



e-ISSN:2582-7219



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY

Volume 7, Issue 9, September 2024



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

Impact Factor: 7.521



6381 907 438



6381 907 438



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www.ijmrset.com



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Science, Engineering and Technology (IJMRSET)

(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Scholarly Indexed, Open Access Journal)

The Role of Music, Dance, and Musical Instruments in Shaping Folk Culture in Purulia and its Surroundings Over the Past

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the central role of music, dance, and musical instruments in shaping the folk culture of Purulia and its surrounding regions, including Bankura and Birbhum, over the past century (1921-2021). Rooted in the traditions of tribal communities such as the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij, these artistic expressions have defined cultural identity through festivals like Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam, and rituals honoring deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa. Using field surveys, historical texts, and ethnographic data, the research examines their evolution amid economic, social, and cultural shifts. Historically fostering communal solidarity and spiritual connection, these elements have declined due to industrialization, urbanization, and economic pressures. Preservation efforts, including digital promotion and community workshops, are highlighted, alongside strategies to sustain these traditions. The study emphasizes balancing modernity with heritage to ensure their survival.

KEYWORDS: Folk culture, Purulia, music, dance, musical instruments, tribal communities, preservation, cultural identity, festivals, rituals, economic pressures, modernization

I. INTRODUCTION

Purulia, located in the western reaches of West Bengal, stands as a vibrant cultural hub, radiating the rich heritage of tribal and rural communities across its rugged red laterite landscapes. Flanked by neighboring districts like Bankura and Birbhum, and proximate to parts of Jharkhand, Purulia forms part of the Rarh or Jangalmahal region, a cultural crossroads where indigenous and historical influences converge. This area is home to diverse tribal groups, including the Santal, Orao, Bhumij, Munda, and Lodha, alongside other marginalized communities such as the Bagdi, Bauri, and Dom. These groups have cultivated a distinctive folk culture, blending Adi-Austral, Dravidian, and Aryan elements, as evidenced by archaeological sites like Birbhanpur and Panduraja's tibi, which trace the region's ancient roots. Purulia's cultural significance is amplified by its natural setting—dense forests, rolling hills, and river valleys—that has shaped the agrarian and spiritual practices of its people. The region's festivals, music, and dances, such as Bhadu, Tusu, Jhumur, and Chau, are renowned, drawing global attention for their vibrancy and authenticity. Bankura, with its terracotta artistry and Bishnupur gharana, and Birbhum, known for Baul music, complement Purulia's traditions, creating a contiguous cultural zone. Historically supported by local royalty like the Panchkot and Bishnupur rajas, this hub has thrived as a repository of folk traditions, yet faces modern threats that jeopardize its continuity, necessitating a deeper exploration of its cultural dynamics.

Music, dance, and musical instruments are the lifeblood of Purulia's folk culture, serving as powerful mediums for expressing the identity, spirituality, and resilience of its tribal and rural communities. These artistic forms are not mere performances but integral to the social and ritual fabric, encapsulating the joys, sorrows, and beliefs of groups like the Santal and Bhumij. Songs such as Jhumur, Bhadu, and Tusu narrate tales of love, nature, and devotion, preserving oral histories in the absence of written records. Dances like Jhumur and Chau, performed during festivals and rituals, embody communal solidarity and mythological narratives, with Chau's masked performances reflecting martial and spiritual themes. Musical instruments—dhamasa, madal, ektara, and dotara—crafted from local materials like wood, leather, and bamboo, provide rhythmic and melodic foundations, their sounds evoking the region's natural and cultural essence. These elements play a crucial role in festivals like Karam and Gajan, reinforcing agricultural cycles and spiritual connections to deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa. They also serve as markers of tribal identity, resisting cultural assimilation despite



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pressures from Hinduization and modernization. By fostering community cohesion and intergenerational knowledge transfer, music, dance, and instruments have shaped Purulia's folk culture, making their preservation vital to maintaining the region's unique heritage.

This study pursues three primary objectives to illuminate the role of music, dance, and musical instruments in Purulia's folk culture over the century from 1921 to 2021. First, it aims to analyze their historical and contemporary roles in shaping cultural identity, examining how they have defined festivals, rituals, and social structures. Second, it seeks to explore the factors contributing to their evolution and decline, including economic pressures, industrialization, and modern influences, to understand the forces reshaping these traditions. Finally, the study proposes preservation strategies to revitalize and sustain these cultural practices, ensuring their relevance for future generations. These objectives are driven by a commitment to documenting and safeguarding a heritage at risk of fading.

