



Crafting Stories of Tradition and Culture in India: A Case Study on Chhau Masks

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Abstract: Masks carry significant cultural meaning deeply tied to religious tradition, particularly Hindu mythology. They allow performers to conceal their identity and depict mythological or spiritual characters, heightening a performance's dramatic effect and emotional depth, while serving as both a prop and a medium of spiritual connection that helps performers convey character through movement and gesture. Several traditional Indian dance forms use masks in this way, among them the Chhau dance, which originated in the Purulia district of West Bengal. Although the Chhau mask carries strong cultural value, the craft of making it lacks economic stability for its artisans and visibility beyond West Bengal. This chapter therefore documents the history, materials, and manufacturing process of the Chhau mask, alongside the socio-economic condition of its artisans, the challenges they face, and efforts toward the craft's upliftment, and proposes strategies for improving both the craft's standing and the artisans' lives. Primary data was collected through interviews and observation, providing insight into present conditions and challenges. The study is intended to help concerned authorities shape policy for improving artisan livelihoods, and to help designers and researchers devise system design strategies toward the same end.

Keywords: Mask making, performance craft, Charida village, Chhau dance, Indian mythology, artisan livelihoods.

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