Impact of Nature and Natural Behaviour Patterns on the *Aangikaabhinaya*/Movement Vocabulary of Chau

Doğanın ve Doğal Davranış Kalıplarının Chau Dansının *Aangikaabhinaya*/Hareket Dağarcığı Üzerindeki Etkisi

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ABSTRACT

It is believed that from the earliest periods, the human species began to dramatically imitate the actions of animals. This natural behaviour pattern can be traced to tribal and folk art, such as painting, music, dance, and dance theatre. 'Chau', often spelt as 'Chhau' by some Indian authors, is a dance and dance-theatre form from the eastern region of India; it is one of the significant examples of how animal movements and subsequent nature patterns primarily impact dance patterns and their presentation. Chau is one of the famous traditional theatres of India, often categorized as semi-classical dance theatre, mainly because of its movement vocabulary. This article aims to examine and discuss how such patterns emerged and how they hold significance in shaping these movements. While Chau adapted technicality in its presentation and instrumentation, its core and legacy remain unchanged – namely, its movement vocabulary pattern and folklore-mythology.

Keywords: Animal, Performance, *Abhinaya*, Traditional Dance Theater, Cultural Heritage, Folk Dance

ÖZ

İnsan türünün en erken dönemlerden itibaren hayvanların hareketlerini dramatik bir şekilde taklit etmeye başladığına inanılmaktadır. Bu doğal davranış kalıbının izlerini resim, müzik, dans ve dans tiyatrosu gibi kabile ve halk sanatlarında bulmak mümkündür. Bazı Hintli yazarlar tarafından sıklıkla 'Chhau' olarak yazılan 'Chau', Hindistan'ın doğu bölgesine ait bir dans ve dans tiyatrosu biçimidir; hayvan hareketlerinin ve buna bağlı doğa kalıplarının öncelikle dans kalıplarını ve bunların sunumunu nasıl etkilediğinin önemli örneklerinden biridir. Chau Hindistan'ın ünlü geleneksel tiyatrolarından biridir ve çoğunlukla hareket dağarcığı nedeniyle yarı-klasik dans tiyatrosu olarak sınıflandırılır. Bu makalenin amacı, bu tür kalıpların nasıl ortaya çıktığını ve bu hareketleri şekillendirmede nasıl bir öneme sahip olduklarını incelemek ve tartışmaktır. Chau sunum ve enstrümantasyonda teknikselliği uyarlamış olsa da özü ve mirası – yani hareket dağarcığı ve folklor mitolojisi – değişmeden kalmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hayvan, Performans, *Abhinaya*, Geleneksel Dans Tiyatrosu, Kültürel Miras, Halk Dansı

Introduction

The movement vocabulary of Chau continues to evolve through animalistic imitations, symbolic representations, and regular human activities, making it both traditional and improvised. The foundation of its movements originates from *Parikhanda* (sword and shield combat technique), a martial art that produces both powerful physicality and rigorous yet stylized moves. The objective of this research study is accordingly on investigating the development of Chau's movement terminology through behavioural elements derived from nature together with animal movement patterns and activities from human interaction.

This research investigates some questions about Chau's movement vocabulary: How has the movement vocabulary of Chau been shaped, and to what extent, through natural elements and animal behavioural observations? What are the three forms of Chau dance? What are their structural elements and stylistic features across Saraikela, Mayurbhanj, and Purulia? How does the movement aesthetics of Chau develop through martial arts practice and the performance of everyday activities as well as traditional cultural customs of the region? What distinct characteristics do Chau's movement patterns share with Indian classical dance forms, and what traits are unique to Chau? This paper investigates these research questions to create an extensive examination of Chau's structural performance components alongside its movement terminology and its social and cultural meanings.

