

An Online Exhibition on
“ **BENGAL ON FRAME**
PICTORIAL CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF BENGAL ”



In collaboration with



Ministry of Culture



National Museum
New Delhi



Shape Foundation

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ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The special exhibition ‘Bengal in frames’; aims to showcase the rich cultural diaspora of West Bengal, through selected photographs clicked by amateur photographers from West Bengal and artefacts from the reserved storage of the Anthropology Department, National Museum, India.

Based on themes associated with folk and traditional Bengal, these the photographs and the objects would reveal the years old customs/traditions, their importance in societies and their relevance in today’s era. Majority of the selected specimens are part of the living heritage of the region, which is still alive and is glorified with utmost pride and honour. Themes centered on folk cult of Manasa, Shitala and other would showcase the folk culture that is still being practiced and preserved in many facets of Bengali culture. Similarly the traditional dance of Chhau, religious festival of Durga puja and other specimens would portray the carriers of rich culture that is being preserved in the museum.

The National Museum in collaboration with Shape Foundation, Nagpur presents this virtual exhibition with immense pleasure and takes the honour to showcase these exquisite elements of the tangible as well as intangible forms of cultural heritage, practiced and preserved by the ethnic communities and societies living in West Bengal, India.

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ABOUT THE COLLECTION

The Anthropology collection at the National Museum comprises more than nine thousand objects from the nook and corners of the country, belonging to ethnic societies and communities. Acquisition of the collection initiated from 1959 and built over the years through purchases, gifts from the private donors and field surveys conducted in the tribal belts and rural areas of India. The collection represents exquisite examples of people's art and gives recognition to an important aspect of our cultural heritage. The department holds its possession to one of the most prestigious ethnographic collection of the country, the Verrier Elwin collection also added by the other eminent collections, i.e. Luthra collection, Mitra collection, Bharani collection and more. At present, the department permanently showcases two display galleries dedicated to the ethnic communities of North East India and Musical Instruments collection named after the sarod maestro legendary Smt. Sharan Rani Backliwal. These artefacts of Elwin collection reflect the rituals and customs related to the life cycles, economic pursuits and traditions of various Indian communities, specially covering the areas of Central and part of North East India. The collection comprises artefacts in varied materials and mediums such as terracotta, textile, basketry, bone wood, metal, paper, leather, etc.

The collection at the National Museum has a vast section dedicated to the West Bengal region of India. Primarily, this collection represents the folk cultural tradition of the state. Noteworthy are, collection of Chhau masks from Purulia, shellac dolls, sholapith artefacts, the exquisite dokra artefacts, terracotta horses and other clay figurines, scroll paintings, Santhal paintings, wooden dolls, textiles, jewelries and many more. This section of the departmental collection represents the rich cultural legacy of the ethnic communities living in West Bengal. Objects acquired from the tribal belt of the state showcase the uniqueness of art, skilled craftsmanship and artistic creation of the skilled craftsman which is primarily inspired by mother nature, various customs, festivals and social belief system.



TERRACOTTA TEMPLE HERITAGE OF PANSKURA

Panskura is a rural valley of an historical River Kansabati in the Purba Medinipur district in West Bengal. It was a valley of flowers, handicrafts and architecture for hundreds of years. Among other things, the region is well-known for its terracotta temples, extensively embellished with molded terracotta decorations. These temples are associated with the vaishnavism and shaivism, dating back to eighteenth century. Modern day Panskura which was under Kashijora Pargana eventually became the capital region of the kings of the Roy dynasty, who ruled over the region from 1573 C.E. till the last half of eighteenth century. In the 19th and 20th centuries, with the advent of British imperialism, many wealthy and influential zaminders reigned the region.

The origins of Panskura as a Center for Religious Culture with its distinctive temple architecture is closely tied to the Gaudiya Vaishnava devotional movement of the sixteenth century. Religious culture of Shaivism also gained speed parallel to the Vaishnavism. The bhakti saint and social reformer, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1533), came to this region and founded Gaudiya Vaishnavism. Spiritualism was marked by an intimate devotion to the Hindu god Krishna, the central deity of the tradition. Vaishnavism and Shaivism created a powerful influence on the distinctive styles of art, craftsmanship and temple artistry due to the alliance with the political authorities of the region. The consequent proliferation of terracotta temples in this region over the centuries gave Panskura its reputation as a Terracotta Corridor. The corridor consists of about 20 temples and Rash-mancha. The temples were constructed on 'Ratna', 'Sikhara', 'Chala' and 'Chandni' style. The temple walls are covered with terracotta panels recounting the life of Krishna, scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, stories from the Purana and incidents of regular life.



Radha-damodar 'Pancha-ratna' Temple



Dadhi-baman 'Nava-ratna' Temple



**Radha-Vinod 'Pancha-ratna'
Temple**

RADHA-DAMODAR 'PANCHA-RATNA' TEMPLE, MANGLOI, PANSKURA

The Radha-damodar Temple is one of the best example of Pancha-ratna or five-towered temples at Panskura in Purba Medinipur district, WB. The temple was built in the first half of the 19th century. The outer wall of the temple is also profusely embellished with continuous bands of terracotta panels, specially the scenes of Radha-Krishna, the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Hindu epics. Beside the main temple, there are two small Shiva Temples and a beautiful Rasmancha. The round shaped Rasmancha consists of seventeen tower and of impressive terracotta carvings on the walls depicting scenes of the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It is erected in the year of 1859 as per inscription.



**DADHI-BAMAN 'NAVA-RATNA' TEMPLE,
PATANDA, PANSKURA**

The Dadhi-baman Temple at Patanda is the best example of the Nava-ratna or nine-towered Temples. This temple is the most significant ornate architecture at Panskura in Purba Medinipur district, WB. The temple of 45ft. high stands on a brick made square platform. It was erected by the local landlord in 1853. The temple had eight ratnas on each four corner of its two roofs and one ratna on the top roof of the temple. The temple consists of an ambulatory pathway with a porch opened by three arches with heavy octagonal columns in between. Inside the temple, the chamber is usually covered by a vault and a vault always covers the porches. Every inch of the temple surface is beautifully embellished with exquisite terracotta panels from the bottom to the top. The plaques represent mythological scenes of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, flora, fauna, geometric motifs, the social life, the Puranas and the life of Lord Krishna.

**RADHA-VINOD 'PANCHA-RATNA' TEMPLE,
PURBA GOPALPUR, PANSKURA**

The Radha-vinod Temple is one of the best example of Pancha-ratna or five-towered temples at Panskura in Purba Medinipur district, WB. The Radha-vinod temple situated at Purba Gopalpur was built in 1774 by a rich businessman. The temple is built on a square structure rising in two storeys and is crowned by a set of ornamental miniature towers, four on each corner of the first storey and a central one crowning the top of the second. Inside the temple, the chamber is covered by a vault. The temple consists of an ambulatory pathway with a porch opened by three arches on the front side of the temple. The most striking feature of the temple is the elaborate 'terracotta' decoration that covers its walls. The outer wall of the temple is also profusely embellished with continuous bands of terracotta panels, specially the scenes of Radha-Krishna, the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Hindu epics. Besides, there is a Rasmancha, which is large in size. The Rasmancha is octagonal in shape. The construction stands on the high platform. Towers of the Rasmancha are decorated by Saptadash-ratna or Seventeen-tower with 'rekha' turrets. The Rasmancha consists of impressive terracotta carvings on the walls depicting scenes of guards.

TERRACOTTA TEMPLE PANELS



**Temple Panel
Depicting Varuna**



**Terracotta Figure Of
Uma- Maheshwar**



**Lord Vishnu In
Tortoise
Incarnation**



**Panel Depicting
Narasimha
Incarnation Of
Vishnu**



Balarama



Mythical Figure



Drummer

TEMPLE PANEL DEPICTING VARUNA

West Bengal

Terracotta

L: 28cm., W: 16.2cm.

Acc. No. 87.156/5

19th Century

This panel showcases the Ocean God of Hindu mythology, Varuna; seated on his vahana or *companion*, *Makara* (crocodile). According to the verses described in Vedas, Varuna, the creator of Heavens, the Air and the Earth; hence he is considered to be the supreme creator who is the supervisor of water bodies including the ocean. Thus, the deity is believed to be the God of Ocean in Hindu mythology. In this panel, the four-armed snake clad deity is shown, bodily ornamentation is also depicted.



TERRACOTTA FIGURE OF UMA- MAHESHWAR

West Bengal

Terracotta

L:28.5cm. W:16.3cm.

Acc. No. 87.156/14

19th Century

A depiction of the iconic pair of god and goddess, Shiv-Parvati is shown in this terracotta panel. Lord Shiva, the greatest of all divinities is also honored by the title of Mahadeva which denotes the Lord with utmost importance in the pantheon. Goddess Parvati, the incarnation of Sati was married to Lord Shiva, which itself is a story of eternal love and devotion as narrated in the Hindu mythology. In this representation, Lord Shiva's mount/vahana Nandi is also shown sitting at the feet of the deity.



LORD VISHNU IN TORTOISE INCARNATION

West Bengal

Terracotta

L:27 cm. W:13 cm.

Acc. No. 87.156/17

19th Century

This plaque represents the second incarnation of Lord Vishnu as a Tortoise or the *Kurma avatar* in Hindu mythology. He is associated with the legend of the churning of the Ocean of Milk or the *Samudra Manthana*. According to the Hindu mythology, that devas and asuras worked together for a millennium, churning the ocean to release the *Amrit*- nectar of immortal life.



PANEL DEPICTING NARASIMHA INCARNATION OF VISHNU

West Bengal

Terracotta

L:26.5 cm., W:13.2 cm.

Acc. No. 87.156/20

19th Century

A portrayal of Narasimha incarnation of Vishnu. The Supreme Lord was once emerged as Narasimha avatar to destroy the evil powers of king Hiranyakashipu on earth. Hiranyakashipu was the king of asuras and father of *Prahalad*; the devout follower of lord Vishnu. Reluctant to accept *Prahalad's* devotion Hiranyakashipu decided to kill him but failed as Lord Vishnu saved *Prahalad* every time his father aimed to kill him. Due to a boon received from Lord Brahma, Hiranyakashipu could not be harmed by any human or animal form. To bring an end to the Asuras life, lord Vishnu appeared in the form of Narasimha or a figure consists of half human and half of a lion. The lord killed Hiranyakashipu at the time of twilight (neither day nor night) on the threshold of a courtyard (neither indoor nor under open sky) he put the demon on his thighs (neither earth nor space) and using his nails as weapon (neither animate or inanimate) as these were the prerequisite conditions to kill the immortal king.





BALARAMA

West Bengal

Terracotta

87.156/13

L: 27.2 cm., W:15 cm.

19th Century

Depiction of Balarama in an iconic posture, holding a plough on his shoulder. Lord Krishna's elder brother, Lord Balarama is believed to be the god of plough or the god of farmers. His creative energy and supreme physical strength are the reason behind his name *Balarama* or often known as *Balabhadra*. While associating him with the plough, the deity is also known as *Haladhara* or *Halayudha* (*Hala*: plough in Hindi). Generally, he is depicted with the Naga, *many headed serpent*, the plough and other agricultural tools that indicate his connection with the pastoral culture. Chronicles of this Hindu deity is explained in religious texts of Mahabharata, Bhagavata Purana, Harivamsha and in other Puranas.

MYTHICAL FIGURE

West Bengal

Terracotta

L:27.2 cm., W:15.9cm.

Acc. No. 87.156/6

19th Century

Depiction of a mythical figure is evident in this temple panel. The *yaksha* like figure is holding a pair of lions using his arms, while riding two elephants using his both legs. The ornamented figure is shown blowing air in the trunks of elephants. His crooked teeth and physical appearance indicate it to be a demonic figure.





DRUMMER

West Bengal

Terracotta

L: 19.7cm., W: 14.5cm.

