



Folk Culture Practices and Folk Economy of Purulia, West Bengal: A Socio-Economic Analysis

Dr. Sudipta Mahato

Principal, Deben Mahato Teachers' Training Institute (B.Ed.), Pahadigora, Deoli, Purulia, West Bengal
Email: mahatosudipta2@gmail.com

Abstract:

The district of Purulia represents a unique cultural zone characterized by a rich blend of tribal and rural traditions. This paper aims to examine the diverse forms of folk culture practiced in the region and their contribution to the local economy. The study focuses on major cultural expressions such as Purulia Chhau, Jhumur, and traditional festivals like Tusu Festival and Bhadu Festival.

Using qualitative research methods, including field observations and interviews with artists and artisans, the study highlights how these cultural practices function as both identity markers and economic resources. The findings suggest that folk culture significantly contributes to rural livelihoods through performance, handicrafts, and tourism-related activities. In recent years, cultural tourism and institutional support have further enhanced the economic potential of these traditions. However, challenges such as declining youth participation and limited market access remain critical concerns.

Keywords: Folk Culture, Folk Economy, Purulia, Chhau Dance, Rural Livelihood, Cultural Tourism Folk Culture, Folk Economy, Purulia, Chhau Dance, Rural Livelihood, Cultural Tourism.

1. Introduction

The socio-cultural environment of Purulia is deeply rooted in its traditional practices, which have evolved through centuries of interaction between tribal communities and agrarian society. Folk culture in this region is not confined to artistic expression; it represents a way of life that integrates social values, religious beliefs, and economic activities.

In contemporary times, the relationship between culture and economy has gained increasing attention, especially in rural contexts where traditional practices serve as sources of livelihood.

2. Review of Literature

Bose (2009) examined Indian society and culture and highlighted that folk traditions play a significant role in maintaining social cohesion and preserving cultural identity.

Chakrabarti (2010) analyzed the traditions of Indian folk art and crafts, emphasizing their importance as a foundation of rural economy and livelihood.

Majumdar (2012) discussed the diversity of Indian races and cultures and identified folk culture as an essential component of the social structure.

Ghosh (2014) explored the cultural heritage of West Bengal and pointed out that folk traditions contribute to regional identity and promote cultural tourism.

Dutta (2015) in Folk Culture of Bengal highlighted the historical evolution and socio-cultural importance of folk traditions in Bengal.

Mukherjee (2016) studied rural folk traditions in India and emphasized their integral role in shaping rural life and influencing economic activities.

Bandyopadhyay (2017) examined the relationship between folk culture and rural economy and concluded that cultural activities significantly contribute to rural income generation.

World Bank (2018) identified cultural resources as important drivers of local economic development and emphasized their role in sustainable growth.

Sen (2018) in Tribal Art and Culture of Eastern India highlighted the socio-economic importance of tribal art forms in eastern India.

Saha (2018) analyzed the role of handicrafts and found that they provide a stable source of livelihood, especially for rural women.

Roy (2019) studied cultural tourism and rural development, showing that tourism strengthens local economies and generates employment opportunities.

3. Objectives of the Study

To identify key forms of folk culture in Purulia

To analyze the relationship between folk culture and local economy

To assess the role of cultural practices in rural livelihoods

To evaluate the impact of cultural tourism

4. Research Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research methods.

Data Collection: Primary data: Interviews with folk artists, mask makers, and villagers

Secondary data: Books, journals, government publications

Study Area: Fieldwork was conducted in culturally significant locations such as Charida and Baghmundi.

5. Folk Culture in Purulia

5.1 Chhau Dance: Purulia Chhau is a prominent traditional dance form characterized by the use of elaborate masks, vigorous movements, and mythological storytelling.

5.2 Jhumur Tradition: Jhumur reflects the emotional and social life of rural communities through music and dance.

5.3 Festivals and Rituals: Festivals such as Tusu Festival and Bhadu Festival play a significant role in maintaining cultural continuity and community bonding.

5.4 Handicrafts: Traditional crafts, particularly mask-making in Charida, form an essential component of the cultural economy.

6. Folk Economy and Livelihood

Folk culture contributes to the rural economy in multiple ways:

Income from cultural performances

Sale of handicrafts and traditional products

Participation in fairs and exhibitions

Tourism-related activities

These practices provide employment opportunities and support the economic sustainability of rural households.

