

# The Mask art of Majuli: A study on Natun Chamaguri satra of Majuli

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## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 15April2019

### Keywords

Mask Art, Artistic expression, aesthetic creation, ceremonial.

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## ABSTRACT

Mask has been a universal part of human experience from the earliest of recorded time to the present day. Mask making is one of the first and longest lasting forms of artistic expression used among ancient society in surprisingly similar ways, despite separation over vast distances and historical time. A mask is an object normally worn on the face typically for protection, disguise, performance or entertainment. Mask has been used since antiquity for both ceremonial and practical purposes. It is an aesthetic creation of man. It is a manner of expression that hides one's true character of feelings.

This article is based on the problems and prospects of Mask Art in Natun Chamaguri Satra of Majuli. The Mask Art of Natun Chamaguri Satra is doing good producing the best quality of mask. But the Mask Art centre has been facing lots of problems like transport, electricity, price determination, proper training & work-shop, communications, branding and packaging etc. Possibilities are often seen less due to these problems.

## 1. Introduction

The Natun Chamaguri Satra is resourced with the art of famous mask making since its inception. The tradition of mask making of the satra is carried out from the Prachin Chamaguri Satra where from it is bifurcated. The spell bounding ability in mask making of the forefathers of Sattradhikars of Natun Chamaguri Satra like Tankeswar Deva Goswami, Mukheswar Deva Goswami, Roseswar Deva Goswami, Chaitanya Deva Goswami et. all are still remembered. Till today some of the creations of those stalwarts are seen in the Prachin Chamaguri Satra. In Natun Chamaguri Satra also there are many stalwarts like Kamal Chandra Deva Goswami, Bhim Kt. Deva Goswami et. al, who have remarkable reputation for their creation of beautiful masks. The Chamaguri Satra has a thought provoking history of 236 years and from that satra the art of mask making is spread to different places. The present Sattradhikar of Natun Chamaguri Satra Sri Kosha Kanta Deva Goswami, Sri Uma Kanta Deva Goswami, Sri Phanidhar Deva Goswami, Deka Sattradhikar of Prachin Chamaguri Satra and Sri Jay Chandra Goswami of the same satra, are some of the reputed persons whose name should be mentioned for their untiring devotion to add the eye catching value in mask making.

There are three types of mask have been found in Natun Chamaguri Satra Majuli. These are Mukh Mukha, Cho Mukha and Latkai Mukha. Mukh mukha is worn over the face. Cho Mukha is very big in size and covers almost the whole body of the person sometimes a Cho Mukha is made 2 to 5 meters in high above the waist of wearer. The huge structure of such a mask portrays the aura of the character portrait. Lotokai Mukha is making to Cho Mukha except in small size.

The mask art of Natun Chamaguri Satra is not only famous in Assam but also in the whole world. It has been playing a major role in the cultural aspects of the Assamese tradition and art and crafts. Besides this art centre provides the platform for the artists to express their talent and creativity on the respective field. In the same financial way so as to fulfill daily

needs of their family. In these ways this Mask Art centre has manifold importance in the socio-economic culture of Assam.

## 2. Objectives

This article is based on the following objectives.

- To know the meaning of mask art.
- To study the uses of mask art.
- To study the problems of mask art in Natun Chamaguri Satra of Majuli.
- To give suggestion regarding the problems.

## 3. Methodology

Methodology is the system of methods and practices in research investigation, the gathering of evidence in process of knowledge and theory formation. It is one of the most important aspects of social research.

## 4. Source of data

For collection of data both primary and secondary source have been used. Primary data are collected through observation, informal discussion and structure interview. Secondary data are collected from books, journals, newspapers, report, articles etc. The primary data are classified and analyzed with the help of statistical procure and presented in tabular form where necessary.

## 5. Circulation of the product

At present the mukha is not limited within Majuli. The mask are making in all Assam and other parts of India also. For example- Guwahati, Uddissa, Italy, France etc. In my survey I found that total 15 workers have been working in Mask Art Centre. A wage of Rs. 300.00 per day is paid to them and in monthly basis. The payment is Rs.9000.00 and no other facilities are provided to them. Thought this payment seems less but with these much of salary the workers can run their houses very nicely and satisfied with their jobs.

## 6. Mask production and related issues

The mask, they produced are two types: (a) Bor Mukha (b) Mukh Mukha

In an one financial year they produced total 30 Nos. of 'Bor Mukha' and 150 Nos. of 'Mukh Mukha' a total Rs. 60,000.00 and Rs.5,70,000.00 is received by trading of the 'Bor Mukha' and 'Mukh Mukha'. The accounting system is maintained by themselves and they don't employ any other for these purpose.

