

Voices from the Periphery presents

DETAILED SURVEY REPORT ON

Cultural Life and Livelihood

IN

BAGHMUNDI AND CHARIDA
VILLAGE, PURULIA

AAYUSH
DEY

RAKHI
MONDAL



INTRODUCTION

This survey report presents an in-depth account of my field visit to Baghmundi and Charida villages in Purulia, West Bengal, conducted to understand the socio-cultural life, livelihood, and challenges faced by the local inhabitants. The objective of this survey was to explore the intertwined relationship between their economic activities, cultural practices, access to government welfare schemes, education, and healthcare facilities.

Located amidst the rugged and picturesque terrain of Ayodhya Hills, both villages exhibit a rich cultural heritage, especially in Charida, known for its traditional Chhau mask-making. However, the survey also revealed stark realities of poverty, water scarcity, lack of proper education, and inadequate government assistance, which severely hinder the community's development.



GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Purulia is characterized by undulating landscapes, lateritic soil, and extreme climatic conditions. Baghmundi and Charida, situated in the foothills of Ayodhya Hills, are remote villages where access to infrastructure, education, and healthcare remains minimal. The economic profile of these villages largely revolves around agriculture, livestock rearing, and traditional Chhau mask-making.

Despite their rich cultural heritage, the socio-economic conditions reflect the long-standing neglect by administrative authorities. The communities continue to grapple with basic survival needs, revealing the paradox of cultural richness amidst material deprivation.



LIVELIHOOD PATTERN

AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK REARING

The majority of the population in both villages primarily rely on agriculture and livestock rearing for their livelihood. Paddy, maize, and pulses are the main crops cultivated, although the dependence on seasonal rain and lack of proper irrigation facilities severely affect productivity. Given the region's water scarcity, most farmers have to draw water from nearby khals (canals), which is also used for drinking purposes due to the absence of a structured water supply system.

In addition to farming, many households rear cattle, goats, and poultry to supplement their income. However, lack of veterinary care, unorganized markets, and frequent drought conditions reduce their profitability. Moreover, during the off-season, the scarcity of fodder often results in the death of livestock, further crippling their economic stability.

“We often have to use water from the canal (Khal) for drinking and cooking. In the summer months, the canal dries up, and we struggle to get water. No one from the government has ever come to help us.”

— Mr. Ram Charan Mahato, a farmer in Baghmundi (Field Interview, July 2024)



CHHAU MASK MAKING IN CHARIDA

Charida village is widely recognized for its traditional Chhau mask-making, an art form associated with the Chhau dance, which was recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010. This craft has been passed down through generations, with almost every household in Charida engaged in mask-making.

The masks depict mythological characters, demons, animals, and divine figures used in Chhau dance performances. However, the artisans face immense challenges such as declining demand, lack of fair market prices, and minimal governmental support. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a severe blow to the artisans, reducing their income drastically.

“We make these masks with great love, but we barely get enough money to feed our family. Middlemen exploit us by purchasing our masks at very low prices. The government never directly supports us.”

— —Mr. Shyam Bauri, a Chhau Mask Artisan (Field Interview, July 2024)

Although government schemes like West Bengal Artisan Support Scheme and Bangla Shilpi Kalyan Prakalpa exist on paper, very few artisans have received substantial benefits from these initiatives. Moreover, due to the remoteness of Charida, artisans lack market accessibility, compelling them to sell their crafts at meager prices to middlemen.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND THEIR LIMITED IMPACT

One of the most striking revelations of this survey was the inadequate reach and implementation of government schemes aimed at rural development.

MUKHYAMANTRI AWAS YOJANA

মুখ্যমন্ত্রী আবাস যোজনা

“They sanctioned our house under Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana, but we only received half of the promised money. We had to finish the house using our savings.”

— — — Mrs. Basanti Mahato, resident of Baghmundi (Field Interview, July 2024)

The Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana, aimed at providing housing facilities to rural communities, has largely remained ineffective in both villages. Several families reported that although their names were enlisted under the scheme, they never received the full financial assistance promised by the government. Many houses remain partially constructed or in dilapidated condition, leaving families vulnerable to natural calamities.





LACK OF ACCESS TO POTABLE WATER

“We requested the panchayat to dig a tube well several times, but they never did. Drinking canal water often makes our children sick.”

— — — —Mr. Dharmesh Soren, Baghmundi resident (Field Interview, July 2024)

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EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

DISMAL STATE OF EDUCATION

“We have very few students now. Parents don’t send their children to school because they are needed in the fields.”

— — — — Mr. Anil Mahato, School Teacher (Field Interview, July 2024)

The educational infrastructure in both villages is severely inadequate. The local high school in Baghmundi has very few students, primarily because of the poor economic condition of families who prioritize livelihood over education. Furthermore, the high school lacks proper teaching staff, educational materials, and infrastructure.

The dropout rate among teenagers, particularly girls, is alarmingly high. Early marriages, financial pressure, and lack of higher educational institutions force most children to discontinue their studies after middle school.

LACK OF HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

“My wife was in labor at midnight, and we had no doctor in the village. We had to travel to Purulia on a rented vehicle. Luckily, she survived.”

— — — — Mr. Kisto Soren, Baghmundi resident (Field Interview, July 2024)

Healthcare infrastructure in both villages is extremely fragile. There is no hospital in either Baghmundi or Charida; the only available healthcare facility is a small Primary Health Centre (PHC), which lacks medical equipment, doctors, and essential medicines. During emergencies, villagers are compelled to travel over 25 Kilometers to Purulia town for medical assistance.



CONCLUSION

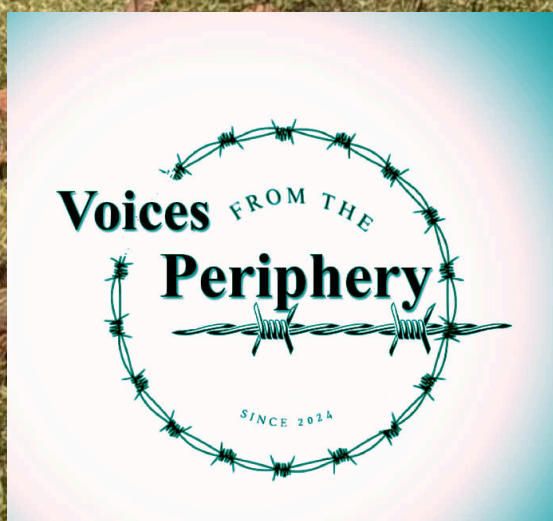
The survey revealed a stark duality – while Baghmundi and Charida possess a rich cultural legacy and strong community bonding, their economic and infrastructural development remains deeply neglected. Poor implementation of government schemes, lack of healthcare and educational infrastructure, and water scarcity continue to impede their socio-economic progress.

It is imperative that government authorities actively address these challenges by ensuring the full implementation of housing schemes, improving healthcare infrastructure, providing direct market access for artisans, and establishing reliable water supply systems. Without such interventions, the cultural and economic survival of Baghmundi and Charida will remain precarious.



FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Government of West Bengal. Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana Policy Guidelines, 2023.
2. Interview with Mr. Ram Charan Mahato, Farmer, Baghmundi Village, February 2025.
3. Interview with Mr. Shyam Bauri, Chhau Mask Artisan, Charida Village, February 2025.
4. Government of West Bengal. Jal Swapno Scheme, 2023.
5. Field visit observations conducted between February 12-15, 2025.



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