Radha Krishna is displayed in West Bengal through a diverse array of crafts and festivities, which include wooden dolls. Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a Bhakti saint devoted to Lord Krishna is also celebrated with his figurines carved out of wood. The following sections showcase the traditional as well as the modern wood crafts of the practitioner communities.



Wooden Doll

Wooden dolls of vibrant colours, especially of owls, Lord Krishna and Radha, and *raja-rani* (king and queen) are part of an age-old tradition of Bardhaman region. In West Bengal, the eternal love of Radha-Krishna is displayed through a diverse array of crafts and festivities, of which the wooden dolls of Natungram village is an integral one.

The uniqueness of these dolls lie in the doll-makers' craftsmanship of handcarving the figurines out of a single block of wood. Different species of wood are used to carve these dolls. Gamar wood is preferred due to its strength and durability. Mango wood, Neem wood, and Akashmoni wood are also used.

Woman of Natungram in Purba Bardhaman painting wooden dolls



Wooden doll crafting process
 (Above left) Chiselling the wood to carve out a desired shape
 (Above right, below left) Painting and drawing features on the carved wooden piece
 (Below right) Popular wooden dolls of *raja-rani*



(Above) Artists at work in Natungram village
(Right) Village festival at Natungram

Diversified products by wooden doll makers



Natungram, the hub of wooden doll makers, is home to about 150 artists. The men are skilled in wood work and women mostly paint on the colours and adorn the dolls. The artists have formed a collective named Swami Janakidas Natungram Wood Carving Artisans Industrial Cooperative Society Ltd. The artist collective works to promote, practice and safeguard this tradition.

Over time, the skilled doll-makers have diversified their craft to make innovative home utility items of modern designs with a creative mix of traditional aesthetics. The community also undertakes commissioned work for making idols of deities and carving installations. They participate in various state and national festivals.

A folk-art centre with a community museum has been developed in the village by the State Government. There is a production centre adjacent to this, which serves as a collective space for mask making. Annual folk festival is held in the village and tourists visit the hub throughout the year for a culturally immersive experience.



Wooden Mask

Gomira masks are wooden masks made by specific craft communities of the rural belts of Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur districts, as ritual elements for the age-old ceremonial tradition of Gomira mask dance. The masks, locally known as Mukha, are objects of worship and devotion, originally catering to the needs of the dancers and any villager wishing to give a mask as an offering to the village deity. The native Rajbangshi communities wear these wooden masks representing different religious and mythical characters, deities, and animals, and dance to offer their prayers to the gods and goddesses to usher in the good forces and drive out the evil during the harvesting season.

Gomira masks of Dinajpur



Mukha dance performance

The two distinct dance performances are Gomira and Ramer Bonobas. It is believed that while dancing wearing these masks, the performers go into a trance-like state taking on the identity of the masks. In the process, they also pledge their masks to the deities, upon fulfillment of their wishes. The large sized colourful Gomira masks make the dance ecstatic and overpowering. Apart from the ritualistic purpose, this dance performance is also a source of joy and gaiety for the villagers.

Kushmandi in Dakshin Dinajpur is one of the most well-known hubs of this craft tradition. Kushmandi's wooden mask has received the GI status in 2018. A registered society by the name of Mahishbathan Gramin Hasta Shilpa Samabay Samity Limited operates as a cooperative of the crafts persons who live in and around this hub. A folk-art centre along with a community museum has been developed by the State Government at Kushmandi to facilitate collective preservation, promotion and safeguarding of the cultural tradition.



(Above) Craftpersons hand-carving Gomira masks
(Below) An artist painting a Gomira mask



An artist showcasing various types of Gomira masks

Gomira masks are made of wood available locally. Gamhar is preferred as it is relatively light-weight. The masks are also made with Shegun, Mahogany, and Mango wood. The wood is seasoned and treated to make it crack resistant, and free of bug infestation, before carving.

Today, these masks which were once only rural ritual objects have found their way into the urban drawing rooms, and with time have become attractive pieces for home decor. The craftsmen are now innovating their work to make more diversified products.

Wooden mask repertoire of Kushmandi depicting the goddesses Kali, Tara, Durga, a tiger and Bura-Buri





Metal Craft

Metal craft is an ancient practice of Bengal. Traditionally, Bell metal, an alloy of copper and tin, was used to craft a variety of utensils for domestic and religious purposes. West Bengal, along with the Chota Nagpur region in eastern India, is also well known for its lost-wax metal casting which is believed to be one of the oldest craft traditions of India, possibly dating back to 5000 years. There are communities engaged in metal crafting using the specific technique of lost-wax metal casting for generations. Their indigenous knowledge of metal processing, including understanding of temperature, chemistry, and sculpting are extraordinary. Some of the hill communities also traditionally work with silver to make ceremonial products primarily used in Buddhist rituals. Although they buy the silver from outside their region, they craft the products entirely by hand which is a specialised traditional skill nurtured by a specific section of people. The following sections showcase their remarkable craftsmanship.



A Dokra craftsperson at work

Dokra

Dokra is one of the earliest methods of non-ferrous metal casting known to human civilisation. It uses the technique of lost or vanishing wax casting method which can be traced back to the Indus valley civilisation.

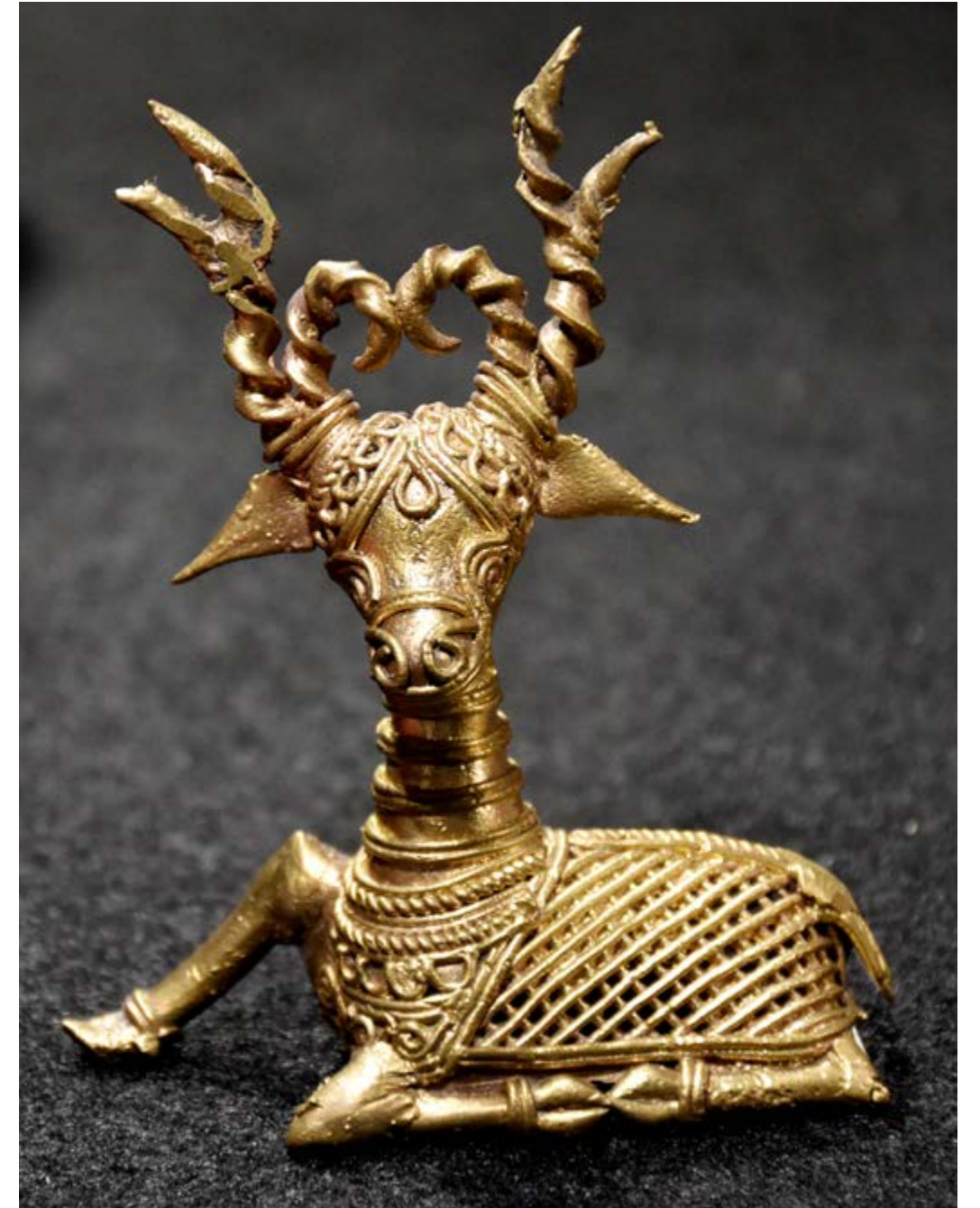
Bikna in Bankura and Dariyapur in Purba Bardhaman are the major clusters of dokra. About 370 artists from these clusters are professionally engaged in Dokra craft. It is believed that the village settlements in these areas are about 120-150 years old. The craftspeople had migrated from the Chota Nagpur region to settle in these villages. Dokra of Bengal has been accredited with GI.



Dokra crafting process
 (Above left) Handcrafting designs on clay model with wax and resin
 (Above right) Creating the mould
 (Centre left) Filling the mould with metal
 (Centre right) Putting the mould in furnace
 (Below left) Breaking the mould after taking it out of the furnace to get the metal product
 (Below right) Polishing the finished product



A Dokra human figurine



A Dokra figurine of a deer

Dokra metal craft is tedious and requires high skills. All members of a family are involved in the process. Each artwork is unique as the mould created can only be used once. The raw materials used are available locally and include brass and bell metal scrap, resin, wood, gum, tar, wax, mustard oil, coal, and soil of a particular type locally known as *nena*.



Traditionally the community used to handcraft brass vessels to measure rice, bells of different kinds, anklets, lamps (*diya*), figurines of local mythical characters, and idols of deities. They also made jewellery for their own family members. Today, the craftspeople produce a wide range of products, continuously evolving designs and applications of Dokra, thereby presenting their heritage in an innovative avatar.

As part of the RCCH project, two major villages of Dokra in West Bengal, Bikna in Bankura district and Dariyapur in Purba Bardhaman district, have become popular cultural tourism destinations. Folk-art centres in both the villages, established by the State Government, have provided the artists with a space for workshop, cultural exchange, and sales of Dokra handicraft products. The centres are active spaces of artist engagement and also house community museums. Annual village folk festivals are held by the communities, which attract a large number of visitors including students, designers, and buyers.



(Above) Schoolchildren visiting Bikna in Bankura to learn about Dokra craft tradition

(Below) Dariyapur Dokra hub of Purba Bardhaman

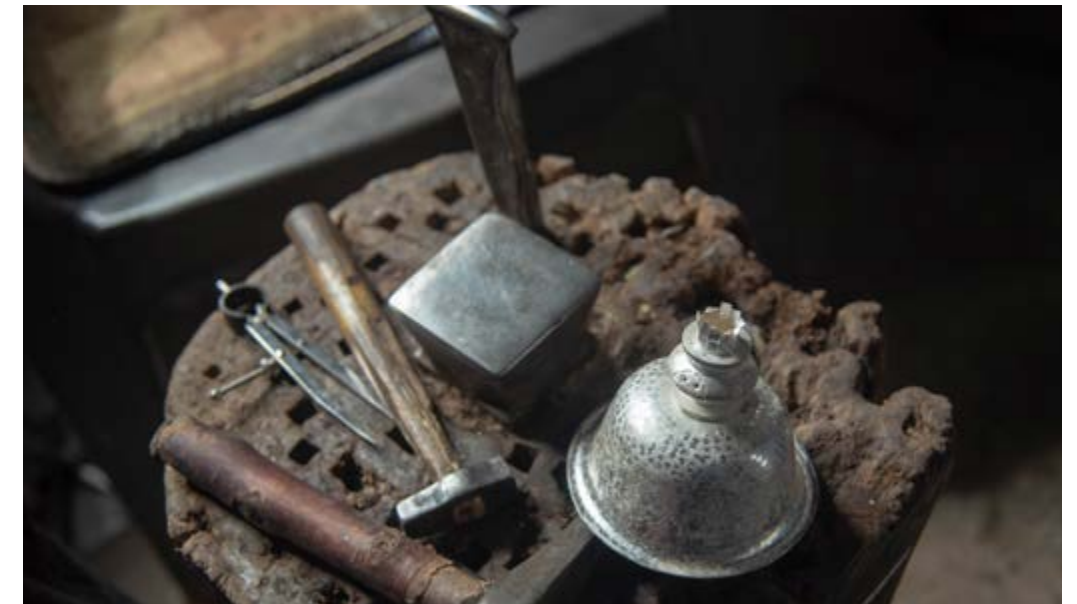


Silver Craft

Silver and other metal craftsmen, settled in Kalimpong town, have been practicing the art of silver craft for generations. The Newar community are the traders and the Biswakarma communities are the craftsmen.

