

Seraikela Kharsawan

A CULTURAL ODYSSEY

Seraikela Kharsawan

A CULTURAL ODYSSEY

Copyright © Contact Base (banglanatak dot com)

The book has been developed by Contact Base as part of the project, “Roots to Prosperity: Developing Sustainable Livelihoods through Heritage”, supported by the Axis Bank Foundation.

All rights reserved

Research & Content: Contact Base
Book Design: Contact Base

Printed at: Sushama Printers, 62 Bentinck Street, Kolkata 700069

First published in October 2026 by banglanatak dot com, 188/89, Prince Anwar Shah Road, Kolkata 700045

Contents

Foreword 03
Preface 05
CHAPTER 01
The Living Landscape 07
CHAPTER 02
Stories of the Land and People 15
CHAPTER 03
Chhau: Rhythm of the Land 23
CHAPTER 04
Forest, Fibre and New Futures 37
CHAPTER 05
Experience Seraikela Kharsawan 47
Glossary 58
References 61
Acknowledgements 62



Foreword

India’s living heritage is sustained through generations of knowledge, skill and practice. Across communities, art and craft are deeply intertwined with local histories, natural resources and ways of life. Preserving this heritage therefore requires not only safeguarding traditions, but also creating opportunities for artisans to adapt, innovate and build sustainable livelihoods.

It is with this vision that *Roots to Prosperity: Developing Sustainable Livelihoods through Heritage* is being implemented by Contact Base (banglanatak dot com), with support from Axis Bank Foundation, across Seraikela Kharsawan in Jharkhand and Mayurbhanj and Koraput in Odisha. The initiative strengthens the livelihoods of traditional artists and craftspeople through capacity building, enterprise development, market linkages and community-led cultural tourism. It also encourages the intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge while enhancing the visibility of lesser-known cultural destinations.

Seraikela Kharsawan: A Cultural Odyssey is a valuable testament to these efforts. By documenting Chhau traditions, mask-making, Kashi grass and bamboo crafts, the publication shines a light not only on the region’s rich cultural heritage, but also on the individuals and communities who sustain it. It highlights how traditional knowledge can remain relevant and resilient by engaging with new audiences, markets and opportunities, while contributing to responsible tourism and local economic development.

We hope this publication inspires travellers, cultural institutions, policymakers and development practitioners to discover Seraikela Kharsawan through a new lens and creates greater opportunities for younger artists and craftspeople to expand the reach and impact of their work.

We congratulate Contact Base and the artists, craftspeople and community members whose knowledge, creativity and participation have shaped this publication. We are committed to supporting pathways through which cultural heritage can contribute to dignified livelihoods, stronger communities and sustainable futures.

Dhruvi Shah
Group Head – CSR, Axis Bank
ET & CEO, Axis Bank Foundation



Preface

Seraikela Kharsawan is a district where royal histories, indigenous traditions, artistic expressions and everyday community life intersect. From the graceful movements and evocative masks of Seraikela Chhau to the vibrant performances of other Chhau traditions, from the skilled hands weaving *Kashi* grass and bamboo to the festivals, music and oral traditions of its communities, the district offers a rich and diverse landscape of living heritage.

This book invites readers to discover Seraikela Kharsawan through its people, places and cultural practices. It explores the relationship between nature and culture, tracing how forests, rivers, agricultural landscapes and community knowledge have shaped local traditions and livelihoods. It also introduces the district's royal past, its distinctive performing arts and crafts, and the villages where these traditions continue to be practised and transmitted.

An important purpose of this publication is to bring greater visibility to the people behind these cultural expressions. Chhau dancers, mask makers, natural-fibre artisans, musicians and other tradition bearers are not simply custodians of inherited knowledge. They are creative practitioners who continue to interpret, adapt and sustain their traditions. Their skills, aspirations and opportunities are central to the future of the district's living heritage.

The book has been developed through field engagement with communities, artists, craftspeople and local knowledge holders as part of Roots to Prosperity: Developing Sustainable Livelihoods through Heritage, implemented by Contact Base (banglanatak dot com) with support from Axis Bank Foundation. Building on Contact Base's Art for Life approach, the initiative seeks to strengthen creative livelihoods while supporting the continuity of cultural traditions.

The chapters move from the district's natural and historical landscapes to its performing arts and traditional crafts, before introducing cultural hubs and possible journeys through its villages, forests and heritage sites. Rather than presenting heritage as a collection of attractions, the book encourages visitors to encounter living traditions in the places where they belong, through meaningful engagement with communities.

We are grateful to the artists, craftspeople, tradition bearers and community members who have shared their knowledge, experiences and stories. We hope this publication will encourage cultural enthusiasts, researchers, travellers and tourism practitioners to discover Seraikela Kharsawan with curiosity and respect, and contribute to a growing appreciation of its living heritage.



01

The Living Landscape

Seraikela Kharsawan lies in southern Jharkhand, within the Chota Nagpur Plateau region. The district covers about 2,724.55 square kilometres and includes the subdivisions of Seraikela and Chandil, with nine administrative blocks. Its geography is characterised by a mixture of undulating uplands, low hills, forests, agricultural fields and river valleys, giving the landscape a rugged but scenic appearance. The area is generally elevated and uneven rather than flat. Rocky low hills occur alongside more fertile stretches of land where villages cultivate rice and other crops. The Subarnarekha River system is an important geographical feature of the wider region, with smaller streams and seasonal waterways draining the surrounding plateau. Seraikela Kharsawan has a landscape that has strongly influenced the lives, livelihoods and cultural traditions of its people.



▲ Map of Seraikela Kharsawan



▲ Dalma forest

Forestlands

Large areas of the Seraikela Kharsawan region are covered by forests and undulating terrain. *Sal* and other native trees form an important part of the landscape, providing communities with food, fuel, minor forest produce and materials for traditional crafts. For indigenous communities, the natural landscape is not simply a backdrop to village life but an important part of their cultural and spiritual world.

The Dalma landscape forms an important part of the district's northern and northeastern surroundings. The forested terrain is closely connected with village life, seasonal activities and the region's indigenous traditions. For the people living around these landscapes, the forests provide natural resources and materials used for food, fuel, household needs and crafts. Forests also provide raw materials for making utility and decorative crafts using bamboo, grass, natural fibre, leaves and wood. This relationship between people and forests also forms an important part of the cultural character of Seraikela Kharsawan.