The research employs a multifaceted methodology to achieve its objectives. Field surveys conducted in Purulia, Bankura, and Birbhum involve direct observations of festivals, dances, and music performances, as well as interviews with practitioners, artisans, and community members to capture lived experiences. These surveys provide qualitative insights into the current state of traditions and challenges faced by performers. Historical analysis draws on archival texts, including works by scholars like Ashutosh Bhattacharya, to trace the evolution of these practices from 1921 to 2021. Ethnographic data, derived from oral histories and local accounts, enriches the study by documenting unwritten traditions and community perspectives. This combined approach ensures a comprehensive understanding, blending empirical evidence with historical and cultural context, to explore the dynamic role of music, dance, and instruments in Purulia's folk culture.

II. HISTORICAL ROLE OF MUSIC, DANCE, AND INSTRUMENTS (1921-1950)

From 1921 to 1950, music, dance, and musical instruments were central to the vibrant folk culture of Purulia and its surrounding regions, including Bankura and Birbhum, shaping the cultural and spiritual lives of tribal and rural communities such as the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij. This period, marked by an agrarian lifestyle and tribal dominance, provided a fertile ground for these artistic expressions, which thrived under royal patronage and served critical social and spiritual functions. Festivals like Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam, alongside rituals honoring deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa, were animated by Jhumur and Chau dances, songs, and instruments like dhamsa and madal, reinforcing community bonds and cultural identity.

Cultural Context: Agrarian Lifestyle and Tribal Dominance Supporting Vibrant Traditions

The early 20th century in Purulia was defined by an agrarian economy that sustained a rich tapestry of folk traditions. Tribal communities, predominant in the region, relied on agriculture and forest resources, shaping a lifestyle closely tied to seasonal cycles and natural rhythms. This agrarian context fostered festivals and rituals that celebrated planting, harvesting, and monsoon arrivals, embedding music, dance, and instruments into daily life. Villages were cultural hubs where communal gatherings, free from urban influences, allowed tribes like the Santal and Bhumij to maintain distinct practices. The absence of widespread industrialization preserved oral traditions, with songs and dances passed down through generations, reflecting the resilience of tribal identity against colonial and external pressures. This cultural environment, rooted in the red laterite soils and forested landscapes, nurtured a vibrant folk culture where artistic expressions were inseparable from community existence.

Royal Patronage (e.g., Panchkot Rajbari) Promoting Festivals and Performances

Royal patronage played a pivotal role in elevating Purulia's folk traditions during this period. The Panchkot Rajbari, among other local dynasties, actively supported festivals like Bhadu Puja, commissioning songs and dances that gained prominence among lower castes like the Bauri and Bagdi. These patrons provided resources, venues, and social legitimacy, transforming village performances into grand spectacles. The Bishnupur rajas similarly fostered fairs, such as the Bishnupur Mela, where music and dance were showcased. Zamindars and feudal lords maintained troupes of performers, ensuring that Jhumur and Chau dances were performed not only in rural settings but also in royal courts. This patronage extended to artisans crafting instruments, sustaining the production of dhamsa, madal, and ektara. Such support amplified the visibility and prestige of folk traditions, embedding them deeply within the region's cultural fabric.



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Music: Jhumur, Bhadu, Tusu Songs as Oral Narratives of Love, Nature, Devotion

Music was a cornerstone of Purulia's folk culture, with Jhumur, Bhadu, and Tusu songs serving as oral narratives that captured the essence of tribal life. Jhumur songs, sung by men and women during festivals and communal gatherings, wove tales of love, separation, and the beauty of nature, reflecting the agrarian context. Bhadu songs, performed by women during Bhadu Puja, celebrated devotion and youthful vitality, often linked to the legendary Princess Bhadravati. Tusu songs, sung during Makar Sankranti, expressed gratitude for harvests, blending devotion with agricultural themes. These songs, devoid of written records, were transmitted orally, preserving tribal languages and cultural values, and served as a medium for storytelling and emotional expression within communities.

Dance: Jhumur, Chau as Communal, Ritualistic Expressions in Festivals

Dances like Jhumur and Chau were vibrant communal and ritualistic expressions, integral to festivals and religious ceremonies. Jhumur, performed in circular formations during Karam and Tusu, involved synchronized movements by women, accompanied by men playing instruments, fostering unity and celebration. Chau, a masked dance with martial and mythological themes, was a highlight of Gajan festivals, embodying spiritual narratives and tribal prowess. These dances, rooted in ritualistic contexts, strengthened social bonds and provided a visual language for cultural identity, captivating audiences in villages and royal courts alike.

