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Preservation and Decline of Folk Festivals and Rituals in Purulia and Adjacent Regions: A Century-Long Perspective

Sabirul Islam Mondal, Ph.D, Naval Kishor Jat

Research Scholar, Department of Music, Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

Professor, Department of Music, Sunrise University, Alwar, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: This study explores the preservation and decline of folk festivals and rituals in Purulia and its adjacent regions over a century. Rooted in the vibrant cultural heritage of tribal communities such as the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij, these traditions—including festivals like Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam, along with associated dances, songs, and rituals—have faced significant challenges due to economic hardships, urbanization, and cultural shifts. Based on field surveys conducted in Purulia, Bankura, and Birbhum, alongside historical and ethnographic data, the research traces the historical prominence of these practices, their decline amid poverty and industrialization, and the impact of modern influences. Despite efforts by scholars, local patronage, and digital platforms to safeguard this heritage, many elements, such as Jhumur songs and traditional instrument-making, are nearing extinction. The study proposes community-driven initiatives, institutional support, and technological integration as strategies to revitalize these traditions, emphasizing the need to balance modernization with cultural preservation.

KEYWORDS: Folk festivals, rituals, Purulia, tribal culture, preservation, decline, music, dance, economic impact, cultural heritage, urbanization, traditional instruments

I. INTRODUCTION

Purulia, nestled in the western part of West Bengal, stands as a vibrant testament to the rich tapestry of cultural heritage that defines the region. Often referred to as part of the Rarh or Jangalmahal area, Purulia is flanked by neighboring districts such as Bankura, Birbhum, and parts of Jharkhand, creating a cultural confluence that has thrived for centuries. This region is characterized by its undulating red laterite soil, dense forests, and a rugged landscape that has shaped the lives and traditions of its inhabitants. The area is home to a diverse array of tribal communities, including the Santal, Orao, Bhumij, Munda, and Lodha, alongside other marginalized groups like the Bagdi, Bauri, and Dom. These groups have contributed to a unique cultural mosaic, blending indigenous practices with influences from Aryan, Dravidian, and Adi-Austral roots, as evidenced by the ethnographic studies of the region.

Purulia and its surrounding areas have long been recognized as a cradle of folk traditions, where oral narratives, music, dance, and rituals form the backbone of social and spiritual life. The region's proximity to the Chotanagpur Plateau has further enriched its cultural landscape, with festivals, ceremonies, and artistic expressions reflecting a deep connection to nature and agriculture. Historical accounts suggest that the area's cultural significance dates back to ancient times, with archaeological sites like Birbhanpur and Panduraja's tibi providing evidence of early civilizations. Over time, this cultural hub has been shaped by the patronage of local royalty, such as the Panchkot and Bishnupur rajas, who supported festivals like Bhadu and Tusu, and by the resilience of its tribal populations in maintaining their traditions despite external pressures. Today, Purulia is celebrated for its distinctive folk dances like Chau and Jhumur, its soulful songs, and the craftsmanship of musical instruments such as the dhamsa and madal, making it a focal point for understanding West Bengal's folk heritage.

The surrounding regions amplify this cultural richness. Bankura, with its terracotta temples and Bishnupur gharana, complements Purulia's traditions, while Birbhum adds the mystical allure of Baul music and the spiritual depth of Shantiniketan's cultural movements. Together, these areas form a contiguous cultural zone where festivals like Karam, Gajan, and Makar Mela are not just celebrations but living expressions of identity, community bonding, and resistance against assimilation. This cultural hub has attracted scholars, artists, and researchers, who have documented its evolution, yet it remains under threat from modern influences, necessitating a closer examination of its past and present.



Folk traditions in Purulia and its surrounding areas serve as a mirror to the identities of its tribal and rural populations, encapsulating their worldview, struggles, and aspirations. These traditions are not mere performances but are deeply embedded in the daily lives of communities, reflecting their dependence on agriculture, their reverence for nature, and their social structures. For instance, festivals like Tusu and Bhadu, rooted in the agricultural cycle, celebrate the monsoon and harvest, symbolizing the communities' gratitude and hope. Similarly, rituals associated with deities such as Mansa (the snake goddess) and Dharmaraj highlight a spiritual framework that predates organized religion, offering protection and prosperity to villagers.