Chau: a dance-theatre

Chau is inscribed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Chau primarily refers to the mask dance-theatre form which has more physicality derived from animalistic movements and symbolic representation. It is performed in open spaces and only by men. The mask is an essential part of Chau, except in the Mayurbhanj Chau style from northern Orissa (a province in India). *Chauk* is a primary standing position of Chau. Stylized gait and locomotion in Chau are called *Chali*s. The basic Chalis further develops into units called *Topka*s. From *Topka*s, it evolves into the next unit, called *Ufli*s. Topkas and *Ufli*s are basic arrangements of feet and postures. They are identical to *Adavu*s or primary dance exercises of Indian classical dances, like Bharatanatyam. Specifically,

> *Topka* may be defined as the style of gait or locomotion in which the imagery suggested by the name is conjured up mainly through the flexions of the body, and the footwork follows perfectly in consonance with it. However, in *Ufli*, the legs become eloquent in

> conjuring up the inspiring imagery, and the body moves obediently in agreement... *Ufli*s and *Topka*s are the alphabet of Chau. (Pani, 1969, p. 38)

A combination of *Topka*s, *Ufli*s, and *Chali*s forms a rhythmic sequence called *Bhangi*. Chau has more flexibility in technique and movement patterns; unlike classical dances in India, it does not have *hast-mudras* (Hand gestures).

Besides nature, animal movement, and behavioural patterns, regular household chores and activities have become part of Chau's vocabulary; this type of movement has no ritual or ceremonial meaning. The martial art stance *'Parikhanda'* (Martial art created by the Rajput community in north India) is the foundation of Chau movement patterns. The term *Parikhanda* is derived from two words - *'Pari'* meaning sword, and *'Khanda'* meaning shield. Parikhanda originated in the Saraikela and Singbhum regions of Jharkhand. Chau encompasses the physical and socio-cultural environment of both humans and nature. This dance form is ancient and tribal, close to nature, and it is interesting to observe how humans' social activities, human nature, animal movements, and natural patterns impacted Chau.

Dynamics of Chau

Chau means 'shadow', which is derived from the Sanskrit term 'Chāyā'. Also, in Oria language dialects, Chau means, 'to attack stealthily.' However, renowned dance historian Kapila Vatsyayan argues that apart from the chāyā-Shadow interpretations, other scholarly views also exist. For instance, Chau may be derived from the Sanskrit term 'Chadma', which means disguise, and Chau is a corruption of the term- 'Chauni', which refers to military Camp (Vatsyayan, 2005, p. 68). However, the commonly accepted etymology is Chau - Chaya - (Shadow). The dance technique of Chau involves minimal movement in the upper body compared to the lower part, which includes more foot movements. The three forms known by the generic term Chau belong to eastern India: Saraikela from Jharkhand, Mayurbhanj from Orissa, and Purulia from West Bengal.

Moreover, it is notable that all three Chau performers are Odiya language speakers. So, Chau is an Odiya dance-theatre form, and its movements resemble a war dance. Most performers are from the sections of socio-economic depressed classes, and many are from lower class and castes too. Saraikela Chau, belonging to today's Jharkhand States, Singhbhum region, uses small masks and comprises energetic movements. Body movement in Saraikela is derived from Parikhanda, a martial art. Its performances are based on folk music, without any dialogues and words. Saraikela is patronized by the princess and performed by different sections of communities. Mayurbhanj

performers are not low in social strata but belong to the various backward communities and are performed by the priest among those groups. Mayurbhanj hails from Orissa, and its performers do not use a mask.

