

**PROBLEMS OF CHHOW MASK MAKING COMMUNITY: A CASE STUDY OF
CHARIDA VILLAGE, PURULIA, WEST BENGAL**

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Abstract :- *Chhow is one of the vigorous Folk cultures in the world. This is very famous at Charida village of Purulia District along with making chow mask. Almost 95% people of charida village are profoundly engaged in mask making activity .Mainly Sutradhar community people are engaged in this type of cultural activity .Mask making industry is very much predominant in the small scale sector of west Bengal and most of the rural people are trying to fullfill their economic desire through this activity in each part of charida village .This research paper mainly focuses on the problems of chow mask makers of charida village in purulia District.*

Key Words:- Chhow Dance ,Chhow Mask making, Chhow Culture, problems of chow mask makers , Socio-economic status.

Type wise Demand and Price of Chhow Masks:

Type wise Demand of Masks: As per the demand level most demand is related to the masks of Mahishasurmardini, Kiratarjun, Avimanyu Badh and Ogasur Bogasur Badh because of high demand in the open air dramas among the local and foreign tourists.

However, most of the people are seeking for masks as showpieces for decorating their room. Therefore, in this modern day society, various society centric palas have evolved i.e., Kannyashree, Santhal Bidroho and these pala related masks have less demand compared to that of others. ii. Price of Various Types of Masks: Chhow masks are mainly used in different open air dramas (pala- gaan) such as Mahishasurmardini, Kiratarjun, Avimanyu badh, Ogasur Bogasur Badh, Santhal Bidroho,

Kannyashree. However, these masks are also being used as showpieces. The price range of this mask is varying from Rs. 500 to Rs. 5000, Kiratarjun Pala related masks sell in the market near about Rs. 15000 to Rs. 20,000 because of costly raw materials, ingredients and hard making process.

Type wise Demand of Masks

Mahishasur Mardini Utilisation of Chhow Mask: Chhow masks are basically used for Chhow Dance or Chhow Palas. However, at present, Chhow masks are being utilised for decorating house too. From every corner of the world, people are seeking for those kinds of Chhow Masks to decorate their rooms or houses.

Therefore, every mask can be used 5-6 times for Chhow Dance. Later, those masks become useless. After completing 5 to 6 palas, dancers need to use new mask for their next performance. So, production of Chhow Mask is very relevant in this context.

Marketing of Chhow Mask: From the primary survey, it has been pointed out that, mask producers sell their masks in India and outside of India also-

International and National Market:-

International Market Very few mask makers sell their products in international markets. However, they got order of making Chhow masks from America, London, Paris, Iran, Scotland, Dubai, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Japan etc.

National Market Most of them sell their products in several districts and cities of West Bengal i.e., Kolkata, Durgapur, Bardwan, Bongaon, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri etc. Moreover, they also sell their products in national markets i.e., Ranchi, Bhupal, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi, Mumbai, Tamil Nadu, Goa etc.

Marketing Process: Every mask makers of Charida village have their individual catalogues of various types and size of masks and individual price range. They collect email id from interested people or tourists and send that catalogue via e-mail. After choosing the product by the customers, they make that masks and deliver that required products to the customers by speed post or by home delivery service. On the other hand, they sell their products to Biswa Bangla Haat and Biswa Bangla stores in Kolkata.

Socio-Economic Condition of the Mask Makers: Most of the mask makers of Purulia are Hindu and Bengali by religion. They are Sutradhar from the clan relationship. According to Anil Sutradhar, all the mask makers were migrated from Burdwan District. Baghmundi king invited them to make the idol of god and goddess but later, they engaged in mask making. The socio-economic conditions of the mask makers are as follows-

Population and Household:

As per the Census data (2011), provided by the office of BDO, it has been observed that in Charida village, the total number of households are nearby 415 and it is dispersed compared to the household density of other villages of Baghmundi block. Therefore, the total population of Charida village is 2087, which is composed of 1089 male and 998 female population, that means 52 percent population are considered as male whereas 48 percent population is female. The primary survey depicts the percentage of male female ratio. It is observed that the population of Charida village is male predominant with 54% (fig: 4) male population and 46% female population. Therefore, Charida village reflects a significant feature that there is no gender discrimination between male and female

Problems of Chhow Mask makers:

Problems related to Mask Making: Mask makers of Charida village are facing several problems related to their business or their small-scale industry, which are as follows-

a) Lack of Banking Loan:

According to BholanathSutradhar (mask maker of Charida village), State Bank of India (SBI) offered them Artigentcard at 10% interest. So, Mask makers were unable to get that card. On the other hand, banking loan is available there, but the interest rate is very high, so they are being unable to get that loan.