Music and dance further reinforce this identity. Jhumur songs, often sung by tribal groups, narrate tales of love, separation, and resilience, while the vigorous Chau dance embodies the martial spirit and mythological narratives of the region. Musical instruments like the ektara, dotara, and dhamsa, crafted from local materials, are not just tools but extensions of the community's creativity and resourcefulness. These artistic expressions are passed down orally, preserving the language, history, and values of groups that have historically been marginalized. The ethnographic diversity of the region—evident in the physical traits and linguistic remnants of Adi-Austral and Dravidian influences—finds its most vivid expression in these traditions, distinguishing Purulia's culture from the urban Bengali mainstream.

For tribal and rural identities, these practices are a form of resistance against cultural homogenization. They provide a sense of belonging and continuity, especially for communities like the Santal and Bhumij, who have faced pressures from Hinduization and economic displacement. The rituals and festivals also serve as social glue, fostering cooperation during communal events like Shikarotsava or Jhapan Mela. However, their decline threatens to erode this identity, disconnecting younger generations from their roots and leaving a void that modern culture struggles to fill. Understanding their importance is thus critical to appreciating the broader cultural narrative of West Bengal and India.

Over the past century, from 1921 to 2021, the folk festivals and rituals of Purulia and its adjacent regions have experienced a significant erosion, jeopardizing a cultural legacy that has endured for millennia. This decline is marked by the fading practice of once-vibrant traditions such as Bhadu Puja, Karam Dance, and the worship of local deities, which have been overshadowed by economic hardships, urbanization, and the influx of modern lifestyles. Historical records indicate that in the early 20th century, these practices were widespread, supported by local patronage and communal participation. However, the mid-20th century saw the rise of industrialization and poverty, with many families abandoning cultural pursuits for survival, as seen in the shift of dokra artists to factory work.

By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, globalization and digital media introduced new cultural influences, further diluting traditional practices. Dances like Kathinach and Patanach have become rare, Jhumur songs are largely unrecorded, and the crafting of musical instruments has dwindled due to the decline of cottage industries. Field observations from recent years reveal that while some festivals, like Bishnupur's fair, have gained national recognition, many others survive only in fragmented forms or memory. This erosion is not just a loss of entertainment but a severance of the cultural and spiritual lifeline that has sustained these communities, raising urgent questions about the causes and potential remedies for this decline over the century.

The primary aims of this study are threefold. First, it seeks to analyze the changes in folk festivals and rituals in Purulia and its surrounding areas over the century from 1921 to 2021, tracing their evolution from prominence to decline. This involves documenting historical practices, their current state, and the transformations they have undergone. Second, it aims to identify the causes behind this decline, exploring economic, cultural, and external factors that have disrupted these traditions. Finally, the study intends to suggest practical preservation methods to revitalize and sustain this heritage, ensuring it remains accessible to future generations. These objectives are driven by a commitment to understanding the past while addressing the present challenges.

To achieve these aims, the study adopts a multi-faceted approach. Fieldwork forms the cornerstone, with surveys conducted in Purulia, Bankura, and Birbhum between 2021 and 2023, involving direct observations of remaining festivals, dances, and rituals. Interactions with local communities, musicians, and artisans provide firsthand insights into their experiences and perspectives. Historical analysis draws on archival materials, scholarly works, and oral histories to reconstruct the cultural landscape of the past century. This combination allows for a comprehensive understanding, blending empirical data with contextual depth. The methodology also incorporates qualitative assessments to capture the emotional and social dimensions of these traditions, ensuring a holistic narrative.



Core Argument: Decline and Preservation Are Shaped by Economic and Cultural Dynamics, Requiring Active Intervention

The core argument of this study is that the decline and preservation of folk festivals and rituals in Purulia and its surrounding areas are intricately shaped by economic and cultural dynamics, necessitating active intervention to safeguard this heritage. Economic factors, such as poverty and the collapse of traditional livelihoods, have forced communities to prioritize survival over cultural practice, while cultural dynamics, including urbanization and globalization, have introduced competing influences that erode tribal identities. Preservation efforts, though present through scholarly documentation and digital outreach, have been insufficient without sustained support. Active intervention—through community engagement, institutional backing, and innovative strategies—is essential to reverse the decline, ensuring that the rich folk traditions of Purulia continue to thrive as a living legacy rather than a relic of the past.

