



Chhuo Dance in Purulia : Preservation of Bengal Folk Culture in Respect of Historical Value

KEYWORDS

Tribal/folk culture, cultural value of Chhuo Dance, social Values, conservation of folk culture.

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ABSTRACT

India is marked by its rich traditional heritage of Tribal/Folk Arts and Culture. The tribal/folk art and cultural forms have played an instrumental role in reinforcing national integrity, crystallizing social solidarity, fortifying communal harmony, intensifying value-system and promoting the elements of humanism among the people of the country. West Bengal is not an exception of that cultural tradition. The districts of West Bengal, like Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapur are belonging in to the same cultural periphery. Among various dance forms, the Chhuo Dance is popular in West Bengal, India and also in various countries of the globe.

The Manbhum, presently belongs to the Purulia District in West Bengal. In 1838 A.D, Purulia was formed as a district town of Manbhum; but previously, it was under a division Chottonagpur in Behar. Many areas of the region are under Jharkhand state have witnessed conscious efforts to conserve their tribal/folk culture for the purpose of enriching their heritage culture. But we are not trying to preserve tribal/folk culture like Chhuo dance.

Socially and economically marginalised tribal people used to express their devotion to God Siva, through Chhuo dance. At present, however, it is a form of dance. It has high socio-cultural value and enriches our popular cultural heritage. But the community, dancers, artists, who act as carriers and follower of this culture, are growing to poor day by day. These marginalised and poor people are not going to stop their cultural tradition. The State government can preserve this popular folk culture through financial support. Academically this art and cultural tradition can be marked as heritage culture, by which this form of cultural tradition enriches our popular folk culture and we can enrich our cultural history.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES :

Aim of this paper is to analyse the tribal folk culture of West Bengal. I want to access socio-cultural value of Chhuo dance in Purulia. The other important subject is that recognition and preservation is necessary for this form of dance and culture, which is highlighted in this paper.

METHODOLOGY :

Initially to prepare this paper at first, I have collected information from several research journals and printed materials about this cultural heritage and its conservation. Then I have observed the empirical reality of this tribal/folk tradition in the present Indian scenario. West Bengal has much tribal folk culture which is enriching our cultural network. Santali language, folk song, dance are preserved by West Bengal government. For this influence, I have gathered lot of historical information about folk and popular cultural heritage recognition & conservation and finally scientifically interpret this with the help of socio-cultural & economic approach.

DISCUSSION :

India is marked by its rich traditional heritage of Tribal/Folk Arts and Culture. Since the days of remote past, the diversified art & cultural forms generated by the tribal and rural people of India, have continued to evince their creative magnificence. Apart from their outstanding brilliance from the perspective of aesthetics, the tribal/folk art and cultural forms have played an instrumental role in reinforcing national integrity, crystallizing social solidarity, fortifying communal harmony, intensifying value-system and promoting the elements of humanism among the people of the country. However with the passage of time and advent of globalization, we have witnessed the emergence of a synthetic homogeneous macro-culture. Under the influence of such a voracious all-pervasive macro-culture, the diversified heterogeneous tribal/folk cultures of our country are

suffering from attrition and erosion. Thus the stupendous socio-cultural exclusivity of the multifarious communities at the different nooks and corners of our country has become glaring. This paper is concentrated on Chhuo dance in West Bengal as well as in Purulia District.

The Manbhum, presently belongs to the Purulia District in West Bengal. In 1838 A.D, Purulia was formed as a district town of Manbhum, but previously it was under a division of Chottonagpur in Behar. Many areas of the region are presently under Jharkhand state and they also try to conserve their tribal/folk culture for the purpose of enriched their heritage culture. The district of West Bengal, like Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapur are belonging in to the same cultural periphery. The popular folk musical traditions in this area are Badna, Tusu, Udhwoa, Jat, Beha, Jhumur and etc. On the other hand the popular folk dance forms include Nachni, Natua, Karam, Pata, Kathi, Jhumur, Vagta, Chhuo and etc. Among of these dance forms, the Chhuo Dance is most popular in West Bengal, India and also various countries around the world.