Furthermore, Purulia Chau performers are the depressed and lower-income class in West Bengal's Purulia district. Large masks are used in this form to depict the character and create visualization. Historically, Purulia Chau communities have had systematic economic hardship due to their agrarian and labour-centric occupation, lack of land ownership, unstable income sources, and lack of formal education. The patronage system of royals and princely states supported Saraikela and Mayurbhanj Chau, yet Purulia Chau thrived autonomously through community support during local festivals without enduring continuous royal support. Figure 1 illustrates the Origin of Chau - Saraikela, Mayurbhanj and Purulia:
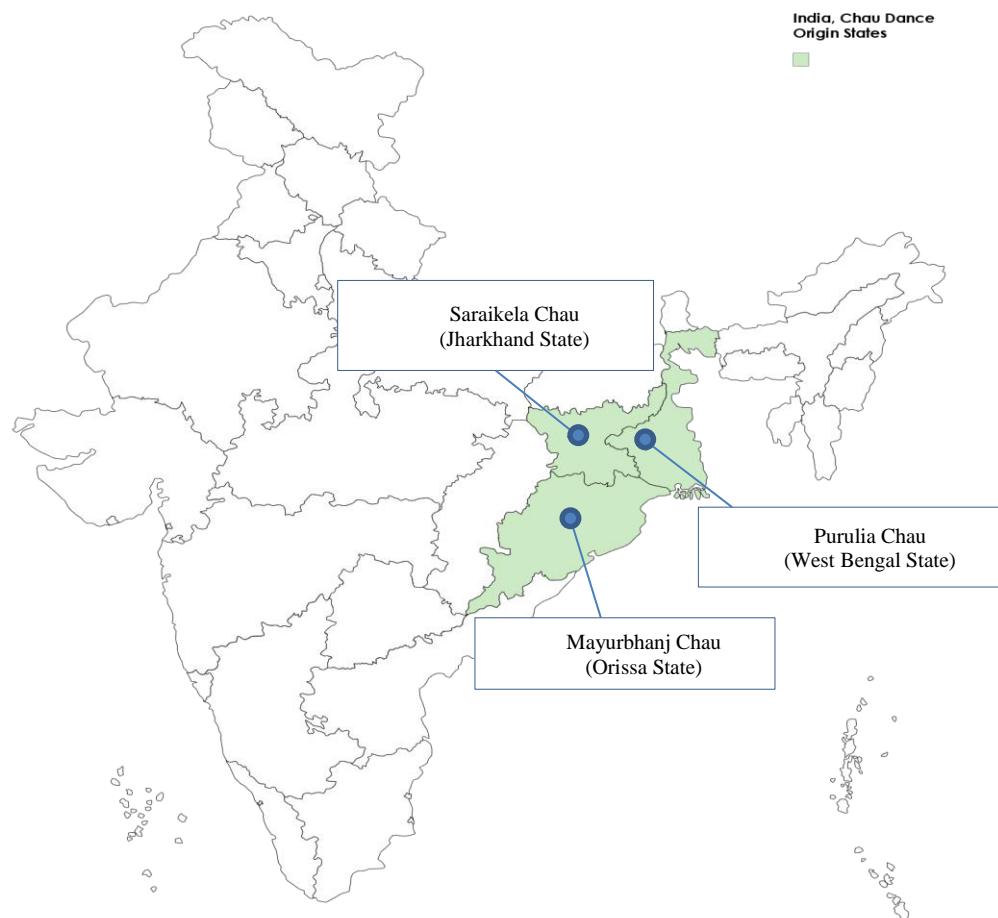
Note. **Figure 1**. Map generated customized by mapchart.net, under Creative Commons License, (CC BY 4.0). It indicates the Chau dance of eastern India, its forms, and its place of origin (Bhalerao, 2024).

Comparisons between Saraikela, Mayurbhanj, and Purulia Chau

Saraikela is located in Jharkhand, near the Kharkai River. The region is known for its fertile vegetation, which remains abundant throughout the year. On the other hand, Mayurbhanj is located in the south-eastern part of Orissa, and the area's tribespeople engage in slash-and-burn farming. Purulia is located in Bengal, where the average amount of rainfall is minimal; the major geographical features of the area include rice farms and arid and barren hilly regions. The performer communities are thus different in all three forms of Chau. Originally in Saraikela, the dance was patronized by princes who used to dance occasionally. Today, the dance is performed by other communities such as Kansari, Gudya, and Tamilee. Chaus forms of Saraikela and Mayurbhanj are places' names, and these two princely state rulers enthusiastically patronize their region's performance art form. Therefore, we can observe the well-structured movement vocabulary of these two forms by forwarding their lineage and oral traditions throughout the generations. Purulia Chau follows more simplicity in movement vocabulary, leaning more towards theatricality and dramatizing characters.

The reason lies in demographies: West Bengal's Folk Theatre form, *Jatra*, which is an improvised, entertaining, storytelling, and acting-dancing form impacted, transmitted into West Bengal's Purulia Chau's style and grammar. Parikhanda martial arts helped develop extensive movement patterns in Saraikela and Mayurbhanj. Mayurbhanj was influenced by a wide variety of tribal dances, especially the Gotipuas and Mahari dance of Puri (Orissa State) (Vatsyayan, 2005, p. 67).