Instruments: Dhamsa, Madal, Ektara, Dotara as Rhythmic, Melodic Foundations

Musical instruments like dhamsa, madal, ektara, and dotara formed the rhythmic and melodic backbone of Purulia's folk performances. The dhamsa, a large drum, and madal, a hand-played drum, provided pulsating rhythms for Jhumur and Chau, crafted by artisans using buffalo skin and wood. The ektara and dotara, stringed instruments, added melodic depth to songs, their simplicity reflecting tribal resourcefulness. These instruments, integral to festivals and rituals, were crafted locally, sustaining cottage industries and embedding the region's sonic identity in its cultural practices.

Social Functions: Strengthening Community Bonds, Reflecting Spiritual Beliefs

Music, dance, and instruments served critical social functions, strengthening community bonds and reflecting spiritual beliefs. Festivals like Bhadu and Karam brought villages together, with performances fostering cooperation and shared identity. Rituals for deities like Mansa and Dharmaraj, accompanied by music and dance, reinforced spiritual connections, offering protection and prosperity. These artistic expressions were not mere entertainment but vital mechanisms for cultural continuity, uniting tribes in celebration and devotion, and affirming their distinct place within the broader cultural landscape.

III. EVOLUTION AMID SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES (1950-1980)

The period from 1950 to 1980 marked a transformative phase for the folk culture of Purulia and its surrounding regions, including Bankura and Birbhum, as music, dance, and musical instruments evolved under the pressures of socio-economic changes. The post-independence push for industrialization disrupted the agrarian foundations that had sustained vibrant traditions among tribal communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij. This era saw a decline in cottage industries critical to instrument craftsmanship, adaptations in music and dance forms, and the emergence of preservation efforts through scholarly documentation and national recognition of cultural events. These shifts reshaped the role of Jhumur, Chau, Bhadu, Tusu, and instruments like dhamsa and madal, reflecting both resilience and vulnerability in Purulia's folk heritage.

Industrialization's Impact: Disrupted Agrarian Economies, Reduced Cultural Resources

The rapid industrialization following India's independence profoundly impacted Purulia's agrarian economy, which had long supported its folk traditions. The establishment of factories and urban centers in West Bengal and neighboring Jharkhand drew rural labor away from villages, disrupting the communal structures that underpinned festivals like Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam. As tribal communities faced population growth outpacing agricultural production, economic pressures intensified, leaving less time and resources for cultural practices. Families prioritized wage labor over participation in music and dance, leading to reduced attendance at rituals and festivals. The shift from self-sufficient village economies to industrial dependence strained the social fabric, weakening the intergenerational transmission of oral traditions. This economic upheaval, coupled with the allure of urban lifestyles, began to erode the vibrant cultural expressions that had defined Purulia in the early 20th century, setting the stage for a gradual decline in folk practices.



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Decline in Cottage Industries Affecting Instrument Craftsmanship

The decline of cottage industries during this period significantly affected the craftsmanship of musical instruments essential to Purulia's folk culture. Artisans who crafted instruments like dhamsa, madal, ektara, and dotara faced economic challenges as demand for traditional goods waned. The rise of industrial products and modern entertainment reduced the market for handcrafted items, with materials like buffalo skin and specific woods becoming harder to source amid environmental changes and economic constraints. Many artisans, including those involved in weaving and conch crafts, abandoned their trades for factory jobs, as their earnings could not sustain livelihoods. This decline disrupted the supply of instruments for festivals and rituals, diminishing the sonic richness of performances like Jhumur and Chau. The loss of skilled craftsmanship not only threatened the physical tools of folk culture but also eroded the cultural knowledge embedded in their creation, further limiting the vibrancy of Purulia's traditions.

Music and Dance Adaptations: Jhumur's Shift to Courtly Forms, Simplified Ritual Dances

Amid these socio-economic shifts, music and dance in Purulia adapted to survive, though often at the cost of their original forms. Jhumur, historically a tribal dance and song tradition, underwent a notable shift as some performances moved from village squares to the courts of lingering zamindars and local elites. Influenced by classical music traditions, Jhumur incorporated ragas like Tilak-Kamod and Behag, as seen in the works of poets like Gauranga Singha, appealing to more formalized audiences. This courtly adaptation, while preserving some elements, distanced Jhumur from its communal roots. Ritual dances, such as those performed during Gajan for Dharmaraj and Shiva, were simplified due to economic constraints and reduced community participation. Elaborate performances like Charak Ghora were scaled back, with fewer resources for costumes and instruments. Bhadu and Tusu songs, once spontaneous, became less frequent, performed by smaller groups as women's roles shifted toward wage labor. These adaptations reflected efforts to sustain traditions but often compromised their scale and authenticity.