Acc. No. 87.156/23

19th Century

This panel depicts a drummer in sitting posture. He is carrying the percussion instrument called *Dhol* or drum while holding the stick on the other hand with the help of which, a drummer produces the rhythmic beats of the drum. The ornamented figure is wearing a *dhoti* or lower garment that reaches his thighs. Such figures are commonly found in multiple panels in Hindu temple architecture.

FESTIVALS



Chau



Vel



Sheetala Puja



Moichara



Gangasagar



Gazan



Durga Puja

CHAU

Chau is an ancient form of martial arts dance performed in the Eastern Indian states, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha. In West Bengal, it is known as *Purulia Chau*, *Mayurbhanj Chau* is practiced in Odisha and in Jharkhand *Seraikella chhau* form is popular.

Originally, this dance form was patronized by the Baghmundi royal family when they organized Chau competitions during the festivities of Chaitra Parva and Shiva Gajana. The traditional spring festival Chaitra Parva is held during the Chaitra month, the latter signifies the spring festival that honors the supreme being, lord Shiva. Chau tradition in Purulia, West Bengal is inspired from the Santhal and Kurmi community's martial dance forms. Folk dance forms practiced in the state too inspired the Chhau tradition. However, the format of Chau is the most energetic and lively, where heavily adorned masks are the most essential element.

It is performed in a natural setting, accompanied by the folk *Jhumur* songs, drums and other high-pitched musical instruments, i.e. trumpets. The dancers, using hand and limb movements express the storyline of the dance, that is generally centered on the narratives of Ramayana, Mahabharata, folklore, Durga-Mahishasura Mardini stories and other stories based on Hindu mythological events. In these open air Chau performances; victory over evil is the prime component to be delivered or shown through the dance drama.



In the Way of Soil



Tell a Tale of Village



Chhau and Costume



Masks: The Story of Life



Art and Livelihood



Chau Masks

IN THE WAY OF SOIL

Traditionally only male members participate in the Chhau dance. This dance is regionally celebrated during spring. Chhau dance is a tradition from eastern India. The dance enacts episodes from epics including the Mahabharata and Ramayana and local folklore. Chhau dance is intimately associated to regional festivals. Chhau is taught to male dancers from families of traditional artists. Increasing modernization is a great threat to Chhau Dance.



TELL A TALE OF VILLAGE

The dance is very rhythmic and it is set to traditional folk music background. The themes of this dance includes regional legends, folklore and episodes of Indian epic. Various episodes from the epics were communicated to the people using the dance. Episodes from Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas were used in the Chhau dance. Various kinds of drums were used during the Chhau dance. Beating of drums signified the starting of the dance and this was followed by the invocation of the lord Ganesha. Colorful clothes and Chhau mask were worn for the dance.



CHHAU AND COSTUME

Chhau dance represents the mythological characters. The costumes adds special gesture to Chhau dance. It plays a vital role in this performance. Basically Chhau Dance is known for its distinctive set and costumes. The male dancers wear brightly colored 'dhotis' with a matching 'kurta' on top. A vast amount of costume jewelry is worn in the form of necklaces. These are large in size and extremely heavy. Once male dancer would depict female character. Now a days, female dancers are available in Chhau Dance. Female dancers, or male dancers depicting female characters, are known to wear colorful sarees.



MASKS: THE STORY OF LIFE

In fact, Chhau Dance of Purulia is listed on UNESCO's world heritage list of dances. The mask is made of paper, clay etc. Lastly it is colored and decorated with Shola and other materials. The masks worn during this performance are of vital importance as they are used to convey emotions and the nature of the character. Chorida is a village that these performers have come to rely on for their masks. All members of a household are involved in creating these masks. They are efficient to procure clay, paint, dry or decorate these masks.





ART AND LIVELIHOOD

The Chhau mask of Purulia is unique. This traditional art of making masks is absolutely own by the Sutradhar community. Soft paper, diluted glue, ash powder, clay is used to make musk of Chhau dance. Artists of the Sutradhar community collect their livelihood from the profession of making musk. The masks are painted in pastel shades. The masks have a frank and bold look. Each mask represents a character from the epics, Hindu mythology and Puranas.

CHHAU MASKS

Masks are the integral and essential part of the Chhau dance along with other bodily adornments. Decorated papier mache masks are indeed a representation of folk-art tradition of the state and skilled craftsmanship of the artists. Following a set procedure and nature based raw materials, artists belonging to the *Sutradhar* community produce these wonderful works of art. Initially a clay layered cane or wooden base is prepared to shape the mould. When dried, the mould is separated from the base and adjusted with papier mache. Over which, another clay layer is applied which smoothens the papier mache coating. Cotton/muslin cloth layer too is applied in this stage. After the preparation of the base minimum three days are invested to sun drying the base. Facial features are added during this period and afterwards, detailing of the masks with ornamentations and decorations are done in the next two to three days. Based on the size of the product, depends the required time to produce it and the initial process takes the same amount of time. Makers usually depend on the alluvial soil from the fields, for creating the hair they use jute and at times, acrylic wool. Ornamentations are done using beads, feathers, wool, wire, leaves and so on.



Mask of Goddess Durga



**Mask Representing the Demon
*Mahishasura***



Mask of Goddess Kali

MASK OF GODDESS DURGA

Purulia, West Bengal

Clay, Papier mache, woolen pom poms,
feathers, paper

L: 42 cm.

Acc. No. 72.8

20th Century

This mask signifies Goddess Durga, the supreme goddess in Hindu mythology. Her divine beauty and power are shown through the Goddess's sharp facial expressions and the symbolic representation of the third eye. The headdress worn by the figure is decorated with feathers, beads and flowers made of paper. The mask of the deity is ornamented with a nose ring, ear rings and a *bindi* on her forehead. Such three eyed masks are the essential part of Mahisasurmardini, the vanquisher of demon Mahisasura /*Mahisasura Mardini* depiction of goddess Durga.



MASK REPRESENTING THE DEMON *MAHISHASURA*

Purulia, West Bengal

Lt. 39.3 cm., W: 43 cm.

Papier mache, cloth, natural fiber

Acc. No. 72. 20

20th Century

This is a depiction of the *Mahisasura*, the buffalo headed demon who was defeated and killed by Goddess Durga. The story of Mahishasura is illustrated in the Markandeya Purana. The demon had gained a boon from Lord Brahma that no man and even gods can ever kill him. Benefitted by the power, Mahishasura goes on a rampage to conquer both heaven and earth and declared war against the Devatas. Being defeated by the demon, the Devas amalgamated their powers and offered to Goddess Durga to destroy the demon. Through a vigorous fight between the two, the divine power of the Goddess conquered the evil and thrashed his energies. The victory over Mahishasura is celebrated in many parts of India, especially during ten days long Navratri celebrations. Vijaya Dashami is celebrated on the 10th day of victory. In Eastern India, where Shaktism is a dominant form of religion, Durga Mahisasur Mardini is regarded the most auspicious power. Through the cult of the goddess's victory over the sinful and evil. Inhabitants here, believes in the supremacy of the feminine in the universe. This mask representing the demon is used during the Chhau dance narrating the story of Mahishasura and his defeat.





MASK OF GODDESS KALI

Purulia District, West Bengal

Papier mache, cloth, natural fiber

Lt. 62 cm

Acc. No. 73.260

20th Century

This *Chhau* mask depicts Goddess Kali, the most powerful form of Goddess Shakti and the destroyer of evil forces. The unbound hair of the goddess is a suggestive of her freedom, as the omniscient paramount power in the Hindu pantheon. Her white teeth indicates the *sattva guna* or attributes of truth. She is shown, wearing a garland of human skulls as head ornament.

VEL

Vel is a major festival observed in Sri Lanka in the month of June/ July. In India it is mostly associated with Tamilnadu. Now in different parts of Bengal Vel is observed. According to Hindu mythology, in the war between Murugan and Soorapadman, Murugan used the Vel to defeat all the evil forces of Soorapadman. Then Asura transformed himself into a huge mango tree. But Murugan hurled his Vel and split the mango tree into two halves. In Bengal Vel is observed in Olaichandi temple.



**Physical Suffering
For Salvation**



Walk On Fire



Piercing With Hooks And Skewers



Physical Suffering By Self

PHYSICAL SUFFERING FOR SALVATION

Vel festival is organized at Bandel in the district of Hooghly. The devotees do ceremonial sacrifice and offering practice to the Lord Sri Mutthu Mariamma. The goddess is recognized locally as Maata Olaichandi or Maa Shitala. The purpose of worshipping is to achieve holy grace. Every year during the month April, Vel is organized. Local Madrasi people are associated with this traditional festival. Devotees pierce their skin, tongue or cheeks with vel skewers while they undertake a procession towards the Olaichandi temple during the Vel festival in Bengal. People keep their babies under the feet of monk. They have strong belief that the babies will have a long life and good health.





WALK ON FIRE

Devotees walk on fire ground piercing their skin, tongue or cheeks with vel skewers while they undertake a procession towards the Olaichandi temple during the Vel festival. Olaichandi Devi is an important figure in the folk traditions of Bengal. As per the belief, the devotees sacrifice themselves take physical pain to implore their deity for assistance. It is originally a traditional festival of Tamil Nadu. People from all walks of life participate enthusiastically each year. This festival brings people of all religion together.

PIERCING WITH HOOKS AND SKEWERS

Iron hooks are pierced through the backs of the devotees and cheeks are pierced with vel skewers. Then they undertake a procession towards the Olaichandi temple during the Vel festival. The willingness to go through extreme physical suffering of the devotees is to please the god and it is significant that people accept them as a part of the god. The devotees perform dance while walking in the procession. Huge number of viewers gather in the processing route to visualize the road show. Some of the viewers wash the feet of the devotees.



PHYSICAL SUFFERING BY SELF

A woman devotee pierces her cheeks and goes through violent physical suffering to please god. Devotees gather every year to do such job to fulfil their prayer. Crowd worship god as well as devotees. The worshipers who pierce their cheeks, tongues and faces with sharp objects hardly bleed. They claim to be feeling very little suffering. Some of them say that their wounds heal almost immediately.



SHEETALA PUJA

Sheetala is a folk deity of Bengal. It is worshiped in about every village. It is believed that the god cures poxes and other life-threatening diseases. According to belief, when poxes and other life-threatening diseases attack to all people, goddess Shitala came to relief people.



Pious Assemblage



'Dandi Kata'- For Salvation



All For Blessings



'Dandi Kata'- A Vow



Pious Procession

PIOUS ASSEMBLAGE

Sheetala Mata is mentioned in many scriptures, especially in *Skanda Purana*. As per belief, Sheetala is the goddess of smallpox. She is both the cause of the disease and the cure. People gather in front of the deity Sheetala and pray. They give their offerings as the goddess Sheetala fulfills their prayer. As per belief they establish goddess Sheetala as a goddess of protection, good fortune, health, and power.

ALL FOR BLESSINGS

According to Hindu mythology, once Jwarasur, a demon started spreading incurable diseases to all the people in the earth, especially among the children. Durga assumed the form of Sheetala Devi and she cured all the people's diseases. Lord Bhairav and Durga Mata fought with Jwarasur. In a fierce battle, Jwarasur was killed with their powerful weapons. They have banished the demon, in order to prevent the sufferings of the people. As per belief, Seetala renders good health and prevention from diseases. Goddess Sheetala protects her devotees' from deadly diseases. Worshipping Goddess Sheetala ensures good health as well as a long and prosperous life for human being. People keep their children on the ground in front of Sheetala for good luck.





DANDI KATA'- A VOW

Indian woman performs Dandi. Children, women, and men are perform Dandi in wet cloth. They wash bath from the pond and soak in water all over. Then they lie down on the ground and move to the temple. It is believed that their prayer will be successful and the disease will be cured. Sheetala is known to be the Goddess who cleans all the viruses. As per belief, worshipping her cures small pox and other such contagious diseases.