This introduction sets the stage for a detailed exploration of how these dynamics have unfolded over the century, offering a foundation for the subsequent sections that will delve into historical contexts, specific traditions, and actionable solutions. The interplay of economic necessity and cultural identity underscores the urgency of this research, positioning it as a call to action for preserving a cultural heritage that defines the soul of Purulia and its people.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF FOLK FESTIVALS AND RITUALS (1921-2021)

The century spanning 1921 to 2021 witnessed profound transformations in the folk festivals and rituals of Purulia and its adjacent regions, shaped by evolving socio-economic and cultural landscapes. During the early 20th century (1921-1950), these traditions flourished, deeply woven into the fabric of tribal and rural communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij. Festivals such as Bhadu, Tusu, and Gajan were more than celebrations; they were essential expressions of agricultural rhythms, spiritual beliefs, and communal solidarity. Bhadu Puja, particularly vibrant among lower castes like the Bauri and Bagdi, received significant patronage from local royalty, notably the Panchkot Rajbari, which elevated its songs and dances to prominence. Tusu Parab, linked to the harvest and Makar Sankranti, saw rural women crafting clay idols and singing devotional songs, while Gajan, centered on Shiva and Dharmaraj worship, featured elaborate rituals and widespread participation. A robust village economy, driven by agriculture and cottage industries, supported these practices, enabling communities to invest time and resources in cultural expression. Local zamindars and feudal lords fostered dances like Jhumur and Chau, accompanied by instruments such as dhamsa and madal, which resonated in village gatherings and royal courts. This era was defined by a strong oral tradition, with songs and rituals transmitted across generations, reinforcing cultural identity despite the marginalization of these communities.

The mid-20th century (1950-1980) marked a turning point as India's post-independence push for industrialization reshaped Purulia and its neighboring areas. The growth of factories and urban centers disrupted the agrarian lifestyle that sustained many folk traditions. Economic pressures intensified as population growth outstripped agricultural output, straining rural livelihoods. Many families, grappling with poverty, prioritized survival over cultural engagement, leading to a gradual decline in festivals like Karam and Jhapan Mela. Cottage industries, including weaving and conch craft, which produced ritual artifacts and musical instruments, struggled to compete, limiting resources for cultural activities. Despite these challenges, preservation efforts emerged, with fairs like Bishnupur's gaining national recognition as cultural showcases. Scholars like Ashutosh Bhattacharya began documenting folk traditions, and events such as the 1979 Kolkata Folklore Seminar spotlighted the region's heritage. However, the shift to industrial economies simplified or sidelined rituals like the Shikarotsava hunting festivals, reflecting a growing disconnect from traditional practices.

The late 20th to early 21st century (1980-2021) saw an accelerated decline in folk festivals and rituals, propelled by globalization and rapid urbanization. Modern entertainment, amplified by television and the internet, introduced urban cultural norms that overshadowed indigenous practices. Dances like Kathinach and Patanach faded into obscurity, and Jhumur songs, once central to tribal gatherings, dwindled due to a lack of practitioners and written records. Economic hardship persisted, with artisans like dokra craftsmen abandoning their craft for factory work as their earnings plummeted. The Hinduization of tribal communities further blurred distinct practices, as Bhumij and Santal rituals merged with mainstream Hindu festivals. Digital exposure, however, had a dual impact. While platforms enabled Purulia's Chau dance and Jhumur songs to reach global audiences, they often prioritized commercial appeal over cultural authenticity, risking dilution. Preservation initiatives, including workshops by the Rahr Akademi Folk Art and government-supported cultural centers, sought to counter this decline, but limited funding and community disengagement hindered progress. Many traditions persisted only in fragmented forms, preserved through memory or occasional performances, highlighting the critical need for revitalization.



This century-long journey reveals a dynamic interplay of continuity and erosion, driven by economic imperatives, cultural shifts, and external forces. The vibrant festivals of the early 20th century, bolstered by local patronage, gave way to mid-century struggles against industrialization, followed by a late-century confrontation with globalization's homogenizing influence. This historical context underscores the challenges faced by Purulia's folk traditions and the urgency of efforts to preserve them, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of their causes and potential solutions.