Preservation Efforts: Scholarly Documentation, National Recognition of Fairs Like Bishnupur Mela

Despite the challenges, preservation efforts emerged to safeguard Purulia's folk culture during this period. Scholars like Ashutosh Bhattacharya played a crucial role, meticulously documenting Jhumur, Bhadu, and Tusu songs, as well as Chau and Gajan rituals, in works that preserved oral traditions for future study. These efforts provided a written record, countering the loss of unwritten knowledge. Cultural events, such as the 1979 Kolkata Folklore Seminar, highlighted Purulia's heritage, fostering academic and public interest. The Bishnupur Mela gained national recognition, becoming a platform to showcase music, dance, and crafts, supported by government initiatives to promote cultural tourism. These fairs helped sustain some traditions, attracting performers and artisans, though their focus often leaned toward urban audiences. Such preservation efforts laid a foundation for later revitalization, offering hope amid the socio-economic upheavals that threatened Purulia's folk culture.

These changes from 1950 to 1980 illustrate a period of adaptation and struggle, as Purulia's music, dance, and instruments navigated the challenges of industrialization while striving to maintain their cultural significance.

IV. DECLINE AND MODERN INFLUENCES (1980-2021)

From 1980 to 2021, the folk culture of Purulia and its surrounding regions, including Bankura and Birbhum, experienced a marked decline in its music, dance, and musical instruments, driven by globalization, urbanization, and modern influences. These forces profoundly impacted the traditions of tribal communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij, overshadowing practices such as Jhumur, Chau, Bhadu, and Tusu, and threatening the craftsmanship of instruments like dhamsa and madal. The Hinduization of tribal practices, economic challenges faced by artisans, and the near extinction of certain dances and songs underscored a period of cultural erosion, despite the resilience of these communities in maintaining their heritage.

Globalization and Urbanization: Modern Entertainment Overshadowing Folk Practices

Globalization and rapid urbanization significantly reshaped Purulia's cultural landscape during this period, with modern entertainment forms eclipsing traditional folk practices. The proliferation of television, cinema, and later the internet introduced urban cultural norms, drawing younger generations away from village-based festivals like Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam. Bollywood music, pop culture, and digital streaming platforms became dominant, relegating folk songs and dances to the margins. Urban migration, driven by economic opportunities in cities, reduced community participation in rural performances, as tribal youth sought livelihoods in industrial or service sectors. Festivals that once united villages,



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such as Gajan and Jhapan Mela, saw dwindling attendance, replaced by urbanized celebrations or modern leisure activities. The accessibility of global media further diminished the appeal of local traditions, with performances like Jhumur and Chau struggling to compete with the spectacle of modern entertainment. This shift not only reduced the frequency of folk practices but also disrupted the communal spirit that had historically sustained them, posing a severe threat to Purulia's cultural identity.

Hinduization Eroding Tribal Distinctiveness

The Hinduization of tribal communities during this period further eroded the distinctiveness of Purulia's folk culture. As mainstream Hindu practices gained prominence, tribal rituals and festivals, rooted in animistic and secular beliefs, were increasingly assimilated or marginalized. Deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa, once central to tribal worship with unique rituals involving music and dance, were absorbed into Hindu frameworks, losing their original significance. For instance, Santal and Bhumij festivals like Karam and Baha were overshadowed by Hindu festivals like Durga Puja, which attracted greater resources and participation. This assimilation blurred tribal identities, as seen in the Bhumij's integration with lower-caste Hindu communities, reducing the practice of distinct dances like Kathinach and songs like Jhumur. The imposition of Hindu rituals, often supported by urban elites, marginalized tribal performers and altered the spiritual context of their music and dance, weakening the cultural autonomy that had defined Purulia's folk traditions.

Instrument Challenges: Artisan Decline Due to Low Income, Resource Scarcity

The craftsmanship of traditional musical instruments faced significant challenges, driven by the decline of artisans and resource scarcity. Artisans crafting dhamsa, madal, ektara, and dotara struggled with low incomes, as demand for handcrafted instruments plummeted amid the rise of modern music and electronic alternatives. Economic pressures forced many, including dokra craftsmen, to abandon their trades for factory or urban jobs, as daily earnings fell below sustainable levels. Resource scarcity compounded the issue, with materials like buffalo skin for dhamsa and specific woods for madal becoming harder to source due to environmental changes and industrial competition. The collapse of cottage industries, once a backbone of Purulia's cultural economy, disrupted the supply chain for instruments, leaving festivals and performances reliant on aging or substandard tools. This decline not only diminished the quality of music and dance but also severed the cultural knowledge embedded in instrument-making, threatening the sonic heritage of Purulia's folk culture.