PIOUS PROCESSION

Worship of Sheetala was held on Sheetala Ashtami. It falls on the day of Krishna Paksha Ashtami in the month of March-April. It is generally held in summer season. This festival is meant to propitiate Devi Sheetala in order to keep away from suffering from heat borne diseases like small pox. Crowd gather round Sheetala and participate in the procession. Involvement of crowd is very significant as Sheetala is very influential goddess in rural Bengal.

‘DANDI KATA’- FOR SALVATION

Sheetala Mata rides on a donkey with four hands carrying a broom stick, dustpan, a bunch of neem leaves and kalash of holy water. As per belief she sweeps the germs with broom and collects them in the dustpan. Then she sprinkles the water from the holy kalash with neem leaves. The main aspect of the Sheetala Ashtami is to offer prayers to Devi for curing the diseases and also bring prosperity and health across the village or town. Women performs Dandi in front of Sheetala. In this way they pray or give their offerings to goddess. It is a traditional culture of Bengal to please god or goddess.



MOICHARA

Moichara is a cattle race to test the capacity of the bulls before the start of cultivation in the rainy season. It usually takes place during June or July. Local farmers come with their bulls to race them in the waterlogged fields.



A Wild Racing Event



The Spectator



Marked By Bulls Race



Festival Of Community

A WILD RACING EVENT

Moichara is a wild racing event. The bulls take part in Moichara. They are left for a frenzied run. The specialty of this festival lies in the way it is celebrated. Not only bulls but also men run till the finishing line of the race through the muddy fields. The ground is filled with water also. The event verifies the physical fitness of the farmers and bulls. It also increases the fertility of land. Though this festival has over a hundred years history in different regions of West Bengal. It is now on the verge of extinction. However, the villagers efforts have kept the tradition alive.



THE SPECTATOR

Moichara is very popular event of Bengal. Peoples from neighboring villages come to enjoy the festival. Here a boy is taking pleasure of the festival through the ventilator of his home. The race is a relentless show of men's physical strength in competition with the wild force of bulls. This festival is devoid of religion, politics, colour and jealousy. It is a sight to watch the bulls race down the sloppy field, splashing the muddy water everywhere. It creates intense pleasure in the environment.

MARKED BY BULLS RACE

Peoples welcomes the harvesting season through the festival of Moichara. It is marked by cattle race among the bulls and villagers. This festival has over a 100-year-old. It is now on the verge of extinction. Each year, the village of Herobhanga in West Bengal organizes Moichara cattle race festival. It is generally held on the arrival of monsoon season. It is usually celebrated during mid-June or early July while the local farmers begin to cultivate their lands.





FESTIVAL OF COMMUNITY

The primary purpose of this cattle race is to test the ability of the bulls before the start of cultivation. Another purpose is to increase the fertility of the land. Moichara usually takes place during late June or early July. During this period local farmers decide to celebrate Moichara festival. They come from neighboring villages with their bulls to race them in the waterlogged fields. All the farmers of different religion join this festival. There is no religious differences among them. The festival serves various purposes. It improves the agricultural health and strengthen the harmony of the people. It brings joy to the people of the villagers.

GANGASAGAR

The Gangasagar fair is held near the confluence of the Ganga and the Bay of Bengal. Kapil Muni Temple is situated near the confluence. It is one of the biggest fairs in India. Every year about 500,000 pilgrims took the holy dip on the occasion of Makar Sankranti. The festival is globally acclaimed owing to its religious essence and importance in one's life.



Sadhu Waiting For Devotees



In Pursuit Of Blessings



Pilgrims Drying Sarees



Flavours Marijuana



SADHU WAITING FOR DEVOTEES

For devotees in pursuit of salvation and renaissance, blessing of Sadhu during the Gangasagar Mela is an experience worth reminiscing. A holy man is ready to give blessings to the devotees. It is believed that taking a dip into the sacred waters at the confluence and taking blessings from Sadhu can help one alleviate his pain and sufferings. The second most popular festival after Kumbh Mela is the Ganga Sagar Mela. It is held in Sagardwip, West Bengal and witnesses a large number of people pouring in. The festival has a cultural and spiritual significance where pilgrims dip themselves in the holy waters of Ganga to purify their souls. The festival is celebrated with great vigour and enthusiasm.

IN PERSUITE OF BLESSINGS

Makar Sankranti is considered to be most auspicious for the event, when millions of devotees assemble at Gangasagar to cleanse their sins. Apart from the general pilgrims, the assemblage of Naga Sadhus gives a unique identity to this fest at Gangasagar Mela. The Naga Sadhu blesses devotees to fulfil their prayers. The devotees after taking a dip also visit the temple of Kapil Muni, a well-known sage of the Hindu mythology.



PILGRIMS DRYING SAREES

A large number of devotees from all over the nation congregate at Gangasagar for a sacred dip to seek righteousness at the convergence of the river Ganga and the Bay of Bengal each year on Makar Sankranti. It is one of the biggest fairs held in Sagardwip, West Bengal. After the sacred dip Pilgrims dry their sarees and go to offer 'Puja' at the Kapil Muni Temple wearing new dresses. The devotees lit lamps and chant in and around Sagardwip.



FLAVOURS MARIJUANA

A man smokes ‘Ganja’ (marijuana) at Gangasagar. He lights a pipe filled with marijuana. Its special flavor gives him extra charm in the festive environment. The mela’s spiritual value and amalgamation of various way of life attracts pilgrims from around the world. Among the crowd who visit the fair, the Naga Sadhus are the highest in numbers. Their bodies are generally smeared with ash. They perform yoga and rituals at their camps. These rituals are also attended by most devotees to get blessings from sages.



GAZAN

Gazan is a folk festival of Bengal. According to the researchers, the word 'Gazan' is derived from the word 'Garzan' (roar). It is fact that the monks roared fiercely in this festival. According to another researchers, the word 'Ga' means 'village' and 'Jon' means 'people'. In reality, Gazan is also a festival of the 'village' 'people'. It is customary to celebrate the festival with pain for the body. Gazan is held on the eve of the worship of Shiv on the last week of the Bengali month, Chaitra



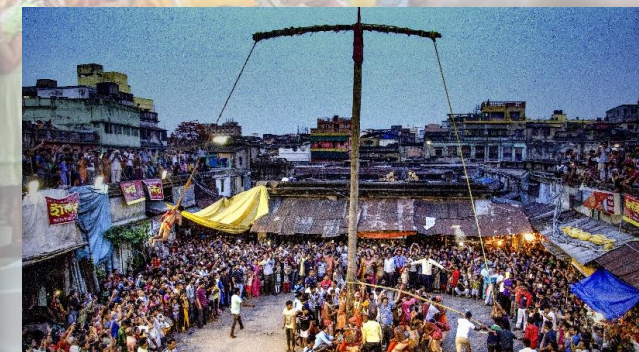
Monk Hanging On Fire



Trial Room Preparation



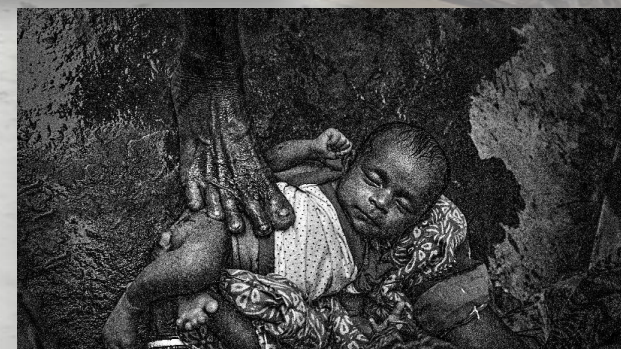
Running With Sword



Charak: Hook-swing Ritual



Dance With Human Skull



Monks- The Part Of God

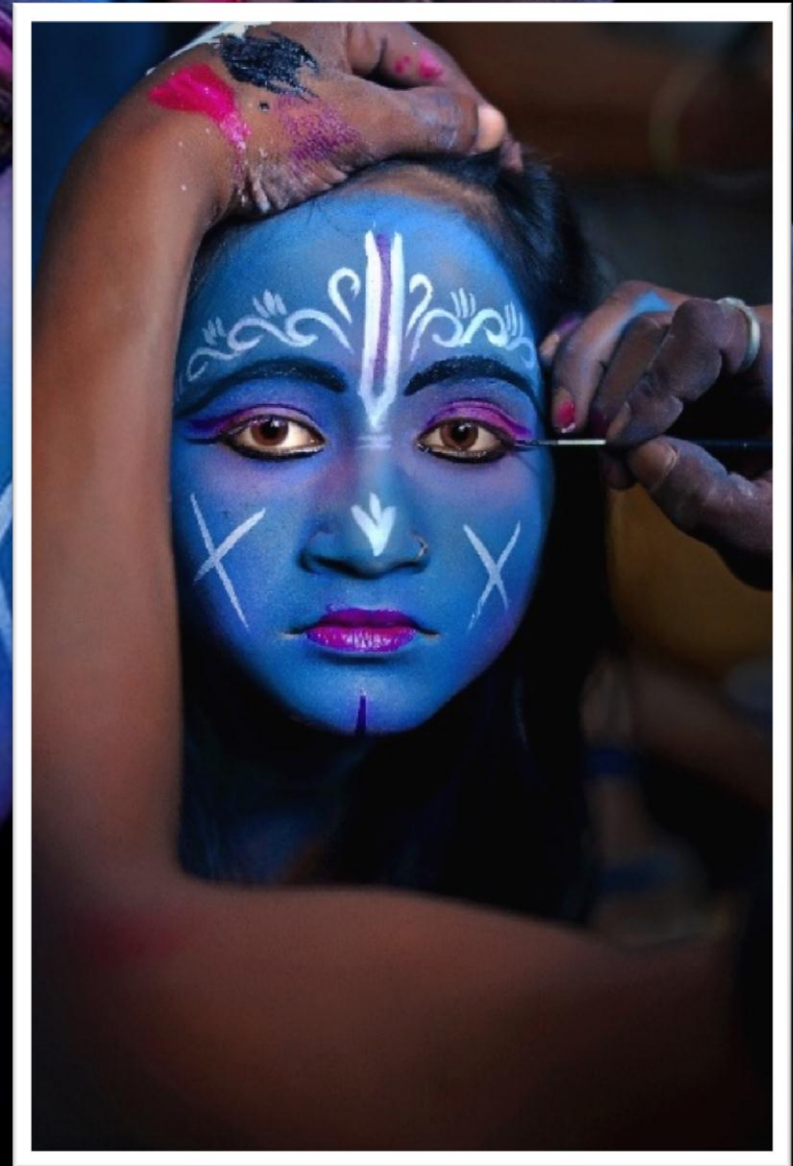
MONK HANGING ON FIRE

Monks hang on fire keeping the feet up. The display of human strength and devotion to the worshipped deity is at the very center of Gazan. The power of endurance and willingness to go through extreme physical suffering of the devotees to please the god are the significant part of Gazan. It prepares them to be fit for the struggle of life. The basic reason for the festival is to worship the deities of the respective devotees for the hope of a better rainy season and good harvest. As per belief, the festival will provide them prosperity eliminating from any sorrow and sufferings in their everyday life.



TRIAL ROOM PREPARATION

A woman dresses up to participate Gazan festival. Persons of any gender can be a participant. On the occasion of Gazan, the participants go with the procession to the temple of god. During Gajan participants dress up as Cosmetic Shiva, Parvati, Gouri, Nandi, Bhringi, Krishna and other deities. The participants are locally known as “*Sang of Gajan*”. Then they recite and sing. The Gazan Folk Song is very popular among people. The word Gajan in Bengali comes from the word ‘*garjan*’ or roar generated by sannyasis during the festivities. In another opinion, the word ‘*gajan*’ has been generated from two word ‘*Ga*’ (village) and ‘*Jan*’ (People).



