

# Chhau Dance

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## Context:

As an independent art form, Chhau stands at a critical crossroad. Its easy adaptability has diluted its essential form, rising concerns about its originality.

## Background:

Chhau, the dance form, defies every label. It is too codified to be folk, too folk to be classical, and too classical and too folk to be martial.

## About Chhau Dance :

1. Chhau dance is a tradition from eastern India (West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha.) that enacts episodes from epics including the Mahabharata and Ramayana, local folklore and abstract themes.
2. Its three distinct styles hail from the regions of Seraikella, Purulia and Mayurbhanj, the first two using masks.
3. The Seraikella Chhau developed in Seraikela, the present day administrative headquarters of the Seraikela Kharsawan district of Jharkhand, the Purulia Chhau in Purulia district of West Bengal and the Mayurbhanj Chhau in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha.
4. The Chhau dance is mainly performed during regional festivals, especially the spring festival of Chaitra Parva which lasts for thirteen days and in which the whole community participates
5. Its origin is traceable to indigenous forms of dance and martial practices.
6. The Chhau blends within it forms of both dance and martial practices employing mock combat techniques (called khel), stylized gaits of birds and animals (called chalis and topkas) and movements based on the chores of village housewives (called uflis)
7. 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.
8. In 2010 the Chhau dance was inscribed in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.