

Name of Element: The Festival of Salhesh, Bihar, India

Community/ies: 'Dusadh' community

Region: Mithila region of Bihar, India

Brief Description: Salhesh is the chief deity of the socially marginalized and downtrodden Dusadh dalit community. The festival of Salhesh provides identity, social cohesion and self respect to the community. Celebrated every year during the auspicious month of Shravan (Rainy season), the chief components of the festival are folklore, rituals, craftsmanship and performing arts. The knowledge and skills involved in the entire festival are transferred from one generation to another through oral tradition. The rituals are performed by a priest (Bhagat). In the rituals, the artists (Manarias) enact the legend of Salhesh through music and dance in which the Bhagat takes the lead role. The performance includes instrumental music, recital of songs in local dialect, dancing, acrobatics and symbolic gestures. The festival culminates with the votive offerings of the terracotta horse-riders to the deity. This cultural heritage is in danger of being lost as the younger generation prefers more lucrative and respectable careers. Some safeguarding measures have been taken by the State, art connoisseurs and community itself who seek to create awareness for this rich cultural heritage.