RUNNING WITH SWORD

Gajan has always been primarily a folk festival celebrated mostly in the rural parts of West Bengal. The celebrations surrounding Gajan span for a little more than a week starting from the last week of the month of Chaitra. The occasion of Charak Puja marks the end of these festivities. The main purpose of this festival is deriving satisfaction through pain and devotion. Gajan is a festival of village folk. According to beliefs, Gajan brings peace and prosperity to the village people in everyday life. This is a mirror photography of a monk who is running with sword in the Gazan festival. This type of mirror photography add an interesting spin to locations. Oceans, lakes, puddles, and even rain drops are the hotspots for the photographers. The mirror photography shows the life in an artistic way.



CHARAK: HOOK-SWING RITUAL

The final day of the Bengali calendar is known as Chaitra Samkranti or Charak Samkranti. This day is most famously associated with the hook-swinging ritual or Charak. It is the concluding ritual of Gazan. There are two iron hooks on one end of the rope. The hooks are pierced through the backs of the Sannyasis. The other end is tied to the head of the Charak tree. In the state of suspension the sannyasis start revolving around the Charak tree. In fact, the Sannyasi's power of endurance makes him prepare for further struggle in life.



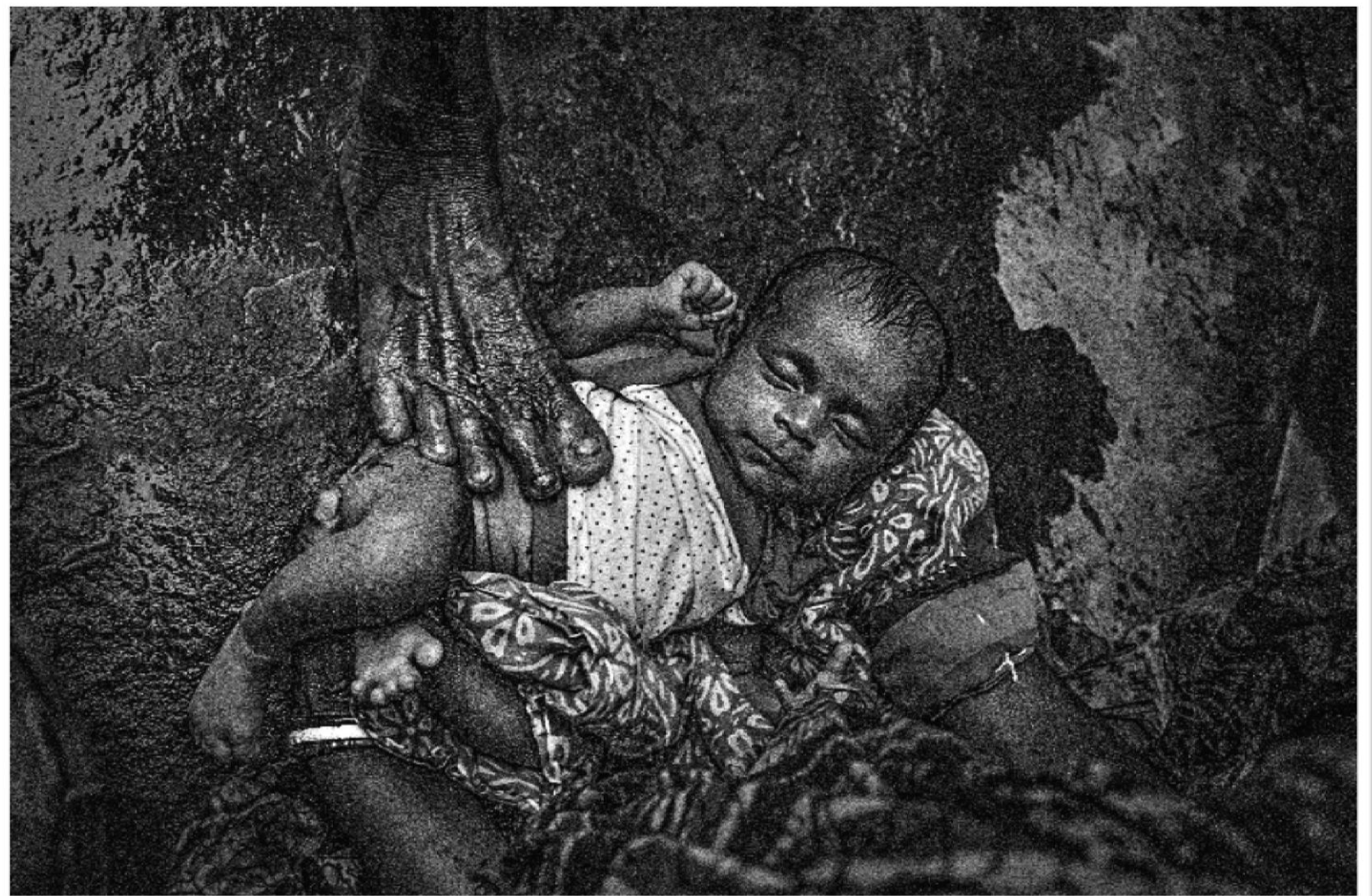
DANCE WITH HUMAN SKULL

Dance with Human Skull is a dangerous rituals in different parts of Bengal in the Gazan festival. The Devotees collect the skull from different burial grounds. The devotees set out in hunt of a dead body from the local burial grounds. A large scale epidemic often force people to bury their relatives in the graveyards. These dead decaying human bodies provide the devotees with essential element as the human skull. The bodies are dug up and the skulls are chopped off. The skull is used as an essential element of these celebrations. Once the celebrations are over these skulls are preserved at some secret location in the village only to be in the future. Local people are supportive enough to act this job. Though this rituals are ugly and unhygienic, peoples' belief is intact.



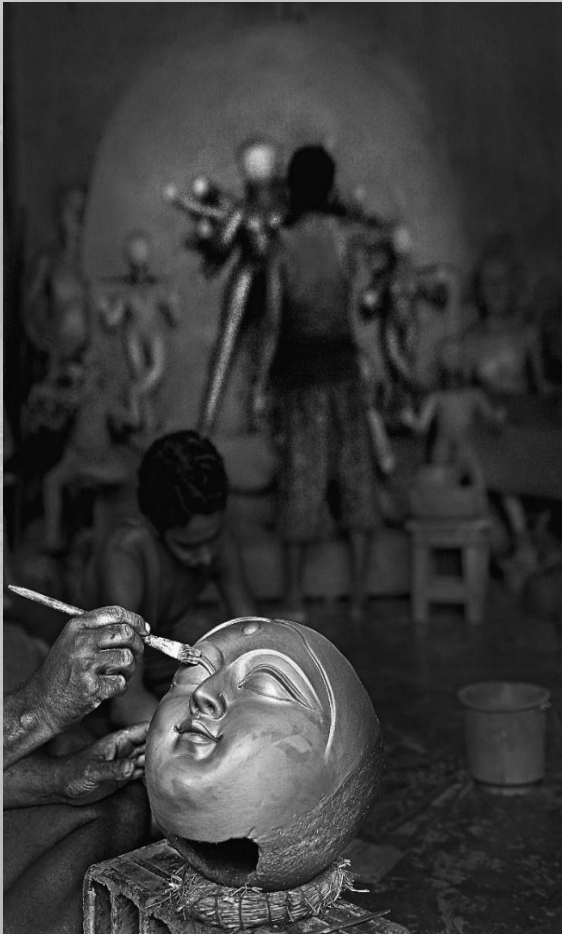
MONKS- THE PART OF GOD

Gajan is held in front of Shiva Temple. The devotees who perform Gajan are called Sanyasis. They lead a strict life during festival. They worship Lord Shiva and live with alms given by people. They eat food like milk, fruits, rice etc. They are not permitted to cut hair, nails. They are restricted to sit bare ground. People think of them as a part of God. People keep their children under the feet of the Sannyasi or monk. They have strong belief that the monks are the part of God in the time of Gazan festival. So the touching feet will bring fortune.



DURGA PUJA

Durga Puja is the largest religious and social festival of Hindus. Again the most popular public festival in Bengal. Durga puja is held on the Bengali month Ashwin and Chaitra. Durga Puja of Ashwin is called Sharadiya Durga Puja and Durga Puja of Chaitra is called Basanti Durga Puja. Durga was worshiped in the autumn during the battle of Rama and Ravana in the Ramayana Of Krittibas Ojha.



The Beginnings



Dhak- An Integral Part Of Durga Puja



Bisorjan: Sinking Durga



Durga Riding Vehicle



Durga Puja Collections

DURGA PUJA

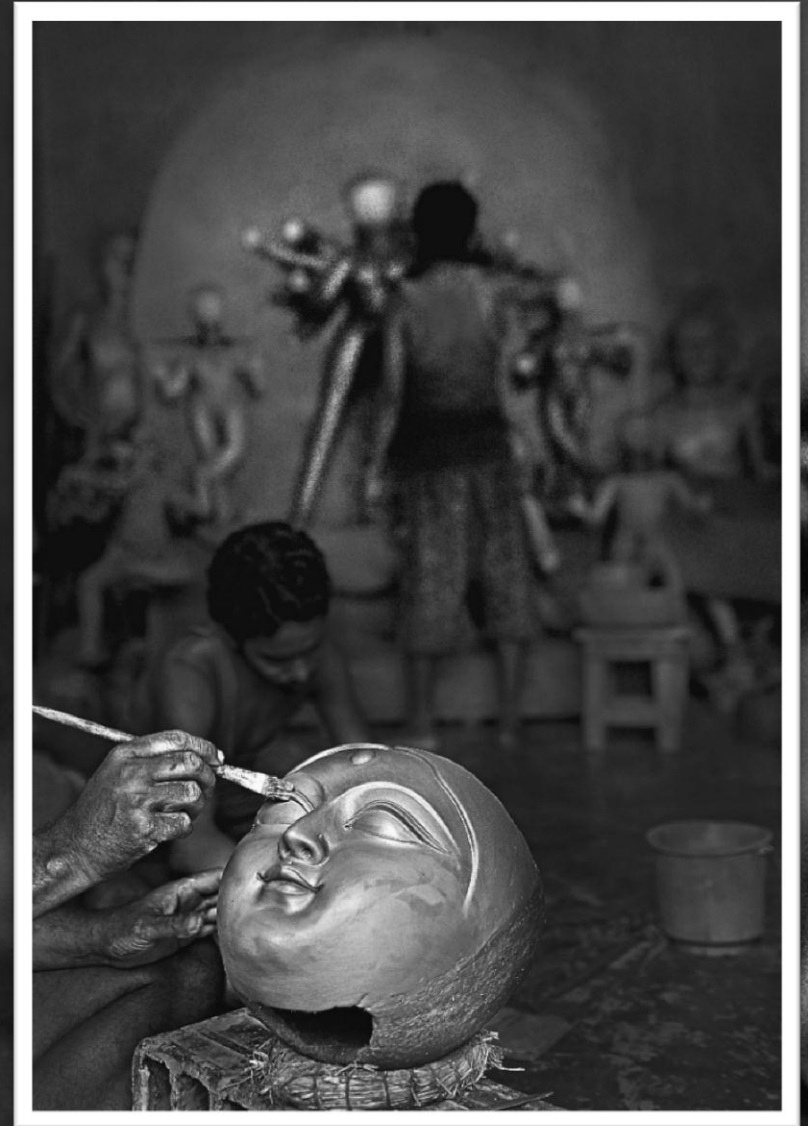
Durga Puja is the most important socio-cultural event among the Bengali people. Celebrated as a ten day long festival, this auspicious event glorifies the divine power of the Goddess Shakti and her victory over the evil power Mahisasura. Traditionally observed in the month of October, Durga Puja starts from the day of Mahalaya or the inaugural day that is celebrated with the chanting of Agomoni or welcome prayers. Later, from the 6th day Shashthi, Saptami, Ashtami, Navami and Vijayadashami puja is celebrated till the 10th day of this auspicious period in the month of Ashwin/October.