In Manbhum region, 'Chhuo' means joking or joking with artistic approach, for this reason the form of dance is popularly brows as the Chhuo dance. Another approach is that all of the participants or artists are all boys or male, no girl or lady is to participate. In Kurmal language, boy is called 'Chhoa' or 'Cholla' ; for that reason this form of dance is called Chhuo dance. According to the archaeologist, Popupati Prashad Mahato, Chhuo Dance is an assimilation of six varieties of dance form, like Nachni, Natua, Bhagta, Kritan, Pata, and Santali. The dance is generally a dramatic presentation and includes masked actors. So, mask is the most necessary prop in Chhuo dance. This dance is being performed as a devotion of god Siva, in the local ritual of 'Vagtaparab', at the time of Bengali Charitra-Parab. Another side is that Chhuo dance gives amusement and en-

tainment. This dance is performed locally from Bengali Chaitra Sankranti to the first week of Ashar. The time and place of performance have modified with time as new venues were included.

Socially and economically marginalised tribal people express their devotion to God Siva, through Chhuo dance. Now a day, the themes have expanded to encapsulate the stories of Puranas, hunting and social wild heroic story. The most remarkable thing of chhuo dance are 1. It serves as an expression of the cultural tradition, of marginalised and poor people 2. This form is produced and performed by male, not female. 3. Wild heroism and bravado sense is the main sentiment of the Chhuo dance. Chhuo dance is specially practiced by Mahato and Kurmimunda communities of Bengal. Most of the artists come from lower economic groups and subaltern castes. In modern times, it attract digital cinema, serials, music, cyber culture, yet even now Chhuo dance of tribal, poor and marginalised people's culture are learned and performed all over India and the world. It has a cultural value in the Bengali cultural scenario.

Males perform in Chhuo dance from the earliest period. Devotion and worship of god Siva is the central theme of this dance. The paوران story of god Siva and his glorious history is expressed through this dance. Lower castes and poor tribe's express their devotion to Supreme God through this cultural practice. Dance is related to the soft and flexible concepts or character, which is generally reflected in the supple movements of the female body. But the culture of Chhuo dance is not like that. Here male characters are performed on the stage, but on the other side the audience and the judges consist of both males and females. The females are enjoying of high status, they are the judge of this culture.

Chhuo dance are performed on the narratives of puranas about god Siva, on success of hunting, and yarns of regal chivalry. This indicates chhuo dances were patronised by kings The changing socio-economic situation bound to change the theme of Chhuo dance but till now Chhuo dance is a of bold, heroic dance form. The formation of this dance is more significant, because good body structure, flexible body, wildness, boldness and humour are necessary attributes of a dancer. The wild, bolt life of people is reflected through this dance, which is the origin of pragmatic period, related to agricultural people and also those people who are accustomed with nature. These characters are similar to the tribal/folk dance of Tamilnadu and Kerala. Their dance form is wild, bold and warrior/ hunter like attitude, but in Bengal chhuo dance mindless bold attitude with artistic approach. So this cultural tradition must be preserve for enriching our cultural heritage, otherwise we would lose a vital aspect of our cultural legacy.

Chhuo dance is represents a syncretise mingling of three cultural trends. The munda tribal culture, purulia's local culture and Hindu worship tradition melt in this dance form. Earlier, they used to start their performance after offering devotion to lord Ganesa, now a day dancer starts their performance after paying obeisance to Lord Nataraja. This form starts in a jocular vain, but it is transformed as an aesthetic expression of popular/ folk/tribal culture.