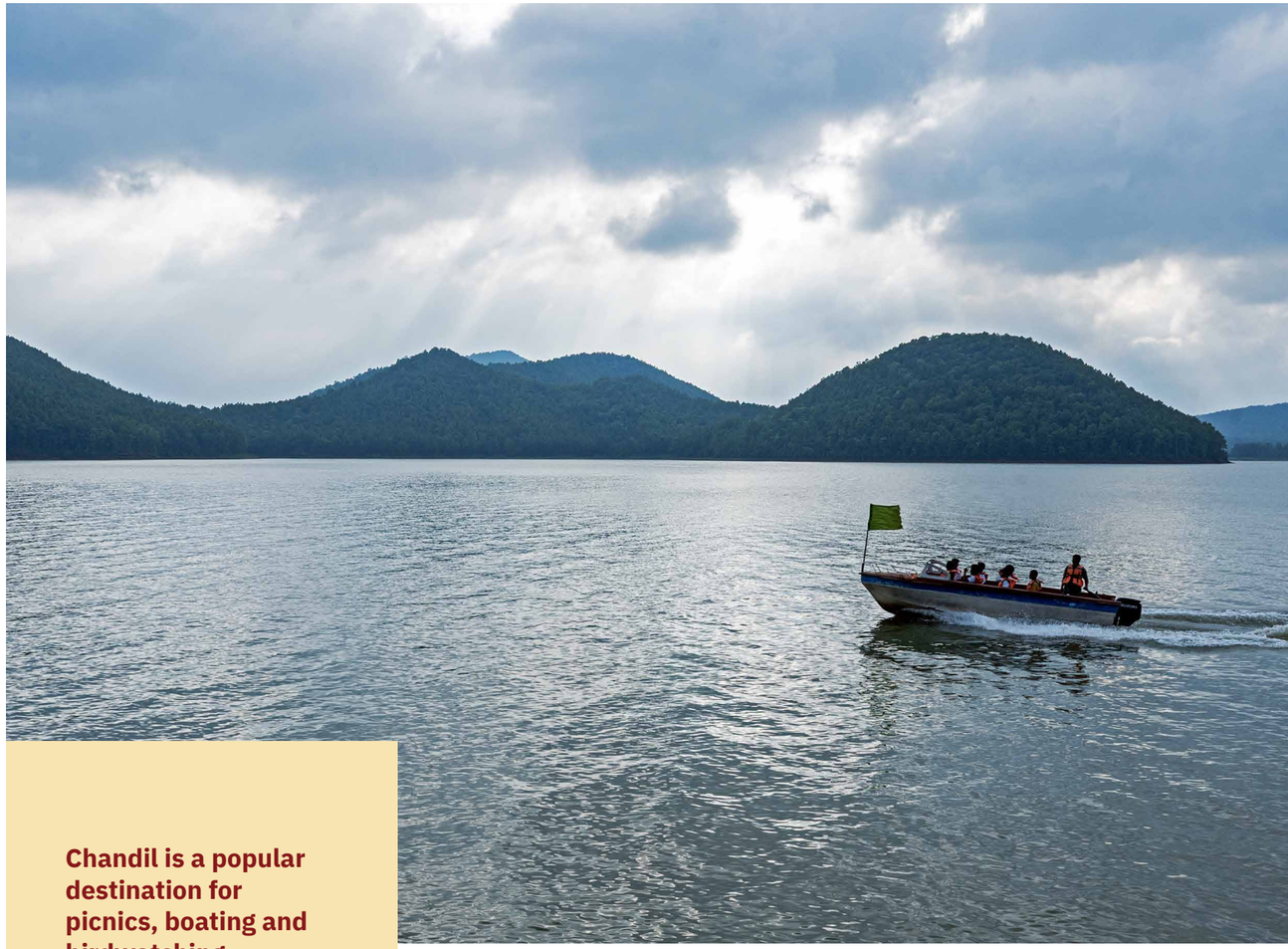
Between the forests and hills are agricultural fields and rural settlements. Farming remains an important part of village life, with the changing seasons influencing agricultural activities, festivals and community practices. Villages often exist in close proximity to forests and agricultural land, creating a continuous relationship between home, field and forest.



▲ Dalma Hills

The River Basins

The Kharkai and Subarnarekha river systems are among the defining geographical features of the region. Rivers provide water for agriculture and everyday activities while also shaping settlement patterns and local livelihoods. The meeting of rivers and surrounding hills creates a varied landscape of riverbanks, valleys, forests and cultivated fields. One of the most striking water landscapes of the district is Chandil Dam and its large reservoir on the Subarnarekha River. The combination of water, surrounding hills and forests gives Chandil a distinctive character. Boating and other activities have developed around the reservoir, while the wider landscape is increasingly being explored as a destination for nature and educational tourism. At Chandil, the river landscape is also connected with other waterways, including the Karkari River. These interconnected water systems contribute to the area's distinctive geography. The rivers shape more than the physical landscape. They influence agriculture, settlement, fishing and everyday life, while also appearing in local memories, stories and cultural traditions.



Chandil is a popular destination for picnics, boating and birdwatching.

▲ Chandil Dam

Changing Seasons and Vegetation

The climate of this region is tropical monsoonal. Summers are hot, while the monsoon transforms the countryside, bringing heavy rainfall and turning the forests and fields a vivid green. Winters are comparatively cool and dry. The landscape therefore changes noticeably with the seasons, from dry, earthy browns in the hotter months to lush green during the monsoon. Vegetation is dominated by dry deciduous forests, particularly sal trees, along with *mahua, palash,* bamboo, and other native species. Seasonal changes are reflected in festivals and community celebrations, while forests and rivers appear in local stories and folklore.



▲ Palash bloom in spring



▲ Agricultural land



02

Stories of the Land and People

Seraikela Kharsawan is a place where royal heritage, indigenous culture and artistic tradition come together in a striking way. It is a landscape of green forests, red earth, quiet villages and winding roads, with the rugged beauty of the Chota Nagpur Plateau all around. There are places that are best understood through monuments, places whose histories are preserved in archives and places that reveal themselves most clearly through the people who continue to live their traditions. The region carries the memory of a princely state alongside the traditions of indigenous and rural communities. Seraikela Kharsawan's story moves between the royal and the rural, the ceremonial and the everyday, the forest and the workshop, the palace and the village, the stage and the field. The history of Seraikela is closely connected with the history of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, local indigenous communities and the former Seraikela princely state.



Seraikela: The Princely State

The princely state of Seraikela was ruled by the Singh Deo dynasty, which established its territory in the Singhbhum region during the 17th century. The dynasty traces its origins to Odia Rajput lineages and has long maintained cultural connections with Odisha. During British rule, Seraikela was recognised as a princely state. It came under the Chota Nagpur division of the Bengal Presidency and was later part of the Bihar and Orissa Province. Although the British crown exercised overall suzerainty, the Singh Deo rulers continued to manage the internal affairs of the state.

After India gained independence in 1947, the princely states were gradually integrated into the Indian Union. Seraikela was eventually merged with Bihar, along with the neighbouring princely state of Kharsawan. When Jharkhand was created as a separate state in 2000, Seraikela Kharsawan became one of its districts.



▲ Singh Deo Palace

The Vibrant Communities

Seraikela Kharsawan has a diverse indigenous population whose traditions are closely connected with the region's forests, rivers, agriculture and village life. Communities have developed distinctive languages, festivals, belief systems, music, dance and craft practices over generations. The Santhal are one of the major *Adivasi* communities of Jharkhand. Their traditional life is closely linked to agriculture and the natural environment. *Sohrai*, *Baha* and other festivals are important occasions for community gatherings, music and dance. Santhal traditions also include a strong oral culture through which stories, songs and knowledge are passed between generations. The Ho community has a significant presence in the region. Their cultural life is closely associated with agriculture, forests and village institutions. Festivals, traditional music and dance play an important role in community life. The Ho language and oral traditions are also important expressions of their cultural identity. The Munda are another important indigenous community of the Chota Nagpur region. Traditionally, their livelihoods have included agriculture and the use of forest resources. Their social and cultural life includes community festivals, music, dance and customary practices that reflect a close relationship with nature.

The district's present population is diverse, and its linguistic landscape reflects its location at a cultural meeting point. Official district information records Hindi, Odia, Bengali, Santhali and Ho among the languages spoken in the region. Seraikela Kharsawan carries traces of its royal past. Old structures and local traditions recall the days when Seraikela was a princely state, while nearby communities preserve rich indigenous traditions, music, crafts, festivals and oral culture.



▲ Rajagora village





Sabar Community

The Sabar community has a strong relationship with forests and forest-based livelihoods. Knowledge of local plants, natural materials and the surrounding landscape forms an important part of their cultural heritage. In parts of Seraikela Kharsawan, Sabar communities have also been associated with natural-fibre crafts and other livelihood activities.

Flavours of Seraikela Kharsawan

Seraikela Kharsawan has a food culture influenced by tribal traditions, local agriculture, forest resources and neighbouring regions of Odisha and West Bengal. The traditional diet of many rural and indigenous communities is based on rice, seasonal vegetables, pulses, leafy greens and locally available forest products. The cuisine reflects the region's agricultural lifestyle, seasonal availability of ingredients and cultural traditions. Dishes such as *dhuska*, *chilka roti*, *rugra* curry, *nimki,* and *dal pitha* illustrate the region's diverse food traditions. Seraikela *Laddoo* is a distinctive local sweet made primarily from *besan*, ghee, cardamom and sugar and has long been a part of the district's culinary heritage.



