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***Mukhash Nach: A Traditional Folk Culture in North Bengal***

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**Abstract:** *The Mukhash Nach is the traditional folk culture in North Bengal. Mukhash dances are popular in Puja ceremonies, Charak festival, Chamundi mela and Burikali mela ect. Mukhash dances have followed in various forms as war and fiction with walking, dancing and singing etc. This folk culture has been recorded from pre-historic times. In ancient Greek and Russia, masks wear men were well-known in popular folk culture. In France, Italy, and Africa, masks wear men have been found in portrait forms of various caves. In Japan, the agriculture festival continues with mask dance, which has a tradition of rituals. Cambodia and Myanmar, where local people practiced expelling ghosts by covering masks. Worship was practiced through masks in various parts of China. The mask-hanging pattern is seen in front of houses in Southern India. This was the symbol of auspicious life. Mukhash dance is a popular ceremony in the districts of Dakshin Dinajpur. The masks dance occurred every year during the Bengali month of Chaity and Jaitha. There Mukhash folk culture runs usually on ritual arts. Mahishbathan of Dakshin Dinajpur district is a recognised place of beautiful masks in all over Bengal and India. The livelihood of many people here depends economically on the manufacture of Mukhash and the sell.*

**Keywords:** *Charak Festival, Mukhash Dance, Mukhash, Mahishbathan, North Bengal etc.*

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**Date of Submission: 05-10-2022**

**Date of Acceptance: 11-10-2022**

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## **Introduction**

Mukha Nach (Mask Dance) was an ancient pattern of folk culture. Bengali folk culture, festivals, and traditional folk dances were enjoyable practices such as walking the lane, rising to mask, singing, and war and fiction. In ancient Greek and Russia, masks are well known. In North Bengal, folk instruments were known such as Dak-Dol (drums), Masks, bows-arrows,

## ***Mukhash Nach: A Traditional Folk Culture in North Bengal***

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musical instruments, ancient materials, coins, clay pots, clay figures, weapons, etc. This folk culture was found in pre-historic times. In various caves of France, Italy and Africa, there have seen humans wearing masks of animals or deities. Non-natural mask wears people's dance and songs are also practiced in different festivals in Japan and celebrated on new-born corps. There is a tradition of worship in China through various masks. The masks are also seen in front of several houses in Southern India.

### **Origin and development of Mukhash Nach**

The mask tradition was found in mystic realism in the primitive era. In order to survive in the pre-historic era, people used to show what they practiced in the search for food. Thus witchcraft was created in primitive times. In ancient times, there were uncontested encounters and masks, followed by hunting wars, farming, etc. Later, many songs were added to it, gradually giving way to dialogue in the place of song and dance. At the time, the main part of dance began with a pair of deities. From the very beginning, the influence of old storytelling can be seen in the folk society of Bengal. Religion had a huge impact on this society and way of life. As a result, the dances and songs of Chamunda, Shiva, Kali, Ganesh, Narasimha, etc., were fascinating aspects of folk drama based on mythologies. In this section, the expression of euphoria and heroism is manifested mainly in religious practices. Not just the pseudo-face of human beings, but the masks used for various creatures, has bears, horses, and birds. This mask criticized the whole society and the mutual application raised. However, mask dance mainly occurs by males.



## ***Mukhash Nach: A Traditional Folk Culture in North Bengal***

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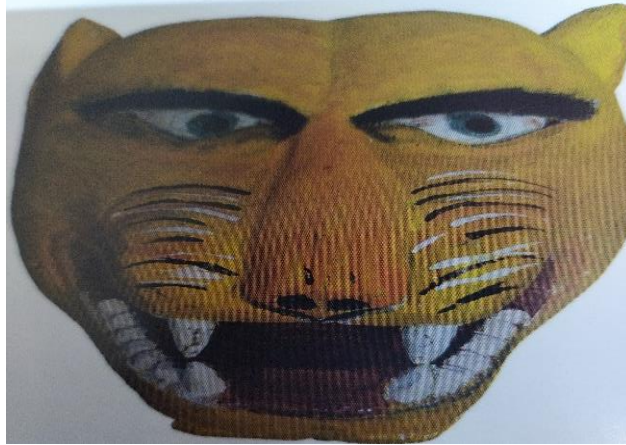
Source: Kali Mask, Akshaya Kumar Maitreya Museum, North Bengal University, Darjeeling.