Tiny silver balls are bought from the market and melted in their workshops to make various products. Silver balls are poured into a stone container and placed on a coal fire for 15-20 mins for melting. The containers are of various sizes aligned to the quantity of silver required.

Silver craft—Handcrafted legacy of the hills



(Above) Simple hand tools used by silver craftsmen
(Centre) Hand-beating with a hammer to shape a silver piece
(Below) An engraved portion of a ritual object



Handcrafted silver objects from Kalimpong

The molten silver is then beaten with a hammer to turn it into the desired shapes of bowls, lamps, containers, etc. During the initial beating process the item is continuously softened by putting it in the fire for making the beating easy. The fire is controlled by a hand operated machine. After the basic shape is created, it is taken for finishing and engraving.

Engraving is a specialised skill borne by only a few who have artistic flairs. The designs are either their own or are given by the traders. The carvings are done with precision with a chisel and hammer. A minimum of seven days are required to finish a product. The tools used by the craftsmen are all handmade.



Folk Painting

Humans have the constant urge to communicate, express and share their emotions and thoughts through creativity, of which painting is the oldest medium in the world. Folk paintings have fascinated art lovers, researchers, and general audiences for ages. In West Bengal, folk paintings are common which usually narrate stories on the lifestyles and beliefs of the painter communities. Painting coloured motifs, patterns and symbols known as *alpona*, at the doorway and walls, is a common tradition in Bengali households. In the hilly regions, we can also find Thangka painting on cloths, innate to the native culture of the mountains. These folk painting traditions beautifully entwine the visual language of storytelling to sustain the local folklores and mythologies. The painting tradition of the state also draws its inspiration from the surrounding nature, elements of which get reflected in the art form. The following sections narrate the history, evolution, and modern relevance of the folk paintings of West Bengal.



Women Patuas from Pingla in Paschim Medinipur narrating the painted story through Pater Gaan

Bengal Patachitra

The word 'Pata' comes from the Sanskrit word 'Patta', meaning cloth, and 'Chitra' meaning painting. In Patachitra, stories are painted on long scrolls. The painters are known as Patuas. The Patuas gradually unfurl the long scroll or Pata while presenting the story through their songs. The songs are known as Pater Gaan. One of the fascinating aspects of Patachitra painting is the use of natural colours derived from local natural materials such as fruits, flowers, and stones. The Patuas paint and sing on various themes, including epics and mythological tales (Ramayana, Mahabharata, Mangalkabya), historical and contemporary themes (biographies of great personalities, nuclear warfare, etc.), and



Making natural colours for Patachitra art

social issues (women empowerment, child right, health, literacy). The folk painting tradition is also used as a tool for mass education and communication. Bengal's Patachitra has been accredited with GI in 2018. There is debate regarding the exact time when Patachitra originated. Various oral forms of records date it back to 10th-11th century AD in Bengal. This folk tradition of scroll painting has been passed on through generations orally. Traditionally, the Patuas used to go from house to house with their painted scrolls to perform and received alms in return from their village audiences. With the passage of time and with modernisation of media, the storytelling tradition of Patachitra was gradually getting lost. The RCCH project led to the revitalisation of Patachitra of West Bengal. Today, the Patachitra artists are engaged professionally and full-time in Patachitra painting, it being a major source of livelihood for them. The revival of the performative dimension of this tradition, the songs, is a particularly mentionable achievement.



A Patua showing a Santhal Patachitra



The Styles

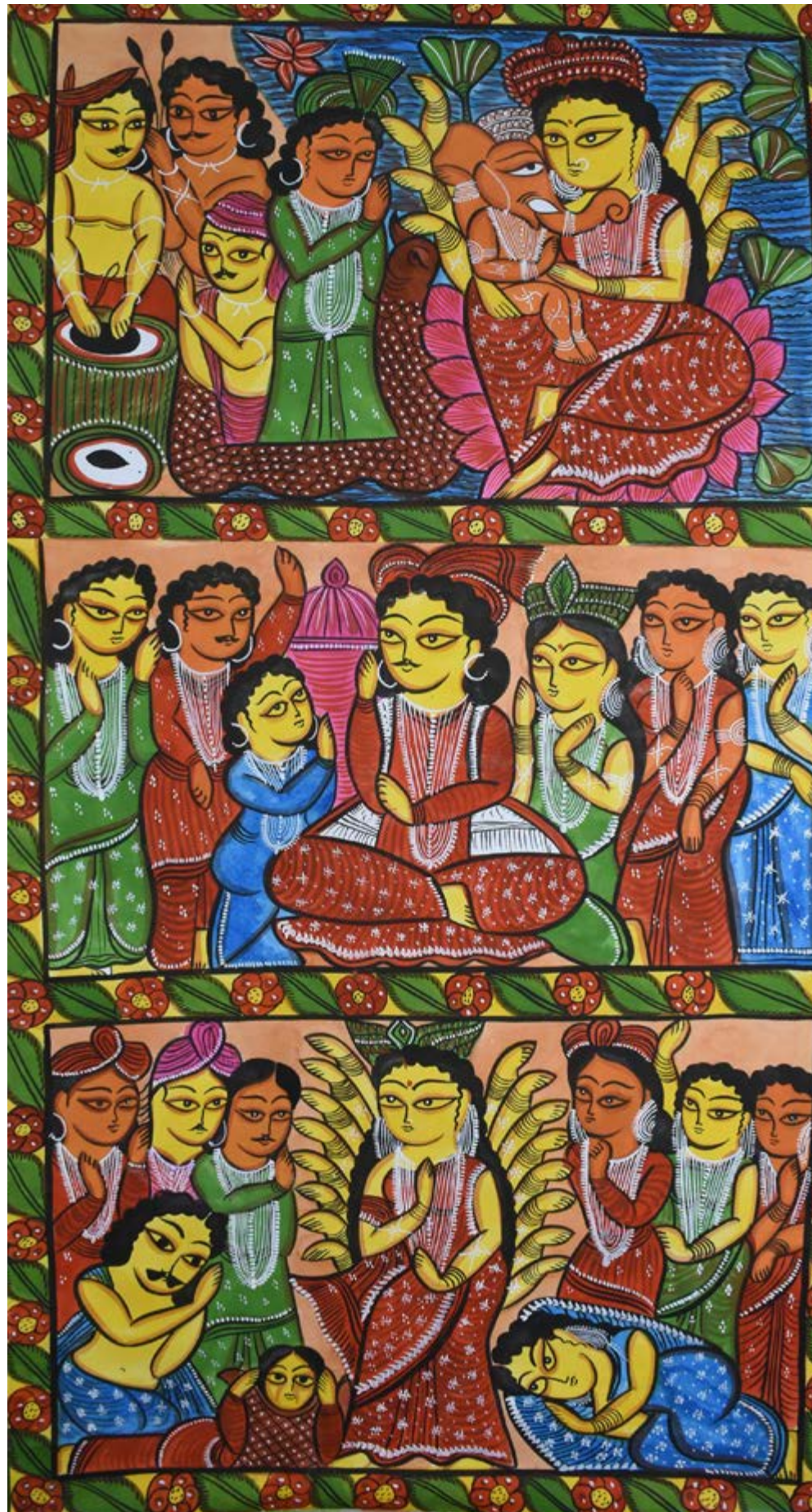
The Patachitra painting is practised in Paschim and Purba Medinipur, Birbhum, Bankura, and Purulia districts of West Bengal. Patachitra comprises of three distinct styles, namely: the Bengal style reflected in Medinipur and Birbhum variants of Patachitra, the Santhal style found in Purulia and Bankura, and the Kalighat style.

Patachitra of Medinipur

About 700 artists are engaged in this tradition across Paschim and Purba Medinipur districts. Naya village of Pingla block of Paschim Medinipur is one of the largest and vibrant cultural hubs, where more than 300 active Patachitra practitioners reside. Chandipur in Purba Medinipur is another hub of more than 200 Patachitra artists.

The Patuas paint and sing on various mythological tales. They paint on Hindu epics, folk tales, as well as various other subjects including social issues, nature, and current affairs (Tsunami, 9/11 terrorist attack, etc.). The

Pot Maya, the Patachitra village festival in Naya started in 2010 and has turned into one of the most popular village festivals of West Bengal. The hub enjoys a continuous footfall of visitors throughout the year.



larger repertoire of Patachitra subjects includes mythical characters from Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. While some of their scrolls are on epic characters such as Manasa, Behula and Lakhindar, others are on Satyapir or Jesus Christ.

Patachitra today is considered as a syncretic tradition of folk painting – the Patuas drawing on various religious and secular themes, reflecting their aesthetic brilliance and transcending the narrow divides of caste, creed, and religion. Patachitra practitioners not only continue their tradition of long scroll paintings narrating a story through a song but have also diversified to include single frame paintings or short scrolls, painting applications on home decor products, and textiles, as well as frescoes for interior decoration.

The artists have a society of their own named Chitrataru. An annual festival, Pot Maya, is organised in the village to celebrate the art. A folk-art centre along with a community museum has been established at Naya, Pingla.

The artists of Chandipur have formed their own society Habichak Nankarchak Lokoshiksha. A folk-art centre is present at Habichak.

Patachitra of Purulia & Bankura

The Patachitra tradition practised in Purulia and Bankura districts depict the style of the Santhal school and is known for its simplistic style and compositions, minimalistic background decoration and distinctive themes, which are strikingly different from the scroll paintings of Medinipur and Murshidabad. Unlike the Patachitra tradition of Medinipur, Purulia Patachitra is relatively lesser known to the outside world. The village of Majramura in Purulia is the main hub of Santhal Patachitra which is home to about 70 artists.

The artists paint scrolls and narrate the painted stories through a song. The colour palette used in Santhal Patachitra is limited to two or three colours, mostly in shades of brown and black. The style of painting and the use of specific colours make Santhal Patachitra distinctive from other kinds.



The painted scroll on Kamale Kamini from Pingla in Paschim Medinipur



Santhal folklore on origin of life from Bharatpur in Bankura



Most of their scrolls start with a representation of the Jagannath trinity, Brahma, and other Hindu divinities. The Patuas paint stories ranging from the origin of the Santhals to the likes of Madanmohan Leela, Krishna Leela, and Raas Leela.

The performative dimension of Santhal School of Patachitra is premised on local beliefs, practices, and rituals. The *Jadu pata* depicts the story of creation of the universe and the origin of the Santhals. The *Yama Pala Pata* depicts the Santhali perceptions of hell. Drawing Patachitra is also integral to the funeral rituals of the Santhals.



Gopalan (cow rearer) Patachitra from Satpalsa in Birbhum

Patachitra of Birbhum

The Birbhum Style is known for its depiction of stories from myths, legends, and the epics, while stories from everyday occurrences are also part of their repertoire. The major difference between Birbhum and Medinipur style lies in the content and usage of colours. While stories of Mangalkabya feature more in the Medinipur style, stories of Chaitanyadev and his Bhakti movement are major themes in Birbhum style of Patachitra. Additionally, in the usage of colours, the Birbhum style uses a reddish base, which can be identified as a trademark style. Gopalan is another popular theme on the utility of cow as the protector and nurturer of mankind. These paintings show the doomed fate of those who disrespect cows and how the ones who protect the animal are blessed for their kindness.





The Kalighat Style

Predominantly urban, Kalighat styles developed in Kolkata in the 19th century, merging styles from various rural areas: satirical secular works mocking urban upper-class Bengali culture, using traditional folk idioms and mythological references to interpret city life. The Kalighat Patachitra is essentially a square or a rectangular painting, also referred to as Chouko Pata. While the tradition at present is no longer practised in Kalighat, the Patuas from Medinipur have taken inspiration from this style and have amalgamated it into their own painting vocabulary.



Kalighat-style Patachitra from Pingla in Paschim Medinipur



Patachitra artists are now painting stories on diversified items



Patachitra mural painting depicts the city of Kolkata



Patachitra on environmental awareness



Patachitra painted trays



Hill Painting

In the hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong reside local artists who have been painting scenes from nature on cotton fabrics for years to attract the tourists. Hill painting has been one of the most popular souvenirs of the north Bengal hills. The hill painting artists have great skills of painting directly on cloth. In this kind of painting, the artists usually do not need to draw pencil outlines. Direct brush work is applied on fabrics of various sizes. The paintings are done on cotton cloths with base colours of black and white. Previously, they used to paint with natural colour but gradually fabric colour has become the medium of painting. Nowadays, colours used in hill paintings are Tibetan colour-powders mixed with gum, poster colours, and fabric colours.