III. KEY FOLK FESTIVALS AND RITUALS: EVOLUTION AND DECLINE

The folk festivals and rituals of Purulia and its adjacent regions, such as Bankura and Birbhum, have historically been vibrant expressions of tribal and rural life, embodying the cultural and spiritual ethos of communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij. Over the century from 1921 to 2021, major festivals like Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam, along with associated rituals, have undergone significant evolution, transitioning from widespread practice to a state of decline. This section examines their historical significance, the transformation of related rituals, and the evidence of their erosion, driven by economic pressures and the loss of oral traditions.

Major Festivals: Historical Significance of Bhadu, Tusu, Karam, and Their Reduced Practice

Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam festivals have long been cornerstones of Purulia's cultural landscape, each tied to the region's agrarian roots and tribal identity. Bhadu Puja, celebrated primarily in the monsoon month of Bhadra, was historically a women-centric festival, particularly among lower castes like the Bauri and Bagdi. Its origins are linked to legends of the Panchkot Rajbari, where it was patronized as a tribute to a royal princess, Bhadravati, symbolizing beauty and benevolence. The festival featured lively songs and dances, performed without formal priests, reflecting a secular, community-driven ethos. Tusu Parab, observed during Makar Sankranti, celebrated the harvest with clay idol-making and devotional songs sung by rural women, symbolizing gratitude for agricultural bounty. Karam, a tribal festival of the Santal and Bhumij, involved dances around a sacred branch, honoring the deity of prosperity and fertility. These festivals were historically significant for fostering social cohesion and reinforcing tribal identities, supported by a rural economy that allowed time and resources for such expressions. However, over the century, their practice has diminished significantly. Bhadu is now confined to a few villages, Tusu is rarely observed beyond small gatherings, and Karam dances are performed sporadically, overshadowed by modern entertainment and urban migration, which have disrupted communal participation.

Associated Rituals: Worship of Deities Like Dharmaraj and Mansa, Shifting from Sacrifices to Symbols

The rituals associated with these festivals, particularly the worship of folk deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa, have also evolved, reflecting broader cultural shifts. Dharmaraj, a regional deity revered as the god of rain and food, was historically worshipped in numerous village thanas (sacred sites) with animal sacrifices, dances, and songs, requiring no formal mantras or priests. Gajan festivals, dedicated to Dharmaraj and Shiva, featured intense rituals like Charak Ghora and Baan Phonda, symbolizing devotion and community strength. Similarly, Mansa, the snake goddess, was propitiated during Jhapan Mela to protect against snakebites, with offerings of animals and incense-filled pots carried by devotees. These rituals were integral to tribal spirituality, emphasizing a direct connection to nature and community welfare. Over time, however, economic constraints and changing sensibilities have led to a shift from live sacrifices to symbolic offerings, such as terracotta elephants and horses. This transformation, while preserving some ritual forms, has diluted their intensity and communal involvement. The worship of deities like Sinidevi and Basali has also waned, with many thanas falling into disuse as younger generations gravitate toward mainstream Hindu practices, further eroding these distinct traditions.

Evidence of Decline: Loss of Oral Traditions and Abandonment Due to Economic Necessity

The decline of these festivals and rituals is starkly evident in the loss of oral traditions and their abandonment due to economic pressures. Many songs, such as Jhumur and Bhadu, which once narrated tales of love and devotion, lack written records and have faded as older practitioners pass away without successors. Dances like Kathinach and Patanach are nearly extinct, with few trained performers remaining. Economic necessity has been a primary driver of this decline, as poverty has forced communities to prioritize survival over cultural engagement. Artisans, such as dokra craftsmen, have abandoned traditional crafts for factory jobs, and rural families, facing low incomes, have little time for festivals. The shift from agrarian to industrial economies, coupled with urbanization, has disrupted the communal structures that sustained these practices, leaving them fragmented and at risk of disappearing entirely.

This evolution and decline highlight the vulnerability of Purulia's folk heritage, underscoring the need for urgent preservation efforts to maintain these cultural treasures.



IV. PRESERVATION EFFORTS AND CHALLENGES

The preservation of folk festivals and rituals in Purulia and its adjacent regions, such as Bankura and Birbhum, has been a persistent endeavor over the century from 1921 to 2021, driven by a recognition of their cultural and spiritual significance to tribal and rural communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij. These efforts, encompassing historical initiatives by scholars and zamindars, contemporary strategies involving digital promotion and educational workshops, and ongoing challenges like funding shortages and resistance to modernization, reflect a complex struggle to safeguard a heritage at risk of extinction. This section explores these dimensions, highlighting both achievements and obstacles in maintaining Purulia's vibrant folk traditions.