### **Mask dance in Malda district**

The mask was released in the Malda district through a traditional dance. The mask was carried out four days before the Bengali month *Chaitra*. This happened in the middle of the month of *Baisakh* and *Jaitha*. These masks are regularly manufactured in Habibpur, Bamangola, Ghazal and Old Malda. In the making process of the mask, the potters make a face with clay and then it burned to the fire. This mask of Malda is known as '**Mukha**'. *Kali, Parvati, Narasimha, Chamunda, Hanuman, Bura-Buri, Ghost-genie, Santal-Santali*, etc., composed the characters of masks dance. Mask dance is also known here as **Gombira** in Malda. Scholar Haridas Palit writes about the mask dance in Malda, '*one on the upper side of the mouth and two holes are formed of the two ears. Through this hole, there is a rope barrier. Another rope barrier on the face*'. This 'Mukha' is extremely heavy. Therefore, to prevent the face from the friction of a heavy mask and a turban by sheets or cloths prevented rubbing on earrings. By buying this mask ordinary villagers of Malda carried it home. It is also practiced in the border area and Bihar. In this district, the mouth of the *Chamunda* is made of clay for worshipping which knows as 'Zohara Maa'. In the dance of Gombira, the tiger's skin with the whole body used by the ashes, Shiva Trishul handed the songs and singers.

### **Mask dance in Jalpaiguri district**

In the district of Jalpaiguri, masks are always practiced in Rajbangshi society. Although a mythical concept works in the stream of life here, the happiness and sadness of everyday life in society and home life are expressed through it. From Durgapujo to Shukla Dashmi, the thieves and kali performers mask dance for 21 days and are also seen the next New Year time, During this song, the boys of the Rajbangshi community put masks on their faces, monsters, cows, lions, horses, tigers etc. They wear masks, began to walk and dance in front of the house. Artists made of wood, Gourd food, thick paper or thin solar paper material used to make the masks of this district. During the Pre-independence period, masks- artists of the Bora region used to gather at the Gombira fair on the banks of the river Karatoya during the month of Baisakh. During the *Akadoshi*, the boys used to wear masks at the *Ramnabomi* festival and dance at night.



Source: Bagh Mask, Akshaya Kumar Maitreya Museum, North Bengal University, Darjeeling.

### **Tibetan mask dance in Darjeeling district**

In the Darjeeling district, the Tibetans dance celebrated with various garments, masks of Gods and Goddesses. The masks artists of the Darjeeling district practice some Tantra instructions when making the masks. Men and women workers associated with tea gardens in Kurseong, Darjeeling also used to wear masks with music. Mask dance is also seen in Naxalbari, Bagdogra, Matigara, Fasidawa, Khoribari etc. local regions. *Jitua, Karam, Dashera* etc. festivals with dance and music by wearing masks of animals, faces of old women, faces of *Ravana* etc. Artists created these masks with branches of trees, shells of coconut, and Kadam wood. The tribal people here make folk dances such as *Jatara* dance, *Lakhe* dance, *Mahakal* dance etc., with different branches of trees and feathers of different birds.

### **Masks dance in Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur district**

One of the unique patterns of Makha Nach is seen in the Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur district. In these two districts, there is a practice of masked dance in the society of Polia, Rajbangshi community. The Gombira began with the artists putting on masks and dance in festivities of Baisakh and Jaitha month. The mask is made of Neem and Gamar wood. The measurement of masks of various types. Large lengths of masks are 1.5-3 feet and 0,5 feet in measure, and

## ***Mukhash Nach: A Traditional Folk Culture in North Bengal***

some are 1 feet. These masks were heavy in weight, for example, 2 kg, 1kg, or 1.5 kg. In rural life, ordinary people wear mask to perform various songs by mouth, focusing on various events. These masks were made - Tigers, Lions, Bears, Giant monsters, and Wild Animals. The villager plays drama on stage by covering of masks such as *Jitua puja*, *Chandi*, *Ansar Song*, *Ramer Banbaspala*, *Sari Ganpala*.



**Source:** Mahishbathan,Kushmandi,Dakshin Dinajpur

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I can say that the culture of North Bengal was a very glorious past of history. Here are the remains of many ancient characters of the Pala and Sen period. Masks became one of the mythic elements of folk culture. In this mask of north Bengal and indications of the culture associated with it- Malda, Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri. The many traditional masks are also found in Cooch Bihar and Tarai region.

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## ***Mukhash Nach: A Traditional Folk Culture in North Bengal***

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