A portrait painted in the popular style of the Hills



The different moods of Kanchenjunga—the most popular inspiration for art—captured by hill painters of Kalimpong



Clay Craft

Clay is a handy natural material that has found its use in moulding, sculpting, baking to make containers, sculptures, and other daily objects by different communities since ages. Pottery, one of the oldest handicrafts of the world, has been of immense archaeological significance and the artefacts provide insights into the history and civilization of human societies. West Bengal has a rich clay craft tradition of terracotta pottery and is also well-known for other diverse forms, including clay idols, clay masks, etc. The terracotta work of the state is famous worldwide, with its application in artefacts as well as in temple architecture. The look and feel of the clay craft changes based on the type of local clay available in different regions of the state.



Terracotta temple of Bishnupur in Bankura

Terracotta

Terracotta is a type of fired clay, typically of brownish red colour, used as ornamental building material and for modeling different idols, figurines, etc. for ages. It is one of the most ancient manifestations of human creativity and dates back to the Indus valley civilisation. Moulded by hand, dried in the sun, and burnt in mud kilns, terracotta products are loved worldwide for their earthly character.

Terracotta craft is practised by the rural communities of Bankura, Uttar Dinajpur, North 24 Parganas, and Birbhum for generations. Mentionable among them are Panchmura in Bankura and Kunoor in Uttar Dinajpur. Panchmura is home to about 300 terracotta artists, and about 325 potters live in Kunoor engaged in making exquisite terracotta pottery.



A ritualistic terracotta elephant figurine

The Malla kings were great patrons of the terracotta art of Bishnupur in Bankura and commissioned craftsmen of Panchmura to build the terracotta temples with beautifully and intricately carved facades. These temples were used both for worship, and as a shelter for warriors. The cultural history of the place, along with its art, has made it an important cultural tourism destination.



Terracotta horses and elephants presented as offerings in Manasa puja

The archetypal terracotta horses and elephants, found everywhere have become iconic products of this craft, which have their origin in local rituals of rural communities of Bankura. With the rise in the popularity of the local serpent goddess Manasa, the villagers promised to dedicate terracotta horses and elephants to the serpent deity for protection from snake bites which were rampant in rural areas. Ritual horses, elephants, Manasa Chali (the crafted pitcher symbolizing Manasa, the snake goddess), and Shashti (the guardian deity of children) are thus produced here in large numbers.

In Panchmura, a prominent hub of terracotta craft, around 80 families of the Kumbhakar (potter) community reside.

Apart from Bankura's Panchmura, other prominent hubs are Kunoor and Subhashganj in Uttar Dinajpur, Kakutiya in Birbhum, and Chaltaberia in North 24 Parganas.



(Above) Terracotta pottery making
(Below) Making pottery on a traditional wheel



Traditional terracotta products

Terracotta lifestyle and home products

Bankura's Panchmura terracotta craft has got GI in 2018. Panchmura Mritshilpi Samabay Samity was formed by the crafts persons in 1959. The society is now active and provides marketing support to the artisans. A folk-art centre has been developed in Panchmura village by the State Government. An Annual folk festival is held in the village, and tourists visit the hub throughout the year.

With changing times and design interventions, the craftspeople have diversified their products to include lampshades, flower vases, clay pots, planters, plates, jewellery, etc. along with crafting idols.



Clay Doll

The craft of clay doll making is an age-old tradition of Ghurni, a neighbourhood of Krishnanagar in the Nadia district of West Bengal. These dolls of miniature figures, humans, animals, and birds are unique in their style. The fineness of moulding and painting renders a highly realistic look to these dolls. A Ghurni doll is considered a collector's item.



(Above) Relief work of traditional motif
(Facing page) Exquisite clay dolls of Ghurni in Nadia





Making of clay dolls



Chiseling a human face out of clay

Though the art of doll making has always been an integral part of Bengal's culture, it gained momentum under the patronage of Maharaja Krishnachandra of Krishnanagar, who was a patron of art, literature and music. In 1728, he brought families of potters from Dhaka, in Bangladesh, and Natore in West Bengal and settled them in Ghurni.

These clay dolls also gained recognition with the advent of the British who popularised this sculpture-craft. The doll makers earned laurels and accolades from the British royalty such as Queen Victoria as well as other important people of the British Raj.

In Ghurni, there are more than 300 artists practicing this craft as a sustainable livelihood.

Realistic clay doll repertoire from Ghurni in Nadia



An artist painting clay dolls



Faces behind the masks—
Chhau dancers of Purulia

Chhau Mask

Chhau masks were traditionally made for the famous Chhau dance, a martial art based dance form indigenous to eastern India. In Purulia's Chhau, the dancers wear large, elaborately ornate masks of the characters they perform and dazzling costumes made of tinsel and brocade. Usually, the masks portray mythological figures such as Goddess Durga, Lord Ganesh, Lord Kartik, and the demons, as well as animals and birds such as peacocks, tigers, monkeys, lions, etc.



(Above) Chhau dance
performance
(Below) Sculpting a Chhau mask



The Chhau dance troupes enact Chhau dance dramas customarily for rural audiences involving vigorous and acrobatic movements of the masked dancers. The stories are usually based on mythological tales that propagate moral and ethical values. Chhau dance was inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of ICH of Humanity in 2010. Purulia's Chhau mask was accredited with GI in 2018.

Chhau masks are made from paper pulp, mud, and clay and undergo many processes before taking the final form. A mask is first moulded by hand with clay and sun-dried. It is then covered with powdered

ash, paper pulp, torn pieces of cloth in layers, which are then fixed to the clay mould with gum. At the end of the process, the clay mould is removed making the mask lighter to wear. Finally, the mask is coloured and decorated with embellishments.

The art of Chhau mask making started in Charida village during the rule of King Madan Mohan Singh Deo of Baghmundi around 150 years back. Charida in Purulia is a vibrant hub of Chhau mask makers. Apart from serving the Chhau dance industry, Chhau mask making has diversified today in form, size, and ornamentation to cater to modern day markets.

Decorating a Chhau mask



Chhau mask making is a vibrant cultural industry of Charida in Purulia



Rich repertoire of Chhau masks sold in shops of Charida in Purulia

Facing page

(Above) Chhau mask of Durga
(Below) Chhau mask of Santhal couple



The mask makers now make smaller and different types of masks for home decor and as souvenirs. Some of the artists also make idols.

Charida is home to about 370 practicing mask-makers. The popularity of Chhau dance drama, and the number of Chhau dancers have substantially increased the demand for Chhau masks. The artists have formed a collective called Purulia Chhou Mukhosh Silpi Unnayan Samity Charida which undertakes collective efforts in furthering promotion, practice and safeguarding the tradition of Chhau mask making.

The Charida village has a folk-art centre with a community museum developed by the State Government. Annual folk festival is held in the village and tourists flock to the hub throughout the year. Charida has grown as one of the most popular rural cultural tourism destinations of the state.





Oral Traditions & Performing Arts

“Our heritage and ideals, our code and standards—the things we live by and teach our children—are preserved or diminished by how freely we exchange ideas and feelings.”

—Walt Disney

Traditions are elements of a culture that have sustained through time and varied cultural contexts, in the form of repeated patterns of behaviours, beliefs or enactments passed down from one generation to another. Traditions entail a complex continuity between past and present and are sites of knowledge and identity formation. Historically, traditional practices in India followed, as many still do, oral means as modes of transmission from a generation to the next. These traditions remain alive through collective memory, and their inculcation by the younger generation is often unconscious and natural.

Performances—in the form of music, dance, theatre, storytelling, pantomime, sung verses, and beyond—are spectacular manifestations of traditions coming alive. Folk performances transcend their entertainment value and are evocative representations of people's beliefs, practices, and realities that shape their daily life. The state of West Bengal is demographically diverse with varied ethnicities, religions, and languages. Many communities, with their distinct beliefs, practices, and cultural traits, inhabit the state, resulting in a vast repertoire of performing art traditions in Bengal. These range of performances are connected with rituals and seasonal festivals and are spontaneous expressions of communitarian aesthetics. They create a shared cultural space and are means of cultural transmission through shared activities. Often, these performances serve as cultural emblems, to which the state's identity is hugely indebted.

The serenity of the Bauls, the acrobatics of Chhau, and Raibenshe dance, the synchronised movements of folk dances, the dramatic make-ups of folk theatre, resonating beats of folk musical instruments, the lyrical rendition of the Patachitra paintings by the Patuas, the vibrancy of different festivities and fairs such as Durga Puja, Charak, Gajan, and Gangasagar Mela enrich the state's cultural tapestry. These performances live only in the present; once the performances are over, they can be recollected but not exactly reproduced. These oral traditions rely primarily on memory and transmission in order to survive withstanding the test of time.

It is the skill, creativity, aesthetic imagination, and cultural philosophy of both the performer and the community that help these practices to transcend the domain of performance and command the status of 'art'. Although a product of history, the performing art traditions are not simply aggregates of past but dynamic expositions of tradition and modernity in dialogue. Hence, these practices evolve with time and reflect popular representations of changed context and aesthetics. In West Bengal's context, while some folk performances such as Chhau dance, Patachitra storytelling, and Baul

music can be identified as thriving living heritages, other forms such as Bahurupi (where artists perform as impersonators of the divine), Domni (folk theatre of north Malda), Alkap (folk theatre of Murshidabad), Khon and Mukha dance of Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur are losing relevance in today's time. This implies an integral relationship between performing art traditions and socio-economic and cultural context of the practicing locale. Going beyond manifestations of creativity, skill and entertainment, these traditions are cultural expressions in dialogue with broader forces of society, nature and culture.

There is a close intimacy between nature and Bengal's performing art traditions. The mangrove vegetation belt of the Sundarbans covers major areas of North and South 24 Pargana districts. In the Sundarbans, biodiversity and cultural expression are tuned in sync with each other. The forested islands, punctuated with rivers, are inhabited by local communities, for whom the surrounding wilderness posits both as a threat and as an asset. Their local folk theatre, Banbibir Pala, is a collective cultural expression of devotion to Banbibi, the forest goddess, who is believed to be the saviour protecting men from the threats of the wild. This veneration and embedding of nature in cultural expressions can also be seen in Bhatiyali folk music, a tradition also innate to the Sundarbans. Bhatiyali is the boatmen's song and expresses their joys, agonies, and the lifestyle. The lyrics reflect the daily challenges and hardships the boatmen face in their everyday life as well as identify river as the metaphor for life. Venerations towards nature can also be traced in Jhumur, folk song and dance tradition of indigenous communities from Bankura, Purulia, and South 24 Parganas. Jhumur is a lifestyle performance tradition that commemorates any desirable moment, be it the arid soil receiving its much-awaited rain or first produce of the agricultural season. Nature's omnipresent influence can thus be identified as crucial in shaping many cultural traditions of Bengal.

Social issues inherent to everyday realities also feature as central themes of some of Bengal's performance traditions. Bhawaiya is the lifestyle



Chadar Badar performance

music of North Bengal, premised on the everyday realities of common man. Embedded in materiality, Bhawaiya poetises simple human existence and their daily concerns and challenges. The spiritual music of the Bauls also addresses everyday concerns of common man. While Bhawaiya is lifestyle music, Baul music and philosophy is premised on the tenets of universal love and brotherhood. The Bauls give a clarion call to rise beyond the narrow divides of caste, creed, and religion and spread love for humanity. The tradition of Baul thus spiritualises materiality and sees divinity in very basic humane elements, urging mankind through its music to strive for a free and equal social setup.

Many of the Bengali traditional cultural pursuits took birth in royal courts and got nurtured through royal patronage. Kobi Gaan is one such cultural legacy of Bengal, mostly practised in Murshidabad and Nadia. In Kobi Gaan, two individuals or groups of poets or minstrels (Kobiyal) debated with each other through lyrical verses. The themes of these verses ranged from devotional, erotic, to satirical and transgressive. While Kobi Gaan historically

thrived through royal patronage, in more recent times, it has been replaced by community funding. Composition of lyrical verses in the form of question and answers is also the characteristic of Pala Gaan. Similar to Kobi Gaan, Raibenshe folk dance tradition also has its inception in royal courts and palaces of West Bengal. Raibenshe, practised in Murshidabad, Birbhum and Purba Bardhaman, is a folk martial dance form which evolved from an ancient martial art practised by the bodyguards of the kings and the landlords (*zamindars*) of Bengal. The dance form is characterised by rigorous body movements and balancing acts. Along with the energetic movements, it involves acrobatics by the dancers with *raibansh* which is a long bamboo pole, from which the term Raibenshe has originated. Depicting the spirit of warriorship and royal masculinity, today's Raibenshe is a living heritage, aesthetically redefining the art of balancing even without royal patronage.

