



Rural Craft & Cultural Hubs of West Bengal



Department of MSME &T
Government of West Bengal



CHAU MASK

Face of War Dance

“A nation’s culture resides in the hearts
and in the soul of its people

Mahatma Gandhi

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West Bengal is a treasure trove of natural and cultural heritage. The intangible cultural heritage of Bengal is an exemplary instance of the aesthetic lineage of Bengal. Utilitarian lifestyle items like basketry made with date palm leaves and Sabai grass, hand spun and hand woven jute rugs (Dhokra), mats made with cane slips (Sitalpati) or Madurkathi (Madur), pottery, Kantha-spreads, decorative and ritualistic items made out of Shola and others, reflect a curious fusion of indigenous craftsmanship and utility. Bengal’s art and craft reflect cultural history, ethnic roots, and lifestyle in-tune with nature. Variety of masks, Dokra and metal work, range of indigenous weaves and embroideries, dolls, masks and figurines curved out of wood are examples of Bengal’s artistry. Culture of Bengal is enriched by the mellifluous tunes of the Baul, Bhawaiya, Bhatiyali singers, rapturous dances of Chau, Raibenshe and Jhumur, storytelling traditions like puppetry and Patachitra, and folk theatres like Gambhira, Banbibir Pala among other folk forms.

The Rural Craft and Cultural Hub (RCCH) Project is an initiative of the Department of Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises and Textiles (MSME&T) and UNESCO aiming to rejuvenate the rich cultural heritage of West Bengal and strengthen rural creative enterprise. The journey started in 2013 and the RCCH project currently covers 50,000 handicraft and folk artists across the state. It has strengthened the ecosystem supporting the transmission of traditional skills in art and craft, fostered direct market linkage, engaged youth in pursuing their traditions, and promoted cultural tourism to the villages of the artists. The project is indeed a testimonial to the contribution of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to sustainable development, social inclusion and also to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





CHAU MASK

Face of War Dance

Chau dance is indigenous to the eastern part of India and it has been inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. Having its origin in martial arts, Chau dance involves vigorous movements, skillful acrobatic feats and leaps. In Purulia's Chau, the dancers wear large stylized masks. The Chau mask makers make various masks of gods, goddesses, and other mythological characters and animals. In Purulia, the mask makers reside in Charida village. These Chau masks are decorated with beads, sequins, and vibrant colours, giving them a dramatic look.

Chau Mask of Purulia received Geographical Indication Status in 2018.



CRAFT HUBS

District: Purulia

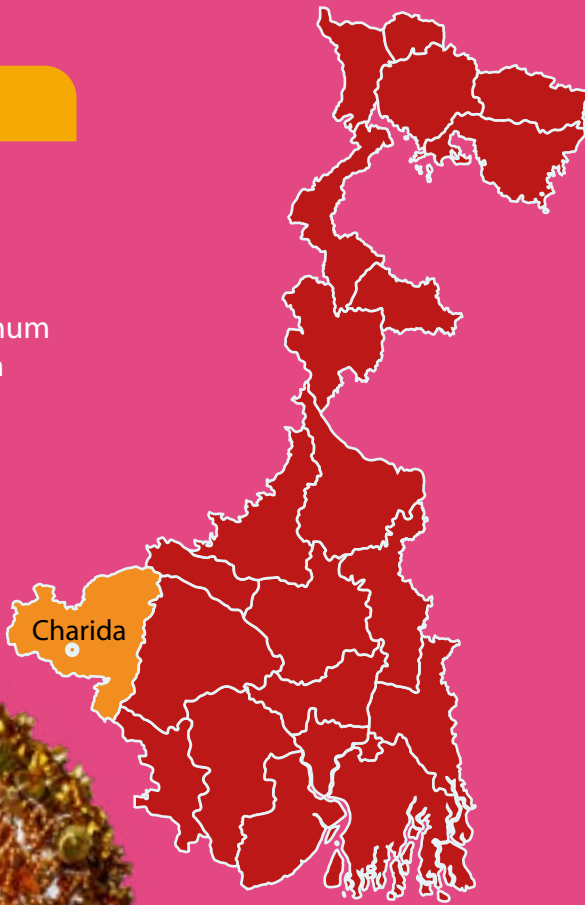


Village: Charida

How to reach?

