

Chhau dance

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In news: Various forms of Chhau dance performed during the three-day 17th Dhauli-Kalinga Mahotsav in Odisha recently.

About the Chhau dance

- The Chhau dance of Eastern Indian states Odisha, Jharkhand, and West Bengal is a blend of martial traditions, temple rituals, folk and popular performance of this region.
- **Origin:** Chhau dance, also spelled as Chau or Chhaau, originated in the Purulia district of West Bengal with martial, tribal and folk traditions, with origins in eastern India. Its origin is also traceable to indigenous forms of dance and martial practices.

Key features

- Chhau dance is a tradition from eastern India that **enacts episodes from epics including the Mahabharata and Ramayana, local folklore and abstract themes**
- The medium of dance and a music ensemble that consists primarily of indigenous drums.
- In its traditional context, the dance is intimately **connected with the festivals and rituals of the eastern region.**
 - Important among these is the **Chaitra Parva** celebrated in the month of April.
 - The month of Chaitra celebrates the advent of spring and the start of the harvesting season.
- The melody is interwoven and is provided by reed pipes like the Mohuri, Turi-Bheri and Shehnai.
- **Though vocal music is not used in Chhau, the melodies are based on songs from the Jhumur folk repertoire, the devotional Kirtan, classical Hindustani 'ragas', and traditional Oriya sources.**

- Dhol, Dhumsa, Nagada, Chadchadi and Jhanj provide accompaniment to Chhau dance.
- Its vocabulary of movement includes mock combat techniques, stylized gaits of birds and animals and movements modelled on the chores of village housewives.
- Chhau is taught to male dancers from families of traditional artists or from local communities.
- The dance is performed at night in an open space to traditional and folk melodies, played on the reed pipes *mohuri* and *shehnai*.
- **The reverberating drumbeats of a variety of drums dominate the accompanying music ensemble.**
- **It is in the Odia speaking regions where Chhau was prevalent in the past** and is now being practised in the present. These are **Mayurbhanj, Saraikela, Puruliya**. In the past, these three regions were under one administration.
- **In the early stage of Chhau dance, masks were used in all the three forms of the dance – Mayurbhanj, Seraikela, and Puruliya.**
- **The masks were discarded by the Mayurbhanj Chhau later.** In the beginning, this dance form was confined to swordplay, with a sword in one hand and the shield in the other.
- Masks are an integral part of the dances of Seraikela and Purulia

Types of Chhau Dance

It is found in three styles named after the location where they are performed, i.e.

1. The Purulia Chau of Bengal
2. The Seraikella Chau of Jharkhand, and
3. The Mayurbhanj Chau of Odisha.

A brief note on the types of Chhau dance

The Purulia Chau of Bengal:

- The *Chhau* Dance originates in the Purulia district in West Bengal and draws inspiration from martial arts and combative training.
- This form of dance is a means to portray stories to the audience, which is why **elaborate masks** and **headgear associated with battle and war** are worn during the performance.
- Purulia's Chhau Dance is usually performed during important ceremonies that have a strong religious significance, such as the Gajan Festival.
- They are also, at times, performed during weddings and on the Sun Festival.
- Mostly, these dances are performed on the floor, as opposed to an elevated stage, with the audience members sitting in a circle or a semi-circle around them to watch.

The Seraikella Chhau:

- The Seraikella Chhau developed in Seraikela, the present day administrative headquarters of the Seraikela Kharsawan district of Jharkhand
- Seraikella is a part of the historic Singhbhum region and its energetic and spirited dance form evolved from martial art techniques called Parikhanda.
- Exercises practiced by soldiers, the paikas, became more stylised in both appearance and execution of this dance.
- It also masked dance
- The unique feature of **Seraikella Chhau is** the complete absence of Vachikabhinaya (vocal support)

Mayurbhanj Chhau

- Mayurbhanj, located in the northern part of Odisha is famous for its Chhau dance
- The warriors in this dance dress in their

traditional costumes and follow strict techniques of Chhau while performing the dance.

- **This form of dancers do not use masks, instead use face paints**
- In Mayurbhanj Chhau, in order to make the body fit and flexible to learn all the techniques, the trainees have to practise their expressions by doing different types of exercises that stress on their body movements
- Mayurbhanj Chhau is performed in solo, duet and group