Each style of Chau has its own distinct identity, defined its unique performing techniques. Saraikela, known as *'Pari-Khanda Khela,'* means Sword and Shield Play. The simple dance of Mayurbhanj Chau, known as *'Rruk-naar Naacha,'* means Defense and Attack Dance. However, Purulia Chau's repertoire theme revolves around the fight (Purulia Chhau: Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, 2018). It can be understood that Chau evolved from a Martial Art form. Orissa State has a martial art form, *'Paaika Naacha,'* which means Soldiers Dance; Chau's rudimentary technique has traces of it. Figure 2 illustrates the performance visual of Saraikela Chau:

Note. **Figure 2** Saraikela Chau, image retrieved from streaming media (Sahapedia, 2016), under Creative Commons License, (CC BY 4.0).

The Mayurbhanj Chau is performed by Nats, Bhadas, Bhumiyas, Paikas and other communities, and the priests' dancing is also from the communities mentioned above. Figure 3 illustrates representative performance of Mayurbhanj Chau:

Note. **Figure 3**. Mayurbhanj Chau, image retrieved from villagesquare.in, under Creative Commons License, (CC BY 4.0). Bibhudatta Das (Project Chhauni & Das, n.d.)

As explained earlier, in Purulia, most performers belong to the category of socially and economically marginalized communities such as the Bhumij, Mura, Santhals, and Kurmis. Figure 4 illustrates the performance visual of Purulia Chau:

Note. **Figure 4.** Purulia Chau, image retrieved from connectedtoindia.com, under Creative Commons License, (CC BY 4.0). Ensemble of Biren Kalindi (Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay et al., 2023)

Similarly, they have differences in the themes of the performances. Saraikela specializes in traditional stories or legends, including the Puranas and others, and employs allegory in its narration. On the contrary, Mayurbhanj Chau has plainer references to myths like Garuda Vahana and Samudra Manthan, but the primary focus is on more mundane activities such as hunting and fishing. The folklore of Purulia Chau is based on Hindu mythology, especially Ramayana and Bhagavata, and it is the hallmark of Jhumar – a folk singing. The ritual songs accompanying these performances are associated with agrarian cycles, specifying sowing or harvesting seasons, emphasizing the closeness of these art forms to rural and agricultural traditions (Bhalerao, 2021). Table 1 presents a comparison of three types of Chau; Saraikela, Mayurbhanj and Purulia:

Table 1

	Saraikela	Mayurbhanj	Purulia
Region and Flora	Situated in Jharkhand State	Prevalent in the southeastern part of Orissa	Located in West Bengal
	Fertile vegetation throughout the year since it is situated on the banks of the Kharkai river	Tribal groups - Shift cultivators	Rainfall is scarce, and rice is the main crop, along with hilly areas and barren land
Performer	Patronized by princes	*Nat*s, *Bhada*s,	Backward classes

Communities	and performed by them	*Bhumiyas*, *Paika*s, and other	perform this
	Communities like- *Kansari, Gudya, Tamilee, Khandhra, Telee, Badhiya, Pathras, Baniya*	Mayurbhanj Chau is performed by the priests within the community	Communities like - *Bhumij, Mura, the Santhal*s, and the *Kurmi*s
Performance Themes	Purana (Ancient texts/Mythologies) stories, myth and legend, epic themes, figurative symbolism	Simple themes such as hunting and fishing	Stories of the epics like Ramayana Bhagavata (Hindu Texts) were adopted
	-	Hindu myths exist in dance dramas such as Garuda Vahana, Kailasa, Samudra Manthan, etc.	Singing style - Jhumar. Ritual songs revolved around sowing, harvesting, etc.

Note. Compiled from (Bhikshu, 2018) & (Bhalerao, 2021)

Commonalities and Differences

Despite the differences in geography, there are similarities between the three forms: all have drawn themes from epics, Indian mythologies, and Puranic literature as their sources. As in any other aspect, there are significant differences in the physical techniques applied in the dance. For example, bending on the knee exists in Mayurbhanj and Purulia Chau but is not significantly observed in the Saraikela style. All three contain *Ufli*s and *Topka*s, where household and animal-inspired movements occur. These are basic positions, gaits, and steps to begin with Chau, formally performed with Sword and Shield in the right and left hand. However, while learning the basics of Chau, mimicking the holding of the sword and the shield is common. Purulia Chau is the only form that uses walking on the knees. The use of jumps, leaps, and spins also differs. In Mayurbhanj Chau, one can come across episodes like *'Duba'* (dipping, diving, swimming and the like) and *'Uska'* (jumping, leaping and others), and similarly, in the movement of Purulia Chau, fish-like movements as well as swan-like rippling are involved. Saraikela does not contain such factors (Acharya, 2019). While comparing the costumes and styles of the performances of Saraikela, Purulia Chau, and Mayurbhanj Chau, both Saraikela and Purulia Chau use masks, but Mayurbhanj