West Bengal's performing art traditions are diverse both in terms of forms and themes. While some revere nature, some highlight issues of social importance, and others through their spectacular

performances bring myths and legends back to life. Chhau dance is a masked dance tradition of West Bengal premised mainly on mythological plots. The vibrant and colourful masks coupled with acrobatic movements, locally known as *ulfa*, bring a range of characters—from gods, demons to animals—to life. While Chhau rekindles the enchantment with fantasies, Gambhira, the satirical folk theatre tradition of Malda, kindles the consciousness as responsible citizens. In Gambhira, while one performer dresses up as Lord Shiva, the others acting as common men voice their daily concerns to the God, serving as the metaphor for ruling authority. Usage of mythological figures, which are fictive, to address real problems, reflects the layered complexity and depth of Bengal's performing art traditions.

These cultural traditions are not just sites of entertainment but also express the beliefs, concerns, practices, aesthetics and perceptions of the practising community. The performing art traditions of indigenous communities are not just cultural expressions with aesthetic intent but also

mechanisms to reaffirm the indigenous identity. The indigenous communities of West Bengal have a variety of folk song and dance traditions. These traditions are performed in the glory of nature and reflect their simplistic beliefs and collective ways of life. Dang dance is performed during weddings. Sohrai is a harvest dance, inviting all the villagers to join the festivities. Dasai dance is performed after the Durga Puja. The characteristic feature of these dances is the perfect synchronisation of movements to the beats of folk instruments such as *dhol* and *dhamsha* and celebration of life through festivity, where both men and women participate. They also have their signature festivals of Bhadu, Tusu, Chhata Parab, Badhna Parab, which reflect the indigenous community's veneration of nature and the sorrows, aspirations and affections of the subaltern communities. The hilly regions of West Bengal are inhabited by diverse ethnicities and are abode to a plethora of cultural practices. The rich cultural repertoire of Darjeeling and Kalimpong are living manifestations of reverence towards local nature and ways of life. While the hill communities'



Puppetry performance

tradition of group song and dance are emblematic of their collective spirit, veneration for nature gets reflected in local festivities such as Jomal Thubbi of the Lepcha community, dedicated to welcome the first farm produce of the season.

Some of Bengal's performance traditions, apart from being endowed with social, mythological and cultural significance, are also infused with ritualistic relevance. Festivities such as the Gajan Mela are held in the summer months in rural West Bengal, dedicated to Lord Shiva. Gangasagar Mela is also a popular

annual festival of West Bengal that takes place at Gangasagar, at the sacred point of confluence where the river Bhagirathi-Hooghly meets Bay of Bengal. West Bengal also has its signature festival, Durga Puja, a five-day sacred performativity undertaken to celebrate the victory of good over evil. While these traditions have ritualistic significance, celebrating people and their well-being, crafts and performances are also integral to these festivities. The rich heritage of oral and performing art traditions unveil the beliefs, practices and aesthetics of common man which have withstood the test of time.



Adivasi song and dance performance



BAUL

Bankura, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Nadia, Paschim Bardhaman, Purba Bardhaman

Artists **2140**



BHATIYALI

North 24 Parganas

Artists **190**



BHAWAIYA

Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri

Artists **4910**



CHHAU DANCE

Purulia

Artists **5005**



JHUMUR

Purulia, Bankura, South 24 Parganas

Artists **190**



RAIBENSHE

Birbhum, Murshidabad, Purba Bardhaman

Artists **290**



RABHA DANCE

Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri

Artists **410**



ADIVASI DANCE

Jhargram, Paschim Bardhaman

Artists **1380**



HILL SONG & DANCE

Darjeeling, Kalimpong

Artists **1080**



BANBIBIR PALA

South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas

Artists **380**



GAMBHIRA

Malda

Artists **290**

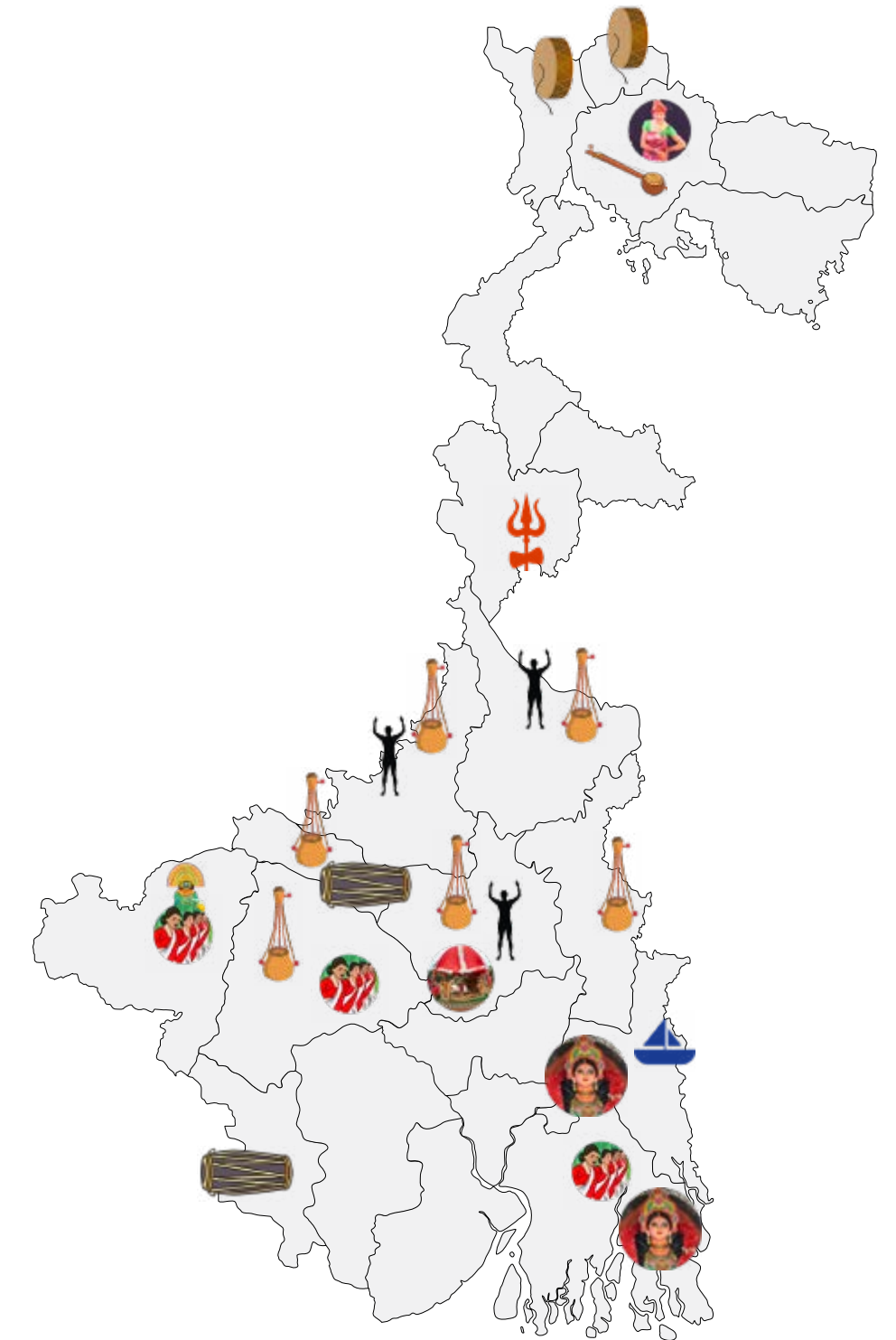


CHADAR BADAR

Purba Bardhaman

Artists **80**

Oral Traditions & Performing Arts of West Bengal





Folk Music

Bengal's folk music is a rich maze of melodies and cultures — there are secular and religious songs, social ballads, workers' chants, hymns based on legends or myths and so much more. The songs are reflections of lived realities and emotions of common rural people. The diverse forms of folk music are classified to particular occasions, related to ceremonies, rituals, and social activities. Collectively, our folk heritage reflects the cultural heterogeneity of Bengal. Baul, Bhawaiya, Kobi Gaan, Kirtan, Bhatiyali, Jhumur constitute the main genres of folk music. Indigenous community of the hills, the Rabhas, the Santhals have their signature folk music genre. Each genre of folk music is accompanied by folk musical instruments, including *dotara*, *ektara*, *khamak*, *sarinda*, *kendri*, *madal*, and others.



Baul

Baul is a genre of spiritual music and a philosophy. It is the soul music of Bengal and is essentially the music of self-searching. Chaitanyadev's Bhakti movement, which is seen as the first social reform movement in Bengal, may be the basis of evolution of Baul music. Living the life of an esoteric, denouncing the material world, a Baul musician urges people to rise above the narrow divides created by caste, creed, and religion to find love, peace, and harmony. Spreading love is the essence of Baul music. Baul music has been inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of the ICH of Humanity in the year 2008. Bauls use a variety of folk musical instruments including *ektara*, *dotara*, *khamak*, *dubki*, *dugi*, *dhol*, *khol*, *mandira*, and flute.

(Above) Ektara—a folk musical instrument

(Facing page) Performance of renowned Baul singer Rina Das Baul





Leading Baul singer Girish Khyapa presenting a Baul performance

(Facing page) Khamak—a folk musical instrument



Baul musical heritage gets passed on from guru to his disciples following the *guru—shishya parampara*. Bauls are known for their *akhra*-based practice. *Akhras* are traditional music spaces of the Bauls. Under the RCCH initiative of West Bengal, *akhra*-based musical practice of the Bauls have been revived and strengthened, and now they are collectively taking initiatives to organise festivals celebrating their art form and philosophy.

Baul music is premised on three major themes: Dehatattwa, referring to the reverence towards human body, which epitomises the ultimate truth; Atmatattwa, which upholds the importance of the soul in guiding the body and hence an aspect of worship; and Gurutattwa celebrating the guru or the supreme being who has attained divine grace through austerity and now preaches to follow the path as shown by him.

Bauls musicians reside in Nadia, Birbhum, Bardhaman, Murshidabad, and Bankura regions of West Bengal. More than 2000 Baul singers from these districts are part of the RCCH project. Gorbhanga, Jalangi, Hariharpara, and Santiniketan are major clusters hosting many Baul *akhras*. Baul resource centres are there in Gorbhanga, Jalangi, and Hariharpara. Musical residencies are frequently conducted in the major Baul clusters, where music lovers from around the world visit to learn about the Baul's musical heritage and collaborate with the practitioners.



Boatmen, river and Bhatiyali song—an inseparable bond

Bhatiyali

Bhatiyali music is inspired by the boatman's life on the river. The word *bhati* means low land, and *bhata* means low tide. It is a tradition of the Sundarbans region of India and Bangladesh. The district of North 24 Parganas is the main hub of Bhatiyali music and is home to about 180 Bhatiyali singers. Traditionally, the boatmen sang Bhatiyali songs while sailing. The songs usually express love, compassion, admiration, and anguish of boatmen through simple lyrics and lingering tunes. These songs also express the lived realities of the boatmen and celebrate spirituality. The lyrics reflect the challenges and hardships the boatmen face in their everyday lives.

Legendary singer Abbas Uddin Ahmed made the genre popular among the masses. Bhatiyali is also integral to the local folk dramas Banbibir Pala and Gazir Gaan. This genre of music is accompanied by traditional musical instruments such as *dotara*, *ektara*, *tabla*, *dhol*, flute, etc.



Women Bhawaiya singers from Maynaguri in Jalpaiguri

Bhawaiya

Bhawaiya songs reflect the experiences of rural life. Many believe that the name is derived from the term *bhava* meaning emotion. Others believe that the term originated from the word *bhawa*, which means low lying land used to grow vegetables. Another opinion suggests that the word comes from the word *bao* meaning breeze.

Bhawaiya compositions are premised on the lived realities of common people. Bhawaiya is popularly used in the folk theatre forms of North Bengal—prominent among these are Kushan Pala (story of Lav and Kush), Chor Chunni Pala (story of a thief and his wife), Mechenir Pala (the story of Mech tribes), and others. The Bhawaiya songs reflect the rural professions of the community, where some are elephant herders while the others are bull rearers. Traditional musical instruments accompanying Bhawaiya music include *dotara*, *dhol*, *khol* (percussion), *sarinda*, and flute.



(Above) Padmashree Mangalakanta Roy—a *sarinda* maestro

(Facing page) *Sarinda*, *dotara*, flute and *dhol*—Bhawaiya musical instruments



Bhawaiya musicians live in the foothills of the Himalayas, in Alipurduar, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri districts, where about 4900 artists reside. Major Bhawaiya hubs include Maynaguri, Jalpaiguri, and Dhupguri blocks in Jalpaiguri district, Alipurduar—1 & 2, and Falakata blocks in Alipurduar district, Tufangunj, Dinhata, Mathabhanga, and Cooch Behar—1 & 2 blocks in Cooch Behar district.