Historical Initiatives: Contributions of Scholars and Past Patronage by Zamindars

In the early 20th century, the folk festivals and rituals of Purulia thrived under the patronage of local zamindars and feudal lords, who played a pivotal role in their sustenance. The Panchkot Rajbari, for instance, actively supported Bhadu Puja, commissioning songs and dances that elevated its status and ensured its practice among lower castes like the Bauri and Bagdi. Similarly, the rulers of Bishnupur fostered fairs and festivals, such as the Bishnupur Mela, which became cultural landmarks. These patrons provided resources, venues, and social legitimacy, enabling communities to perform Jhumur, Chau, and other dances accompanied by instruments like dhamsa and madal. As the century progressed, scholars like Ashutosh Bhattacharya and Gurusday Dutta emerged as key figures in preservation. Bhattacharya's extensive documentation of Bengali folklore, including detailed studies of Bhadu and Tusu, provided a written record of oral traditions, preserving their nuances for future generations. Dutta's Bratchari movement sought to revive folk dances like Dhali and Raibeshe, emphasizing their role in cultural identity. Events like the 1979 Kolkata Folklore Seminar further spotlighted Purulia's heritage, fostering academic interest and public awareness. These historical initiatives laid a foundation for preservation, countering the early signs of decline driven by economic shifts and colonial influences.

Contemporary Strategies: Digital Promotion and Educational Workshops

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, preservation efforts adapted to modern contexts, leveraging digital platforms and educational initiatives to sustain Purulia's folk traditions. The advent of the internet enabled global exposure for cultural forms like Chau dance and Jhumur songs, with videos and performances shared on social media and streaming platforms. This digital promotion attracted international audiences, positioning Purulia's heritage as a source of cultural pride and economic potential through tourism and festivals. For instance, the Bishnupur Mela, recognized nationally, benefited from online visibility, drawing visitors and researchers. Educational workshops, organized by institutions like the Rahr Akademi Folk Art and government-backed cultural centers, aimed to engage younger generations. These programs trained youth in traditional dances, songs, and instrument-making, such as crafting madal and ektara, fostering a sense of ownership. Community-based events, like those held in Bankura and Purulia, encouraged local participation, with artisans and performers sharing knowledge. These strategies sought to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, ensuring that festivals like Tusu and Karam remained relevant. However, their impact was uneven, as digital efforts often prioritized commercial appeal over authenticity, and workshops struggled to reach remote villages where traditions were most at risk.

Challenges: Funding Shortages and Resistance to Modernization

Despite these efforts, preservation faced significant challenges, primarily due to funding shortages and resistance to modernization. Limited financial support from government and private sectors restricted the scope of workshops and documentation projects. Rural artists, such as dokra craftsmen and Jhumur singers, often earned meager incomes, discouraging participation in cultural activities. The decline of cottage industries further strained resources for producing ritual artifacts and instruments, hampering revival efforts. Resistance to modernization posed another hurdle, particularly among conservative tribal communities who viewed digital adaptations or urban performances as diluting sacred traditions. For example, some Santal groups opposed the commercialization of Karam dances, fearing a loss of spiritual essence. Additionally, the younger generation's preference for modern entertainment over folk practices reduced community engagement, leaving preservation efforts reliant on aging practitioners. These challenges underscored the difficulty of balancing cultural authenticity with the demands of a globalized world, necessitating innovative solutions to sustain Purulia's folk heritage.

The interplay of historical patronage, contemporary strategies, and persistent challenges highlights the fragile state of Purulia's folk festivals and rituals, urging a concerted effort to ensure their survival.



V. CASE STUDIES AND FIELD OBSERVATIONS

The folk festivals, dances, and musical traditions of Purulia and its adjacent regions, including Bankura and Birbhum, are vital expressions of the cultural identity of tribal and rural communities such as the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij. Recent fieldwork provides critical insights into the historical prominence and current challenges facing these traditions. This section presents case studies on the Bhadu Festival, Jhumur Dance, and musical instruments, highlighting their evolution, present limitations, and efforts toward revival, based on observations and interactions with local communities.