Chau do not. Mayurbhanj also excels in using upper torso and limb motions, which are missing in the dance forms of Saraikela and Purulia. Despite the thematic similarities, there are vital differences in the aesthetics of each of the three forms concerning the techniques of the performance, the physical moves, and the costumes (Bhikshu, 2018). Table 2 presents a comparison of Technical and Thematic Elements of Chau:

Table 2

	Saraikela	Mayurbhanj	Purulia
Themes in common	Epics, Indian mythologies, and Puranas	Epics, Indian mythologies, and Puranas	Epics, Indian mythologies, and Puranas
Bending on Knee	No	Yes	Yes
*Ufli*s and *Topka*s (Household and Animal) Movements	Yes	Yes	Yes
Walk on the knees	No	No	Yes
Jumps, leaps, and Spin around	No	Yes, *Duba* (Dipping, diving, or swimming movement), *Uska* (Jumping and leaping movements)	Yes, ripping movements like Fish and Swan.
Mask	Yes	No	Yes
Utilize the upper torso and the articulation of the lower limbs.	No	Yes	No

Note. Compiled from (Bhikshu, 2018) & (Bhalerao, 2021)

Movement Analysis

Most of the source material of the Chau depends on oral tradition. The movement vocabulary of Saraikela Chau is based on a systematic martial exercise - *Parikhanda*, which is practised in a group in the morning, like exercise. It is like a training technique to prepare a soldier. Performers often use gestures and props like holding a sword, arrow, bow, and *Trishula* (three-headed spear).

Walking, jumping, leaping, swift turns, and rapid spinning are similar to military drilling. The torso is used more often than a spiral movement and in resistance to the movements of the hips and body lower limbs.

In Saraikela Chau, *Chali* denotes nature-inspired movement in space. With *Chali*, Chau performer comes to the arena. Moreover, in Mayurbhanj Chau, the authentic dance starts with *Chali. Chali* relates to Human body movements and includes animal, bird, and even nature-inspired movements as a symbolic and metaphoric representation. *Chali* steps include front, back, and side, followed by percussion rhythm with various tempos, like single, double, quadruple, and others. Chali is classified into ten sorts, i.e., *Ek Padi* means move once; *Dui Padi*, move twice; *Teen Padi,* move three times; *Adali,* sideway walks; *Peechhali,* move backwards; *Bagh*, tiger gait; *Teetir,* steps like a bird; *Gomutra Chanda,* crisscross movement; *Akash Gati,* movement like a floating cloud in the space; and *Suru Gati,* a light move. Purulia Chau uses more acting based on war, fighting, and animal behaviour. In comparison, Mayurbhanj and Saraikela Chau use martial arts exercise patterns and *Parikhanda* (Sword and Shield Method).

Saraikela Chau is not precisely a dance-drama like Purulia and Mayurbhanja. It is considered a pure dance form. *Parikhanda*-Martial arts has a vast influence on this form. Scholar Jeevan Pani, in his comparison between Saraikela and Mayurbhanj, observes:

> Deep in the past, before guns thundered the age-old weapons off the stage, men-at-arms used to parade, rhythmically, their mastery over weighty weapons like the sword, shield, club, spear or bow. To keep up the mastery, they also held a sort of mock-fight. To the beat of the huge war drums, one group would attack the other and defend, giving rise to a martial dance form known as Rookmar Nacha or Pharikhanda Khela. ... Under the royal patronage of the different princely states of Orissa, Chhau was nurtured and developed. (Pani, 1969, p. 35)

As it was patronized by the king, later Maharaja Aditya Pratap Singh Deo codified its technique. *Chali*s are divided into six types, and *Ufli*s into thirty-six. The *Khel* technique is depicted as a traditional weapon practice divided into ten. *Topka* is a local variation of movement which aesthetically placed into the body movement. *Kasagati* (medium movement), *Jhonkcholi* (bend movement), *Surochali* (pleasurable royal gait), *Sagar Gatee* (the ocean gaits), *Bagh Chali* (tiger movement), *Hasti Gatee* (gait of the elephant), *Mayra Gatee* (gait of peacock and *Hansagatee*) (gait of swan) are some *Topka*s which are commonly used. Apart from this, there are fifty combinations of *Chali*, *Ufli*, and *Topka* called *Bhangi*. *Bhangi* comprises all *Rasa* described in *Natyashastra* (Indian treatise on dramaturgy).