The RCCH project had an immense impact on Bhawaiya music, creating a bridge between the practitioners of different districts and locales which have helped the gurus to come together to create a Bhawaiya curriculum and spread it amongst the local Bhawaiya training centres and also developing a quality supply line to the generated demand of authentic folk music. Today, Bhawaiya musicians, along with singing traditional songs, are also invested in composing new lyrics reflecting the lived realities of contemporary times. The project also helped the artists in reaching out to various places in India and abroad. Renowned Bhawaiya artist and *sarinda* player Mangalakanta Roy was honoured with Padmashree in 2022.



Folk Dance

The ancient war dances such as the Raibenshe and Dhali of Bengal formed part of a soldier's physical as well as mental training. Chhau, a popular mask dance form, is also known for its acrobatic movements and is regarded as a martial art dance form. Dances such as Kathi, Lathi, Jhumur, Dhamail are linked to the *brata* (a ritualistic practice) and wedding rituals. These dances are performed in groups and the choreographed emotions are expressed through accompanying songs. Folk dance traditions, such as Mukha, are performed to appease the deity and thus have ritualistic significance. The regional folk dance styles of the various indigenous communities display unique movements inspired by everyday activities such as fishing, farming, and hunting along with other aspects related to rural life including festivals, weddings, and religious rituals. The musical instruments, vibrant costumes, masks, symbolic movements make each folk dance tradition distinct. The instruments accompanying most of them include different kinds of drums, such as *dhak*, *dhol*, *dhamsa*, *madal*, etc.



Purulia's Chhau dance performance

Chhau

Chhau is an acrobatic mask dance form. Colourful masks, rhythmic drum beats, powerful acrobatic movements and somersaults (locally known as *ulfa*) are characteristics of Chhau dance as practised in the Purulia district of West Bengal. Apart from Purulia's Chhau, there are two other variants—Seraikella Chhau and Mayurbhanj Chhau practised in Jharkhand and Odisha respectively. Purulia's Chhau dancers enact stories from the epics of Ramayana, Mahabharata, the Puranas and other texts.



A training session at Maldi, Purulia

The dancers wear ornate costumes and elaborately crafted masks that portray the characters of the dancers. The masks are made by a community of rural mask makers living in Charida village in Baghmundi block of Purulia.

Chhau dance has been inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of ICH of Humanity in 2010. There are about 5000 practicing Chhau artists in Purulia today.

Purulia's Chhau dance comprises of a number of acrobatic steps linked with characters, namely Danabchal (movements of the demons), Debchal (movements of the gods), and Pashuchal (movements of different animals). The traditional musical instruments used in Chhau dance include *dhol*, *dhamsa*, *charchari*, *tikra*, *mahuri*, *sanai*, and flute.



Chhau dance performance at village festival in Bamnia of Purulia



Chhau dance being recognised as a living heritage has given a cultural identity to the district of Purulia, where over the last decade Purulia has grown to be a vibrant cultural tourism destination. Chhau dancers are now transcending boundaries to present their dance form to the world. Leading dancers are being invited to various international destinations. While initially Chhau was a male-dominated folk form, over the past few years, female dancers have also got involved with the folk dance form. Leading Chhau guru Bhuban Kumar got Sangeet Natak Academy award in 2023. Local schools and universities have introduced a course on Chhau about a decade ago.

Jhumur

Jhumur is an indigenous lifestyle music accompanied with folk dance popular in the Chota Nagpur plateau region. It is also popular in the Sundarbans region among communities who migrated from other states centuries ago.

Jhumur songs soulfully express the happiness, sorrow, love, and loss of the people of these regions. Jhumur is best known for celebrating the union of Radha-Krishna. Apart from devotional odes dedicated to Lord Krishna, everyday stories of common men and women, their love, loss, and aspirations are some of the general themes of Jhumur songs.

Jhumur song and dance performance



Jhumur dancers using local props during performance



Purulia's contemporary poets have also started writing new Jhumur compositions, adding to its rich repertoire and reflecting Purulia's natural beauty with its lifestyle and culture and welcoming people to visit Purulia. Farmers sing Kobi Jhumur while sowing paddy. Jhumur is a vital part of local festivities, including Karam, Bhadu, Tusu, Badhna, and rituals centering harvests, weddings, etc. Jhumur songs are sung in rituals and essentially convey the joy, festive spirit, and grievance to god on life's tribulations. In West Bengal, more than 2900 Jhumur artists live in the districts of Bankura, Purulia, and South 24 Parganas.

The songs are sung in local languages such as Kurmali, Santhali, etc. Jhumur songs have a strong rhythmic component. The various kinds of Jhumur songs are usually named according to the time of the year when they are sung or the characteristics of the composition, dance, and rhythmic pattern they have.

Accompanying instruments for Jhumur include *dhol*, *dhamsa*, *kartal*, *tabla*, *madal*, *gypsy*, *juri-nagra*, harmonium, maracas, and flute.



(Above) Workshop on Jhumur song and dance
(Below) Jhumur dancers in their traditional attire



Raibenshe dance performance

Raibenshe

Raibenshe is an acrobatic dance form which evolved from ancient martial arts practised by the bodyguards of the kings and the *zamindars* of Bengal. The dance form is characterised by rigorous body movements and balancing acts by the dancers on *raibansh* which is a long bamboo pole, from which the term Raibenshe has originated.

The reference of Raibenshe is found in old texts such as Annadamangal, Chandimangal, and Dharmamangal. The performers enact the actions of drawing a bow, throwing a spear, waving a sword, and riding on the back of a horse during their performance. The attacking stances of older warriors can be seen entrenched in the dancing form. Raibenshe musical instruments include *dhol*, flute, cymbal, and *sanai*.



Acrobatics in Raibenshe dance

Raibeshe folk dance is practised in Baharampur, Bharatpur, Burwan, Jiagunj, Kandi, and Nabagram blocks of Murshidabad; Mayureshwar, Labhpur, Rampurhat, Nanoor, Saithiya of Birbhum; and Katwa block of Purba Bardhaman. There are about 280 Raibenshe artists living in these regions.

Eminent folklorist and writer Gurusaday Dutta was instrumental in popularizing the dance form.

Dance residencies are routinely held in the major Raibenshe clusters, where dance lovers and practitioners from all over the world come to learn about the dance legacy and to interact and collaborate with leading Raibenshe dancers.

Rabha Song & Dance

Rabha is a minor ethnic community residing in parts of the Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar districts of West Bengal. The Rabhas believe in different deities and spirits. Their occupation and livelihood is dependent on agriculture, forest department jobs, and daily labour. They also grow rice, jute, vegetables, and corn.

The Rabha community has unique traditions of folk song and dance. Everyday activities, such as fishing, farming, as well as stories of battles fought are the thematic premise of Rabha song and dance. The RCCH project has been catalytic in enhancing the visibility of Rabha's cultural heritage to larger audience.



Adivasi Song & Dance

Santhals have a rich cultural heritage which is reflected in their song and dance. The forest fringe regions of Jhargram, Birbhum, Purulia, Bankura, and Paschim Bardhaman are inhabited by the Santhals. Dance is an integral part of all their festivities. There are various kinds of dances such as the Dang dance performed during marriage rituals, the Sohrai, which is a harvest dance, inviting all the village members to come out of their homes and join in the festivities, and Dasai, a dance performed just before the Durga Puja, when the Santhali men go out to the neighbouring villages, to perform and collect donations in kind. These dances, performed to the joyful beats of their drums, celebrate the glory of nature and offer prayers to the presiding deity of their tribe. Both men and women participate in Santhal dances.



Gomira



(Above) Bura-Buri (old man and woman) dance
(Facing page) Gomira dance performance

Gomira (locally known as *Mukha nach*) are ritualistic dances. The performers treat each mask philosophically, by considering it as the *mukha* (face), rather than a *mukhosh* (mask)—the belief being that it comes alive as soon as one puts it on. Traditionally, the Rajbanshi community was engaged in the dance tradition. The performances are held during the Bengali months of Chaitra to Ashad (April–July) at a central location which is usually the village temple. The dances are organised to appease the village deity, goddess Chandi. Mukha Mela is the annual village festival of Gomira dance, organised in the Mahishabathan region of Dakshin Dinajpur.





Dance of Dhimal community from Darjeeling

Song & Dance of the Hills

The diverse ethnic communities of Darjeeling and Kalimpong have much to offer in terms of their traditional folk dances, songs, music, and festivals. The songs and dances are performed to venerate nature—sky, earth, mountains, rivers, forests, and wildlife, pay tribute to their ancestors and celebrate new harvests, full moon, and rains. The folk songs and dances of the hills are largely linked to the religions of Buddhism and Shamanism and showcase the cultural integration of the Himalayan communities, beyond borders.



Tibetan opera dance from Kalimpong



Mangar dance from Kalimpong



(Above) Ghatu dance of the Gurung community from Kalimpong

(Below) Kathi Pyakha (stick) dance of the Newar community from Kalimpong



Folk Theatre

Folk drama of West Bengal mostly voice the common people's grievances, aspirations, joys, and sorrows. The earliest form of theatre in Bengal, known as *pala*, started with one actor being the protagonist and then restructured to include multiple actors, with the audience sitting around them in a circle or half circles. Different forms of folk genres that emerged in West Bengal took the form of *pala*, be it Alkap, Chhau, Kushan Pala, Manasa Mangal, Jhapan, and others. Jatra, one of the popular versions of *pala*, was believed to have started during the 15th century and gained popularity in the 18th century. Gradually, Jatra evolved into proscenium form and the concept of *pala* lost its relevance. Presently, in the popular folk theatre forms such as Gambhira, Domni, the common man's concerns are depicted in a satirical form. References to puppetry are found in medieval folk ballads of undivided Bengal. String puppetry is the most popular form in Bengal, and a few artists also practise glove puppetry and rod puppetry. The themes are mostly based on myths and legends, but presently also influenced by popular themes of Jatra. The indigenous Santhal community of West Bengal also performs an interesting puppetry tradition called Chadar Badar. Folk instruments such as *banam*, *khorkuto* are used in the performance. Banbibir Pala is a mythology-based folk theatrical form that has its origin in the man-animal conflict in the Sundarbans. Apart from bringing delight and providing entertainment to the people, folk theatres used humour and sarcasm to express the common sentiments and became a platform for catering to popular and non-formal education, initiating a new backdrop in socio-cultural milieu.

Banbibir Pala



The age-old tradition of Banbibir (Lady of the Forest) is a fascinating local folk drama innate to the delta regions of Sundarbans in West Bengal. Around 370 artists are involved in this cultural tradition.

Banbibibi, a local deity, is considered the supreme protector of the forest-dependent people and is popularly believed to be the saviour they pray to for safe return from collecting honey or wood in the forests or fishing. As the sole protector of the forest dwellers, both Hindus and Muslims venerate her with the same devotion and submission. This tradition is thus considered a syncretic Bengali folk tradition of this region. The play narrates the story of how Banbibibi and her brother Shahjangali came to rule over the Sundarbans and how she established her supremacy over the other native godly characters such as Dakshin Ray (Tiger God) and his mother Narayani. The play upholds the mercy and kindness of Banbibibi and emphasises the need to maintain a delicate ecological balance through equal and judicious distribution of forest resources among local community members. The performances are elaborate, colourful and dramatic in nature, full of songs, of which many are from the Jhumur and Bhatiyali traditions. In recent times, this folk theatre has also become a popular attraction for tourists visiting the Sundarbans.

A scene from Banbibir Pala in the Sundarbans

Gambhira



Gambhira is a satirical folk theatre popular in the Malda district of West Bengal, which is home to about 290 practising artists. This art form voices the grievances and aspirations, joys and sorrows of the common people. It became popular after the decline of Buddhism in the 7th-8th century and during the rule of the Sen dynasty.

The current form of Gambhira emerged during the reign of the Pala kings in the 10th century. In Gambhira, out of the two performers, one dresses up like Lord Shiva and represents the feudal lord or the government. The other performer conveys the people's woes, concerns and worries to Lord Shiva in an entertaining way—through dances and songs mixed with humour and satire.

The themes of Gambhira are always based on social and political issues. The characters wear torn and worn-out clothes and use rags for wristbands and headbands. The main accompanying instruments used are *dhol*, harmonium, *tabla*, *trumpet*, and *cymbals*.