The goddess, along with her children Lord Ganesha, Lord Kartik, Goddess Laxmi as well as Saraswati are worshipped. Extensively made of clay and sholapith idols where the Goddess is placed in the center, seated on the lion, holding heavenly attributes slaughtering the demon Mahishasura; this is the main attraction of the puja pandals. On the day of Vijaya Dashami, people bid farewell to the deity by immersing the idols in the river. The custom is symbolic of the departure of the deity to her mythological marital home of Kailash to Lord Shiva.

In the Bengali cultural diaspora Durga Puja signifies supremacy. Initially started by the wealthy zamindars the extensive celebration of Durga Puja soon spread to the other sections of the society and in present time, the whole of Bengali community celebrates the festivity along with other Eastern Indian states of Odisha and Assam where Shaktism is popularly followed by inhabiting communities.

THE BEGININGS

The process of the making of clay sculpture-idols for the Durga is started months before. The collection of clay to the ornamentation is a ceremonial process. The artisans makes the sculpture-idols with clay, straw, bamboo, jute rope etc. Lastly idols are decorated and displayed in the puja pandels. In fact, the idols are traditionally made of eco-friendly materials. Bodhon is held on the sixth day after Mahalaya and it is called Mahashashthi. In this day Durga comes to our world from Kailash, her heavenly abode. She reaches here with her children- Lord Ganesh, Lord Karthik, Devi Saraswati and Devi Laxmi.



DHAK- AN INTEGRAL PART OF DURGA PUJA

Drum beats are an integral part of the festival associated with Durga Puja in Bengal. The enchanting beats of Dhak are necessary to conjure up the sights and smells of Durga Puja. Durga's face is uncovered while devotees celebrate the occasion with much pomp and dhak beats as it marks the deity coming alive. It's time for the celebrations of beginning Durga puja. A huge gathering adds an extra flavor to the festival. But it is true that the art of playing the Dhak is now going to the way of extinction.



DURGA RIDING VEHICLE

The idol of Devi Durga is carried away from the Artist place to different Pandals. It is the biggest Hindu Festival. Durga is worshiped with grandeur in different places of Bengal. This festival has a social and economic significance. The creation of the idols, setting up of the pandels, installation of lights and other decorations and performance of rituals involve various segments of the population. The range is from craftsmen, potters, painters to artists and artisans. This generates income for them. Besides that, it is an occasion for people to come together and celebrate this wonderful festival together. It is also a delicious time for people to taste the street foods.



SINKING DURGA

The goddess Durga is worshipped with Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kartik and Ganesh. The celebrations end with Vijaya Dashami. Idols are carried in huge processions to local rivers, where they are immersed. The custom is symbolic of the departure of the deity to her mythological marital home of Kailasha to Shiva. Images of the goddess riding on a lion, attacking the demon king Mahishasura are placed at various pandels. The pandels are erected and elaborately decorated with bamboos and cloths. It is a big festival of Bengal. After immersion of idol, people wait for one year to welcome the goddess again.



FESTIVAL – DURGA PUJA COLLECTION



Durga Flanked By Brahma and Saraswati



Depiction of Goddess Durga



Mask Depicting Goddess Durga



Durga Mahishasura Mardini

DURGA FLANKED BY BRAHMA AND SARASWATI

Keshiary, Medinipur, West Bengal

Wall decoration

Sholapith, paper

L:90cm. W:90 cm.

Acc. No. 75.1041

20th Century

This semicircular shaped painting depicts the triad of Hindu deities; Goddess Durga seated in the center, flanked by three-headed Lord Brahma and Goddess Saraswati clad in a white sari. Both the figures are shown standing on either side of the creator, Lord Brahma. The color palette is minimal and simply done. This painting serves the purpose of wall decoration. The cult of the divine power deeply influences the Bengali culture and the lives of people. Such hangings adorn the puja mandaps or households and part of the Durga Puja decoration among the community.



DEPICTION OF GODDESS DURGA

Howrah, West Bengal

Bamboo

Carved, Burnish

L:62 cm. W:47cm.

Acc. No. 72.45

20th Century

The image of the Goddess is beautifully made out of bamboo and shown wearing a betel leaf shaped crown. Detailing of the three eyed face of the Goddess reveals the imagination of the supremely talented craftsman. The figure is bejeweled in floral designed ornaments and elongated ear ornaments. The *Tandava* manifestation of Lord Shiva is illustrated in the crown. The three eyed/ *Triyambake* form of the divine is an indication of her, being the source of infinite power, wisdom, dynamism and effectiveness of Lord Shiva. Legends says, mother Durga had manifested Goddess Kali from her third eye. According to the Puranas, Goddesses' third eye indicates wisdom and knowledge/*Agni(fire)*. While, the left eye signifies desire-moon/ *Chandra* and action/*Surya (Sun)* is signified by the right eye.



MASK DEPICTING GODDESS DURGA

West Bengal
Clay, Sholapith
Painted
H: 48.4cm.
Acc. No. 73.58
20th Century

A decorative mask of Goddess Durga intricately designed with sponge wood on a framework of clay. Expressive facial features of the goddess signify the divine beauty and power that she possesses. She is shown wearing an elaborate crown made of Sholapith. Initially, molded clay is used to make the face and then sun-dried; it is then beautifully painted to produce the sharp and intricate features. Later, a layer of varnish is applied to give the mask a finished look. These types of decorative masks are the specialty of Kumartuli area of West Bengal and the prime themes are based on Hindu divinities. Often, such a mask is also attached to bamboo rice husking device and used as a decorative item.

In this mask, beautifications are done with locally available shola wood (also known as Indian cork or sponge wood). Shola is a milky white spongy plant having a grey colored bark, grows in the marshy areas of Eastern Indian states. Because of its pure white color, this spongy wood indicates purity and sacredness. In West Bengal ritualistic items made of shola wood are used till today. Traditionally, the Malakar community of the state is associated with the *Sholar Kaaj* or Sholapith craft tradition. Using a sharp iron blade, the artisans carve intricate designs out of this soft wood.



DURGA MAHISHASURA MARDINI

Natungram, Burdwan, West Bengal

Wood

H: 30cm., W:16.5cm.

Acc. No. 73.261

20th Century

This is a representation of Goddess Durga defeating the buffalo headed demon *Mahishasura*. It is carved out of a single piece of wood. The Goddess is shown with her four hands holding her divine attributes as gifted by lord Vishnu, lord Brahma, lord Shiva and Devas. Sitting on the lion, she is targeting the demon *Mahishasura*. The Goddess waged a ten-day long battle against the asuara who was disguising in the form of a buffalo, a lion, a man, and an elephant throughout the course of battle. The panel also depicts the demon holding a sword, as well as his elephant form. The Asura, who was gifted with a boon that no god and man could ever kill him, eventually was slaughtered by the divine incarnation of Goddess Durga. The figures on the wooden panel are extensively ornamented.

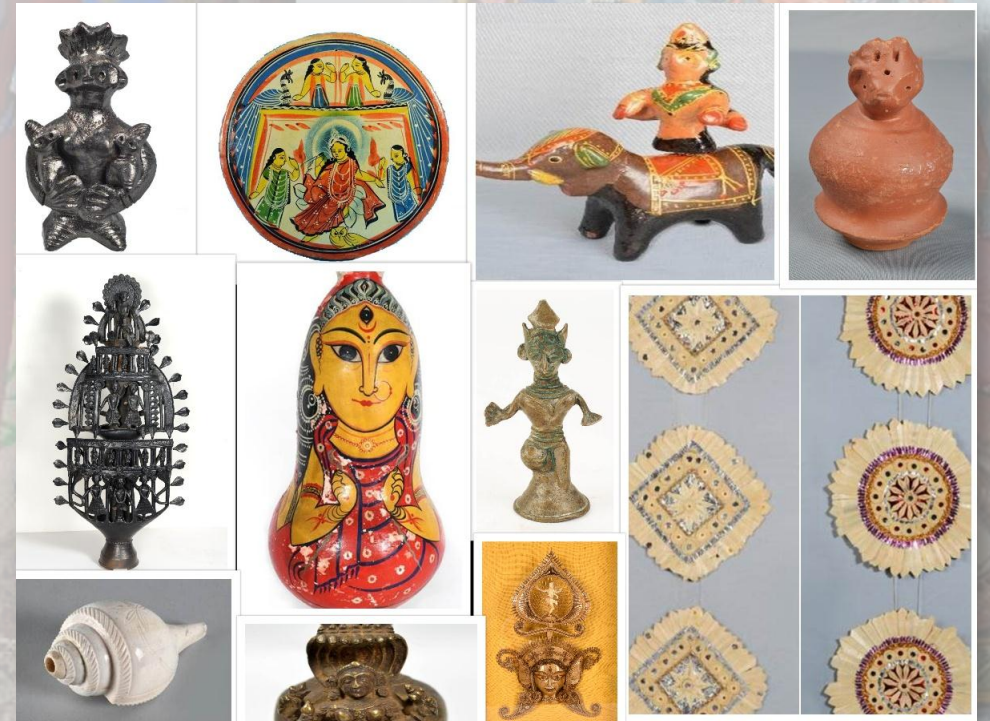


ART

Patachitra



Other Collections



ART : PATACHITRA

In West Bengal, Patachitra are painted narrative scrolls executed by the group of painters known as *Patuas* or *Chitrakars*. The word Pata is derived from the Sanskrit word *Patta* or cloth and *Chitra* indicates painting. The *Patuas* describes the narrative of the Pata by singing mythological songs, unfolding the painted scrolls step by step to illustrate their songs which are known as *Pater Gan*. During the early days, the *Patuas* used to paint on palm leaves. Later, they shifted to canvas made of cloth, gum and handmade paper from cotton pulp. The popular themes involve are, stories of Indian mythology, female folk deities or *Mangala Kavya* narrative poems. Alongside, *Yam Pata* is another theme which describes the realm of *Yama*, the God of death. From the beginning, the Chitrakars of Medinipur, Bankura, Birbhum, Murshidabad, 24 Parganas and Bardhaman districts were associated with this art. *Patuas*, using indigenous colors and brushes made from animal hair, used to produce these significant art forms of visual storytelling. i.e. yellow from tamarind, blue from indigo etc. Colors are mixed with natural gum or boiled in tamarind seeds to get the glaze.

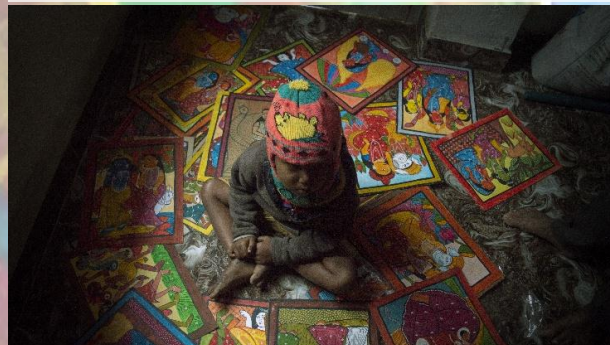
This living tradition of West Bengal is still in practice in few villages in the mentioned districts. In the present context, *Patuas* illustrates themes inspired by various regional events, urban and social issues or natural calamities etc. with some nominal changes to the traditional techniques.