Moreover they determined the price of the product themselves on the basis of investment on the raw materials and the time they took for their production. In contrast they have to negotiate in the price. So they have faced the problems regarding the price determination. They don't go to the market themselves as they do the consignment business and they perform the trading business with the help of representative.

**Statement showing cost and profit on 'Mukh Mukha' per unit.**

Sl.No.	Particulars	Amounts(Rs)
1	Wages (1 workers Rs.300/day) for 3 days	900.00
2	Bamboo	12.00
3	Pith Place	300.00
4	Colour	170.00
5	Cane	150.00
6	Cloth	170.00
7	Packaging	500.00
8	Total Cost =	2,200.00
9	Sales	3,800.00
10	Profit	1600.00

Source: Based on survey

**Statement showing cost and profit on 'Bor Mukha' per unit.**

Sl.No.	Particulars	Amounts(Rs)
1	Wages	3,700.00
2	Bamboo	400.00
3	Pith Place	900.00
4	Colour	800.00
5	Cane	700.00
6	Cloth	700.00
7	Packaging	3,800.00
8	Total Cost =	11,000.00
9	Sales	20,000.00
10	Profit	9,000.00

Source: Based on survey

**Production Table**

Sl. No.	Year	No. of 'Mukh Mukha'	Price per mukha	Total amount	No. of 'Lotkai Mukha'	Price per mukha	Total amount
1	2011-12	85	2,700.00	2,29,500.00	14	9,500.00	1,33,000.00
2	2012-13	93	2,700.00	2,51,100.00	18	10,700.00	1,92,000.00
3	2013-14	115	3,000.00	3,45,000.00	22	14,000.00	3,08,000.00
4	2014-15	139	3,500.00	4,86,500.00	26	17,000.00	4,42,000.00
5	2015-16	150	3,800.00	5,70,000.00	30	20,000.00	6,00,000.00

Source: Based on survey

**Interpretation :** A table of production of two types of mukha ( Lotokai & Mukh Mukha) shows certain statistical data.

Total five years are taken into consideration for the number of mukha manufactured and rate. It has been observed that numbers of mukha manufactured and the prices taken is lowest in case of Mukh Mukha and the same can be said for

the 'Lotokai Mukha' in the financial year 2011-12. While these prices numbers of manufactures mukha and the rate have been observed increasing gradually and highest is recorded for the financial year 2015-16, where in case 'Mukh Mukha' the total production is Rs. 5,70,000.00/- and in case of 'Lotokai Mukha' where it is Rs. 6,00,000.00/-

## Sales tables

The table showing total sales in Mukha

Sl. No.	Year	Sales Amount of Mukha					
		Mukh Mukha	Rate	Amount	Lotokai Mukha	Rate	Amount
1	2011-12	85	2,700	2,29,500	14	9,500	1,33,000
2	2012-13	90	2,700	2,43,000	17	10,700	1,81,900
3	2013-14	113	3,000	3,95,500	20	14,000	2,80,000
4	2014-15	135	3,500	4,72,500	24	17,000	4,08,000
5	2015-16	141	3,800	5,35,800	27	20,000	5,40,000

Source: Based on survey

The table of sales two types of mukha (Mukh Mukha and Lotokai Mukha) shows certain statistical data.

Total 5 years are taken into consideration for the number of mukha manufactures, prices and numbers of working employees. It has been observed that numbers of mukha manufactured and the price taken is lowest in case of 'Mukh Mukha' and the same can be said for the 'Lotokai Mukha' in the financial year 2011-12. While this prices number of manufactured mukha and numbers of worker have been observed increasing gradually and

highest in recorded for the financial year 2015-16. Where in case of 'Mukh Mukh' the total sales Rs. 5,35,800 and in case 'Lotokai Mukha' is Rs.5,40,000.

USAGES OF MASKS: The varoius usages of Masks are as follows

1. Social and Religious use: Masks representing potentially harmful spirits were often use to keep a required balance of power or a traditional relationship of inherent position within a culture. The form of these Masks was often associated secret society, especially in Africa where the greatest range of types and functions can be found. They were also used among Oceanic peoples of South Pefic and America, Indians and are even used in some of folk rites still performed in Europe.
2. Festive use : Mask for festive occasions are still commonly used in the 20th century. Ludicrous grotesque or superficially horrible, festival Masks are usually conducive to good- natured licence release from inhibition and ribaldry. These included the Halloween ,Mardi-grans. The disguise us assumed to create a momentary . amusing character , often resulting in humorous confusion or to achieve anonymity for the prankstar or ribald reveler.
3. 3.Theatrical use : Masks have been used almost universally to represent character in theatrical performances. Theatrical performance are visual literature of transistant ,momentary kind. It is most impressive because it can be seen as a reality. It expend itself by its very revelation. The Mask

participates as a more enduring element since its form physical.