Gambhira performance—a satirical rendition from Malda

Chadar Badar



Chadar Badar or Chadar Bandhani is a form of indigenous Santhal puppetry and a hallmark of Santhali culture. This art form is seen scattered in the Purba Bardhaman and Dakshin Dinajpur districts of West Bengal. More than 70 artists are involved with the tradition of Chadar Badar. The puppets, carved out of bamboo or wood, showcase intricate workmanship. They are about 8 to 9 inches in height. Carving is done on light wood available in the area and once the puppets are made, they are adorned with clothing and colourful accessories. During the performance, the puppets are controlled with strings tied to the puppeteer's fingers. The puppets are placed on a small platform with a canopy or hung inside a wooden box, open on three or all four sides. The puppeteer narrates stories from ancient Santhal culture using words and verses from the Santhali language, making the puppets enact these tales. A range of traditional musical instruments, including the *baje banam*, *lagara*, *tirenya* or flute, and the *tunda* or *madal* accompany the performances.

The puppets of Chadar Badar

Puppetry



Puppetry is an age-old folk art form. It has been a medium of traditional entertainment usually performed in village fairs. Themes of the puppet shows are generally based on myths, legends, and epics. There are three different styles and formats of puppetry in West Bengal: Beni Putul (Glove puppetry) is the tradition where a puppet is moved with hands, Dang Putul (Rod puppetry) in which a puppet is moved with a stick, and Taar Putul or Suto Putul (String puppetry) where a puppet is moved with strings. These puppets are made of diverse materials such as clay, paper maché, wood, Shola and are clothed in colourful costumes.

Puppeteers move in troupes to different places, earning a living. They have a sense of reverence towards their art and consider the puppets to be sacred. Around 200 puppeteers professionally practise puppetry in hubs such as Muragacha in Nadia district and Sonamukhi in the district of Bankura.

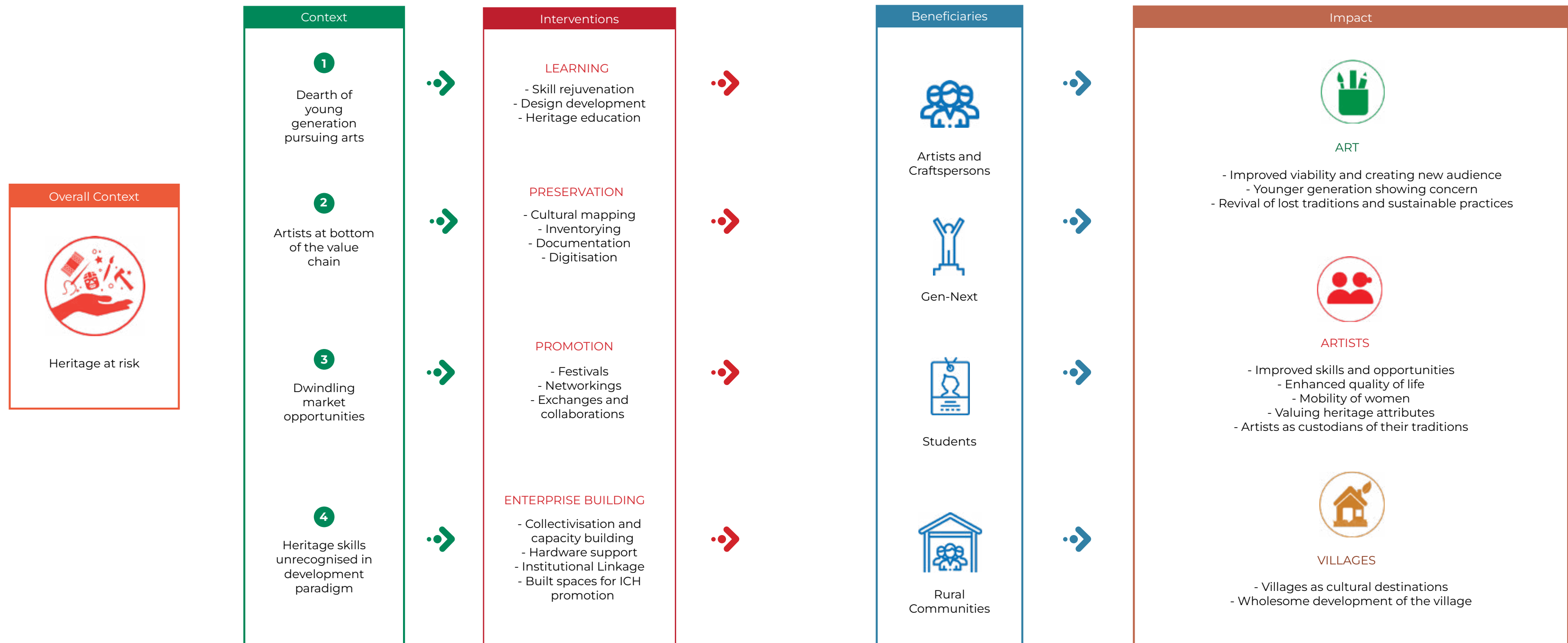
A puppetry performance

Safeguarding culture and advancing development

Today, we are in a critical phase in human development, when nations are reviewing their progress towards the erstwhile Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and shaping a new post pandemic agenda for resilient and sustainable development. There has been a paradigm shift in development strategies which are moving away from industrial/production intensive models to human centred sustainable approaches. At the global level, culture has been recognised as an enabler of growth and sustainable development. The UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022, adopted a declaration affirming culture as a 'global public good'. The global leaders recognised the creative economy as an engine for inclusive growth, and called for the reference to culture in the global development agenda post-2030. Today the role of culture as enabler and driver of sustainable development is well recognised.



Theory of Change



The making of the Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs of West Bengal

The vibrant Rural Craft and Cultural Hubs of West Bengal bear testimony to the amazing cultural industries of this region, and their contributions to sustainable development. The project has been one of the pioneers in revitalising the traditional arts and crafts for socio-economic empowerment of the practitioner communities. A holistic and integrated approach was undertaken addressing the enhancement of creativity, skills, business, and well-being of the artist communities across the state.

The project invested in skill transmission, skill preservation, and promotion, organising artists for heritage management, building and strengthening their enterprises; facilitating direct market linkages and making the artist-led enterprises and collectives market-ready; providing handholding support for fulfilling orders and establishing independent market relationships; enhancing creativity through exposures and international exchanges and

collaborations; creating a collective brand of the communities and their villages through GI, labels, and village cultural tourism; and finally empowering the community artists to become champions of their own development through successful village based cultural economies. Apart from contributing to income enhancement, improved women empowerment in terms of enhanced mobility, agency, and betterment of socio-economic status, can be identified as key outcomes. The Progress Report on Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index of 2023, published by the Niti Aayog, highlights significant poverty reduction in some districts of West Bengal, e.g., Purulia (from 50% to 27%) and Uttar Dinajpur (from 43% to 22%). Growth of grass-root creative enterprise and development of community-led cultural tourism may have been crucial factors contributing to marked poverty reduction and quality of life enhancement in these regions of the state.



Skill transmission training session in Bamnia of Purulia

Safeguarding and sustaining ICH as creative capital of the state

The interventions have led to safeguarding of more than 30 ICH elements. Today the tradition bearers invest in safeguarding and sustaining their art and craft forms through practice, skill transmission, creative exchange and evolution, innovation, and business development. The traditional learning mechanism through *guru—shishya parampara* for folk music and dance genres has been revived. The project has directly contributed in increasing youth engagement in traditional cultural pursuits. Improved prospects from traditional cultural pursuits have also motivated the cultural practitioners in retaining their engagement, thereby reviving many endangered cultural traditions.

Cultural traditions at risk have been successfully revived through documentation of process of crafts, films on the art and craft villages, music and dance forms and skill transmission training. Special emphasis

has been given on safeguarding the endangered traditions. Around 30 documentaries have been developed. Recordings have been taken up of the oral traditions. A total of 17 albums, comprising 500 songs have been recorded. A curriculum has been developed for learning Bhawaiya. Traditional Chhau steps have also been documented as a means of safeguarding the cultural endeavour. Graphic novels have been developed on Chhau, Baul, puppetry, Raibenshe to encourage the next generation to learn about the heritage of West Bengal. The project interventions gave momentum to the initiative of safeguarding endangered cultural traditions such as Chadhar Badar, Patachitra, Rabha and Kenjakura handloom, etc. Improved work conditions have been facilitated through creation of safe infrastructure for metal and wooden craft traditions such as Dokra and wooden doll.





Sabai - a vehicle of women empowerment

Impacting rural economies and societies

The project led to a major transformation not only in the individual lives of the artists but also in the status of their communities as a whole, bringing dignity and identity to their creative professions. Apart from income enhancement, the project has transformed crafts persons working on wage basis to creative micro-entrepreneurs. Many rural artists are now part of the artist enterprises and collectives, and a few who have excelled in their creativity have reached new heights, nationally and internationally. Their digital empowerment has helped them to reach out to new audiences across the globe. As a result of the regeneration of these local cultural industries,

unsafe migration to cities from the villages have significantly reduced. Community based institutions are formed and strengthened, enhancing production and profitability. Now, the rural artist communities have a better quality of life with respectable and decent work. Women from the artist communities are empowered and have successfully put their step forward to cross local and national boundaries. Practitioners of five art forms are also empowered to use certifications, including GI to assert their cultural rights and undertake heritage-sensitive marketing strategies for socio-economic benefit.

Enriched skill repertoire and innovation

The project has facilitated purposive exchange of knowledge, skill and expertise between cultural practitioners of diverse geographical contexts. International collaborations and exchange have contributed to creative exposure and confidence of the artists and have inspired them to continue and innovate with their art and craft forms. Cross border cultural and creative interactions have enriched the artists in a holistic way leading to mutual appreciation and openness towards global creative pursuits. Exposure has led to greater understanding of market needs leading to the orientation of product diversification and better realisation of the value of the artists' work. International visits have in particular, emboldened the female artists and producers.

Denmark, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Germany, Hungary, Wales, Ireland, Portugal in Europe, and China, Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Taiwan, Bahrain, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Bangladesh in Asia. The artists have travelled to reputed festivals such as Womex (World Music Expo), Respect Festival in Czech Republic, Urkult Festival in Sweden, Oimo Festival in Kyrgyzstan. More than 50 artists participated in international festivals during 2022-23 and the total number is around 400. There has been a number of exchanges and collaborations with international musicians and designers. Baul musicians have collaborated in 2022 with Russian Folk Band Otava Yo and Northern Ireland music band Madagan.

Artists have travelled across the continents of Europe, Asia, and North America, including UK, France,



Bengal's cultural heritage going global



Diversified products



Geographical Indication logos for six crafts of West Bengal



Folk-art centre at Pingla in Paschim Medinipur

Festivals celebrating ICH

The artists host their annual village festivals. These festivals celebrating the art and craft forms and tradition bearers centering the folk-art centres have led to cumulative impact on growth and well-being of the communities by connecting folk art and handicrafts village industries with local, national, and international tourism.

Village and district level festivals have also been held in locations with multiple art and craft forms. Dokra festival at Bikna in Bankura and Dariyapaur in Purba Bardhaman, Patachitra festival at Pingla and Chandipur in Paschim and Purba Medinipur respectively, Chhau mask festival at Charida in Purulia, wooden doll festival at Natungram in Purba Bardhaman have helped in recognition and identity of the place among the locals. Presently visitors regularly come to the village and purchase products directly from the artists, thus helping in overall development of the community.

Cultural tourism development in art and craft villages of West Bengal

The project has contributed in transforming the rural art and craft villages of West Bengal into vibrant cultural tourism destinations. Naya, the hub of Patachitra in Paschim Medinipur, Natungram, the wooden doll village in Purba Bardhaman, Bikna, the Dokra hub and Pachmura, the terracotta hub in Bankura, Charida, Chhau mask makers' village in Purulia, and Kushmandi, wooden mask makers' village in Dakshin Dinajpur, have evolved to be destinations, where creative offerings serve as the epicentre of tourism. These hubs attract regular footfall of tourists and are living testimonies of inclusive and responsible tourism, where tourism benefits are percolated to generate grass-root benefits. This approach of community-led cultural hub development in the art and craft villages of West Bengal has enhanced the socio-economic prospects of the residents, boosted pride, recognition and visibility of the art, artists and the villages. These community-led rural tourism hubs provide an alternative, culturally immersive experience production site, transforming mainstream tourism offerings.



Community identity and living museums of rural Bengal

The creation of Folk-art centres inside the artist villages by the West Bengal Khadi and Village Industries Board (WBKBIV) has provided the necessary infrastructure for the arts to flourish through the provision of spaces for work, training, storage, and exhibitions. The centres also house community heritage museums, which act as information hubs showcasing the process of craft making and exemplary work of the artists, as well as a space for practice, learning and collaborations. The community museums are the pride of the people and are playing a key role in safeguarding heritage. They are managed by the respective artist collectives. Presently, there are 14 resource centres across 10 districts in West Bengal.



Dokra festival at Bikna in Bankura



Visitors at Charida in Purulia

Glossary

A

Annadamangal: Annadamangal is a ballad written by Bharatchandra Ray in the 18th century. It eulogises Hindu goddess Annapurna, an incarnation of Parvati, worshipped in Bengal.