Bhadu Festival: Historical Popularity and Current Limitations Observed in Fieldwork

The Bhadu Festival, celebrated during the monsoon month of Bhadra, was historically a cornerstone of cultural life in Purulia, Bankura, and Birbhum, particularly among lower-caste communities like the Bauri and Bagdi. Linked to legends of Princess Bhadravati of the Panchkot Rajbari, Bhadu was a women-centric festival, marked by spontaneous songs and dances performed by unmarried girls before clay idols of the goddess, symbolizing youthful vitality and rural harmony. These songs, free of formal priests or mantras, explored themes of marriage and social bonds, accompanied by drums and communal dancing, and were bolstered by royal patronage, ensuring their vibrancy in the early 20th century. Recent fieldwork in Purulia revealed a stark decline. Visits to villages like Kashipur showed that Bhadu is now practiced in only a few households, with participation limited to small groups of women. Interviews with local singers underscored economic constraints as a major barrier, with many families prioritizing labor over cultural activities due to poverty. The influence of modern entertainment, such as cinema and television, has further reduced interest, especially among younger generations, who view Bhadu as outdated. Observations in Bankura noted that while some cultural programs attempt to revive Bhadu songs, they often cater to urban audiences, diluting their traditional essence. The festival's communal spirit, once a hallmark of rural cohesion, has significantly waned, with immersion ceremonies on the last day of Bhadra rarely observed, signaling a marked retreat from its historical prominence.

Jhumur Dance: Transition and Near Extinction, with Insights from Fieldwork

Jhumur Dance, a folk tradition of the Sadan ethnolinguistic group, including the Santal and Bhumij, was historically a vibrant expression of Purulia's tribal heritage, performed during festivals like Karam and Tusu. Originating in the Chotanagpur Plateau, Jhumur wove together seasonal and romantic themes, with women dancing in synchronized formations and men playing instruments like madal, dhol, and flutes. Its transition from village gatherings to royal courts in the medieval period, under zamindar patronage, elevated its status, incorporating ragas and poetic forms influenced by Vaishnavism. Fieldwork in Bankura painted a grim picture of Jhumur's near extinction. Observations in rural areas revealed that only a few elderly performers, mostly in their 60s and 70s, continue the tradition, with no young successors due to migration and disinterest. Interviews with a Jhumur troupe in Purulia highlighted the absence of written records, leaving the dance reliant on oral transmission, which is fading as practitioners age. The rise of modern dance forms, such as Bollywood and electronic music, has overshadowed Jhumur, as noted in urban youth preferences during field visits. Efforts to showcase Jhumur, such as performances for regional cultural events, indicate sporadic revival attempts, but these are often commercialized, lacking the communal intimacy of traditional settings. The dance's intricate footwork and narrative songs are at risk of vanishing, underscoring an urgent need for preservation.

Musical Instruments: Decline in Craftsmanship and Revival Attempts Noted

The craftsmanship of traditional musical instruments like dhamsa, madal, ektara, and dotara has been essential to Purulia's folk performances, providing the rhythmic foundation for dances and songs. Historically, these instruments were crafted by local artisans using materials like wood, leather, and bamboo, supporting festivals and rituals. Fieldwork in Purulia and Bankura documented a sharp decline in this craft, driven by economic pressures and the collapse of cottage industries. Artisans, such as those making madal, reported earning minimal income, prompting many to abandon their trade for factory work. Observations revealed that the production of instruments like dhamsa, requiring buffalo skin and specific wood, has nearly ceased due to resource scarcity and lack of demand. Revival attempts, noted during visits, include workshops by cultural organizations, where artisans train youth in instrument-making. However, these initiatives face challenges, as young trainees often view the craft as unviable compared to modern livelihoods. Government programs aiming to document such crafts have limited reach in rural areas. The decline in craftsmanship threatens the sonic identity of Purulia's folk traditions, necessitating sustained support to restore this vital cultural practice.

These case studies, grounded in recent fieldwork, illustrate the profound challenges facing Purulia's folk heritage, from the fading Bhadu Festival to the near-extinct Jhumur Dance and dwindling instrument craftsmanship, while highlighting modest but critical revival efforts.



VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PRESERVATION

The folk festivals, rituals, dances, and musical traditions of Purulia and its adjacent regions, such as Bankura and Birbhum, are at a critical juncture, with many practices like Bhadu, Tusu, Karam, and Jhumur facing near extinction due to economic pressures, urbanization, and cultural shifts over the century from 1921 to 2021. To ensure the survival and revitalization of this rich heritage for future generations, a multifaceted approach is essential, combining community-based initiatives, institutional support, and technological integration. These recommendations aim to empower local communities, secure resources, and leverage modern tools to preserve the cultural legacy of Purulia's tribal and rural communities, including the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij.

Community-Based Approaches: Training Youth and Leveraging Festivals Economically

Engaging local communities, particularly the youth, is paramount to sustaining Purulia's folk traditions. Training programs tailored for young people should be established in villages to teach traditional dances like Jhumur and Chau, songs such as Bhadu and Tusu, and the craftsmanship of instruments like dhamsa and madal. These programs, ideally led by elderly practitioners, would ensure the transmission of oral traditions, which are at risk due to the aging of current performers. Community centers in Purulia, Bankura, and Birbhum could host regular workshops, fostering a sense of cultural pride and ownership among participants. To make these initiatives sustainable, festivals should be leveraged as economic opportunities. For instance, organizing Bhadu or Karam festivals as tourist attractions, similar to the nationally recognized Bishnupur Mela, could generate income for performers and artisans. Local markets during these events could promote traditional crafts, such as terracotta idols and musical instruments, providing financial incentives for communities to maintain their practices. Collaborations with local cooperatives could further support artisans, like dokra craftsmen, by connecting them to broader markets. By tying cultural preservation to economic benefits, these community-based approaches would encourage active participation, countering the trend of youth migration and disinterest driven by poverty and modern entertainment preferences.

Institutional Support: Funding and Curriculum Integration

Robust institutional support is critical to provide the financial and structural backbone for preservation efforts. Government bodies, such as the West Bengal Department of Information and Culture, should allocate dedicated funding to revitalize folk traditions, prioritizing rural areas where practices are most endangered. Grants could support the restoration of village thanas (sacred sites) for deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa, as well as subsidize training programs and artisan livelihoods. Partnerships with non-governmental organizations and cultural trusts could amplify these efforts, ensuring resources reach remote communities. Integrating folk traditions into educational curricula is another vital step. Schools in Purulia and neighboring districts should incorporate modules on local festivals, dances, and music, using storytelling, performances, and hands-on activities to engage students. Universities could offer courses on folk culture, encouraging research and documentation, as pioneered by scholars like Ashutosh Bhattacharya. Cultural institutions, such as the Rahr Akademi Folk Art, should expand outreach programs, hosting festivals and competitions to incentivize youth participation. These institutional measures would create a sustainable framework, addressing funding shortages that have historically limited preservation efforts and fostering a broader appreciation of Purulia's heritage among future generations.

Technological Integration: Digital Archives and Global Collaboration

Technology offers transformative potential for preserving and promoting Purulia's folk traditions, bridging local practices with global audiences. Digital archives should be developed to document festivals, dances, songs, and instrument-making techniques, preserving oral traditions that lack written records. These archives, hosted on accessible platforms, could include videos, audio recordings, and interviews with practitioners, ensuring that traditions like Jhumur songs and Bhadu rituals are safeguarded for posterity. Collaborations with institutions like the National Mission on Cultural Mapping could facilitate this process, creating a comprehensive repository. Social media and streaming platforms should be harnessed to promote authentic performances, countering the commercialization often seen in urban showcases. For example, live-streamed Karam dances or virtual tours of Gajan rituals could attract global interest while maintaining cultural integrity. International collaborations with cultural organizations, such as UNESCO or global folklore societies, could provide funding, expertise, and exposure, positioning Purulia's heritage within a worldwide context. Virtual reality experiences could further immerse audiences in festivals, offering educational tools for schools and researchers. By integrating technology thoughtfully, these efforts would amplify preservation, making Purulia's traditions accessible without sacrificing their communal and spiritual essence.

These recommendations—community engagement, institutional backing, and technological innovation—offer a holistic strategy to preserve Purulia's folk heritage. By empowering locals, securing resources, and embracing modern tools, the



region can reclaim its cultural legacy, ensuring that festivals, dances, and music continue to resonate beyond the challenges of the past century.

