

MASK AND MASK MAKERS OF EASTERN INDIA

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Introduction

Mask is a medium for transformation. It is used for impersonating the others, namely, a person, a deity, animal or cosmic character. Masks form a very significant mode of creative expression in all cultures. Mask dance as a media of entertainment is popular in various rural areas of India and they are called by different names. It is also a form of ceremonial dancing. Mask had been used from a very early period in India and other countries. Indian museum houses quite good number of masks collected from different parts of India and at different times. The objective of the study had been for proper understanding of the masks in view not only in perceiving their aesthetic value but, at the same time to get an insight into the social, cultural and psychological context of the mask, its use and the of those who make them. There three aspects, the mask, those who wear them, the viewers and the makers. The Both the entertainment and ritualistic aspects are studied.

Material and Method

Present work is carried out in two adjacent states of eastern India. These are the states of Assam and West Bengal in Eastern India. Some of the masks housed in Indian from these states are studied. For information on

the makers of mask, field work had been carried out among the mask makers residing in eastern India. Methodologies used are direct observation, narration, case study and attribute analysis of the masks. Raw materials used for making the mask, technique of manufacture, marketing and rituals associated with the manufacture are studied. At the same time the use of the masks in ceremonies, dances, entertainments are noted.

Conclusion

Masks are generally made out of *paper machier*. The mask makers belong to a caste group called *Sutradhar*, who are traditionally carpenters. Primary occupation of the mask makers are agriculture. Market for masks is seasonal. Although there is a state level policy, both at the Government and non government levels, for the revival of the ancient craft in the area but, the craftsmen are struggling to save their skill and make it profitable. Use of mask and the craft of making mask is embedded in traditional Indian society. However, with globalization forms of entertainment are also changing. The ritualistic aspects are also undergoing a drastic change in the social sector. As a result the craft is losing its popularity. The present paper aims at highlighting

the condition of those mask makers who are virtually on the verge of giving up their age old craft. The paper also aims to explore the avenues for

sustainability of the crafts among majority of the mask makers and the change in the socio-cultural milieu.