b) Lack of Proper Market:

Unavailability of market in Purulia for selling masks is a major problem and the respondents have given their opinion as this is very high severe problem.

c) Less Number of Tourist Lodges:

Lack of Tourist Lodges is one of the major issues that, tourists have to stay far away from the Charida Village, which reduces the selling possibility.

d) Load Shedding Problem:

During making of masks, mask makers of Charida village are facing load-shedding problem during peak season and this is the main obstacle for their business.

e) Other Problems:

Lack of rooms for making mask, lack of Governmental help, financial problem, space problem as well as less profit are other severe problems. However, banking loan problem, problem of localized raw materials, less number of NGOS and lack of buyers are also severe problems. On the other hand, unavailability of own shops as well as pensions are moderately severe and least severe problems respectively.

Livelihood Problems of the Mask Makers:

Mask makers have several livelihood problems (fig: 14) mainly include lack of rooms, space problems, lack of water supply, ill-maintained house. 88 percent respondents stated that, they have lack of toilet and it remarks as very high severe. 75 percent respondents have severe problem of roof made by Khapra, which causes infiltration of rainwater during monsoon period, and it hampers their livelihood. Sewerage system as well as Sanitation is not there in most of the houses and it is very high severe.

Problems Regarding Mask Making

Problems Regarding Mask Production

Load shedding Problem during Season time 100%

Lack of Rooms for making Masks 67%

Lack of Banking Loan Facilities 100%

Economic Problem

Space Problems

Lack of Governmental Help

Unavailability of Raw Materials

Lack of Markets for selling Masks

Less number of Own Shops

Unavailability of Pension

Less no. of NGOs

Initiatives: Government has already been initiated pension and the facilities of selling the mask in Biswa Bangla Haat, and the respondents are highly satisfied. While, the facility of bank loan is not adequate, so they are least satisfied. On the other hand, NGO's such as Rose group, Banglanatok.com, SHG Group, Shilpa Sangha have initiated various measures for the exploration of talent of these mask makers in front of the tourists from local and abroad and they are moderately and highly satisfied in this regard.

Male Female Ratio:

The primary survey depicts the percentage of male female ratio. It is observed that the population of Charida village is male predominant with 54% male population and 46% female population. Therefore, Charida village reflects a significant feature that there is no gender discrimination between male and female population because women are engaged in mask making activities too.

Age-Sex Structure:

A stratified sampling has been done during primary Survey and it reflects that 31% male and 28% female population are under the age category of 0 to 15 years where as 6% male and 4% female population are under the old age category i.e. more than 60 years. Therefore, 23% male is under the age category of 31 to 45 years and they are mainly engaged in mask making activity in Charida village. However, this pyramidal diagram denotes that, Charida village is quite underdeveloped.

Educational Status of Mask Makers of Charida Village:

From the primary survey, it can be observed that, 14% people are illiterate. Nearly 32% people are educated up to primary level and 22% people are educated up to Class VIII. However, only 24% people are qualified up to the Secondary level. A significant change has been observed that only 4% people are graduated. Therefore, in most of the cases, educational status of female population is low compared to that of male population.

Primary Educational Status of Charida Village:

Charida Primary School (CPS) is one of the primary school in Charida village where most of the villagers enrol their name. Considering the caste-wise variations in education, Charida village comprises of mostly scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST) as well as other backward class (OBC) people. As per the data (year- 2016) provided by CPS, 45% students under OBC category have enrolled their name in this school and the percentage is high because, most of the students are sutradhar (OBC category). However, 20% and 26% students under ST and SC caste have enrolled their name in this primary school too.

House Materials:

As per the house materials are concerned, 65 percent and 35 percent families have the room wall made by mud and Brick respectively. However, Brick wall is mostly found in middle and high-income group families. However, 58 percent and 30 percent families have roof made by khapra (khapra is one type of thin heated clay) and brick respectively, 4% have straw, asbestos and tiles roof. While 65 percent families and 31 percent families have floor made of mud, cement and brick respectively, and rest 4% families have mud

floor. Therefore, most of the houses are made of Khapra roof, mud wall and mud floor, which denotes the poor condition of the mask makers.

Number of Rooms with Respect to Number of Families and Family Members:

Lack of rooms and space problems are primarily concerned among the respondents of Charida village. From the matrix diagram, it reflects that 3 families have 10, 6 or 5 number of rooms and 13 families have only 2 rooms. On the other hand, it can be observed that, mask makers of Charida village have inadequate number of rooms with respect to number of family members. Therefore, number of family members is high, but, number of rooms is very less.