Atmatattwa: Atmatattwa is a genre of Baul music which upholds the importance of soul in guiding the body and hence is an aspect of worship.

B

Back-strap loom: It is a traditional weaving technology which consists of sticks, rope, and a strap that is worn around the weaver's waist while weaving. This strap is how the back-strap loom received its name. Most simply, this is an over-under-over-under pattern. The back-strap loom allows the weaver to brocade designs into the fabric as it is woven.

Banbibir Pala: Banbibir Pala is a folk theatre form celebrating the local goddess, Banbibir (forest goddess) practised by the communities residing in the Sundarbans.

Bandna Parab: It is a festival celebrated in autumn as the crops ripen. The indigenous communities worship their cattle and agricultural implements for good harvest.

Baul: Baul is a philosophy and a genre of folk music, especially practised in Bengal. It is the soul music of Bengal and is essentially the music of self-searching.

Beni Putul: Beni Putul is the glove puppetry tradition of West Bengal.

Bhakti movement: The Bhakti movement was a significant religious movement in medieval Hinduism that sought to bring religious reforms to all strata of society by adopting the method of devotion to achieve salvation.

Bhatiyali : Bhatiyali is referred as boatman's song and is inspired by the river-based lifestyles of communities of Bengal delta region.

Bhawaiya: Bhawaiya is the lifestyle music of North Bengal premised on the lived realities of common people.

Bhushnai: Bhushnai is a fine variety of Sitalpati with smooth textures, intricate designs and patterns, developed with extremely fine slips, requiring high skills.

C

Chadar Badar: It is an indigenous Santhal puppetry form.

Charak: It is a Hindu folk festival held in honour of Lord Shiva celebrated on the last day of the Bengali month of Chaitra (mid-March to mid-April).

Charchari: It is a folk drum used by the Santhals.

Chhau: An acrobatic mask dance form practised in Purulia district of West Bengal. The dance form has been inscribed in the Representative List of the ICH of Humanity by UNESCO in 2010.

Chhata Parab: It is a festival celebrated in Purulia during Bhadra Sankranti (last day of the Bengali month of Bhadrpada, i.e., mid-August to mid-September). During Chhata Parab, Santhal men and women dance, sing and choose their life partners.

Chor Chunni Pala: Chor Chunni Pala is a folk drama of the Rajbangshis based on the story of a thief and his wife.

D

Dang Putul: Rod puppetry tradition of West Bengal is also known as Dang Putul.

Dehatattwa: Dehatattwa is a genre of Baul music which refers to the reverence towards human body that epitomises the ultimate truth.

Dharmamangal: It is an important subgenre of Mangalkabya, with narratives of local deities of rural Bengal, the most significant genre of medieval Bengali literature. The texts belonging to this subgenre eulogise Dharmathakur, a folk deity worshipped in the Rarh region of Bengal.

Dhokra: It is a tradition of weaving jute mats on back-strap loom in the rural areas of Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur districts.

Dhol: It is the most popular percussion instrument of Bengal. This is a drum which consists of a wooden barrel with leather coverings stretched over the open ends which is usually played with two sticks.

Dhunuchi Nach: *Dhunuchi* refers to a clay container in which burning incense is kept. In Bengal, devotees dance with *dhunuchi* in their hands, known as Dhunuchi Nach, after religious festivities to bid farewell to the gods and goddess.

Dokra: Dokra is one of the earliest methods of non-ferrous metal casting known to human civilisation.

Domni: It is a unique folk theatre form of Manikchak region of Malda in West Bengal. It presents social satire through which common people voice their grievances and aspirations.

Dotara: It is an indigenous lute with four to five strings. It is an integral part of Bengal's folk music traditions.

Dubki: It is a percussion instrument common to the Bauls of Bengal.

E

Ektara: It is a single stringed instrument used by the Bauls.

G

Gajan: It is a Hindu festival dedicated to Lord Shiva celebrated in the last week of the Bengali month of Chaitra (mid-March to mid-April), culminating in Charak Puja.

Gambhira: It is a satirical folk theatre of Malda district of West Bengal.

GI: A Geographical Indication (GI) is a certification given to products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin. The GI label identifies a product as originating in a given place.

Golden fibre: Jute – a long, rough, shiny bast fibre, due to its colour is also known as golden fibre.

Gomira dance: The Gomira mask dance of Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur, also known as Mukha, has ensued from the animistic practices of the Desi and Pali communities. The Gomira dance or Mukha dance is organised to propitiate the deity to usher in the good forces and drive out the evil forces during the harvesting season.

Guru—shishya parampara: *Guru—shishya parampara* refers to the practice of knowledge transmission from a master to his disciples.

I

ICH: Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

J

Janmashtami: Janmashtami refers to the birthday of Lord Krishna during the Bengali month of Bhadrpada.

Jhumur: Jhumur is an indigenous lifestyle music and dance of the Chota Nagpur plateau.

K

Kamalkosh: Kamalkosh is a fine variety of Sitalpati developed with smooth textures and intricate weaves. Kamalkosh is developed with complex imagery designs using the diagonal weave pattern.

Kantha: Kantha is a traditional form of embroidery where rural women reuse old worn out clothes to stitch them into a surface-ornamented new fabric of varied uses.

Karam: It is a harvest festival celebrated in the Bengali month of Bhadrpada (mid-August to mid-September) by indigenous communities of Chota Nagpur plateau region.

Kemlet and Kambang: Dress worn by the Rabha community women are divided into two parts – the lower part is called Kemlet which is wrapped around their waist like a saree and the upper part is covered with a stole known as Kambang.

Khamak: Khamak, also known as the Gub-gubi or Anandalahari, is a percussive string instrument played by the Bauls of Bengal.

Khol: Khol is one of the oldest percussion instruments of Bengal. It is a barrel-shaped asymmetrical drum where the two faces are of different sizes.

Krishna Leela: Krishna Leela is an auspicious poem, narrating the greatness of Lord Krishna.

Kumbhakar: Kumbhakars or Kumars are traditional potter groups engaged in clay modelling and making earthenwares.

Kushan Pala: Kushan dance or Kushan Nritya or Kushan Gaan is a folk drama performed by the Rajbongshi community of North Bengal based on the Indian epic of Ramayan.

M

Madal: It is a percussion instrument made of clay and leather. This is used mostly by the indigenous communities in their folk songs and dances.

Madur: A herbaceous plant which grows in marshy land in southern and eastern India is used for making exquisite mats called Madur.

Mahogany: Type of wood.

Malakars: Malakars are a community involved in making of Shola products.

Manasa: Manasa is the Hindu goddess of snakes.

Mangalkabya: Mangalkabya is a collection of auspicious poems, verses in honour of a popular god or goddess in Bengal. The poems are associated with gods like Shiva, Manasa (goddess of snakes) and Shitala (worshipped for fertility and curing ailments).

Mandira: Mandira also known as Kartal, or Khartal, is a traditional Indian percussion instrument. It is basically a pair of small hand cymbals.

Masland: Masland is the finest variety of Madur (mats).

Murta: Murta is the grass that grows in Cooch Behar region of West Bengal and is used for making Sitalpati mats.

P

Patachitra: It is a visual storytelling form, where the painters called Patuas unfurl the painted scrolls and presents the story through their songs.

R

Raas Leela: Raas Leela is a traditional dance that Krishna performed with Radha and her friends.

Rabha: Rabha is a minor ethnic community residing in parts of the Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts of West Bengal.

Raibenshe : Raibenshe is a folk martial dance form which evolved from ancient martial art practised by the bodyguards of the kings and the landlords (*zamindars*) of Bengal.

S

Sabai: A type of grass that grows in Purulia, Bankura, Jhargram districts of West Bengal. Women in these districts make wide range of products with the grass.

Sarinda : Sarinda is a bowed instrument of North Bengal with three strings. Hollowed out of a single block of wood, the lower part of the resonator is covered with parchment made of goat skin. This instrument is played with a horse hair bow and is used as an accompaniment mostly in Bhawaiya songs.

Shakha: Conch bangles, which Bengali women wear after marriage, as a mark of conjugality.

Shegun : Type of wood.

Shola / Sholapith: Sholapith, also referred as Indian cork, is a milky-white spongy plant botanically known as *Aeschynomene Aspera*. Shola grows in wild, water logged and marshy areas of Bengal and has unique properties of being pure white and delicate.

Sindur Khela: *Sindur* refers to vermilion, an auspicious mark of conjugality. On Dashami, the last day of Durga Puja, there is a custom of Sindur Khela, where married Bengali women apply vermilion to Goddess Durga and also to each other to mark the eternal bond of marital unions.

Sitalpati: Sitalpati are cooling mats that are commonly found in most of the Bengali households made by weaving together the strips of a plant known as Murta.

Sohrai: Sohrai is a harvest festival.

Sujni Kantha: Sujni is considered as a form of quilting wherein old sarees and dhotis were used as the creative canvas, the cloth was folded twice or thrice and then simple stitches were done on these used clothing to add newness.

T

Taar Putul: String puppets of West Bengal are also called Taar Putul.

Tabla: A *tabla* is a pair of hand drums used in the Indian subcontinent.

Topor and mukut: *Topor* and *mukut* are headgears made out of Shola. These are integral props in Bengali weddings.

Tusu: It is a festival of the women in Chota Nagpur plateau region celebrated in December–January and ends on Makar Sankranti—the last day of the annual agriculture cycle. Tusu represents the source of life and the power of regeneration of nature which is essential to ensure good crops and good harvests that the communities pray for.

Artist Contacts

Handicraft artists

Basketry

Malda

Srinath Tudu	9064766615
Jatin Tudu	7602126100
Sujata Mondol	7501121068
Manoranjan Mondol	9733457947
Anjali Mahali	9382169011

Uttar Dinajpur

Minoti Das	9614557745
Laxmi Das	9907900141
Jayanti Das	7908838848

Dakshin Dinajpur

Gostho Baishya	7407149148
Paltu Baishya	7098201104

Birbhum

Baidyanath Hansda	8617535834
Rajen Hembram	6297871157
Prasanta Kisku	9064295004
Santosh Tudu	9064424846

Purba Bardhaman

Ajit Das	9593519521
Purna Chandra Das	9091695934

Kalimpong

Anand Lepcha	7076753185
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Chhau Mask

Purulia

Falguni Sutradhar	9735129308
Janmenjay Sutradhar	9002765861
Bijoy Sutradhar	9732316254
Monoranjan Sutradhar	9732336157
Dharmendra Sutradhar	9679719388
Raja Sutradhar	8944023377
Baby Pal	8768813116
Anita Sutradhar	8159814410
Kishor Sutradhar	9593843783
Triguni Sutradhar	9564811026
Dwijen Sutradhar	9732085763
Kaberi Dutta	9732848895
Parimal Duta	9593816766
Dharmadas Sutradhar	9732210907
Bhim Sutradhar	9635304740

Clay Doll

Nadia

Rana Mallick	7908938015
Manoranjan Das	7908038190
Satyajit Pal	7364927800
Simanta Pal	9614224173
Debu Pal	9064163721
Sankar Adhikari	9126494214
Pranab Biswas	9474483055

Dhokra

Uttar Dinajpur

Sasthi Das	9733264790
Tulsi Sarkar	8436340400
Chhaya Mondal Sarkar	7098117592
Rina Sarkar	7076904983

Dakshin Dinajpur

Sanchita Sarkar	7872878518
Basanti Sarkar	9635105355
Purnima Sarkar	9593809421
Sandhya Sarkar	9593431226

Dokra

Bankura

Harendranath Rana	9932601095
Somnath Karmakar	9932546842
Gita Karmakar	9933698558
Putul Karmakar	9382914469
Gopon Karmakar	8670518026

Purba Bardhaman

Subho Karmakar	9153255955
Suresh Karmakar	7872287512
Subhash Mondol	9735228086
Guranga Karmakar	8001058766

Kantha

Birbhum

Tajkira Begum	6296761698
Afroza Khatun	6294807939
Lovely Bibi Shekh	8372994373
Najma Sultana	6294827514
Amina Yasmin	7407737627
Mili Bibi	8509779403
Sunehera Khatun	8509621644

Santana Bibi Shekh	8389908029
Anjila Khatun	8108461587

Purba Bardhaman

Bulti Bibi	6297017402
Fatema Shekh	9641998925
Yasmin Begum	8926771793
Tahamina Bibi	8327375738

Kenjakura handloom

Bankura

Rahul Das	9609356528
Montu Dey	9635581831
Mithu Lakshman	8768850800
Baridbaran Rudra	9775715108
Goutam Das	9933461819