As discussed earlier, in Chau, the initial spinal body posture is known as *Chauk.* This means a stealth attack. Compared with the Indian classical dance Odissi from Orissa, *Chauk* of Odissi is bound with devotional calmness towards the Lord Jagannatha. In Mayurbhanj Chau, *Chauk* portrays a masculine mythical hero. This is because Mayurbhanj Chau's background originated from a war field, whereas the divine inspiration of Lord Jagannatha nurtured Odissi. Mayurbhanj Chau's performance shows the dance expression of village culture with tribal elements. The performer expresses his inner emotions through facial expressions, where his body movements and legs are core tools. The performer does not communicate through dialogue or lyrics.

The reformation of Mayurbhanj arrived in three kinds: *Lakshana, Tandava,* and *Lasya.* These elements and vocabulary are found in activities such as *Hathiyar Dhari*, which means holding a weapon; this is a *Tandava* stance. *Kalibhanga* means to break a floret. The action of this stance is tender; hence, this is a *Lasya* posture. *Kalikat* means cutting the bud with the help of a weapon. Here, both *Lasya* and *Tandava* merged in this posture.

In Oriya dialects, the male *Ufli*s are known as *Khanda Haan*, with movements symbolizing various actions such as killing someone with a sword *(Khanda Haan)*; cutting spiny bushes *(Kant Khat)*; cutting spiny bushes, removing thorns from a path *(Kant Neek)*; splitting a bamboo *(Bat Chir)*; leaping like a fish *(Shiulaf Diyan)*; killing by squashing the belly *(Anta Mod)*; a monkey drinking water *(Hanuman Panikhiya)*; a crane hunting for a fish *(Bagha Maka Khoja)* among others.

Dakshina Sahi (Group of Chau performers) also describes some Female *Ufli*s. According to them, these are the leaping movement of a deer *(Harina Dian)*; the playful jump of cattle *(Chheli Dian)*; the strange jump of a lobster *(Chingdee Chatka)*; killing by throwing something hefty *(Habs)*; walking with the overwhelming style *(Chalak)*; walking with a poetic rhythm *(Thamka)*; wiping the face *(Muhan Pochcha)*; mixing cow dung with water *(Gobar Gola)*; sweeping the floor *(Karka)*; wiping the floor with cow dung *(Chunch Diya)*; cleaning the utensils *(Basan Maj)*; pouring water while bathing *(Gadhua)*; combing the hair *(Sintha Phad)*; putting the dot of vermilion on her forehead *(Sindhur Pinda)*; removing husks from the rice *(Dhan Pachhuda)*; drawing a design by using rice paste and water *(Jhuntidiya)*; collecting cow dung *(Gobarkudha)*; collecting mud *(Chichra)*; these numbers are endless as this is a part of acting through improvising by natural behaviour and household works. *Ufli*s are not continuous movements, but the control of

body and leg movements helps to execute an act flawlessly. Later, Chau artists combined these female acts in their performances to create another segment of *Lasya*. It is concluded that the villagers or community women significantly impact the development of Chau dance vocabulary as well as its themes, and uniqueness.

Mayurbhanj Chau's repertoire consists of *Bhairava Bandhan*, a short solo dance. It is an introductory episode associated with *Purana Katha*. *Bhadrarjun* is a mythological dramatic story of Arjuna and Subhadra, described in the Mahabharata. *Abak-Chakra* (childhood of Lord Shrikrishna) was added and crafted by the Mayurbhanj and Purulia Chau tradition. Next is Krishna's *Rasaleela* (associated with Lord Krishna and Radha's story), *Mahishasur Mardini* (story between goddess and evil), *Shiva-Tandava* (Lord Shiva's dance), *Nataraja* (the master, God of dance); these are a few items being performed in dance.