▲ Nimki



▲ Seraikela Laddoo



03

Chhau: Rhythm of the Land

The living heritage of Seraikela Kharsawan reflects its cultural diversity, artistic traditions and community life. Three distinct Chhau traditions—Seraikela, Manbhum and Kharsawan—are practised here. While sharing historical roots, each has developed its own character. Seraikela Chhau, which originated here, is known for its delicate masks and graceful movements with semi-classical dance style; Manbhum Chhau (also known as Purulia Chhau, practised mostly along the Jharkhand-West Bengal border) for its elaborate masks and energetic leaps; and Kharsawan Chhau for its maskless performance style, influenced by both Seraikela and Mayurbhanj Chhau, but with strong connections to the cultural traditions of the Ho community. In 2010, UNESCO inscribed Chhau dance on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, encompassing the Seraikela, Purulia and Mayurbhanj traditions. Kharsawan Chhau, a local innovation and practised by a small community, contributes to this diversity, although it is not included in the inscription.

Seraikela Chhau

Seraikela Chhau is a distinctive form of Chhau dance that developed in the former princely state of Seraikela in present-day Jharkhand. It is particularly known for its elegant movements, stylised masks, controlled gestures and strong theatrical quality. Seraikela Chhau tends to emphasise subtlety and expression through the body. The masks are one of the most recognisable features of the tradition. They are traditionally crafted by local artisans and represent deities, mythological figures, animals, warriors, or other characters. The mask is not merely decorative; it shapes how the performer moves and creates a sense of mystery and transformation. Movements of the head, torso, arms and feet become especially important for conveying emotion and character.



▲ Radha Krishna *pala* of Seraikela Chhau

Uniqueness of Seraikela Chhau

Seraikela Chhau is not only a form of storytelling and ritual performance. It also gives communities a way to express their history, emotions, beliefs and understanding of the world. The dance has roots in traditional martial practices such as *Parikhanda Khela*—a form of mock combat used to develop and maintain the skills of warriors. The word Parikhanda comes from *pari*, meaning shield, and *khanda*, meaning sword. Over time, Seraikela Chhau evolved beyond these martial origins. It developed a sophisticated language of movement, gesture, symbolism and abstraction, giving the dance a distinctive artistic character that continues to thrive today. Training in Seraikela Chhau traditionally follows the *Guru Shishya Parampara,* with students learning directly from an experienced guru. Many dancers begin at a young age and first develop physical strength, flexibility, footwork and body control through rigorous exercises such as *uphlei* and *upa-uphlei.* They gradually learn *chali* and *gati,* which form the basis of Chhau movement, along with the controlled gestures and expressions needed for masked performance. The visual effect of Seraikela Chhau is striking, a brightly costumed, masked dancer moves almost silently at first, then suddenly breaks into precise, rhythmic gestures as drums build around the performance. Since the dancers' face cannot communicate emotion, the entire body becomes an expressive language. Seraikela Chhau is therefore not simply a dance—it is a combination of dance, theatre, music, mask-making, costume, mythology and local cultural history. Seraikela Chhau was historically supported by royal patronage and has since become an important symbol of Seraikela Kharsawan's cultural identity and pride.



▲ Seraikela Chhau performance in a village setting



▲ Ritual procession during Chaitra Parab

Ritual Context of Seraikela Chhau

Chaitra Parab, celebrated during March–April, is the main festival associated with Seraikela Chhau. It marks the beginning of the New Year and is linked with the worship of Lord Shiva and Shakti, bringing together Hindu traditions and the nature-based beliefs of local indigenous communities. The festival brings together communities such as the Santhal, Ho, Oraon and Munda, creating a shared space for cultural and spiritual expression. Chhau performances draw on stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas. Shiva is an important figure, while the Seraikela royal family's devotion to Rama has also influenced the dance repertoire. Shakti is represented through deities such as Kalika and Mangal Chandi. Chaitra Parab traditionally lasts thirteen days, with Chhau performances taking place during the final four days. The first three days are open to the public, while performances on the fourth day are traditionally restricted. Each of these four nights is symbolically associated with one of the four *Yugas*—Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali, linking the performances with ideas of creation, heroism and the struggles of human life.



A Brief History

A significant chapter in the history of Seraikela Chhau began in 1937, when Kumar Bijay Pratap Singh of the Seraikela royal family travelled to Europe with a troupe of Chhau performers. This journey introduced the dance to audiences outside India and marked an important step in its wider recognition. Another important figure in the development of modern Seraikela Chhau was Rajkumar Suddhendra Narayan Singh Deo (Padma Shri, 1991) from Seraikela princely state. A performer himself, he took an active role in nurturing and promoting the tradition during the twentieth century. Padma Shri Kedar Nath Sahu, a master choreographer and teacher, was among the most revered figures of Seraikela Chhau in post-Independence India. Beginning his career in the 1950s under the patronage of the Seraikela court, Sahu quickly gained recognition for his technical prowess and depth of *rasa* expression. He played a pivotal role in formalising Chhau training, first informally and later through state institutions.



▲ *Hara-parvati* pala of Seraikela Chhau

Movements as Metaphors

The themes of Seraikela Chhau are drawn largely from mythology, nature, human emotions and everyday experiences. Rather than simply narrating a story, many performances use stylised movement to capture the character, mood or essence of a subject. Stories and episodes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranic traditions provide many themes. Performances explore figures such as Shiva, Krishna, Durga and other deities, emphasising their qualities, actions or relationships. Nature is an important source of inspiration. Dances portray birds, animals, flowers, seasons and natural



▲ *Meghdut* pala of Seraikela Chhau

phenomena, using movement to imitate their distinctive qualities. Themes such as love, devotion, anger, courage, jealousy, sorrow and joy are expressed through stylised bodily movements. Some performances depict battles, warriors, confrontations between good and evil and acts of bravery, reflecting Chhau's historical connection with martial traditions. Because Seraikela Chhau developed within the cultural environment of a princely court, some traditional compositions also reflect courtly aesthetics, refinement, romance and social life. One of the distinctive features of Seraikela Chhau is that a performance need not tell a complete narrative. A dancer uses movement to explore something as simple as a peacock displaying its feathers, a flower blossoming, or the changing mood of a character. Overall, the themes of Seraikela Chhau move between myth and nature, spirituality and human emotion, narrative and abstraction. Its masks and highly controlled movements allow these themes to be expressed visually without relying on spoken dialogue.

Musical Instruments

Music forms an integral part of Seraikela Chhau, shaping the rhythm, mood and energy of the performance. The dancers' movements are closely coordinated with the changing tempo and patterns created by the accompanying musicians. The *dhol* provides a steady rhythmic foundation, while the deep and powerful sound of the *dhamsa* adds intensity to the performance. The *madol* and *nagara* contribute additional rhythmic variations, helping to build momentum and support the dancers during different sequences. The flute introduces a softer and more melodic quality, creating a contrast with the strong percussion. The *shehnai,* with its distinctive ceremonial sound, adds a dramatic and expressive dimension to the music. Together, these instruments create a rich soundscape that complements the masks, costumes and movements of the dancers. The music does more than accompany the performance—it helps set its pace, create its atmosphere and guide the emotional flow of Seraikela Chhau.



▲ Seraikela Chhau musicians with their instruments

Living Legacy of Chhau Masters

Guru Malay Kumar Sahu and Guru Bijay Kumar Sahu are eminent artists of Seraikela Chhau who are training the next generation of Chhau artists. Arjun Gope, Kush Kumar Karua, Daman Hansda and Ganesh Chandra Mahato are other renowned artists.
Malay Kumar Sahu is a distinguished Seraikela Chhau artist and son of Padma Shri awardee Guru Kedar Nath Sahu. With over four decades of experience, he has represented India internationally, performing in countries including China, France and Malaysia through programmes supported by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). A recipient of national scholarships, fellowships and state honours, he founded the Sri Kedar Art Centre to train young artists and support the safeguarding and transmission of Seraikela Chhau.



