

## **Preface and acknowledgements**

My background and experience before starting the research fieldwork are worth mentioning to understand how this research journey began five years back. Being a trained classical dancer for 27 years, I always had the curiosity and interest towards the indigenous folk – aesthetic traditions. I came across interesting reads which further elicited my enthusiasm in this domain. My exposure to environmental social science research at IIT Kharagpur, closely working with my supervisor as teaching assistant to courses on these lines and other projects and workshops provided me with the much needed edge to explore the relationship between folk cultures and local ecologies of West Bengal.

The five year journey has remained exciting with some apprehensions and anxieties especially with the sudden halt of field work in the midst of the pandemic. Without strong support and guidance from many people, this journey would not have been possible. At first, I would like to express my deepest sense of reverence, sincere gratitude, and appreciation to the most important person who stood always by my side, not only during this Ph.D. endeavor but also in my life endeavors. Though she has asked me to acknowledge her at the end, my Ph.D. supervisor, Dr. Jenia Mukherjee, was the only person who could realize that this thematic area was the perfect fit for me and I had the potentials to navigate through this. Her constant support, direction, and motivation have helped me to complete the thesis. I could not have imagined a better mentor and guide for my Ph.D. work. I have thoroughly enjoyed my work under her supervision and would continue to do so regardless of the extent of recognition.

I am deeply obliged to the members of my doctoral scrutiny committee, Dr. Anuradha Chaudhry, Dr. Bhagirath Behera, and Dr. Balraj K. Sindhu for their insightful comments, encouragement, and suggestions which incited me to widen my research from various

perspectives. I also express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Priyadarshi Patnaik and Dr. Amrita Sen for their insightful comments and suggestions throughout my research period. Sincere thanks to Prof. Narayan Chandra Nayak (HoD) and the office staff members of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. Without their support, it would not have been possible to conduct this research smoothly.

Months were spent to unravel the tangibility and intangibility interconnections to understand the nature-culture-livelihoods relationship. With methodological training during my M.Phil and Ph.D. days, I started first with the secondary literature and exploring archival materials from the National Library and West Bengal State Archives (WBSA). This was followed by the selection of the field of study – the *mukhosh gram* – Charida village in the Baghmundi block, Purulia, West Bengal. I must thank Dr. Dripta Piplai who put me in touch with Braja, exposing me to the mask makers of Charida. I like to specifically thank Dharmendra Sutradhar and Bijay Sutradhar who assisted me in the field.

I would like to convey my sincere gratitude to Shreyashi and Raktima for helping me in finalizing the thesis through their constant guidance on theoretical insights and its connection to my empirical narratives. On a personal note, I would also like to thank all my dear friends Prithagni, Shrabani, Trishna, Somjeeta, Supriya, Rasmita, Rajoshree, Trina, Moumita, Jit da, Bharat, Sreekar, and my Boikalik family who constantly supported me at the campus and instilled the much needed confidence to continue and complete this research.

I can't express in words how I am grateful to my parents, my sister, my grandparents, and the Maulik family. Though losing two important persons (my grandma and elder grandpa) of my family during the pandemic period came as a sudden shock. But Avirup kept on repeating "*sob hoye jabe*" (Everything will be fine) and these magical words healed me from within.