7. Impact of Cultural Tourism

The growth of cultural tourism has positively influenced the region by:

Enhancing income generation

Promoting cultural heritage

Creating new employment avenues

Increasing global visibility

8. Findings and Discussion

The present study on the folk culture and folk economy of Purulia reveals a complex and dynamic relationship between cultural practices and rural livelihood systems. The findings indicate that folk culture in this region is not merely an expression of tradition but functions as an active economic mechanism that sustains a large section of the rural population.

One of the key findings of this study is that traditional cultural practices such as Purulia Chhau and Jhumur play a dual role—serving both as carriers of cultural identity and as sources of income. These art forms are deeply embedded in the socio-religious life of the community, yet they have gradually evolved into professional activities. Artists and performers participate in local festivals, state-sponsored events, and even national and international platforms, thereby generating income and gaining recognition. This transformation reflects the increasing commercialization of folk culture without completely losing its traditional essence.

Another important observation is the role of festivals such as Tusu Festival and Bhadu Festival in strengthening both social cohesion and economic activity. These festivals act as seasonal economic hubs where local markets flourish. Temporary stalls, craft sales, food items, and cultural performances create a vibrant economic environment. Thus, festivals not only reinforce cultural continuity but also contribute significantly to local income generation.

The study also highlights the importance of handicrafts, particularly the mask-making tradition in Charida village. This craft has developed into a specialized economic activity involving entire households. From raw

material collection to final decoration, the production process is labor-intensive and skill-based. The sale of masks, costumes, and related items provides a stable source of income for many families. However, the findings suggest that artisans often face challenges such as price fluctuations, dependency on middlemen, and lack of direct market access.

A significant dimension of the findings is the growing impact of cultural tourism. In recent years, increased promotion by government agencies and cultural organizations has attracted tourists to regions like Bagmundi and Charida. This has led to higher demand for performances, crafts, and local products. Tourism has opened up new avenues of employment, particularly for youth and women. However, the benefits of tourism are unevenly distributed, and infrastructural limitations such as poor transportation, lack of accommodation, and inadequate marketing strategies restrict its full potential.

The discussion also brings attention to the changing socio-economic context. While older generations remain actively engaged in cultural practices, younger individuals are increasingly moving away from traditional occupations due to better opportunities in urban areas. This generational shift poses a serious threat to the sustainability of folk traditions. Without proper incentives, training, and modernization, the continuity of these cultural practices may be at risk.

Furthermore, the study identifies a gap between policy initiatives and ground-level implementation. Although various government schemes aim to promote folk culture and support artisans, their reach and effectiveness remain limited. Lack of awareness, bureaucratic hurdles, and insufficient financial support reduce the impact of such initiatives.

From an analytical perspective, the findings support the theoretical framework of cultural economy, which suggests that cultural assets can be transformed into economic resources. In the case of Purulia, folk culture contributes to livelihood through multiple channels—performance, production, and tourism. At the same time, the Sustainable Livelihood Framework is also validated, as cultural practices enhance income, social capital, and resilience among rural communities.

In conclusion, the findings and discussion clearly establish that folk culture in Purulia operates as both a cultural system and an economic structure. While it offers significant opportunities for livelihood and development, its sustainability depends on effective policy support, community participation, and adaptation to changing socio-economic conditions.

9. Conclusion

The present study on the folk culture and folk economy of Purulia clearly demonstrates that culture and economy are deeply interconnected in rural contexts. Folk culture in Purulia is not merely a symbolic or aesthetic expression of tradition; rather, it functions as a dynamic and living system that sustains both social identity and economic livelihood.

The analysis of cultural forms such as Purulia Chhau, Jhumur, and seasonal festivals like Tusu Festival and Bhadu Festival reveals that these practices are closely linked with the agricultural cycle, community participation, and traditional knowledge systems. These cultural expressions not only preserve the heritage of the region but also generate multiple avenues of income for local communities.

The study further establishes that the folk economy of Purulia operates through a decentralized and informal network where artisans, performers, and rural households actively participate. Activities such as mask-making in Charida, performance of Chhau dance, and participation in fairs and festivals contribute significantly to household income. In many cases, these cultural occupations serve as primary or supplementary sources of livelihood, especially in areas where industrial or formal employment opportunities are limited.