▲ Malay Kumar Sahu



▲ Hunting pala of Kharsawan Chhau

Kharsawan Chhau

Rooted in local cultural practices, Kharsawan Chhau brings together martial movement, folklore, mythology, nature and ritual traditions. The dance form possesses its own expressive vocabulary, shaped by regional rhythms, physical techniques and community-based performance practices.

One of the defining features of Kharsawan Chhau is its emphasis on dynamic bodily expression. Regional descriptions distinguish it by its maskless performance style, in which facial expression, body paint, vigorous footwork and expansive gestures contribute to characterisation. The dancer's body becomes the primary medium of storytelling, communicating action and emotion through shifts in posture, rhythm, balance, and movement. Its physical vocabulary draws on martial techniques and observations of the natural world, giving the dance an energetic and grounded quality. This form of Chhau is practised mainly by the Ho community.

The thematic world of Kharsawan Chhau encompasses mythological episodes, animal behaviour, hunting, cultivation, local folklore and ritual life. Narratives drawn from the Puranic tradition coexist with representations of everyday community experiences. Nature is not merely a backdrop; it becomes a source of movement, rhythm and symbolism. The physicality of animals, the alertness of a hunter and the repetitive gestures associated with agricultural work are transformed into stylised choreographic expressions. Through these themes, the dance brings together the human, natural and spiritual dimensions of community life.

Manbhum Chhau

Manbhum Chhau, also known as Purulia Chhau, is also practised in parts of Jharkhand and West Bengal, reflecting the shared cultural heritage of the historical Manbhum region. It is a vibrant folk dance tradition rooted in the cultural landscape of the historical Manbhum region. Characterised by elaborate masks, flamboyant costumes, vigorous movements and dramatic storytelling, it brings mythology and folklore to life through a powerful synthesis of dance, music and physical theatre. The historical Manbhum region encompassed areas that today lie in West Bengal and Jharkhand. Following the reorganisation of Manbhum district in 1956, Purulia became a separate district of West Bengal.

Manbhum Chhau dancers wear large, vividly painted masks representing gods, demons, heroes and other mythological figures, often accompanied by towering headgear and elaborate costumes. The movement vocabulary combines martial energy with acrobatic leaps, powerful turns, rhythmic footwork and stylised gestures. Since facial expressions are concealed by masks, the dancer communicates through the body, transforming posture and movement into a language of character and emotion.

The thematic world of Manbhum Chhau draws primarily from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranic mythology. Stories of divine intervention, the struggle between good and evil, courage, devotion and the restoration of cosmic order form the foundation of many performances. These narratives are interpreted through exaggerated movement, dramatic confrontations and visually striking characters. Contemporary performances have also incorporated historical events and social concerns, demonstrating the tradition's capacity to respond to changing times.

▼ Manbhum Chhau performance





▲ A mask maker with his creation

Seraikela Chhau Mask: Expressions Carved in Tradition

The mask is at the heart of Seraikela Chhau, and its making is an important craft tradition in the region. Each mask is carefully designed to support the character, movement and visual style of the performance. One of the distinctive qualities of Seraikela Chhau masks is their controlled and understated appearance. Compared with the more exaggerated forms found in some other Chhau traditions, Seraikela Chhau masks generally use more restrained facial features. The eyes, brows and lips are particularly important. Small changes in these features suggest different emotional qualities or rasas. For example, the shape of the lips suggests happiness, while the eyes create an impression of compassion or serenity. The mask therefore does more than represent a character. It becomes part of the artistic language through which the dancer communicates ideas and emotions.

Diversity in Chhau Masks

The Chhau masks are inspired by Indian mythology and traditional stories. Characters associated with the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranic traditions and other narratives are represented. However, the mask does not necessarily reproduce a realistic human face. Instead, it uses stylisation and visual symbolism. The shape of the eyes, the treatment of the eyebrows, the colour scheme, the ornamentation and the overall proportions suggest the nature of the character. Animals and birds also become subjects of Chhau performance. Mask-making is also a source of livelihood. In recent times, Chhau masks have increasingly attracted interest beyond the stage. Smaller masks and replicas are purchased as decorative objects, souvenirs, cultural artefacts or pieces of traditional art. This creates new opportunities for artisans.

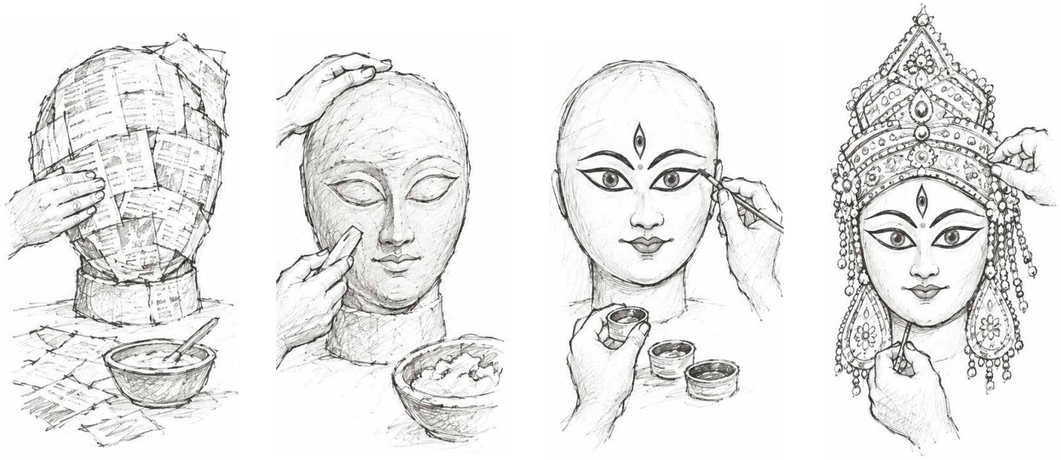


▲ Seraikela Chhau masks

Process of Mask-Making

Creating a Chhau mask requires several careful stages. The basic shape is first formed and allowed to dry. It is then smoothed and prepared for painting. Artisans traditionally use natural and mineral colours to create the distinctive appearance of the masks. Colour is an important visual element because it helps in communicating the personality, mood, status, or supernatural qualities. The eyes, eyebrows, lips and other facial features are carefully defined. Because the mask will be viewed from a distance during a performance, these features need to be visually clear and expressive. Traditional colour materials include *khari mati* for white, *mayur kantho* for teal, *sihuri* for yellow and *sindoor* for red. Different colours are mixed to produce other shades, including blue. The final stage involves adding ornamental details. Once the face is complete, additional elements such as *mukut* (crowns), feathers, beads and decorated fabric are attached.

In earlier times, artisans used materials that were easily available locally, including gourds, wood and bamboo. One traditional form was the *hama patia*, recognised by its wide, open mouth made from bamboo strips and coloured paper. This type of mask was particularly suitable for portraying powerful, frightening or animal-like characters. Over the years, clay became an important material for mask production. Traditionally, clay obtained from the Kharkai River was prepared and combined with natural binding materials. Contemporary artisans have introduced newer methods to make masks lighter, stronger and more comfortable, while still retaining many traditional techniques.



▲ Process of Chhau mask making



Mask makers

Seraikela's Chhau mask makers play an important role in preserving this living tradition. Artists such as Sushanta Mahapatra, his son Sumit Mahapatra and Dilip Acharya continue to practise and develop the craft, demonstrating how knowledge is passed from one generation to another while adapting to contemporary needs.

Headgear

The tradition of Seraikela Chhau headgear is also maintained by artisans such as Ajay Kumar Sahu and his family. Their elaborate crowns and other ornamental pieces complement the masks and contribute to the overall appearance of the performers.