Madur

Paschim Medinipur

Alok Jana	9734845044
Tapas Jana	9434942166
Mithu Rani Jana	7585860943
Gouribala Das	9933517974
Gourirani Jana	9635178909
Nishikanta Das	9800314193
Ashok Jana	9733728742
Akhil Jana	9748137691
Arun Khatua	9775134162
Gurupada Mana	8972511596
Lakshmi Sahoo	8972187006
Kalyani Maity	9382960641
Netai Gayen	9735318301
Tapas Gayen	7076177878
Chandan Mula	9734736117
Madan Mohan Mana	8617884163
Srikanto Mondal	9733706946

Purba Medinipur

Sarajubala Giri	9547321445
Ranjit Guchait	9733486806
Biswajit Dutta	9733804115
Gopal Jana	6296195193
Swapan Giri	7586800532
Purna Chandra Giri	9732785430
Ashoke Pradhan	9564300817
Pabitra Samanta	9775257518
Sushanta Sashmal	6294409035
Ajay Giri	8768892531
Bijay Giri	9547376872
Anil Jana	9635777534
Kalachand Pradhan	8327049782

Bengal Patachitra

Pingla, Paschim Medinipur

Swarna Chitrakar	9732799107
Manoranjan Chitrakar	9732731776
Anwar Chitrakar	9733700769
Montu Chitrakar	7407032073
Jaba Chitrakar	8509477383
Amit Chitrakar	9733737318
Chandan Chitrakar	9933461787
Putul Chitrakar	8653979658
Rahaman Chitrakar	6294138130
Rahim Chitrakar	9932851321
Bahadur Chitrakar	9734536388
Madhu Chitrakar	6294064901
Uttam Chitrakar	9734666097
Sonali Chitrakar	6294752199
Mamoni Chitrakar	9932170077
Rupsona Chitrakar	8159931429
Sonia Chitrakar	7585802223
Monimala Chitrakar	9800009556
Seramuddin Chitrakar	9679480125
Johuran Chitrakar	9800990887
Rahim(Choto) Chitrakar	9932356176
Bapi Chitrakar	8509736988
Tagar Chitrakar	9547735754
Maushumi Chitrakar	6295923785
Layla Chitrakar	7557883033
Sanwar Chitrakar	9800314398
Sandhya Chitrakar	6296546532
Suman Chitrakar	9635965120
Sahajahan Chitrakar	9093406772

Chandipur, Purba Medinipur

Shubha Chitrakar	9732612975
Nuruddin Chitrakar	9732742028
Fajlu Chitrakar	8768270837
Fuljan Chitrakar	9932698700
Bablu Patidar	9775536559
Jahadali Saha	9647003182
Nurul Islam	9735747547
Golap Chitrakar	9735747547
Abed Chitrakar	9733601383
Sayera (Khatun) Chitrakar	9733601383
Torab Chitrakar	9775074169
Kalpana Chitrakar	9733647843
Farid Chapri	9775851865
Mukbul Chitrakar	7384658656

Daspur, Paschim Medinipur

Moyna Chitrakar	7029487883
Joydev Chitrakar	9732510500
Bhatu Chitrakar	8967423527
Jarina Chitrakar	7478776155
Rabiya Chitrakar	7427969142

Sabejan Chitrakar 9735450297
Sona Chitrakar 7479296680
Sohan Chitrakar 9144170558

Narajol, Paschim Medinipur

Haru Chitrakar 7699942322
Raju Chitrakar 9932166831
Sayra Chitrakar 8116377989
Tiya Chitrakar 9800653577
Pampa Chitrakar 6294575270
Ananda Chitrakar 9903286474
Ayesha Chitrakar 8101311811
Alimuddin Chitrakar 9734545575
Tumpa Chitrakar 9635358782
Hakim Chitrakar 8116814193

Birbhum

Jameer Patua 7407263219
Muktar Patua 9593301040
Laltu Patua 9593301040
Salema Patua 9564640068
Milan Chitrakar 8926859525
Mansur Patua 8927819951
Ripan Patua 9733191411
Chayna Patua 7407975204
Babu Patua 7864911870
Sabu Patua 8250274664
Moktar Patua 8972008814
Phulchand Patua 9735725716
Alok Patua 9647471870
Bakul Patua 8972936621
Jhuma Khatun 9734062417
Rintu Patua 8145936626
Rabi Potua 9733615466
Kadam Patua 9641381176

Majramura, Purulia

Baul Chitrakar 7864079673
Sattikapur Chitrakar 7602108634
Henadhan Chitrakar 6294567459
Khemananda Chitrakar 7863960028
Manik Chitrakar 816 7534213
Rabi Chitrakar 9609277363
Dijalal Chitrakar 9002547405
Bijoy Chitrakar 7584940217
Manbodh Chitrakar 9883878793
Goutam Chitrakar 8927795836

Lohadih, Bankura

Madan Chitrakar 7810950705
Dilip Chitrakar 9609027113
Atul Chitrakar 6294945322
Jharu Chitrakar 7001446509
Ashok Chitrakar 8768459712

Parul Chitrakar 9641532143
Trilochon Chitrakar 8317861658
Sishir Chitrakar 8389806768

Rabha handloom

Alipurduar

Urmila Rabha 7384639102
Ranika Rabha 9832872258
Menonti Rabha 9064299277

Sabai

Purulia

Dipali Mura 9907026586
Ashima Tantubai 9749173911
Baby Munda 9382716921
Niyati Singh 9476461696
Sima Murmu 9748195166

Jhargram

Hiralal Mahato 9064542734
Mridula Mahato 9735891162
Bharati Dutta 8944018298
Kakoli Shaw 6295683992
Jharna Patra 8116911633
Pratima 9641807332
Kalyani Mahato 9749413732
Rekha Mahato 9547767078

Bankura

Jolly Sardar 8145669144
Srabani Tati 9564486154
Chobi Karmakar 8695219531

Shola

Madhusudan Das 8918221618
Binod Das 8016539051
Sovarani Das 8372811966
Sandhyarani Das 9635442353
Priyanka Roy 7866043529
Parthanath Malakar 6296397519
Gourab Malakar 9064390980
Samir Saha 9832231113
Sandip Biswas 9733563778
Mukesh Saha 9932408069
Kamal Malakar 9474009311
Kanchan Malakar 9563200730
Ranjan Ray 9609095941
Biswanath Malakar 9734266820
Mallika Halder 6294315703

Sourav Halder 8697829986

Sitalpati

Cooch Behar - I Block

Pradip Roy 8670805055
Ramchandra Paul 9883996542
Santosh Bhowmik 6296703152
Rina Dey 7430959760
Malati Dhar 7001770175
Sushama Dey 7908252137
Sandhya Rani Dey 8906215794
Gita Rani Pal 9749241908
Jyostna Dutta 9064745638

Tufangunj - I Block

Kajal Paul 9382043762
Manindra Ch. Dey 8016390114
Bhajan Dey 7811054684
Shipriti Dey 7866894218

Terracotta

Bankura

Dipankar Kumbhakar 9547163124
Brajnath Kumbhakar 8001814005
Bhutnath Kumbhakar 9732187161
Tapas Kumbhakar 9641565596
Kanchan Kumbhakar 6294842851
Biswanath Kumabhakar 8617026403
Mahadeb Kumbhakar 6295474950

Uttar Dinajpur

Dulal Roy 9733435602
Hrishikesh Roy 7908606232
Pankaj Pal 7501451522
Ramani Mohan Pal 760258585
Manoranjan Pal 9832679838
Sukumar Pal 9339234467
Sukumar Pal (Senior) 9614650437

Birbhum

Kanti Pal 9475671241

North 24 Parganas

Uttam Pal 9830586957

Wooden Mask

Dakshin Dinajpur

Siten Sarkar 8145269262
Paresh Chadra Sarkar 9733462109
Sankar Das 9593358360

Tulu Sarkar 9609937877
Nandi Sarkar 8158932313
Ananta Sarkar 8145157712
Kalyan Sarkar 9593601647
Dipak Sarkar 9732894053
Sanjulal Sarkar 9734958839
Shib Soren 8967967318
Gostho Baishya 7407149148
Goutam Baishya 9733362566
Paltu Baishya 7098201104
Shanti Baishya 9593078835

Wooden Doll

Purba Bardhaman

Uttam Bhaskar (President) 9732908249
Dilip Sutradhar (Secretary) 9333386501
Bijoy Sutradhar (Treasurer) 7872214736
Dilip Bhaskar 9733902091
Manik Sutradhar 9932469992
Sujoy Sutradhar 8637023054
Subhash Sutradhar 6297625701
Ghoton Sutradhar 8918268118
Toton Sutradhar 8967110814
Joydeb Bhaskhar 9153281453
Amal Bhaskhar 9064793569
Gour Sutradhar 9832570996
Rakhi Sutradhar 8167309627
Tinamoni Bhaskar 7908678503

Performing artists

Baul

Nadia

Babu Fakir 9733948841
Arman Fakir 9733956858
Khaibar Fakir 9647190624
Ranjit Sarkar (Kartick) 9732123965
Subhadra Baulani 9932205548
Arjun Mondal 9732799811
Ananda Sardar 7797541636
Prafulla Biswas 9932754206
Uttara Baidya 6295019652
Shyam Khyapa 9635726835

Murshidabad

Chote Golam 9732917198
Mallika Akar 8617835245
Rashidul Fakir 7029950442
Shyamsundar Das 9635714002

Birbhum

Rina Das Baulani	9800120227
Rabi Das Baul	9614196848
Nityapriya Das	9609031427
Anath Mal	8001294718
Sadhu Das Baul	9732892002
Bama Prasad Singha	9732008599
Prodyut Bala	7477543941

Purba Bardhaman

Girish Mondal	8637549294
Pijush Baul	8637549294
Bhajan Das Bairagya	9733907558

Bankura

Chandan Roy	6297110496
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Bhawaiya**Alipurduar**

Kaushalya Roy	8597332070
Pradyut Roy	6295745322
Nityananda Adhikary	9564168770

Cooch Behar

Najrul Islam	8670918772
Himadri Dewri	9434885357
Sanjay Roy	7550931556
Tumpa Barman	9733007844

Jalpaiguri

Dipankar Roy Dakua	9932257022
Anindita Roy	8617481902
Sipra Roy	9932209479

Bhatiyali

Sourav Mondal	9830710713
Bishnupada Sarkar	8159845715
Nabanita Mondal	9002587309

Chhau**Purulia**

Biren Kalindi	8972679889
Jagannath Chaudhury	9933409339
Binadhar Kumar	9434655963
Sougata Mahato	9932283541
Bhuban Kumar	9932530321
Baghambar Singmura	9735163475
Kartik Singmura	9800938965
Sanjay Mahato	7001968527

Raibenshe**Birbhum**

Rakkhakar Pramanik	8016474415
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Murshidabad

Gopal Chandra Sarkar	9474078276
Basudeb Bhalla	8170808528
Sentu Bitter	9064426950
Ajit Konai	9733686835
Prokash Bitter	9609285367
Kajal Bitter	9564155048
Shakti Doloi	9734585234

Purba Bardhaman

Rajesh Hazra	8101045372
Bablu Hazra	8768185220
Aloy Pandit	9735342737

Gambhira**Malda**

Adwaita Biswas	7001684334
----------------	------------

Domni**Malda**

Abhiram Mondal	9932962785
Sachin Mondal	7076032776

Mukha**Uttar Dinajpur**

Sachindranath Sarkar	9932530517
----------------------	------------

Dakshin Dinajpur

Jagadish Sarkar	7407149938
-----------------	------------

Puppetry**Nadia**

Ranjan Roy	9609095941
------------	------------

Chadar Badar**Purba Bardhaman**

Dilip Murmu	7585888991
Lakhiram Kisku	7863929829
Som Soren	7908230373
Fagu Hansda	8293529166
Sunil Tudou	9832271038

Jhumur**Bankura**

Fatik Sahis	9474047098
Sunil Pal	9474668582

Purulia, Balarampur

Muktinath Mahato	8116173646
Tarapada Singh Sardar	9932185205
Ashimananda Kumar	9933428688

South 24 Parganas, Satjelia

Sujit Sardar	8670529984
Shila Sardar	8348635188
Gautam Sardar	6290350178
Bandan Sardar	8348854904
Bablu Sardar	8001490685

Adivasi song and dance**Paschim Bardhaman**

Mugli Hembram	9382471519
Caran Hembram	9064893534
Bholanath Murmu	9475149533
Panmani Mardi	7719213803

Rabha song and dance**Jalpaiguri**

Nirmal Rabha	9932635226
Phoolmati Rabha	9064982728
Monika Rabha	6296585576
Minanti Rabha	8207076567



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“Cultural matters are integral parts of the lives we lead. If development can be seen as enhancement of our living standards, then efforts geared to development can hardly ignore the world of culture.”

Amartya Sen