Comparing Saraikela and Mayurbhanjs *Topka*s, Sunil Kothari, a renowned dance historian, highlighted the differences. In his writing in Marg Publication's special edition on Chau, he pointed out nine *Topka*s in Saraikela and six in Mayurbhanj (Pani, 1969, p. 36). Table 3 presents a various *Topkas* of Saraikela and Mayurbhanj Chau:

Table 3

Topkas - Sareikela Chau	*Topkas - Mayurbhanj Chau*
1. *Sur Gati* (gait of a god)	1. *Sada Topka* (simple locomotion)
2. *Bagh Dumka* (leap of a tiger)	2. *Lahara Topka* (rippling locomotion as in a rivulet)
3. *Baglz Gati* (gait of a tiger)	3. *Dhen Topka* (wavy locomotion as in a sea)
4. *Hansa Gati* (gait of a swan)	4. *Moda Topka* (wiggling locomotion)
5. *Kasa Gati* (gait of a demon)	5. *Dooba Topka* (diving locomotion)
6. *Sagar Gati* (waves of the sea)	6. *Uska Topka* (leaping locomotion)
7. *Hasti Gati* (gait of an elephant)	-
8. *Mayur Gati* (gait of a peacock)	-

9. Jlzunka (swinging locomotion)   -

However, there are four *Ufli*s, which are not practised in Saraikela but in Mayurbhanj (Pani, 1969, p. 37). Chau scholar Shashidhar Acharya demonstrated its practicality at a Chau workshop (Acharya, 2019). These *Chali*s and *Ufli*s are as below; Table 4 Present the list of *Ufli*s of Saraikela and Mayurbhanj Chau:

Table 4

Ufli - Saraikela Chau	Ufli - Mayurbhanj Chau	Imagery (Natural) Inspiration
1. Gobargola	1. Gobargola	Mixing cow dung in water
2. Gutikudha	2. Gobarkudha	Picking cow dung from ground
3. Chhadadia	3. Chhada dia	Sprinkling the cow dung
4. Pithou bata	4. Haldibata	Grinding on a stone slab
5. Edimaja	5. Jhoontia maja	Cleaning the toe-ring with heel.
6. Swan	6. Gadhia	Bathing
7. Sindoor-tika	7. Sindoor pindha	Putting a dot of vermilion on forehead.
8. Dhankuta	8. Dhankuta	Pounding paddy
9. Kula pachuda	9. Dhan paehhuda	Winnowing the de-husked rice.
10. Jhoonti dia	10. Jhoontidia	Drawing decorative motifs on the floor
11. Pasari hana	11. Kantakata	Cutting down thorny shrubs
12. Batachira	12. Bata-chira	Splitting a bamboo in two
13. untamoda	13. Untamoda	To kill by trampling on the abdomen.
14. Harindian	14. Harindian	The leaping gait of a deer.
15. Cheeli dian	15. Chheli dian	A kid jumping playfully

16. *Baga topka*	16. *Baga topka*	A stalking crane.
17. *Bagha panikhia*	17. *Bagha panikhia*	A tiger drinking water
* Not practiced in Saraikela	18. *Chingdichhitka*	Flashy jerks of a lobster when it is pulled out of water.
* Not practiced in Saraikela	19. *Baga-machha khoja*	A crane searching for a fish
* Not practiced in Saraikela	20. *Hanuman panikhia*	A monkey drinking water.
* Not practiced in Saraikela	21. *Mankadchiti*	A monkey somersaulting

Note. Data from the above table extracted and compiled from Chhau, a comparative study of saraikela and mayurbhanj forms by Jiwan Pani (Pani, 1969, p. 3) and Shashidhar Acharya (Acharya, 2019)

Purulia Chau is more masculine and influenced by *Tandava* (Lord Shiva's Dance), while the other two spots are on *Lasya* (Shiva-Parvati Dance) and *Tandava.* Purulia Chau's performance visually depends on the character's speed which can be divided into two parts: a movement inspired by animals and birds, and another one which is traditionally stylized. Purulia Chau uses the *Bhava* (sentiment) method to communicate through emotions. This movement was adopted from animal and bird behavioural patterns in a stylized manner (IGRMS, Bhopal (IGRMS) [VHS-164], 1997).