Another significant finding of this research is the growing impact of cultural tourism. In recent years, increased visibility through government initiatives, cultural festivals, and media exposure has enhanced the demand for folk performances and handicrafts. This has not only improved income levels but also provided a platform for global recognition of local traditions. However, the benefits of tourism are not evenly distributed, and issues such as lack of infrastructure, inadequate marketing strategies, and the role of intermediaries often limit the full economic potential of local communities.

At the same time, the study highlights several challenges that threaten the sustainability of folk culture and its associated economy. One of the most critical concerns is the declining participation of the younger generation, who are increasingly shifting towards urban employment and modern lifestyles. Additionally, the absence of institutional support, limited access to digital platforms, and insufficient financial assistance create barriers for artisans and performers. Without proper intervention, there is a risk that these valuable cultural traditions may gradually lose their relevance.

In conclusion, folk culture in Purulia should be viewed not only as a cultural heritage but also as a viable economic resource that can contribute to sustainable rural development. There is a strong need for integrated policy measures that focus on preservation, promotion, and economic empowerment. Encouraging community participation, strengthening market linkages, incorporating cultural education into academic curricula, and leveraging digital technologies can play a crucial role in revitalizing this sector.

Thus, the study underscores that the future of Purulia's folk culture lies in balancing tradition with modernity, ensuring that cultural practices continue to thrive while simultaneously contributing to economic growth and social well-being.

10. Suggestions

Strengthening financial support for artisans

Expanding cultural tourism initiatives

Encouraging youth participation

Promoting digital marketing of cultural products

11. References

- Bose, N. K. (2009). Culture and Society in India. New Delhi: National Book Trust.
- Chakrabarti, K. (2010). Folk Art and Craft Traditions of India. New Delhi: Lalit Kala Akademi.
- Dutta, A. (2015). Folk Culture of Bengal. Kolkata: Academic Publishers.
- Dutta, A. (2015). Folk Culture of Bengal. Kolkata: Academic Publishers.
- Ghosh, B. (2014). Cultural Heritage of West Bengal. Kolkata: Firma KLM.
- Government of West Bengal. (Various Reports on Culture and Tourism).
- Majumdar, D. N. (2012). Races and Cultures of India. Delhi: Asia Publishing House.
- Mukherjee, R. (2016). Folk Traditions of Rural India. Kolkata: Progressive Publishers.
- Sen, S. (2018). Tribal Art and Culture of Eastern India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, S. (2018). Tribal Art and Culture of Eastern India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- UNESCO. (Reports on Intangible Cultural Heritage).

Journal Articles

- Bandyopadhyay, S. (2017). Folk culture and rural economy: A study of West Bengal. *International Journal of Social Science*, 5(3), 45–52.
- Banerjee, A. (2021). Chhau dance and its socio-economic relevance. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(2), 112–120.
- Das, P. (2020). Economic importance of folk arts in eastern India. *Indian Journal of Economics*, 72(4), 89–101.
- Roy, T. (2019). Cultural tourism and rural development in India. *Journal of Rural Development*, 38(2), 215–230.
- Saha, M. (2018). Role of handicrafts in rural livelihood. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 6(1), 33–40.

Government & Institutional Reports

- Government of India. (2017). *Handicrafts Development Policy Report*.
- Government of West Bengal. (2019). *District Statistical Handbook: Purulia*. Kolkata.
- Ministry of Culture, Government of India. (2018). *Annual Report on Cultural Heritage*.
- Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. (2020). *Tourism Development Report*. New Delhi.
- West Bengal Tourism Department. (2021). *Cultural Tourism in West Bengal*.

UNESCO & International Sources

- UNESCO. (2010). *Intangible Cultural Heritage: Chhau Dance*. Paris.
- UNESCO. (2019). *Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Development*.
- World Bank. (2018). *Culture and Local Economic Development*. Washington, DC.

Citation: Mahato, Dr. S., (2026) “Folk Culture Practices and Folk Economy of Purulia, West Bengal: A Socio-Economic Analysis”, *Bharati International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development (BIJMIRD)*, Vol-4, Issue-02, February-2026.