Evidence of Decline: Near Extinction of Dances Like Kathinach, Loss of Jhumur Songs

The decline of Purulia's folk culture is starkly evident in the near extinction of dances like Kathinach and Patanach and the loss of Jhumur songs. Kathinach, once a lively tribal dance performed during festivals, has virtually disappeared, with few practitioners remaining due to the lack of training and community support. Patanach, similarly, has faded, its intricate movements preserved only in memory. Jhumur songs, which narrated tales of love, nature, and devotion, have suffered a significant loss, as their oral transmission faltered with the passing of elderly singers and the absence of young successors. The lack of written records has left these songs vulnerable, with many melodies and lyrics forgotten. Field observations in Purulia and Bankura revealed that festivals like Bhadu and Tusu are now performed by small, aging groups, and ritual dances for Gajan are simplified or abandoned. This erosion, driven by economic necessity and modern influences, underscores the fragility of Purulia's folk traditions, highlighting the urgent need for revitalization to preserve their cultural legacy.

V. PRESERVATION EFFORTS AND THEIR IMPACT

The music, dance, and musical instruments integral to the folk culture of Purulia and its surrounding regions, such as Bankura and Birbhum, have faced significant decline over the century from 1921 to 2021, prompting a range of preservation efforts to safeguard these traditions for tribal communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij. Historical initiatives by scholars and zamindars, alongside contemporary strategies leveraging digital platforms and youth-focused workshops, have sought to maintain the vibrancy of Jhumur, Chau, Bhadu, Tusu, and instruments like dhamsa and madal. However, these efforts have been hampered by funding shortages and the risk of commercialization, which threaten the authenticity of Purulia's cultural heritage. This section examines these preservation efforts and their impact, highlighting both achievements and limitations.



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Historical Initiatives: Scholarly Contributions, Zamindar Patronage

In the early 20th century, preservation of Purulia's folk culture was significantly bolstered by the patronage of zamindars and the scholarly contributions of researchers. Local royalty, such as the Panchkot Rajbari, played a crucial role in sustaining festivals like Bhadu Puja, commissioning songs and dances that ensured their prominence among communities like the Bauri and Bagdi. The Bishnupur rajas supported fairs like the Bishnupur Mela, providing platforms for Jhumur and Chau performances and fostering artisan communities crafting instruments like ektara and dotara. These patrons offered resources and social legitimacy, embedding folk traditions in both rural and courtly settings. As the century progressed, scholars like Ashutosh Bhattacharya and Gurusday Dutta emerged as key preservers. Bhattacharya's extensive documentation of Jhumur, Bhadu, and Tusu songs, alongside Chau and Gajan rituals, created a written record of oral traditions, safeguarding them against loss. Dutta's Bratchari movement promoted folk dances like Dhali and Raibeshe, emphasizing their cultural value. Events like the 1979 Kolkata Folklore Seminar further amplified academic interest, raising awareness of Purulia's heritage. These historical initiatives provided a foundation for preservation, countering early economic and colonial pressures that threatened cultural continuity.

Contemporary Strategies: Digital Platforms Promoting Chau, Jhumur; Workshops Training Youth

In recent decades, preservation efforts have adapted to modern contexts, leveraging digital platforms and community-based workshops to sustain Purulia's folk traditions. The rise of the internet has enabled global promotion of Chau dance and Jhumur songs, with performances shared on social media and streaming platforms, attracting international audiences and boosting cultural tourism. For instance, Chau's masked performances have gained recognition at global festivals, while Jhumur videos have drawn attention to Purulia's tribal heritage. These digital efforts have helped position folk culture as a source of pride and economic potential, particularly for events like the Bishnupur Mela. Concurrently, workshops organized by institutions like the Rahr Akademi Folk Art have focused on training youth in traditional music, dance, and instrument-making. Programs in Purulia and Bankura teach skills like Jhumur choreography, Bhadu singing, and crafting madal and dhamsa, aiming to engage younger generations and ensure knowledge transmission. Community-driven initiatives, including local performances and cultural festivals, encourage participation, fostering a sense of ownership among tribal youth. These strategies have revitalized interest in folk practices, creating opportunities for performers and artisans to sustain their traditions in a modern world.