▲ Artist Ajay Kumar Sahu and headgear made by him



04

Forest, Fibre and New Futures

In Seraikela Kharsawan, forests have long provided materials for everyday life and craft. Communities draw on their knowledge of bamboo, grasses, leaves, wood and other natural resources to create useful and decorative objects. Kashi grass and bamboo are woven into baskets, trays, mats and household items, reflecting skills passed down through generations. Today, craftspeople are adapting these skills to new designs and markets, sustaining livelihoods while keeping their craft traditions alive.

Kashi Grass

Kashi grass craft represents one of the distinctive craft traditions of Seraikela Kharsawan in Jharkhand. The craft is especially associated with villages in the Nimdih area, where locally available grass is transformed through handwork into objects that are both functional and decorative.

Kashi grass is a tall perennial grass that grows naturally in parts of Jharkhand. It is commonly found in open spaces, along forest margins and in areas where the soil receives seasonal moisture. The grass grows mainly during and after the rainy season. Once mature, its long stems are harvested and prepared for craftwork. Its natural availability makes it a convenient material for village artisans, while its light weight and flexibility allow it to be manipulated into different shapes. Another important feature of the plant is its capacity to regenerate. Its underground root system helps the grass return after harvesting and also contributes to holding soil together. The production of Kashi grass articles is associated with rural and forest-dependent communities of Seraikela Kharsawan, including members of the Sabar community. Women play an important role in several stages of the craft, from gathering and preparing the grass to weaving and completing the finished products. For many families, craft production can supplement agricultural and other rural activities.



▲ Kashi grass



▲ Kashi grass products

Making of Kashi Grass Craft

The transformation of Kashi grass into a finished article involves considerable manual skill. Although the precise method varies according to the product, the process is broadly understood in several stages. Collection usually takes place after the rainy season, when the grass has grown to a suitable size. Artisans select mature stems and harvest them carefully. The freshly collected stems contain moisture and carry soil or other natural debris. They are therefore cleaned and laid out for sun-drying. Once sufficiently dry, the stems are examined and separated according to characteristics such as size, thickness and flexibility. Depending on the design, an artisan may cut, split, soften or thin individual pieces. Several strands are brought together to create stronger sections suitable for particular forms of weaving or coiling.



▲ Making Kashi grass products



▲ Artist adding finishing touches to a Kashi grass product

Artisans use weaving, coiling, plaiting or related techniques to gradually build the desired form. Some designs incorporate other natural materials, including date palm leaves, to provide variation in texture and appearance. After the main structure has been completed, the artisan examines the piece and removes unwanted fibres. Then edges are strengthened or trimmed, handles are attached and the shape is adjusted.

Kashi grass craft has a strong ecological dimension because its principal raw material comes directly from the surrounding landscape. Instead of relying on plastic or other synthetic materials, artisans make use of a naturally occurring plant resource. The material is also biodegradable, and its local availability reduces the need to transport raw materials over long distances.

Artists and Craft Hubs

Located in the foothills of the Nimdih block in Seraikela Kharsawan district, the villages of Rajagora, Bhangat and Ketunga are known for their Kashi grass artistry. Srikanta Sabar and Balika Sabar, both from Rajagora, are some of the renowned Kashi grass artists from the region.



▲ Kashi grass artists of Ketunga village



Sreemati Sabar is a prominent artisan and community leader from the Sabar community in Bhangat village, Nimdih, Jharkhand. She is known for showcasing traditional Kashi grass handicraft at various regional and national exhibitions.



▲ Contemporary Kashi grass products

Blending Traditional Artistry with Contemporary Design

The versatility of Kashi grass has allowed artisans to move beyond simple traditional containers. Depending on the skill of the maker and the intended market, Kashi grass is used for a variety of products such as baskets, trays, boxes, plant holders, lampshades and decorative wall pieces. This growing range demonstrates how a traditional material is incorporated into modern product design while retaining its handmade character.

Bamboo Craft

Bamboo craft is an important part of the traditional material culture of Seraikela Kharsawan. In the rural areas of the region, bamboo has long been valued as a versatile natural material because it is strong, light, flexible and readily available. Local artisans use it to create objects for household activities, agriculture, storage, decoration and cultural occasions. The craft reflects the close relationship between the people of Seraikela Kharsawan and their natural surroundings.

Bamboo belongs to the grass family and grows rapidly under suitable climatic conditions. Its hollow stem combines lightness with considerable strength, which makes it useful for both structural and craft purposes. In the Seraikela region, bamboo can be found around villages and in forest and agricultural landscapes. It can regenerate relatively quickly when harvested appropriately. The thickness, age, flexibility and condition of a bamboo stem influence whether it is better suited for basketry, weaving, framework, furniture, agricultural equipment or decorative work.

One of the defining features of Seraikela's bamboo craft is its connection with everyday rural life. Bamboo objects have traditionally been used in farming, fishing, storage, transportation, household work and village construction. This practical dimension distinguishes bamboo craft from objects created purely for decoration.





▲ Process of Bamboo craft making



▲ Bamboo craft artists at work

Making of Bamboo Craft

Bamboo craft requires careful preparation and skilled handwork. Stems are selected according to the intended product. Mature stems are generally preferred because they provide greater strength and durability. The bamboo is cut and cleaned before being divided into manageable sections. A bamboo stem is divided into thin strips, narrow splints, or broader sections.

Bamboo strips and pieces are soaked overnight in a protective solution to help prevent damage from pests and insects. They are subsequently dried in the sun. The strips are then softened or bent so that they can be shaped without breaking. For basketry and similar products, prepared strips are interlaced in carefully controlled patterns. Different arrangements of strips produce variations in texture, strength, pattern and appearance. The completed object is trimmed and checked for rough edges or loose strips. Handles, supports, lids or other components are added depending on the design.



▲ Women of Tentlo making bamboo jewellery



▲ Bamboo basketry in the making

Artists and Craft Hubs

The villages of Sima, Tentlo, Matkamdih and Chirugora in Seraikela Kharsawan are among the district's primary cultural hubs of bamboo crafts. Manjura Mahali and Krishnapada Mahali from Tentlo, and Mano Mahali from Chirugora are some of the bamboo craft practitioners from the area.



▲ Home décor items made of bamboo

Bridging Tradition and Modern Design

Bamboo craft in Seraikela Kharsawan reflects both traditional needs and changing lifestyles. Artisans have long created functional objects such as baskets, storage containers, trays and mats for carrying agricultural produce, storing household goods and supporting everyday activities. Building on these skills, they are now exploring contemporary designs, including lampshades, planters, decorative panels and home accessories. This adaptation of traditional craftsmanship to new uses and markets creates opportunities for artisans to diversify their products and strengthen their livelihoods.



▲ Jewellery made of bamboo



05

Experience Seraikela Kharsawan

The quiet movement of a river, the red flame of a palash tree against a blue sky, the sound of a village *haat* waking in the morning, the distant beat of a madol and the sudden appearance of an elephant trail through the forest, together evoke the landscape of Seraikela Kharsawan. Here, nature and culture are woven together, each shaping the landscape and the lives of its communities. Forests and hills frame villages; ponds sustain agriculture and livelihoods; local crafts carry the memory of materials gathered from the land; and Chhau remains part of a living cultural tradition. A journey through this region is therefore not simply a circuit of places. It is an encounter with a way of life shaped by landscape, community and memory.