Chitrakar Showing Own Patachitra



Chitrakar- Painting For Livelihood



Centre Of Attraction



Patachitra On The Wall

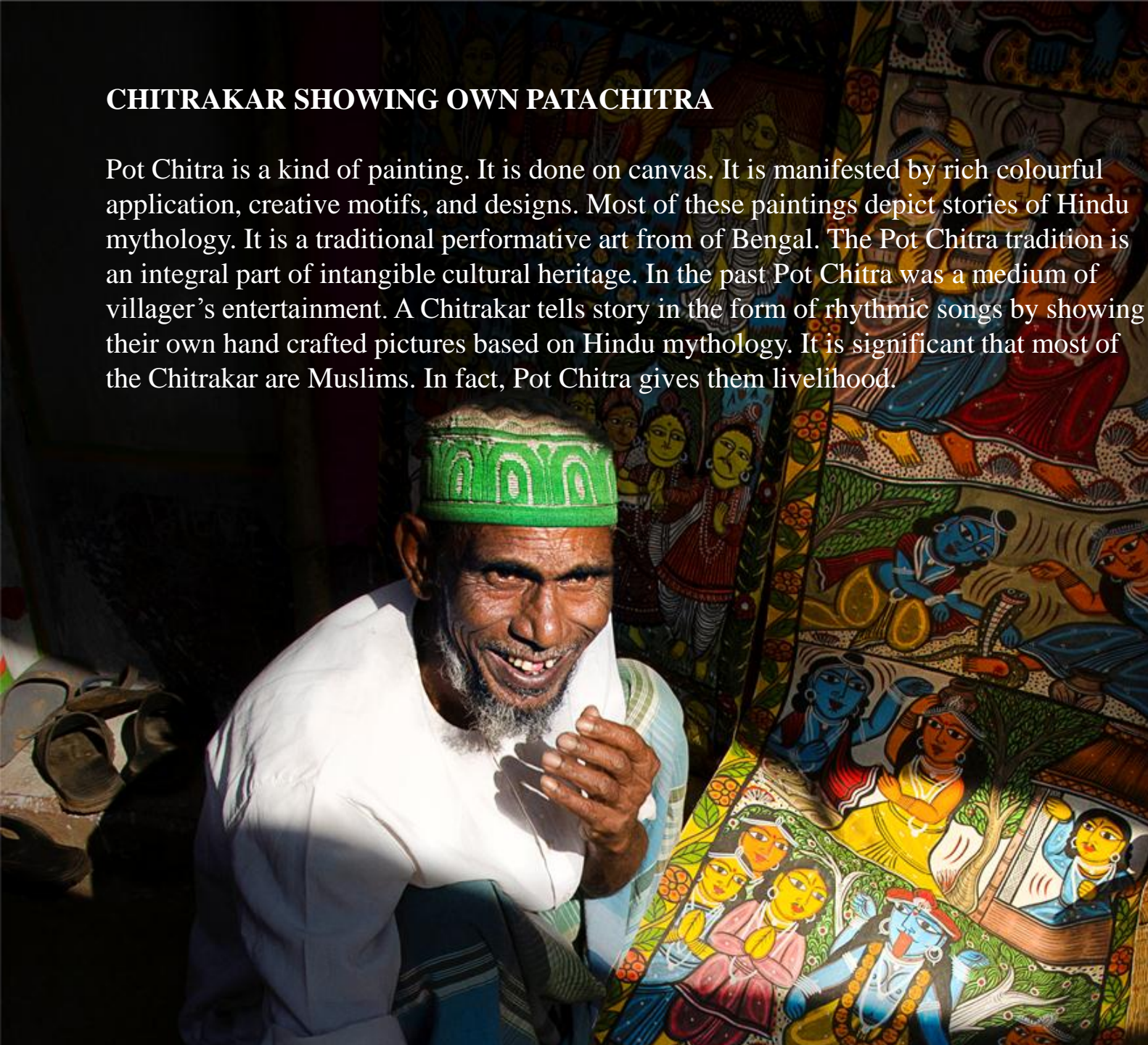


Survives Through Inheritance



CHITRAKAR SHOWING OWN PATACHITRA

Pot Chitra is a kind of painting. It is done on canvas. It is manifested by rich colourful application, creative motifs, and designs. Most of these paintings depict stories of Hindu mythology. It is a traditional performative art from of Bengal. The Pot Chitra tradition is an integral part of intangible cultural heritage. In the past Pot Chitra was a medium of villager's entertainment. A Chitrakar tells story in the form of rhythmic songs by showing their own hand crafted pictures based on Hindu mythology. It is significant that most of the Chitrakar are Muslims. In fact, Pot Chitra gives them livelihood.



CHITRAKAR- PAINTING FOR LIVELIHOOD

The painter, who is called Chitrakar portrays the scenes with natural colors and motifs on a cloth based canvas. They present ancient mytlogical stories of epic. These rural folk art of the past survive centuries through Pot Chitra. Pata Chitra is a component of an ancient Bengali narrative art. It is served as a visual device during the performance of a song. The activity, 'Poter gaan' is a form of storytelling used in shows traditionally performed by Potua men throughout their region.





PATACHITRA ON THE WALL

Wall Painting has a deep relation with Pot Chitra. The Chitrakar portrays the scenes of Pot Chitra on the wall using Natural Colours. It not only beautify the walls of the house, but also express their good cultural taste. Themes that define the painting vary from oral traditions of folk tales, mythological texts and natural scenes, sociological topics of interest. This kind of artwork has a traditional appeal and is intrinsic with Indian values, customs and rituals, which are a part of the Hindu faith and religion

POT CHITRA: CENTRE OF ATTRACTION

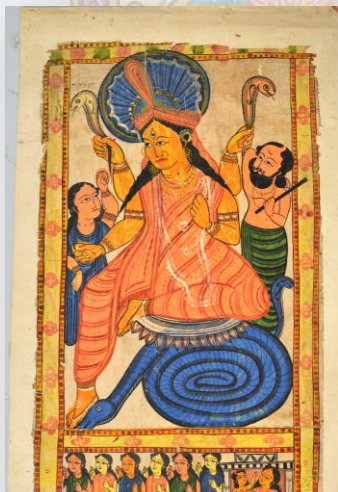
A child is in the middle of books covered with paintings related to Pot Chitra. The old tradition of this painting still survives in the places like Bengal, Orissa etc. The subject matter of Pata Chitra is mostly mythological, religious stories and folklore. Themes are chiefly on Lord Jagannath, Radha-Krishna, Manasamangal, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc. Pata Chitra paintings exhibit the strong line and brilliant natural color on canvas.



SURVIVES THROUGH INHERITANCE

Pot Chitra is a traditional and rural art form of Bengal since middle ages. It is portrayal of simple themes, mostly mythological in depiction. Potuas are not only painter, but also lyricists, singers, performers and true artists. Vibrant colours are made from natural products such as vegetables and turmeric and used in making frames or paintings, which are joined together to make the scroll. It survives through inheritance. A child also bears the quality of his ancestors. But now, it is in the way of extinct.

ART – PATACHITRA COLLECTION



**Manasa
Pata/Mansa
Mangal)**



**Manasa
Pata/Mansa
a Mangal)**



**Chandimangal
Pat**



**Story Of Goddess
Manasa/Manasa
Pata**



**Ramayana
Pata**



**Ramayana
Pata**



Manasa Pata



Chalachitra



Chalachitra



Shitala Mansa Pata



**Painted Clay
Disk/Mahishasurmardini
Śara**



Laxmi-śara

SCROLL PAINTING (MANASA PATA/MANSA MANGAL)

Bankura, West Bengal

L.332, W. 49.5 cm

Paper, Natural color

Painted

Acc. No. 73.53

20th Century

This painted scroll depicts the story of *Manasa Mangal*; the most popular of all *Manasa Kavyas*, the devotional tribute to the folk deities composed in West Bengal between 13th to 18th centuries. It reveals the folktale of Manasa mangal; the snake goddess and the dedication of Behula who is well acknowledged for her courage and compassion. This scroll narrates the story of acceptance of the serpent deity Manasa. In each panel of this scroll, the narrative of Behula-Lakhindar folk tale is depicted.

SCROLL PAINTING (MANASA PATA/MANSA MANGAL)

The story talks about a rich merchant called Chand who lived in West Bengal and was reluctant to acknowledge the glory of goddess Manasa. The goddess takes it up as a challenge to convert Chand Saudagar, cursing him for vowing to kill his sons by sending her serpents which killed all his six sons. The seventh unmarried son, Lakhindar was destined to be killed on his wedding night. His father took all possible precautions and constructed a protective bridal chamber. Manasa, in spite of all the precautionary measures by Chand, sent Kalanagini; one of her poisonous snakes, to kill Lakhindar. The scenes on this scroll illustrate the fate of Lakhindar as he is bitten by Kalanagini. Behula, the newly wed bride determined to bring back her husband, started her six months long voyage on a raft, along with the corpse of Lakhindar, to persuade the gods to revive her dead husband. On her journey, she was encountered by ferocious river animals who were attracted to the smell of the decayed corpse. Fighting off everything, Behula continues down the river and meets Neto, the washerwomen of Gods and Goddesses. She started helping Neto as a washerwoman and impressed the Gods by her devotion. As a result, they call Behula in their heavenly abode where she meets the supreme gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva who were impressed by her skills and dedication. Behula's meeting with them is illustrated in the latter part of this scroll. Finally, goddess Manasa was captivated by Behula's devotion and granted her prayer by restoring Lakhindar's life along with his six brothers. As a result, Chand Saudagar finally agreed to worship Manasa. Goddess Manasa's quest for human worship and Behula's eternal love and devotion is at the heart of this folk illustration.

CHANDI MANGAL PAT

Midnapore, West Bengal

Paper, Natural color

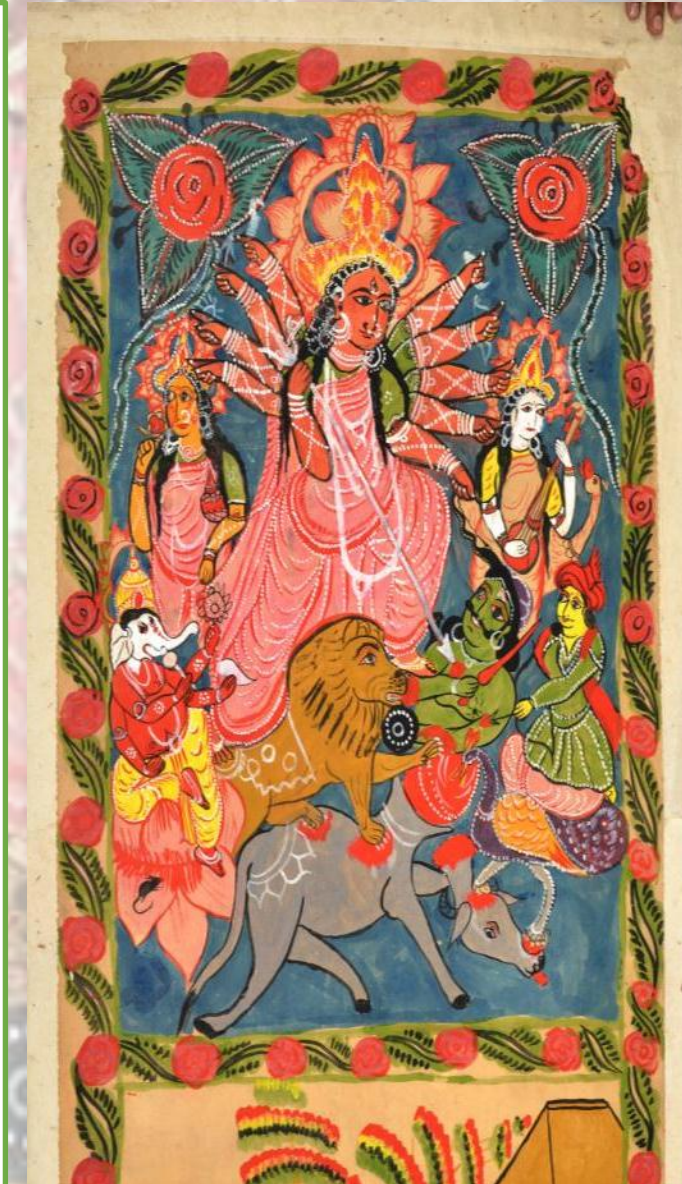
Painted

L: 387cm., W:61cm.