Limitations: Funding Shortages, Risk of Commercialization Diluting Authenticity

Despite these efforts, preservation initiatives face significant limitations, primarily due to funding shortages and the risk of commercialization. Limited financial support from government and private sectors restricts the scope of workshops and documentation projects, particularly in remote villages where traditions like Karam and Tusu are most at risk. Artisans crafting instruments and performers of Jhumur and Chau often earn minimal incomes, discouraging participation and pushing many toward urban livelihoods. The decline of cottage industries further exacerbates resource constraints, limiting the production of traditional instruments. Commercialization poses another challenge, as digital promotions and urban performances sometimes prioritize market appeal over cultural authenticity. For example, Jhumur and Chau performances tailored for festivals or tourist audiences may simplify traditional elements, diluting their spiritual and communal significance. Resistance from conservative tribal communities, wary of external influences, complicates efforts to modernize preservation strategies. Additionally, the preference of younger generations for modern entertainment over folk practices reduces community engagement, leaving preservation reliant on aging practitioners. These limitations hinder the full impact of preservation efforts, necessitating innovative solutions to balance accessibility with cultural integrity.

The interplay of historical and contemporary preservation efforts highlights both the resilience and fragility of Purulia's folk culture. While scholarly documentation, zamindar patronage, digital platforms, and workshops have sustained traditions to varying degrees, funding shortages and commercialization risks underscore the need for targeted strategies to preserve the authenticity and vitality of music, dance, and instruments in Purulia's cultural landscape.

VI. CASE STUDIES FROM FIELD OBSERVATIONS

The folk culture of Purulia and its surrounding regions, including Bankura and Birbhum, is vividly expressed through its music, dance, and musical instruments, integral to the identity of tribal communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij. Field observations in these areas provide critical insights into the historical significance and contemporary challenges



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facing Bhadu songs, Jhumur dance, and traditional instruments like madal and dhamsa. These case studies highlight their evolution, current limitations, and efforts toward revival, revealing the interplay of cultural resilience and economic pressures that threaten their survival.

Bhadu Songs: Historical Role in Festivals, Current Limited Practice, Economic Barriers

Bhadu songs have historically been a cornerstone of Purulia's folk culture, central to the Bhadu Puja festival celebrated in the monsoon month of Bhadra, particularly among lower-caste communities like the Bauri and Bagdi. These women-centric songs, performed without priests or formal rituals, were vibrant oral narratives of devotion, love, and social harmony, often linked to the legend of Princess Bhadravati of the Panchkot Rajbari. Sung by unmarried girls before clay idols, Bhadu songs fostered communal bonds during festivals, accompanied by simple percussion and dances, and were supported by royal patronage in the early 20th century. Field observations in Purulia villages, such as Kashipur, revealed a drastic reduction in their practice. Now limited to small, sporadic gatherings, Bhadu songs are performed by a dwindling number of women, primarily older generations. Interviews with local singers underscored economic barriers as a primary cause, with families prioritizing wage labor over cultural activities due to poverty. The allure of modern entertainment, including cinema and television, has further diminished interest among youth, who view these songs as outdated. Some cultural programs in Bankura attempt to revive Bhadu songs, but they often cater to urban audiences, altering their traditional spontaneity and communal essence, highlighting the festival's retreat from its historical prominence.

Jhumur Dance: Transition to Commercial Forms, Near Extinction, Lack of Successors

Jhumur dance, a cherished tradition of the Sadan ethnolinguistic group, including the Santal and Bhumij, was historically a dynamic communal expression during festivals like Karam and Tusu. Originating in the Chotanagpur Plateau, Jhumur featured women dancing in synchronized circles, accompanied by men playing madal, dhol, and flutes, weaving themes of love and nature. Its transition to royal courts under zamindar patronage in earlier centuries enriched it with classical influences, but by the late 20th century, it began shifting toward commercial forms. Field observations in Bankura showed Jhumur teetering on the brink of extinction, performed only by a few elderly practitioners, mostly in their 60s and 70s. Interviews with a Purulia Jhumur troupe revealed a lack of successors, as youth migrate to urban areas or favor modern dance forms like Bollywood and electronic music. The absence of written records leaves Jhumur reliant on oral transmission, which is fading with aging performers. Commercial performances, such as those at regional cultural festivals, often simplify Jhumur's intricate footwork and narrative depth to appeal to broader audiences, diluting its cultural significance. These observations underscore the urgent need to preserve this dance before it vanishes entirely.

Musical Instruments (e.g., Madal, Dhamsa): Declining Craftsmanship, Workshop-Based Revival Attempts

Traditional musical instruments like madal and dhamsa have been essential to Purulia's folk performances, providing the rhythmic pulse for dances and songs during festivals and rituals. Historically crafted by local artisans using wood, leather, and bamboo, these instruments embodied tribal ingenuity and cultural heritage. Field observations in Purulia and Bankura documented a severe decline in their craftsmanship, driven by economic challenges and resource scarcity. Artisans reported earning minimal incomes, prompting many to abandon their craft for factory jobs. The production of dhamsa, requiring buffalo skin, and madal, needing specific woods, has nearly halted due to environmental changes and reduced demand. This decline weakens the sonic quality of performances like Jhumur and Chau. Revival attempts include workshops organized by cultural institutions, where artisans train youth in instrument-making. However, these efforts face obstacles, as young trainees often find the craft economically unviable compared to modern livelihoods. Government initiatives to document such crafts have limited reach in rural areas, leaving the revival of instrument-making precarious. The fading craftsmanship threatens Purulia's musical heritage, necessitating sustained support to restore this vital cultural practice.