The types of mask are also variable in Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa. In Baripada (Orissa), Chhuo dancers do not use mask, they uses colour and cosmetic directly on the face. Sericalla's (Jarkhand) Chhuo dancers use thin and colourful

paper mask, and in Purulia (Bengal) they use thin, colourful paper mask, which decorated with ornaments. Benga Chhuo dancers are directly use colour with cosmetic and decorate it with colourful straps like Potua, in early time. In Bagmundi dancers used wooden mask but at present they prefer lighter masks, therefore, they use paper and cotton mask, with colour and ornaments. As the colour, style and getup of the masks are improved, it hassled to gradually enhancement of the amount/ cost of mask. Ornament, colour, dresses are also essential accessories along with masks.

Occupation / jobs are also generating by this Chhuo dance and market also developed. Tailors, carpenters, colour mechanics, music instrument manufacturers are also engaged in this enterprise. The value of mask is Rs. 50/- to 1000/- according to recent market price. The Chhuo groups are buying their mask and accessories during the Bengali month of Charitra. But it is not possible to supply masks within one or two month. So mask manufacturers are engaged throughout of the year, but there is no customer. So they bound to sell masks to stockists or mediators of this trade. Mask manufacturers are not able to get the proper value for their wares. On the other side, the poor villagers, artists, dancers are bound to buy masks at high price. Dancers and mask manufacturers are enmeshed in poverty. A Chhuo group is to be formed by the cost nearly Rs. 10,000/-, which they collect from donation, grant or chanda by the members of this group. The poor artists are the follower and performer of this culture and they are exploded by those treading groups. The famous market for these tools is Charida in Bagmundi, Dimdiha in Joypur Police station, Jamdabad in Kenda police station, Dubrajpur village in Purulia police station, Manbazar, Balorampur and Jhalda, etc. The marginalised, poor people are becoming poor as they hold on to preserving this cultural tradition. But they are not without hope; they are trying incessantly to make the performances financially viable. Mask manufacturers, tailors, carpenters, musical instrumentalists, dancers, treading group, ordinance and supporters all of are engaged in this culture, which number of volume is high.

Indian government awarded 'Padmashree' to Gambhir Sing Munda in 1981, as a famous Chhuo dancer. In 1983 he was also awarded by 'Sangit Natta Academy'. His dance is famous and popular in India and even abroad. Napal Mahato is another remarkable artist in this field, who has been also, honoured 'Padmashree' by the Indian Government. Chhuo dance is famous in Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and all around the world. But we are carrying out our responsibility by merely giving one or two awards to some famous artists. Why are not interested in bestowing honour of these artists, community, who are the follower and carrier of this heritage culture? Would be we able to preserve this tribal cultural heritage, which has enriched our knowledge about tribal cultural heritage? If we help by giving financial support to these artists and communities, for preservation and continuance this kind of cultural tradition, this will be more effective. Kothari commission has suggested the development village universities for high-lighting village, community, folk and traditional culture. But the India Government, West Bengal Government and education ministry of state and centre are not aware or take any stapes to preserve about it. West Bengal government is protecting labour of 'bedi' industries and their child, by financial support. But it is more important and relevant to give financial support of these artists, their child and community, for preservation and enrichment of Bengal folk/ tribal culture.

CONCLUSION :

West Bengal Chhuo dance is one of the remarkable tribal/folk dance, which is famous in Bengal, Jharkhand, Orissa and also world cultural platform. Mask manufacturers, tailors, carpenters, musical instrumentalists, dancers, treading group, ordinance and supporters all of are engaged in this culture, which number of volume is high. It has high socio-cultural value and enriching our popular cultural heritage. But the community, dancers, artists, who are playing as carrier and follower of this culture, are going ruined. Kothari commission has suggested the development village universities for highlighting village, community, folk and traditional culture. We can take a plan to preserve and highlighting in the global cultural academia. We can make a plan to develop a complex where displayed their lifestyle, short-museum, food and also present a stage performance of chhuo dace, which can enriched our tourism industries also. In spite of to preserve chhuo dancers by giving identity card, State government can preserve this popular folk culture through financial support. Thus a cultural tradition may be marked as heritage culture, by which this form of cultural tradition enriched our popular folk culture and cultural history also.

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