VII. CONCLUSION

The folk festivals, rituals, dances, and musical traditions of Purulia and its adjacent regions, such as Bankura and Birbhum, have undergone a profound transformation over the century from 1921 to 2021, reflecting the interplay of economic, cultural, and social forces. These practices, deeply rooted in the lives of tribal and rural communities like the Santal, Orao, and Bhumij, have faced a steady decline, yet preservation efforts have offered glimmers of hope. This conclusion summarizes the century-long decline and preservation initiatives, explores the implications for balancing modernity with cultural heritage, and suggests avenues for future research to ensure the survival of this vibrant legacy.

From 1921 to 2021, Purulia's folk traditions, including festivals like Bhadu, Tusu, and Karam, dances such as Jhumur and Chau, and instruments like dhamsa and madal, transitioned from widespread practice to near extinction. In the early 20th century, these traditions thrived, supported by a robust agrarian economy and patronage from local royalty, such as the Panchkot Rajbari, which elevated festivals like Bhadu through songs and dances. Rituals honoring deities like Dharmaraj and Mansa were integral to community life, with sacrifices and communal performances reinforcing tribal identities. However, the mid-20th century brought challenges as post-independence industrialization disrupted rural livelihoods, forcing many to abandon cultural practices for survival. Poverty and the decline of cottage industries, such as dokra craftsmanship, further limited resources for festivals and instrument-making. By the late 20th and early 21st centuries, globalization and urbanization accelerated the decline, with modern entertainment overshadowing traditions and Hinduization blurring tribal distinctiveness. Dances like Kathinach and oral traditions like Jhumur songs faded, lacking written records or young practitioners. Preservation efforts countered this erosion with varying success. Historical initiatives by scholars like Ashutosh Bhattacharya and Gurusday Dutta documented folklore, while zamindar patronage sustained performances. Contemporary strategies, including digital promotion and workshops by the Rahr Akademi Folk Art, aimed to engage youth and global audiences, though limited funding and resistance to modernization posed obstacles. Fieldwork in Purulia and Bankura revealed that while some traditions, like the Bishnupur Mela, gained recognition, many persist only in fragmented forms, underscoring the urgency of revitalization.

The decline of Purulia's folk traditions highlights the delicate balance required between embracing modernity and preserving cultural heritage. Modern influences, such as digital media and urban lifestyles, have introduced opportunities for global exposure but risk diluting authenticity, as seen in commercialized Jhumur performances. Economic pressures have driven communities to prioritize livelihoods over cultural engagement, yet economic incentives, like tourism tied to festivals, could revitalize traditions. The challenge lies in integrating modern tools—such as digital archives or educational curricula—without compromising the communal and spiritual essence of practices like Bhadu or Gajan. This balance demands community agency, ensuring that tribes like the Santal retain control over their heritage rather than allowing external forces to reshape it. Institutional support, through funding and policy, must prioritize rural areas, where traditions are most vulnerable, while fostering pride among youth to counter the allure of modern entertainment. The implications extend beyond Purulia, offering a model for other indigenous cultures facing similar threats. By valuing heritage as a living, evolving entity rather than a static artifact, modernity can coexist with tradition, enriching both local identity and global cultural diversity.

Future research should explore two critical areas to advance the preservation of Purulia's folk traditions: the impact of digital technologies and the documentation of oral histories. Investigating digital impacts would assess how platforms like social media and streaming services influence the authenticity and reach of traditions like Chau dance or Tusu songs. Studies could analyze whether digital archives preserve cultural nuances or inadvertently prioritize commercial appeal, guiding strategies for ethical promotion. Collaborative projects with global institutions could evaluate best practices for digital preservation, ensuring accessibility without exploitation. Research on oral histories is equally vital, given the reliance of Purulia's traditions on unwritten knowledge. Collecting narratives from aging practitioners, such as Jhumur singers or madal craftsmen, would safeguard stories, songs, and techniques at risk of disappearing. Ethnographic studies in remote villages could uncover lesser-known rituals, enriching the cultural record. Longitudinal research tracking the effectiveness of community workshops and curriculum integration would further inform preservation strategies, ensuring that Purulia's heritage thrives as a dynamic legacy for future generations.

This conclusion underscores the resilience and fragility of Purulia's folk traditions, urging a commitment to preservation that honors their past while embracing a sustainable future.



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