These case studies, drawn from field observations, illustrate the profound challenges facing Purulia's folk culture, from the waning Bhadu songs and near-extinct Jhumur dance to the struggling craftsmanship of traditional instruments, while highlighting modest revival efforts that strive to keep these traditions alive.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PRESERVATION

The music, dance, and musical instruments of Purulia and its surrounding regions, including Bankura and Birbhum, are vital to the cultural heritage of tribal communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij, yet they face significant decline due



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to economic pressures, urbanization, and modern influences over the century from 1921 to 2021. To ensure the survival of traditions such as Jhumur, Chau, Bhadu, Tusu, and instruments like dhamsa and madal, a comprehensive preservation strategy is essential. This strategy should focus on community engagement, institutional support, and technological integration to revitalize these practices, empower local communities, and balance cultural authenticity with modern opportunities.

Community Engagement: Youth Training in Music, Dance, Instrument-Making; Economic Incentives via Tourism

Engaging local communities, particularly the youth, is critical to sustaining Purulia's folk traditions. Training programs should be established in villages across Purulia, Bankura, and Birbhum to teach young people traditional music, dance, and instrument-making. These programs, led by experienced practitioners, would focus on skills like singing Bhadu and Tusu songs, performing Jhumur and Chau dances, and crafting instruments such as madal and ektara. Community centers could host regular workshops, fostering cultural pride and ensuring the transmission of oral traditions at risk due to aging performers. To make these initiatives sustainable, economic incentives should be created by leveraging cultural tourism. Festivals like Bhadu, Karam, and the Bishnupur Mela could be promoted as tourist attractions, drawing visitors to experience authentic performances and purchase traditional crafts. Local markets during these events could sell terracotta idols, woven goods, and instruments, providing income for performers and artisans. Cooperatives could connect artisans, such as dhamsa makers, to broader markets, enhancing their livelihoods. By linking cultural preservation to economic benefits, these community-based approaches would encourage youth participation, countering migration and disinterest driven by poverty and modern entertainment, and revitalizing communal engagement in folk practices.

Institutional Support: Government Funding for Cultural Centers, Curriculum Integration

Institutional support is essential to provide the financial and structural framework needed to preserve Purulia's folk culture. Government bodies, such as the West Bengal Department of Information and Culture, should allocate dedicated funding to establish and maintain cultural centers in rural areas, where traditions like Jhumur and Gajan are most vulnerable. These centers would serve as hubs for training, documentation, and performances, supporting artists and artisans with grants to sustain their work. Funding could also restore village thanas for deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa, preserving the spiritual context of music and dance. Partnerships with non-governmental organizations could expand outreach, ensuring resources reach remote communities. Integrating folk traditions into educational curricula is another key step. Schools in Purulia and neighboring districts should include lessons on local songs, dances, and instruments, using interactive methods like storytelling and performances to engage students. Universities could offer courses on folk culture, encouraging research and preservation, building on the legacy of scholars like Ashutosh Bhattacharya. Cultural institutions, such as the Rahr Akademi Folk Art, should organize festivals and competitions to incentivize youth involvement. These institutional efforts would address funding shortages, create sustainable support systems, and foster widespread appreciation of Purulia's heritage.

Technological Integration: Digital Archives for Oral Traditions, Global Collaborations for Funding, Exposure

Technology offers powerful tools to preserve and promote Purulia's folk traditions, ensuring their accessibility while maintaining authenticity. Digital archives should be developed to document oral traditions, including Jhumur and Bhadu songs, Chau and Karam dances, and instrument-making techniques. These archives, hosted on accessible platforms, could feature videos, audio recordings, and artisan interviews, safeguarding knowledge that lacks written records. Collaborations with initiatives like the National Mission on Cultural Mapping could streamline this process, creating a comprehensive repository. Social media and streaming platforms should be used to share authentic performances, countering commercialization by prioritizing traditional contexts. For example, live-streamed Gajan rituals or virtual Jhumur performances could engage global audiences while preserving cultural integrity. International collaborations with organizations like UNESCO or global folklore societies could secure funding, share expertise, and enhance exposure, positioning Purulia's heritage on a world stage. Virtual reality experiences could immerse users in festivals, serving as educational tools for schools and researchers. By thoughtfully integrating technology, these efforts would amplify preservation, making Purulia's traditions resilient against modern challenges while fostering global appreciation.