▲ Cultural destinations of Seraikela Kharsawan

Seraikela Chhau

Kharsawan Chhau

Manbhum Chhau

Chhau Mask making

Bamboo Craft

Kashi Grass Craft



▲ Flame of the forest blooms

A Landscape in Celebration

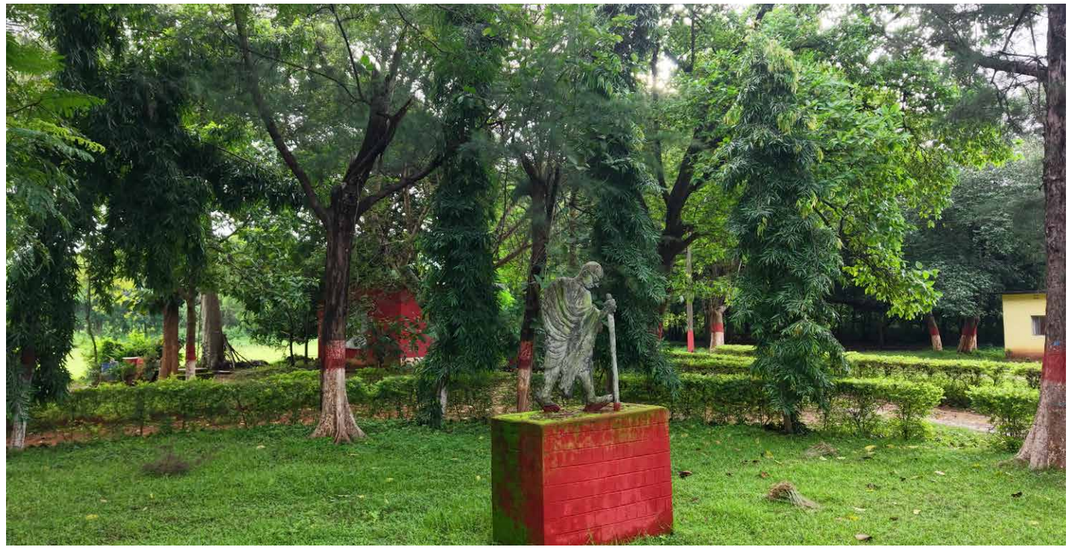
In this part of eastern India, spring announces itself in colour. Palash flowers turn stretches of the landscape into a blaze of orange and red. The festival of Holi, or *Basanta Utsav,* arrives in a landscape already transformed by colour. Palash appears almost without warning, lighting up otherwise quiet stretches of woodland and village roads. Against the muted greens and browns of the dry season, the colour is startling, almost theatrical. For a photographer, it offers an extraordinary palette. For a traveller, it offers a moment of recognition, the feeling that the landscape itself is participating in the festival. The most memorable images of Seraikela Kharsawan may therefore not be monuments at all but a flowering tree beside a village path, a child covered in Holi colours or a cluster of palash glowing in the afternoon sun.

Nimdih: Slow Living Amid Nature and Culture

The Nimdih Gandhi Ashram represents another strand in the story of the region, the continuing resonance of Gandhi's village-centred vision. The Gandhian idea of development was rooted not merely in economic production but in dignity, self-reliance, productive labour and the strengthening of village communities. The Ashram's history is associated with initiatives intended to improve rural livelihoods.

Spread across approximately 20 acres, the Ashram sits in a landscape of hills, trees and open spaces. A hill rises in front of the premises, while plantations surround the site. The setting itself encourages a slower rhythm.

The Ashram has more recently been developed as a place where visitors stay, eat simply and experience the landscape. Cottages, kitchen facilities and a Chhau museum have added new dimensions to the space, while art and craft workshops create opportunities for visitors to encounter local traditions more directly. For those accustomed to the compressed pace of cities, the appeal is elemental: a morning walk, the shade of trees, a village road, birdsong, a local haat and the changing light across the foothills. Here, travel can become less about seeing more and more about noticing more.



▲ Nimdih Gandhi Ashram



▲ Chhau workshop with school children at Nimdih



▲ Chhau festival at Nimdih

A Chhau festival bringing together the Seraikela, Kharsawan and Manbhum traditions offers another way of experiencing the cultural continuum, not as something preserved behind glass but as something performed, practised and reinterpreted. Nearby villages such as Panradda are known for traditional folk instruments including the dhamsa and madol. Their sounds belong to the wider sonic landscape of the region: music that accompanies celebration, gathering and performance. Nimdih also provides a convenient base for exploring nearby cultural hubs and scenic destinations.

Into the Forest: Dalma

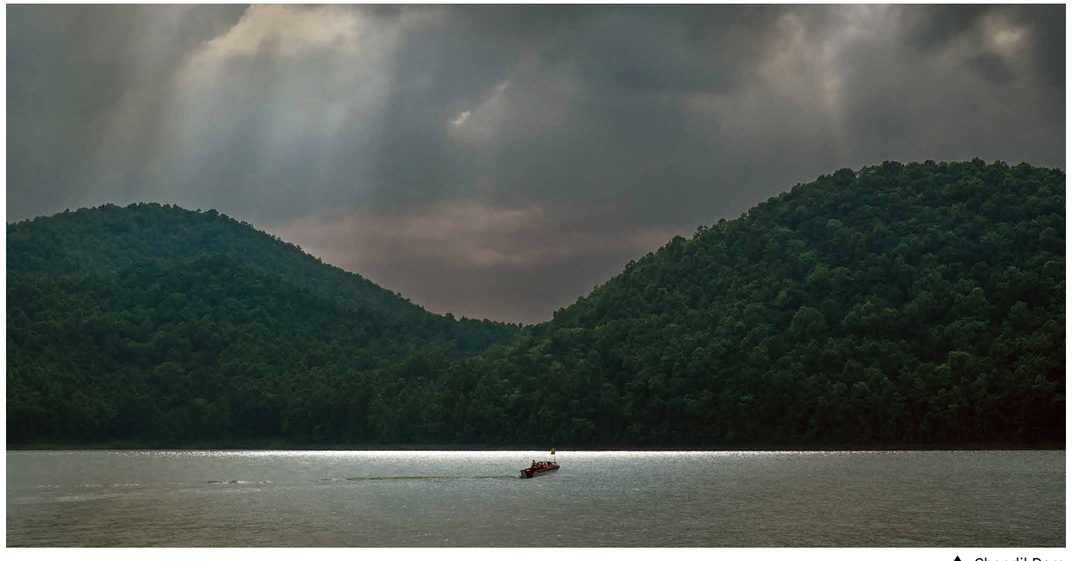


▲ On the way to the Dalma Hills



About 25 kilometres from Nimdih lies Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary, extending along the foothills of the Dalma mountain range. The sanctuary offers an opportunity to move from cultivated landscapes into forest. Visitors can travel by private or locally hired vehicle, following routes into the sanctuary during daytime hours. The forest is particularly known for its elephant population, and elephants are an important part of the wider ecological identity of the Dalma landscape. The sanctuary is also home to a variety of other wildlife, including deer, wild boar, monkeys, jackals and numerous bird species.

Chandil: Water, Hills and Open Skies



▲ Chandil Dam

If Dalma offers immersion in the forest, Chandil offers openness. Approximately 17 kilometres from Nimdih, Chandil Dam stretches across the Subarnarekha, creating a vast expanse of water against a backdrop of hills. Boating brings visitors onto the water, while the surrounding spaces invite picnics and unhurried afternoons. The reservoir changes character with the weather and the hour—bright under the midday sun, reflective in the softer light of evening. The proximity of Chandil to Nimdih and Dalma makes it possible to experience the forest, hill and water within a single journey. Around three kilometres from Chandil Dam is the Jayda Temple, an important local place of worship.

During the *Poush Sankranti* period, the temple becomes the setting for a local fair, bringing together religious observance, commerce, food, movement and community.



▲ Jayda Temple

Visiting the Cultural Hubs



▲ Seraikela Palace

The towns and villages of Seraikela Kharsawan offer visitors opportunities to discover the district's rich performing arts, traditional crafts and living cultural heritage. These cultural hubs are home to artists and craftspeople who continue to practise, transmit and adapt their traditions. The town of Seraikela, the cultural heartland of Seraikela Chhau, offers opportunities to experience this distinctive dance form. The Kedar Art Centre, founded by the late Padma Shri Guru Kedar Nath Sahu, is a traditional school dedicated to preserving and practising the Seraikela style of Chhau. The historic Seraikela Palace, also known as Seraikela Rajbati, is another important heritage site showcasing colonial-era influences and intricate craftsmanship that reflect the region's royal heritage.