Standard of Living of Mask Makers:

As per the standard of living is concerned, approximately 50 percent families have lack of toilet facility (they go jungle and use pond water for their latrine and urine) followed by 62 percent families are not getting water facility in their houses. In this regard, they have to collect water from local drinking water tube well. All families have electricity as well as mobile phone facility. However, 31 percent, 4 percent and 69 percent families do not have television, bicycle and motorbike respectively. A significant fact has revealed that, 92 percent families do not have refrigerator and 77 percent families are facing lack of sewerage system in their houses. Therefore, standard of living of the mask makers is quite poor.

Satisfaction Level of workers:

From the primary survey, it has been reflected that, approximately 29 percent of the mask makers are least satisfied because they are not getting high profit from market. 35 percent respondents are moderately satisfied and satisfied. However, 1 or 2 percent respondents are highly satisfied because these families are getting maximum profit by selling their products to international market and they are being awarded from the Presidents of India, Prime Minister etc.

Recommendations: -

The major recommendations are as follows:

Pension Scheme: Government of West Bengal has already started Pension scheme for the Chhow dancers only however, there is a need of this scheme to Chhow mask makers also. Here, the main contradiction starts between dancers and mask makers. It is necessary to start pension scheme for all the mask makers who have BPL card to support them economically.

Market: As per the perception survey, it has been pointed out that there is no local market in order to purchase the raw materials of making mask and selling the final product of mask. So some localised market should be established in Charida village and near railway station of Purulia, where the people or the mask makers can easily access this market in order to fulfil their regular demand and supply.

Banking Loan: As per the data provided by the local inhabitants, it is pointed out the fact that there is less banking facility that will give the loan to those mask makers to make the mask or to purchase raw materials. Bandhan bank has already taken some initiatives but some others nationalised or private bank should be established in order to give the loan facilities at less interest to these inhabitants of Charida village.

Tourist Lodges: In Charida village there is no tourist lodge, so the National as well as International tourists who are interested to purchase those masks from the mask makers, have to travel long distance either from Purulia town or other places from Baghmundi block. So, West Bengal Government as well as some private hotel enterprises may establish some hotels for the tourists in order to show natural beauty of Ayodhya hills as well as traditional culture of Charida village.

Sewerage System: Charida village do not have any underground sewerage system, as a result, inundation may take place due to high rainfall. Proper garbage disposal site is not there and it results environmental pollution. So garbage disposal site should be there for the betterment of local inhabitants of Charida village.

Sanitation: Approximately 15 to 20 percent families have the sanitation system in their own house and others use open field, jungle, pond for sanitation. So concrete sanitation system should be established in order to improve the environmental quality in support of

"Swaccha Bharat Cess" or "Nirmal Bangla" for the betterment of the livelihood pattern of the mask makers.

Major Findings: From the primary survey, several findings have been explored which are as follows-

The Chhow mask makers are originally idol makers by profession. The masks are generally made during the months of Falgun (Bengali Month), January to February.

Most of the mask makers are less qualified so, they are not getting more profit from their business. On the other hand, few mask makers are educated up to higher secondary and graduation and it helps them to communicate with the international tourists as well as national tourists.

The educational status of OBC cast students is significantly high compared to that of SC, ST and general caste students. It reflects that, most of children from Charida village are Chhow mask makers because; sutradhar community people are under OBC category.

There are so many mask production houses in Charida village but, very few of them are being invited in governmental fairs. So, a contradiction arises among the mask makers.

High-income group families are getting BPL card instead of low-income group families. For that reason, high-income group families are getting pension facility from the government.

Government of West Bengal has already started pension scheme for the dancers, not for the mask makers. Here, contradiction arises between Chhow dancers and mask makers.

However, from the primary survey it records that, the mask makers are very much interested to prepare and shape the mask and sell it in various fairs such as in Milan Mela near Science City, Biswa Bangla Haat at Eco-Park or various fairs throughout West Bengal and India. In this way, Mask making becomes more popular among the local as well as National and Foreign tourists.

Conclusion:-

Any research paper makes an ultimate layout of thinking. Creativity of human being may always touch the finishing point, which creates concluding observation. At the end of the discussion of this empirical research paper, it has been pointed out that, mask-making industry is very much predominant in small-scale sector in West Bengal and most of the rural people are trying to fulfil their economic desire through this activity in each part of Charida village. However, due to poor socio-economic condition, the mask makers are not getting enough exposure to show their talent and they are not getting enough profit from international and national markets. A contradiction is there among the mask makers and dancers due to high, middle and low-income group families and less education. Therefore, some creative strategies and multilevel planning should be initiated to solve the immediate problems and make this creative industry more attractive and acceptable for all the people all over the world.

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