Some locomotions used in Purulia Chau are unique. Each line has its imitation, which is Demon Walk, which depicts arrogant locomotion; Sideway Walk, - seeking enemy; Crawling - suspicious gesture; Heroic Walk - Majesty, walking on the knees; Wavy Movements - diving locomotion; Ripping and Rocking - walk of monkey, walking like a tortoise, and others. Gods and mythological characters - like animals have their unique movement styles. Lord Ganesha, Shiva, Durga, Rama, Krishna, and Hanuman can be identified by observing how a performing character walks or moves. Table 5 presents the list of movements in Purulia Chau:

Table 5

Basic Gaits and Locomotion	Jumps	Typical Movements
1. The Majestic Walk of a Hero	1. Jump and fall on one knee	1. Shaking the crown

2. The arrogant walk of a Demonic Titan	2. Jump and fall on both the knees	2. Shaking the shoulders
3. The Sideway Walk to Seek an Enemy	3. Jump and take a turn in the air	3. Shaking the Torso
4. The walk of a prowling animal	4. Jumps evoke those of animals like monkeys, lions, etc.	
5. The walk of a monkey		
6. The walks of various animals like lion, tiger, etc.		
7. The walk on the knees		
8. Wavy locomotion		
9. Crawling locomotion		
10. Diving locomotion		
11. Rippling locomotion (like a fish)		

12. Rocking

   locomotion (like a

   swan)

Note. Information from the above table is obtained and compiled from CCRT's info-book on 'Purulia Chhau.' (Purulia Chhau: Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, 2018, pp. 6-7)

Though Purulia Chau does not have complicated movements, it consists of a vigorous and theatrical performance style. Some movements resemble the other forms of Chau, but Purulia is still different in spectacle and movements.

Conclusion

Chau, either dance or dance-theatre, across its three forms, Saraikela, Mayurbhanj and Purulia, exemplifies a unique and dynamic fusion of multiple performances and traditions such as martial arts, folk traditions and storytelling. Despite their regional differences, all three forms share a foundational movement vocabulary characterized by hand gestures, limited neck movements due to the mask (Mayurbhanj Chau is an exception), controlled shoulder articulation and a distinctive kinetic progression where body movement originates from the lower body and extends up to the chest. This physicality aligns with Chau's historical roots in *Parikhanda*, a martial art. This martial movement made Chau's structure and classical stance.

An essential aspect of Chau's development is associated with natural elements, animal behaviour, and daily household chores. Imitating animal movements, such as the tiger's leap or the swan's glide, not only serves as a stylized embodiment of nature but also reinforces the dance's semiotic function within its cultural ecosystem. Furthermore, household activities such as grinding, sweeping, and drawing motifs are translated with vivid, symbolic gestures, making Chau an organic reflection of the human and community functions. This interplay between movement and environment situates Chau within an embodied cultural practice, wherein physical performance is a repository of collective memory, reinforcing identity, tradition, and social cohesion.

The socio-cultural dimensions of Chau also shape its artistic distinctions. Historical support from royal patrons gave Saraikela Chau its refined structure, representing symbols instead of literal imagery. In unmasked performances of Mayurbhanj Chau, the dancers blend tribal dance qualities with matrix body movements to produce ritualistic and theatrical expression. Purulia Chau governs

a theatrical approach through its elevated dramatics, which depend on vibrant, exaggerated movements. The working-class background of Chau performers strongly affects its aesthetic quality, particularly in Purulia, because marginalized communities continue supporting the Chau tradition despite the absence of institutional support, such as previous royal patronage and recognition.

Chau survives mainly through oral transmission and ritual festivals, revealing its potential for endurance while threatening it with extinction or dilution. As the movement vocabulary stays consistent across centuries, the art form requires structured documentation systems, standardized instructor methods, and programs to protect cultural heritage for survival in present-day environments. As a significant performative artefact within Indian cultural history, Chau presents a critical example of how bodily expression maintains our connection to historical and mythological traditions through the performative medium.

The transformation of Chau demonstrates the general theoretical principle between cultural preservation and artistic development through performing arts platforms. The future direction of Chau will depend on its capability to uphold its fundamental philosophical framework and executively adapt to emerging artistic advancements and social-political changes under modernization, digital transformation, and global cultural influences. This research examines Chau's distinctive movement vocabulary and cultural immersion in local traditions. It demonstrates how the art form establishes dynamic exchanges with present-day performance trends to validate its dual status as a historical legacy and evolving artistic form.

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Project Chhauni, a government initiative, is helping revive Mayurbhanj Chhau dance (Photo courtesy Project Chhauni)

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