The masks as device for theatre first emerged in western civilization from the religious practices of ancient Greece. In the worship of Dionysus , god of fecundity and the harvest , the communicates attempt to impersonate the deity by donning goatskin and by impinging wine eventually developed into the sophistication of masking. When a literature of worship appeared a disguise , which consisted of a white line mask hung over the face,the leaders of the ceremony to make the god manifest. Thus symbolically identified, the communicant was inspired to speak in the first person, thereby giving birth to the art of drama.

Inthe middle ages , maskwere used in the mystery plays of the 12th to the 16th century. In plays dramatizing portions of the Old and New testaments, grotesques of all sorts, such as devils,demons,dragons and personifications of the seven deadly sins were broughtto stage life by the use of masks. Constructed of papier- mache, the masks of the mystery plays were evidently marvels of ingenuity and craftsmanship,being made to articulate and to belch fire and smoke from hidden contrivance. But again no reliable pictorial record has survived. Masks used in correction with present day carnivals and MardiGras and those of folk demons and characters still used by central European.

### 7. Problems of Mask Art in Natun Chamaguri Satra of Majuli

The Natun Chamaguri satra mask art is doing well in producing the masks of the best quality. But this centre has been facing the many problems that are mentioned below.

1. Transport problems: transport is one of the major problems faced by the mask art centre. As the product exported by airplane and train transport system. The fare is charged on the basis of the space occupied by the product as well as their weight. The 'Lotokai and Bor Mukha' being large in size and occupied a large space. So it creates problems in transports.
2. Electricity problems: the electricity is the main problem in Assam as it is also prevalent in the mask art centre. The mask art centre is depended on electricity as they have to work during night time also. So it creates a major problem during the manufacture of the mask products.

3. Problems of branding: the brand is the surest means of conveying quality of product. Hence, the Natun Chamaguri Satra mask art centre is not division of brand. This will create problems for the mask maker. Due to this problem they did not determine the price because of that, there is no brand. They have determined the price on the basis of their investment on the raw materials and the time they gave during the production.
4. Problems of workers: the workers are the chief power for the mask art centre. The workers are doing hard work but they did not get proper salary. The owner of the mask art centre fail to provide other necessary supports to the workers more over as the workers are the learners at the first stage. So it is essentials to provide them adequate trainings.

smooth way but sometimes they may faced several financial problems. In this case the govt. should pay attention to their problems.

5. Suggestion regarding the problems of worker: as the workers is chief force in the mask art centre. So the problems regarding the workers should be corrected. The workers should posses some qualities like drawing skill of manufacturing etc.

### 8. Suggestions

1. Transport problems: for the problems of transport we suggest that govt. should take the initiative by providing the mask art centre a good transport vehicle. So that, the product can be taken to the desired market without any damage to them. Besides the owner of the centre can apply for the transport vehicle to the government.
2. Electricity problems:-electricity is the main source of light energy. As this problems are very much prevalent in the mask art centre. So, it must be connected. The suggestion is that they can use the solar lights and other alternative source of light as two illuminate there working place.
3. Problems of price determination: price determination is the most important problems for the workers. Besides the workers are determine the price only. The suggestions are that the workers should be properly trained regarding determination of price.
4. Suggestion for the financial problems: financial problems are one of the most important problems in mask art centre. Though the centre is running in a

### 9. Conclusion

Majuli is the focal centre of Vaishnavite Culture. Its holds an indispensable place of importance in the preservation and promotion of the vaishnavite culture. The immortal culture of Srimanta sankardeva and Madhabdeva in the genre of Naat, Bhaona, borgeet and other are practice not only in the vaishnavite satras but also widely preserved all over the reverine island of Majuli. It is a tradition of every village in Majuli to hold the annual Bhaona performances. Mask is one of the ancient achievements of man and can be often considered as a forerunner of art in the formal sense. Masks take on the identity of another being and reveal personalities and moods which the human face might not be able to portray. In this process it has been recognized as an art form. In Assam masks were prevalent since time immemorial. From the scarecrow-whether it is the clay pot smeared with lime to a bunch of straw and in the effort to create something frightening, we find the rudimentary examples of masks. Imbedded in the bhakti movement, just as the vaishnavite saint Srimanta Shankaradeva uplifted in the Assamese people in the cultural realm with the bhaona, naat, borgeet, and musical instrument. The mask were also given a separate identity and uplifted it to a form of art. The Bhaona are conceived as a medium of propagation of religious faith by Srimanta Sankardeva. In this Bhaona mask were born and develop. The art form is still practice in few Satras which at one time wear the torchbearers of cultural renaissance in Assam. At present the Natun Chamaguri Satra, Prachin Chamaguri, Alengi Narasingha and Bihimpur Satra are primarily involved in mask making.

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