Located near Seraikela town, on the banks of the Bong Banga River, Bhimakhand is known for its striking stone formations associated with local Mahabharata legends. These include Bhim's Chulha, a massive stone hearth believed to have been used by Kunti to prepare a feast following Bhima's marriage to Hidimba. The nearby Pandaweshwar Mahadev Temple attracts devotees during *Makar Sankranti*, when a traditional fair is held.

The surrounding villages reveal the diversity of the district's living heritage. Kita is known for its Kharsawan Chhau tradition. Rajagora, predominantly inhabited by the indigenous Sabar community, is renowned for Kashi grass weaving, with artisans crafting baskets, utility products



▲ Ketunga village



▲ Basketry artists in Chirugora village

and decorative pieces. In Ketunga, women lead livelihood initiatives centred on Kashi grass weaving and crochet. Tentlo is known for its traditional bamboo and natural-fibre basketry, now evolving into contemporary lifestyle products and a rural tourism attraction.

Other villages offer encounters with the district's performing arts and associated crafts. Tentoposhi offers a glimpse into the art of Chhau mask-making and is home to the artisan Dilip Acharya. A visit to Dehridih provides an opportunity to experience Kharsawan Chhau and traditional musical instrument-making. Meanwhile, Kotarichara, a small Santhal village, is home to the Seraikela Chhau artist Daman Hansda, offering an intimate look at the performances and everyday lives of Chhau artists.

Together, these villages and cultural centres offer an immersive journey into the living artistic traditions, craftsmanship and community heritage of Seraikela Kharsawan.

Access and Connections

The nearest major airports serving Seraikela Kharsawan are Birsa Munda Airport in Ranchi and Kazi Nazrul Islam Airport in Andal (West Bengal). The road distance from Seraikela town is approximately 135 km to Ranchi and 220 km to Andal. Railways provide access to the district and surrounding urban centres. Sini Junction is the nearest railway station to Seraikela town. Other important stations in the district include Adityapur, Gamharia, Kandra, Chandil and Rajkharsawan. Tatanagar Junction in Jamshedpur is another important railway connection. The district is connected by national highways, state highways and district roads. Road routes link Seraikela Kharsawan with Jamshedpur, Ranchi and Chaibasa. Local buses, taxis, auto-rickshaws and other public or private vehicles are used for transportation.



▲ The scenic beauty of the Dalma Hills

Living Traditions, Evolving Cultures, Enduring Stories

The living heritage of Seraikela Kharsawan reflects a continuing dialogue between tradition and change. From the refined movements of Seraikela Chhau to the vibrant performances of Kharsawan and Manbhum Chhau, and from intricate mask-making to the weaving of Kashi grass and bamboo, the district's artistic expressions embody generations of knowledge, creativity and skill. These traditions are not static legacies of the past. They continue to evolve through the imagination, practice and aspirations of the communities who sustain them.

The future of the district's heritage depends on nurturing young talent, supporting master artists and craftspeople, adapting traditional skills to contemporary needs and expanding audiences to sustain cultural knowledge and creative livelihoods across generations. Seraikela Kharsawan offers visitors meaningful experiences through its cultural villages, performances, crafts and natural landscapes. Community-led tourism fosters local interactions, creates livelihood opportunities and strengthen pride in living heritage while respecting cultural traditions and community priorities.

As Seraikela Kharsawan looks forward, its greatest strength lies in the creativity and knowledge of its people. Supporting their aspirations and enabling communities to shape their own cultural and economic futures will help ensure that the district's living traditions continue to flourish, finding new expressions and audiences while remaining rooted in the places and communities that give them meaning.

Glossary

Adivasi: A collective term referring to indigenous communities of India, literally meaning original inhabitants.

Ashram: Spiritual hermitage, monastery or retreat centre.

Baha: A major three-day spring flower festival celebrated by tribal communities like the Santhal, Ho, and Munda in eastern Indian states.

Basanta Utsav: A spring festival associated with the celebration of colours.

Besan: Flour made from Bengal gram (chickpeas).

Chaitra Parab: A vibrant spring festival celebrated during the Hindu month of Chaitra primarily in Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Chali: Stylised walking movements and gait patterns forming part of the basic movement vocabulary of Chhau dance.

Chilka Roti: A round bread prepared using rice flour.

Chulha: A traditional hearth or cooking stove.

Dal Pitha: A dish of steamed dumplings filled with spiced lentils.

Dhamsa: A large, bowl-shaped traditional kettle drum used by indigenous communities in eastern India.

Dhol: A double-headed barrel drum from the South Asian subcontinent.

Dhuska: A popular deep-fried snack made with lightly fermented batter.

Durga: Goddess in Hinduism, representing supreme power, protection and the triumph of good over evil.

Dvapara Yuga: The third of the four ages in Hindu cosmology, preceding Kali Yuga.

Gati: Stylised movement patterns used to depict particular characters, actions or qualities, often inspired by nature and everyday life.

Ghee: Clarified butter used in Indian cooking.

Guru Shishya Parampara: An ancient Indian lineage system where spiritual, intellectual, and practical knowledge passes directly from a teacher (guru) to a disciple (shishya).

Haat: An open-air weekly or periodic market held regularly in rural or semi-urban areas.

Hama Patia: A traditional form of Chhau mask characterised by a wide, open mouth, made using bamboo strips and coloured paper, often representing fierce or animal-like characters.

Hara-parvati: Lord Shiva (Hara) and Goddess Parvati, symbolizing divine love and harmony in Hinduism.

Ho: An indigenous ethnic group in Eastern India.

Holi: A major Hindu spring festival of colours and love, celebrating the divine love of Radha and Krishna.

Kalika: A major Hindu deity associated with time, destruction and power.

Khari Mati: A traditional white natural clay, chalk, or kaolin material.

Krishna: Hindu God who is considered to be the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Laddoo: A round sweet from the Indian subcontinent made of various ingredients like milk, sugar syrup or jaggery.

Lord Shiva: One of the principal deities of Hinduism.

Madol: A traditional, double-headed cylindrical hand drum.
Mahabharata: One of the major Sanskrit epics of ancient India.

Makar Sankranti: A Hindu solar festival marking the Sun's transition into Capricorn, associated with seasonal celebrations and fairs.

Mahua: A deciduous tree also known as the Indian Butternut tree indigenous to the Indian subcontinent.

Mangal Chandi: A revered form of the Hindu goddess Durga.

Mayur Kantho: A shimmering, iridescent peacock-neck colour inspired by the shifting hues of a peacock's neck.

Meghdut: Literally means 'cloud messenger'; the title of a celebrated Sanskrit poem by Kālidāsa and a theme interpreted in Seraikela Chhau.

Mukut: An Indian crown or headgear worn during weddings, religious ceremonies or theatrical performances.

Munda: An indigenous ethnic group primarily concentrated across the Chhotanagpur Plateau in eastern India.

Nagara: A traditional South Asian and Middle Eastern kettle drum played with sticks.

Nimki: A crunchy savoury snack.

Oraon: A major ethnolinguistic indigenous group in India.

Padma Shri: A civilian honour awarded by the Government of India.

Pala: An episode or composition in a traditional performance, often depicting a particular story, character or theme.

Palash: Widely known as the Flame of the Forest, is a medium-sized deciduous tree known for its orange-red flowers.

Parikhanda Khela: A form of mock combat used to develop and maintain the skills of warriors.

Poush Sankranti: A traditional mid-winter harvest festival celebrated on the last day of the Bengali month of Poush.

Puranas: Ancient Hindu texts containing mythology, cosmology, genealogies and religious traditions.