36 kms away from Barabhum

62 kms away from Purulia
(nearest railway stations)





CHARIDA

The art of Chau mask making started in Charida village during the rule of King Madan Mohan Singh Deo of Baghmundi around 150 years back. There are 377 artists practicing the tradition in the village. The increasing popularity of Chau dance in both national and global locales has eventually increased the demand for Chau Masks. The mask makers now have also secured a market for the masks and make smaller masks for home decor and souvenirs.

A folk-art centre with a community museum has been developed in the village by the West Bengal Khadi and Village Industries Board. Annual folk festival is held in the village, and tourists visit the hub throughout the year. Charida has grown as one of the unique cultural tourism destinations of the state, witnessing visitors throughout the year. Artist and scholars visit the hub to learn about the process of making Chau Masks and collaborate with these talented craftspeople. The artists participate in State and National festivals and are eager for further opportunities of purposive and collaborative exchange.



Artists at Charida
Men - 240 | Women - 137

THE MASK MAKERS

The Chau mask makers of Charida have made a name nationally for their wonderful craftsmanship. Men are mostly involved in preparation of the paper mâché mould while women are more involved in adornment and finishing of the products. Falguni Sutradhar, Kishor Sutradhar, Triguni Sutradhar, Monoranjan Sutradhar, Dwijen Sutradhar, Jagadish Sutradhar, Dharmadas Sutradhar, Porimol Duta and Dharmendra Sutradhar are the renowned artists of the area. With added prospects associated with mask making, young artists are also keen in pursuing the tradition. Bijoy Sutradhar, Janmenjay Sutradhar, Bishal Sutradhar and Raja Sutradhar are young artists who are getting acclaimed for their work. Dharmendra Sutradhar and Porimol Sutradhar have received state level awards. Women artists like Anita, Kaveri and Baby Pal have excelled in the craft.

The artists have formed a collective by the name of Purulia Chau Mukhosh Silpi Unnayan Samity Charida which undertakes collective efforts in furthering promotion, practice and safeguarding the tradition of Chau Mask making.

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





MAKING PROCESS

Chau masks are made from paper, mud and clay and undergo many interim processes before taking the final form. First, a clay model of a mask is made and dried in direct sunlight to make it hard. It is then covered with powdered ash and layers of papers moistened with gum are pasted on this powdered mask. It is again covered with clay. Upon drying, strips of clothes are pasted on it. The mask is then polished. Once dried, the first initial layer of clay is removed. Then, the first coat of white paint is applied.

Finally, the mask is coloured and decorated with embellishments according to the characters they represent. Wool, jute, foil, bamboo sticks, plastic flowers and beads are used for ornamentation. Both the male and female members of a family are involved in mask making. Young boys and girls learn the artistry hands-on from their elders.



1



Preparation of clay mould

2



Drying

3



Lining with paper

4



Painting

5



Adornment and finishing

PRODUCTS

The Chau dancers wear ornate and elaborate masks and dazzling costumes made of tinsel and brocade. The masks used in Purulia's Chau are elaborate and ornamental. Each of the characters in the play have distinct masks. The masks mainly portray mythological figures like Goddess Durga, Ganesh, and Demons. These masks also depict animal and bird heads like peacocks, tigers, monkeys, lions, etc.

Some of the artists also make idols. The crafts persons have improvised their craft into different decorative items to further strengthen their market and bring innovation in their creative produce.



TRADITIONAL MASKS









CHAU MASKS
FOR DECOR







FOLK-ART CENTRE

The folk-art centre in Charida showcases different types and diversities of Chau Masks.



CHAU MASK FESTIVAL

Annually the Chau mask makers organise the Chau Mask Festival at Charida, showcasing their intricate artistry. The festival aims to create awareness about the Charida village, where the community has been carrying out the tradition of making ornate masks for Chau dance for generations. Over the years the village has evolved as a cultural tourism destination in Purulia, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the vibrant cultural tapestry of the district.



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