Acc. No: 73.224

20th Century

The image depicts the age old traditional patachitra art form, which is a visual and performing art form of eastern India. This particular pata represents Goddess Durga in her Durga Mahishāsurmardini form portraying the story from the Chandi Mangal Kavya. The Chandi Mangal eulogizes Chandi or Abhaya, primarily a folk goddess, but identified with the puranic goddess Chandi. The Chandimangal usually has two narratives but the one which is depicted in this image is that of Dhanapati, the merchant, his wife Khullana and their son Srimanta who is the main protagonist of this story. In a pata, the story starts from the top and ends with the bottom frame with each frame narrating an episode of the story. The scroll depicts total eleven scenes demarcated by floral patterned, decorated borders with each scene gradually elaborating the story.



SCROLL PAINTING DEPICTING STORY OF GODDESS MANASA/MANASA PATA

Bankura, West Bengal

Paper, Natural color

Painted

L: 293cm, W: 41.4 cm.

Acc. No. 73.225

20th Century

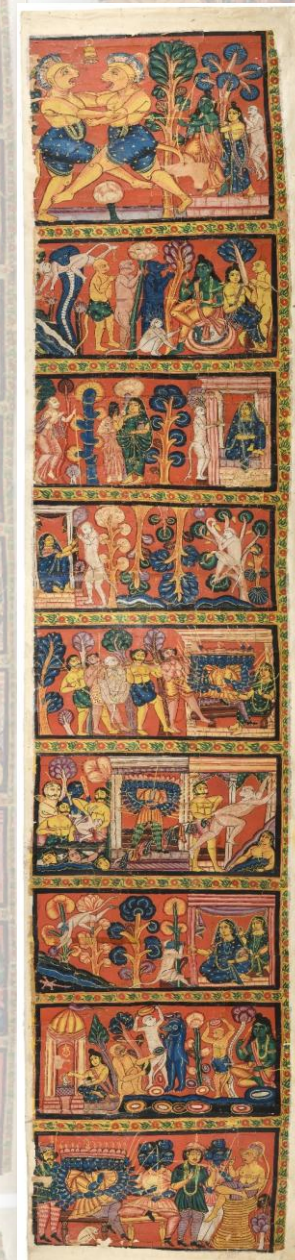
The depiction of Manasa Pata extols the snake goddess, Manasa, who is widely worshipped in West Bengal and Assam since the ancient times. The narrative of the goddess is elaborately depicted in this scroll painting. The story glorifies her various exploits, stories of Chand Saudagar, his son Lakhindar and devotion of Behula; Lakhindar's wife. She is looked upon as a model Indian woman known for her dedication, courage and compassion. Through her endless compassion and prayers Behula brought her dead husband into life, which transformed reluctant Chand Saudagar to accept the supremacy of the serpent deity, Goddess Manasa



RAMAYANA PATA

Birbhum, West Bengal
 L: 140cm., W: 28.5 cm.
 Paper, Natural color
 Acc. No. 76.106
 20th Century

This paper scroll narrates the scenes from Ramayana and is named as Ramayana Pata. The illustrative scroll starts with the fighting scene of Bali and Sugriva, the Vanara (*monkey*) kings. Bali is the most powerful ‘vanara’ and the ruler of Kishkindha who was in continuous dispute with his brother Sugriva. In terror, Sugriva was hiding in the Risyamuka mountains. Here, lord Rama approached him and assured Sugriva that he would assist him restoring his lost kingdom, wife Ruma and his lost glory. Despite knowing the fact that Sugriva was being protected by the mighty Lord, Bali fought with his own brother, eventually bringing his own downfall. In the fighting between the two, lord Rama saved Sugriva's life by killing Bali. The next scenes depict the scenes of Rama-Laxman's exile, their quest for Sita's capture who was abducted by Ravana, imprisoned in Ashok Vatika/Ashok grove in Lanka.





RAMAYANA PATA

The second scene illustrates Hanuman, Vanara sena and Jambavan with lord Rama and his brother Laxman. In the next panel, Sita is depicted in Ashok Vatika where Hanuman, is sent by Rama, to search Sita and know her well-being and convey her husband's message. Caught by the army of Ravana, Hanuman was carried to Ravana's court. Queen Mandodari, clad in a green saree is also depicted in this scene. Furious to know about Hanuman's identity and approach, Ravana ordered to punish him by setting his tail on fire. Mischievous Hanuman casted his magic spell by making his tail longer and soon after, the demons were running short of cotton to wrap his tail. Hanuman set the Lanka city on fire by the blaze on his tail. The second to last section of this scroll shows Rama's Vanara sena constructing the stone bridge or *Ram Setu* to Lanka in order to save his wife from Ravana. The last episode of this scroll illustrates Hanuman in the court of Ravana where he is seen with his multi folded and coiled tail so as to be seated higher than the ten headed demon king Ravana.

MANASA PATA

Midnapur, West Bengal
Paper, natural color
L:120.5 cm., W:91 cm.
Acc. No. 64.1831
20th Century

This is a coarse handmade paper scroll used in households or as replacement of idols during rituals in Bengal. The painting illustrates goddess Manasa and two snakes on her either side. The background is painted with floral motifs in pink and green color.



CHALACHITRA

East Bengal
Paper, Natural Color
Dia. 161.5; Wd. 38 cm.
Acc. No. 71.642
20th Century

A semi-circular shaped scroll painting known as *chalachitra* depicting *Veena dhari Shiva/ Lord shiva holding the Veena* sitting on his vahana Nandi at the central position. The next scene shows depiction of court scenes on either side of Lord Shiva. On the extreme position, the *chalachitra* illustrates combating scenes of Goddess Durga; on the right side the Goddess is shown on her vahana lion whereas, on the left we can see the manifestation of Goddess Kali in her ferocious form.

The tradition of *Chalachitra* is a part of Scroll painting or *patachitra* tradition of the state. These are used as a backdrop to the *Devi Durga Pratima/ Durga* idol during the worshipping of Durga Puja. *Chala* in Bengali is referred to covering and *Chitra* means painting. This is an ancient tradition being practiced by the Patua community. Themes depicted in these *Chalachitras* are Shiv-Parvati, Durga Mahishasura Mardini, Shiva attending Nandi and Bhringi, scenes of Dashavatar etc. While positioning as a backdrop to the idol, the cloth base of the *Chalachitra* is fixed with a half-doomed bamboo structure. The base is then layered with chalk dust where the narrative is drawn. Similar to the *Patachitra* style, Patuas' traditionally used colours obtained from nature; i.e. indigo for blue, pauri for yellow, chalk dust for white etc. In general, black and white, red, blue, yellow, green and brown colour are used in these paintings. The ancient tradition of *Chalachitra* is a living heritage In West Bengal, where the Patua community is engaged in this craft and practicing, however with limited changes of material and technique in due course of time.



CHALACHITRA

East Bengal

Paper, Natural Color

Dia.195; Wd. 39 cm.

Acc. No. 71.641

20th Century

The curvature shaped scroll *Chalachitra* depicts mythological characters of Shiv-Parvati as the central figures. Goddess Durga in her three incarnations is the key figure of this illustration. In the center the Goddess is shown holding Lord Ganesha in her lap, seated along with lord Shiva. The scenes on the left side show Brahma, Vishnu and other mythological characters. On the right, a scene from the exile (*Banabasa*) of Lord Rama, Laxamana and Goddess Sita is illustrated. The manifestation of goddess Kali combating the troop is shown on the left. Whereas, on the other side the Goddess is shown in her Durga avatar, rebelliously defeating the demons with her heavenly attributes.



SHITALA MANSA PATA

Midnapur, West Bengal

Paper, natural color

L: 124 cm., W: 92.3 cm.

Acc. No. 64.1830

20th Century

This scroll decoration depicts Shitala, the folk goddess associated with the prevention from smallpox disease. The goddess is shown in green while the companion Manasa is depicted in yellow color. The cult of Shitala Mata is known and worshipped in many parts of the country, however highly admired in West Bengal. She is also known as the Queen of disease or *Roga Raja* or mother of poxes or *Basenta Raya*. It is believed that the folk goddesses' mythical birth from the cooled ashes of the sacrificial fire denotes her name to be *Sitala* which literally means the cool one. There are multiple folk narratives that describe the emergence of Shitala Mata and her various appearances as described in these narratives known as *Shitala Katha*. Prayers known as *Mangals* are written and practiced in Bengal to honor the deity. The Sitala Katha's describes the goddess as the patron of prosperity and the guardian of the children.



PAINTED CLAY DISK/MAHISHASURMARDINI ŚARA

West Bengal
Painted Terracotta
Dia 33.1 cm
Acc. No. 73.270
19th Century

Goddess Durga in the form of Mahishasura Mardini is depicted in this circular shaped painted clay disk or *Sara*. Beautifully painted in natural color, the Sara depicts Goddess Durga combating the demon Mahishasura, as the central figure. The goddess is flanked by Karttikeya and Goddess Lakshmi on the left and Saraswati and Ganesh on the right side with Lord Shiva. Such clay disks are used as idols during Durga puja and rituals performed by the women for domestic happiness and the welfare of loved ones.



LAXMI-ŚARA

West Bengal

Painted Terracotta

Dia 27.3 cm.

Acc. No. 72.463/A, 19th century

The painted clay disk also known as *Lakshmi Sara* is the unique form of ritual worship performed in rural Bengal. Goddess Laxmi is the main theme of this sara. In autumn of every year, a simple worship ceremony for good harvest is a significant part of every Hindu household in the villages of the state. Lakshmi, the goddess of plenty, is worshipped as the goddess of harvest and the womenfolk of the village, worship her on the full moon day during the harvest season. An integral part of the ritual, use of these painted earthen covers or saras which are handmade are baked in slow fire. Palpara village of Nadia district is popular for making these traditionally painted earthen disks done generally by men of the potter caste with the assistance from their womenfolk. On each *Sara*, there is invariably a representation of the goddess of wealth. She is often depicted on saras where other Hindu deities are painted and worshipped during auspicious occasions.

This convex shallow dish is an interesting example relating to the close connection between art and ritual. In this Sara, the Goddess is attended by her two female attendants on each side, the fistful of paddy in her hand symbolizes a plentiful harvest. At the feet of the deity, the watchful night bird Owl is present with vigilant eyes which carries a ceaseless war on rats and other insects which infest the granaries. The owl has acquired the high privilege of being the mount of the goddess.



ART - OTHER COLLECTION



Conch/Shankh



**Goddess Lakshmi
Riding An Elephant**



Lakshmi Ghat



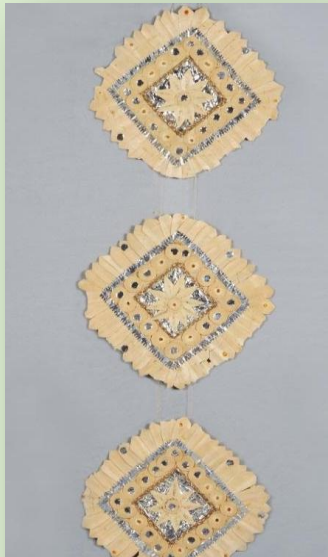
Lakshmi Ghat



Manasa Ghat



**Goddess
Shashthi**



**Wall
Decoration**



**Wall
Decoration**



Manasha Jhar



**Goddess
Lakshmi**



**Ritual Vase/
Manasa Ghat**

CONCH/SHANKH

Kolkata, West Bengal

Shell

L: 21.7cm.

Acc. No. 73.245

20th Century

Conch, a sacred element in the Hindu culture and tradition and an earliest form of trumpets. The sound produced by the Conch is called *Shankhnaad*, and is believed to be the purest of all sounds in the universe. It releases the *Om* sound in a sharp, shrill manner. According to the Hindu mythology, *Shankh* originated during the *Samudra manthana*/ churning of the ocean by the divinities. The *Shankha* is regarded as the sacred emblem of Lord Vishnu, signifying fame and prosperity.