Puranic: Relating to the Puranas, a collection of ancient Hindu texts containing stories of gods and goddesses, mythology, cosmology, genealogies and religious traditions.

Radha: A central figure in Hindu devotional traditions, particularly associated with Krishna and divine love.

Rajbati: Refers to a royal residence or palace.

Rama: A Hindu deity and the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu.

Ramayana: One of the major Sanskrit epics of ancient India.

Rasa: An aesthetic mood or emotional essence evoked through artistic performance.

Rugra Curry: A seasonal forest mushroom dish popular in Jharkhand and surrounding regions like Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

Sabar: An indigenous community found in parts of eastern and central India, with traditions closely associated with forests and natural resources.

Sal: A large, slow-growing hardwood tree native to the Indian subcontinent.

Santhal: An indigenous community living primarily in eastern India, as well as Bangladesh and Nepal.

Shakti: The primordial cosmic energy and feminine power that sustains all existence in Hinduism.

Shehnai: A traditional double-reed woodwind musical instrument from the Indian subcontinent.

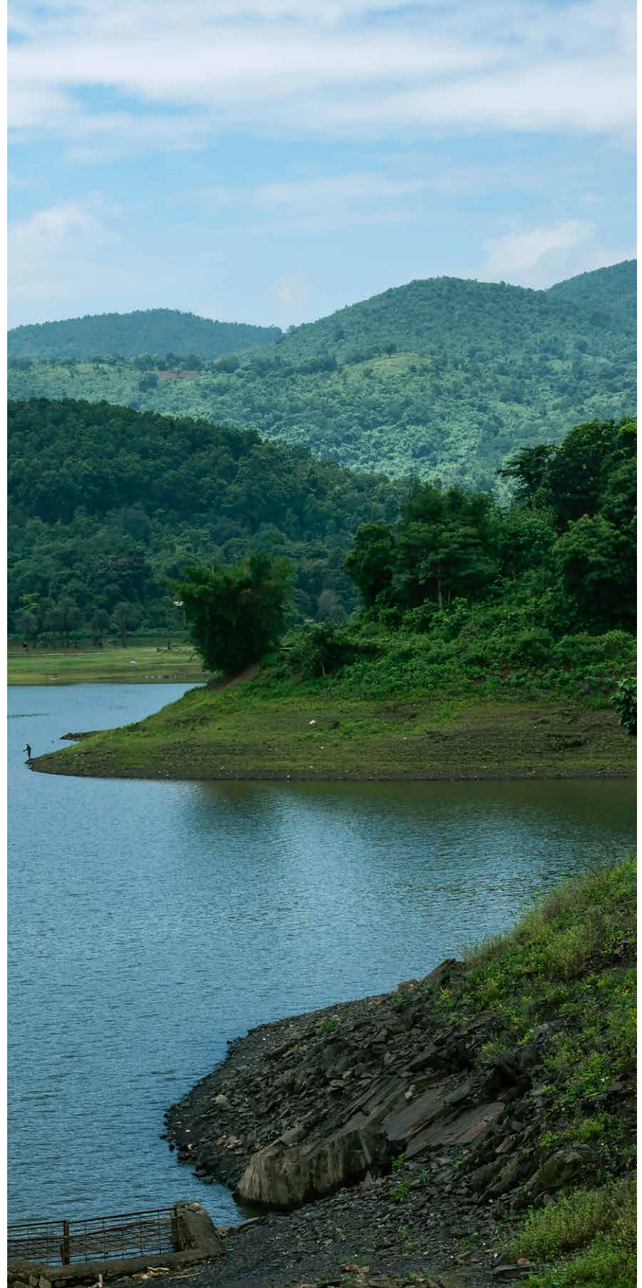
Sihuri: A natural, earth-mined yellow mineral pigment.

Sindoor: A traditional vermilion-red or orange-red cosmetic powder or liquid worn by married Hindu women.

Sohrai: A harvest-related festival celebrated by several communities of eastern India, particularly associated with cattle, agriculture and thanksgiving.

Uphlei and Upa-Uphlei: Foundational physical exercises in Seraikela Chhau training that develop strength, flexibility, balance and control through structured movements, including leg extensions and jumps.

Yugas: The four repeating world ages or epochs in Hindu cosmology that measure the cyclical progression of time.



References

Bose, N. K. (1971). Tribal Life in India. National Book Trust. Available at: https://books.google.com/books?q=Tribal+Life+in+India+N.K.+Bose

Directorate of Census Operations, Jharkhand. (2014). Census of India 2011: Jharkhand, Series 21, Part XII A, District Census Handbook, Saraikela Kharsawan. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. Available at: https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/?page=4&ps=15&sk=Jharkhand&tab_type=document

Jha, B. K. (2024). “Negotiating Identity: Seraikela Chhau Between Folk and Classical.” Journal of Social and Economic Justice, 4(4), 85–92. Available at: https://jsej.bipinkumarjha.com/Archieve/JSEJ-44/44/44%20(9).pdf

Kothari, S. (1968). Chhau Dances of India. Marg, 22(1). Retrieved from https://marg-art.org/reader/?order-id=T3JkZXI6MTgzODg=&line-id=T3JkZXJMaW5lOjE4OTE3

Paty, C. K. (2002). History of Seraikella and Kharsawan States. Classical Publishing Company. Available at: https://books.google.com/books?id=8EVuAAAAMAA

Roy Biswas, K. (2008). Masks from the archives of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge, 7(1).

Singh Deo, J. B. (1973). Chhau – Mask Dance of Seraikela. Calcutta: Radiant Process.

Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the members of the Seraikela Chhau, Manbhum Chhau, Kharsawan Chhau communities along with Kashi grass and bamboo craft artists, whose collective efforts and active participation made this publication possible. The tradition bearers are from Rajagora, Bhangat, Ketunga, Tentlo, Chirugora, Jamdih, Chunchuria, Kushputul, Jhimri of Nimdih Block, Seraikela and Kharsawan town, Dehridih of Kharsawan Block, Gamharia, Tentoposi of Gamharia Block, Choga of Ichagarh Block, Kita, Chota Tangrani from Seraikela Block, Kuchai, Maranghatu, Aruwan from Kuchai Block and Kotarichara of Rajnagar Block. We sincerely thank the management of Nimdih Gandhi Ashram for their kind cooperation.

We acknowledge photographers who joined the immersive photo tour organised as part of the Axis Bank Foundation-supported project Roots to Prosperity, namely Ajaya Kumar Behera, Amlan Biswas, Lopamudra Talukdar, Nilanjan Bose, Sabyasachi Talukdar, Debashis Roy, Sanhita Bhaumik, Sanjay Hazra, Santanu Chandra, Souren Banerjee, Shantanu Das and Bikash Mondal whose visual documentation is included in this book.

The Contact Base team led the research, content development and design of this publication. This publication is a collective effort, shaped by the knowledge, creativity and generosity of the communities and collaborators who brought Seraikela Kharsawan's living heritage to life.

‘Roots to Prosperity: Developing Sustainable Livelihoods through Heritage’ is an initiative implemented by Contact Base (banglanatak dot com) with the support of Axis Bank Foundation. Spanning Seraikela Kharsawan in Jharkhand and Mayurbhanj and Koraput in Odisha, the project works with more than 5,500 traditional artists, craftspeople and rural communities to strengthen creative livelihoods rooted in living heritage.

The initiative supports cultural practitioners, including dancers, musicians, mask-makers, weavers, wood and natural-fibre artisans, through skill development, creative enterprise promotion, market linkages and community-led cultural tourism. It seeks to create sustainable economic opportunities, encourage intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and enhance the visibility of lesser-known cultural destinations.

Seraikela Kharsawan: A Cultural Odyssey has been developed as part of this initiative to celebrate the district’s cultural diversity, natural landscapes and living traditions, while inviting readers to discover the people and communities who sustain them.



AXIS BANK FOUNDATION

banglanatak.com
CONTACT BASE