These recommendations—community engagement, institutional support, and technological integration—provide a holistic approach to preserving Purulia's folk music, dance, and instruments. By empowering locals, securing resources,



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Science, Engineering and Technology (IJMRSET)

(A Monthly, Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Scholarly Indexed, Open Access Journal)

and leveraging modern tools, the region can sustain its cultural legacy, ensuring that these traditions continue to thrive as living expressions of tribal identity and heritage.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The music, dance, and musical instruments of Purulia and its surrounding regions, including Bankura and Birbhum, have been foundational to the folk culture of tribal communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij, shaping their identity and heritage over the century from 1921 to 2021. These artistic expressions, integral to festivals like Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam, and rituals honoring deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa, have faced significant decline due to modern pressures, yet preservation efforts have achieved partial success. This conclusion summarizes their role, the challenges they face, and the preservation landscape, explores implications for balancing modernity with cultural identity, and suggests directions for future research to ensure the vitality of Purulia's folk traditions.

From 1921 to 2021, music, dance, and musical instruments have been central to Purulia's folk culture, serving as vibrant expressions of tribal life. Jhumur and Bhadu songs, Chau and Karam dances, and instruments like dhamsa, madal, and ektara have animated festivals and rituals, fostering communal solidarity and spiritual connections. In the early 20th century, these traditions thrived under an agrarian economy and royal patronage from entities like the Panchkot Rajbari, embedding them in village life and courtly settings. However, socio-economic shifts, starting with industrialization in the mid-20th century, disrupted rural economies, reducing resources for cultural practices. The decline of cottage industries impacted instrument craftsmanship, while urbanization and globalization from 1980 onward introduced modern entertainment, overshadowing folk forms. Hinduization further eroded tribal distinctiveness, with dances like Kathinach nearing extinction and Jhumur songs fading due to a lack of successors. Preservation efforts have countered this decline with partial success. Historical initiatives, including scholarly documentation by Ashutosh Bhattacharya and zamindar support, preserved oral traditions, while contemporary strategies like digital promotion and workshops by the Rahr Akademi Folk Art have engaged youth and global audiences. Despite these efforts, funding shortages and commercialization risks have limited impact, leaving many traditions fragmented but not entirely lost.

The trajectory of Purulia's folk culture underscores the challenge of balancing modernity with cultural identity. Modern influences, such as digital media and urban lifestyles, offer opportunities for broader exposure but risk diluting the authenticity of Jhumur, Chau, and ritual songs, as seen in commercialized performances. Economic pressures have forced communities to prioritize livelihoods over cultural engagement, yet economic models like cultural tourism could revitalize traditions by providing income for performers and artisans. Community-driven preservation is essential to ensure that tribes like the Santal and Bhumij retain agency over their heritage, preventing external forces from reshaping sacred practices. This balance requires integrating modern tools, such as digital archives and educational programs, while preserving the communal and spiritual essence of festivals like Gajan or instrument-making traditions. The implications extend beyond Purulia, offering a framework for other indigenous cultures navigating globalization. By fostering community ownership and valuing folk traditions as dynamic expressions, modernity can enhance rather than erode cultural identity, sustaining Purulia's heritage as a source of pride and resilience.

Future research should focus on two key areas to advance the preservation of Purulia's folk culture. First, investigating the impact of digital tools on authenticity would provide insights into how platforms like social media and streaming services affect traditions like Chau dance and Bhadu songs. Studies could explore whether digital promotion preserves cultural nuances or prioritizes commercial appeal, informing strategies for ethical dissemination. Collaborations with global cultural organizations could identify best practices for digital preservation, ensuring accessibility without compromise. Second, documenting oral histories is critical, given the reliance of Purulia's traditions on unwritten knowledge. Collecting narratives from elderly practitioners, such as Jhumur singers and madal craftsmen, would preserve songs, dance techniques, and artisan skills at risk of disappearing. Ethnographic research in remote villages could uncover lesser-known practices, enriching the cultural archive. Longitudinal studies tracking the effectiveness of youth workshops and curriculum integration would further guide preservation efforts, ensuring that Purulia's music, dance, and instruments remain vibrant expressions of tribal heritage for future generations.



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This conclusion highlights the enduring significance of Purulia's folk traditions, the challenges posed by modern pressures, and the potential for community-driven, technology-supported preservation to secure their future, urging continued efforts to celebrate and sustain this cultural legacy.

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