Shankha is an essential component in Durga puja rituals too. The offerings start with the sound of this holy item that is believed to be the symbol of the prime and earliest form of sound from which the entire cosmos has emerged. It is one of the ten attributes Goddess Durga possesses in her hands. Bengali ladies clad in traditional sarees, blow the *Shankha* during the auspicious days of Durga puja rituals.





GODDESS LAKSHMI RIDING AN ELEPHANT

West Bengal

Clay, Lacquer

L: 14.7cm., H: 7.8cm.

Acc. No. 73.139

20th Century

It is a traditional shellac or lacquer finished doll from Midnapur, West Bengal. It is made of baked clay, finished with lacquer, depicting goddess of wealth Lakshmi, riding on an elephant. The Nuri community of West Bengal practices this local craft of shellac doll making. These dolls are about two to six inches in height. Artisans of Midnapur produce these dolls out of a lump of clay with the use of fingers. They are skillfully shaped and finished with the layer of shellac to form the figures of deities and different animals. The traditional method of making these dolls continues until the present era.

LAKSHMI GHAT (LAKSHMI GHAT/GANESH GHAT)

West Bengal

Clay

H: 9 cm

Acc. No. 64.1787

20th Century

In the tradition of earthenware of West Bengal, *ghat* or *auspicious pottery* has a significant position. They are basically votive offering pots used in household puja and other rituals. Lakshmi and Ganesh Ghats are placed in pairs during ritual ceremonies. Locally available *Entel mati* or sticky clayey soil is used which gives a natural plasticity while moulding. In certain areas, *Do-aansh* mati is also used. There are variants in form and shapes of Lakshmi Ghats which are mostly moulded, backed or painted in reddish *banak maati* (one variant of soil) brought from the nearby riversides. Such ghats are produced using both wheel mould and hand moulding process. This figure is stylized in the shape of Ganesha's trunk, while the upper fringe shows perforated facial portion of the deity.



LAKSHMI GHAT

West Bengal

Brass

H: 9.5 cm.

Acc. No. 80.458

20th Century

This elongated Lakshmi Ghat depicts the goddess of plenty, on the upper fringe of the vase. It has an elongated neck portion and globular shaped on the lower surface. The crowned goddess depicts ornamentation around the neck. These Lakshmi Ghats are used in rituals to offer water to the worshipping deity and devotees often offer prayers to these ghats as a gesture of worshipping the Goddess.





MANASA GHAT/BRASS PITCHER

West Bengal

H: 9.54cm.

Acc. No. 78.1178

20th Century

This ritualistic brass pitcher is the particular type of *Manasa ghat* used during the worshipping of serpent deity and folk goddess, Manasa in West Bengal. The four-armed goddess is shown as positioning one of her arms in Varada Mudra.



GODDESS SHASHTHI

Panchmura, Bankura, West Bengal

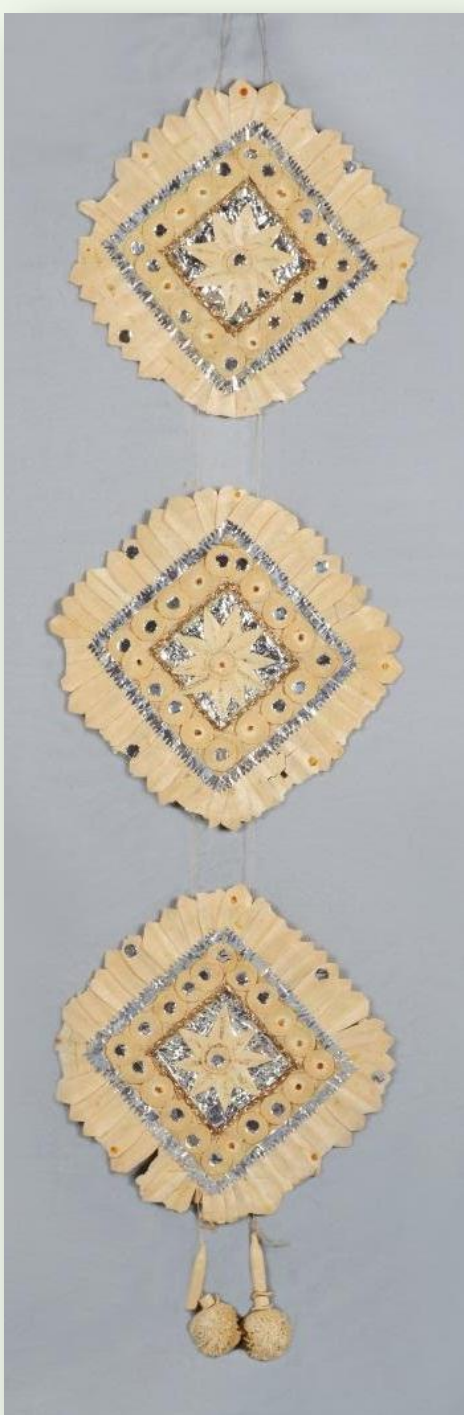
Clay

Baked, Painted

H: 11.8 cm.,

Acc. No. 73.141

This votive figure represents goddess Shashti, who is regarded as the guardian angel in rural Bengal households. She is seen holding her two children on her lap. Matri Shashti is believed to be an incarnation of Goddess Durga and worshipped by the womenfolk on the sixth day of the lunar calendar as a celebration of the power of womanhood and motherhood. Mothers keep a day long fast on this day and worship the goddess for the welfare of their children. The rituals to worship the goddess are performed symbolically in front of the earthen pot or *ghat* and not worshipped in the idol form. She is known as the goddess of fertility, reproduction and guardian of the children. All the married Bengali women worship her, wishing to remain fertile. Traditionally on the sixth day after child birth both mother and infant offer their prayers to the deity. There are other Shashti rituals too performed in households, for instance; Jamai Shashti for the well being of son-in-law, Durga Shashti, Ghetto Shashti, Ashoka Shashthi, Sheetal Shashti, Neel Shashti etc. All variations of Shashthi rituals have their specific significance and have been a part of Bengali tradition since a long past.



WALL DECORATION

West Bengal

Sholapith, foil paper

Acc. No. 72.461/a and d

L: 103 cm.

20th Century

Decorative hanging made of shola-pith (Indian cork) consisting of a squarish and round structures detailed with silver paper cut-outs. These type of shola wall decorations are used during puja ceremonies and household occasions.

MANASHA JHAR

Bankura, West Bengal

Terracotta, Natural Pigment

Baked, Painted

H: 153 cm, Dia. 71 cm

Acc. No. 78.234/a,b,c

20th century

Manasa Jhar is a stylized form of goddess Manasa, representing her shrine itself in an abbreviated form, which is famously known as one of the creative inventions of the terracotta artisans (Kumharas) of Panchmura district of West Bengal, which is popularly known for the terracotta horses. Manasa is the snake deity widely worshipped in the 'Rarh' areas of Bengal, where inhabitants lived in snake-infested jungles and the fear of death urged them to invoke the goddess to bequeath protection from snake-biting. This form originated from the ancestral tradition of worshipping a human form of Manasa set amongst the snakes.

Traditionally, the term Jhar/ Chali is referred to as "the shade of idol" like Chalchitra, which is also denoted by its decorated hemispherical shaped top section. Its elaborate structure is joined in three segments displaying groups of divine figures, influenced by folk tales, along with Devi Manasa, and is attached with the rows of snake hoods that are protruding out all around the corners. This terracotta idol (Poramati kaaj) is prepared, using traditional methods and techniques.



MINIATURE FIGURE OF GODDESS LAKSHMI

West Bengal

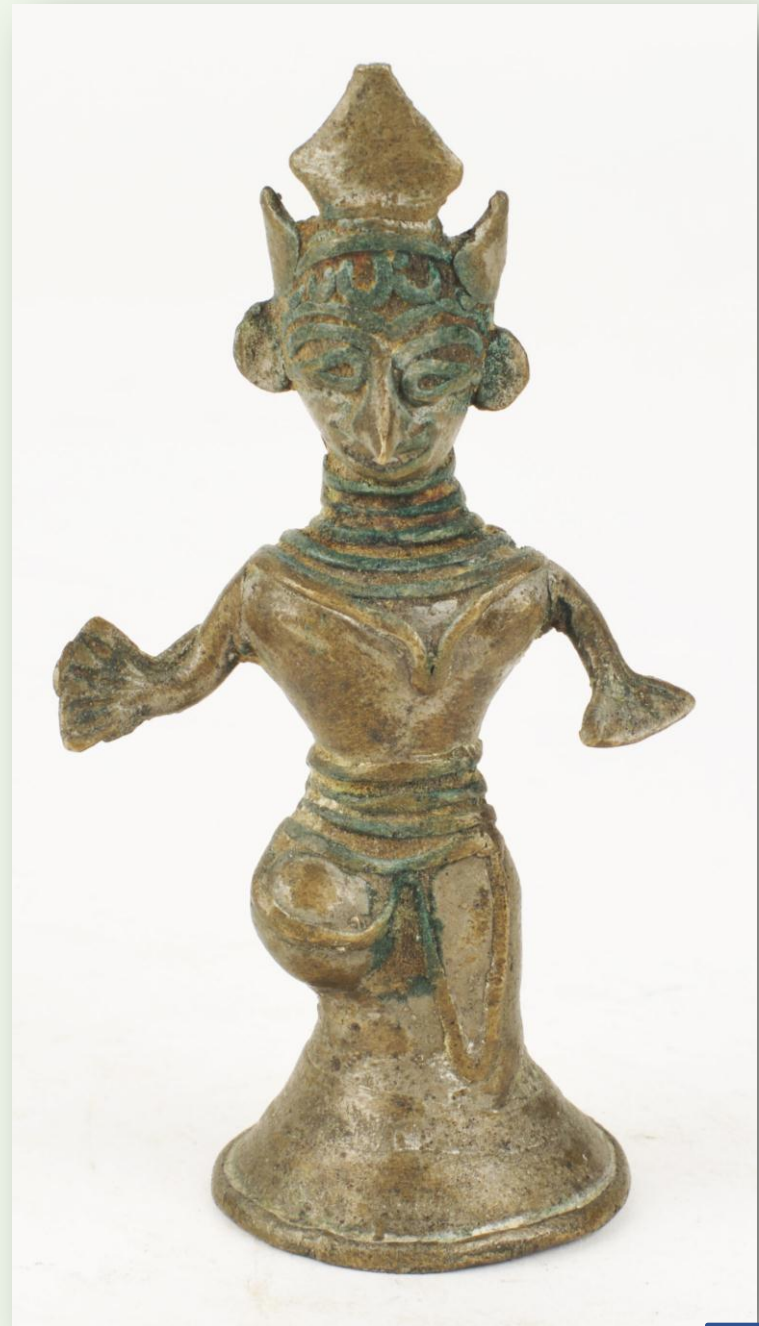
W:4 cm, H:9 cm.

Casted

Acc. No. 75.1092

20th Century

This crowned deity is a representation of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and fortune in Indian mythology. The casted figurine is shown seated on a pedestal, wearing neck ornaments, positioning her hands forward. Goddess Lakshmi is widely worshipped in and around the country. Especially in West Bengal, Assam and Odisha in Eastern India, She has a significant position in folk culture and tradition.





RITUAL VASE/ MANASA GHAT

Baliatore, Bankura, West Bengal

Terracotta ,Painted

Ht. 50.2; Dia. 25 cm

20th century

The ritual earthen vase known as *Manasa Ghat* is used to worship the serpent deity, Goddess Manasa. Devotees worship such terracotta pots, clay made image of snake or sometimes a bunch of a tree in order to worship Manasa instead of an idol. The elongated vase is stylistically painted in yellow, vermilion and black to depict the goddess, holding two snakes in her hands. The flared rim serves as the opening of the elongated vase and illustrates a suggestive head ornament of the deity.