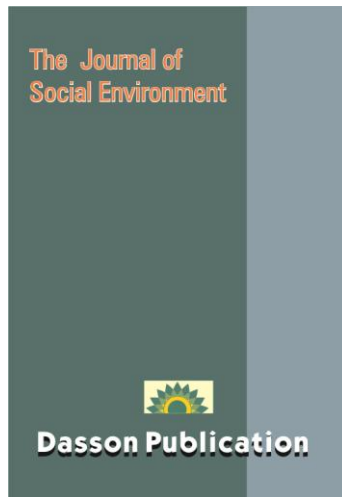


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# **Folk resource utilization and sustainability of rural livelihood: an inquiry on Purulia Chhau mask making art in Chorda village, Baghmundi C. D. Block, Purulia district**

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## **Abstract**

*Human culture is produced and reproduced by interaction of man and environment. Cultural aspect becomes resource when it meets the needs of man. Folk art tradition has continuously been recreated and regenerated from one generation to another by the concerned community due to change in livelihood and perception of aesthetic environment. By this way, the folk art tradition becomes a folk resource of man-environment symbiosis and the culture based folk resource utilization helps in sustaining the life and livelihood of the people.*

*Among many regional masked folk dances of West Bengal, Purulia Chhau dance of Purulia District is characterized by the most elegant and gorgeous masks. The masks of Purulia Chhau is not only an essential part of the dance but also have gained popularity as a separate work of art. The paper pulp mask is mainly made up by a community, called, Sutradhars who have been basically engaged in the profession by generation after generation.*

*This field based empirical investigation has highlighted the dynamics of mask-making art in the context of global consumerism and changing nature of the concerned community through the arduous door to door survey.*

**Key words** :1.Environmental Sustainability, 2.Folk Art Tradition, 3.Intangible Cultural Heritage, 4.Folk Resource Utilization.

## **1. Introduction**

Human culture is an outcome of the symbiotic relationship between Man and Nature. A neutral material becomes a resource when man imposes some of its utility upon it with the help of his learned behaviour i.e. culture. Thus culture itself becomes a resource when it fulfills the human needs. Folk culture is basically cherished and nourished traditionally by a particular community living in a particular area with typical geo-environmental peculiarities. Subsistence pattern of a community leads to the fulfillment of the basic needs of human being in particular socio-cultural context. Sometimes, a folk art form which is basically a non-material aspect of the cultural behaviour of the particular community becomes a folk resource which helps people to sustain their lives and livelihoods. The way of the particular community, uses the hereditary tradition, opens the gateway of considering the particular art form as a folk resource. *Purulia Chhau* is one of the vigorous folk dances of West Bengal which have gained popularity throughout the world by representing the aroma of Bengal's indigenous culture. Use of gorgeous headgear is integral part of *Chhau* Dance. The masks are mainly made up of paper pulp and the making of such masks has become a separate art. Chorda Village of Purulia District is popular for mask making. It has provided a momentum to the overall economy of the concerned village and the village has become a place of tourist interest in Purulia. In the

present study, the focus has been given to the process of producing mask making art as a cultural resource and its influence on rural livelihood in the present context. From different sources it is evident that the dance form has originated in the Baghmundi area. The erstwhile Royal nobility helps the dance form to develop. The use of masks has started thereafter. It is said that the *Raja* of Baghmundi has given some land to the *Sutradhars*, whom he has invited from Bardhaman District to make clay-models of Hindu gods and goddesses for various *Puja* and festivals. Probably, it was the first half of Eighteenth Century, when the *Raj Parivar* was converted to Hinduism, the ancestors of the recent mask makers of Purulia, settled in Chorda village near Baghmundi (Ghosh, 2012). Later on when the primary form of *Chhau* dance got popularity in front of the *Raja*, full-fledged development of *Chhau* dance started with the incorporation of various mythological stories in different *palas* (Sathpathi, 2008). At that time, various shaped symbols were used as facial painting or body painting by the dancers. Thus they are recognized as personifying the characters which they are playing in the performance. Later on to satisfy the need of those *palas*, masks were introduced which were being made by those clay modelers (Sathpathi, 2002). Prof. Asutosh Bhattacharya (1961) wrote in Census Handbook of Purulia about the mask in 'Chhaw dance', "to cover the ugly human feature they used masks". Moreover, Dr. Bhattacharya (1965, p: 771) in his reference book of Calcutta University, Dept. of Bengali, for Folklore special paper wrote that the general mass of Purulia are comparatively black in colour and ugly in appearance, that is why they introduced the legacy of wearing masks while taking part in dance and acting in the role of sophisticated mythological characters (as cited in Sathpathi, 2002).

## 2. Study area

The village Chorda is situated within the extension from 23°19'00" N to 23°24'00" N and 86°02'00" E to 86°06'00" E (Map No. 2.1.) under Sindri Gram Panchayat (G.P.) of Baghmundi C.D. Block, Purulia Sadar West Subdivision of Purulia District in West Bengal. It is bounded by the parts of Ajodhya G.P. in the North, parts of Baghmundi G.P in the East. Ghorabandha, Dhaba, Dhundhikhap, Khirabera and Baredi Mouza of Sindri G.P. make its Southern, South-Western, Western and North-Western boundaries respectively. Being a part of Chotanagpur Plateau, the village is characterized by undulating topography. More than 50% of its area is covered by the deciduous forest.

## 3. Objectives

Major objectives of the present study are as follows

- To chalk out the present situation of mask making art in context of folk resource utilization.
- To understand the dynamics of mask making art in the context of sustainability in the rural livelihood.

## 4. Materials and methods

It is grass root level empirical studies based on primary surveys involving 10 selected *Purulia Chhau* dance troupes, 39 households including 25 mask making workshops. The general information about the natural as well as demographic and socio-economic set up of the study area, have been collected from the District Gazetteer of Purulia (1985), official website of Purulia District etc. Other information has been collected from different books, reports, e-journals on the *Chhau* dance and *Chhau* mask making art of the district. The collected data and information have been analysed and represented through charts, diagrams, and maps with the help of Microsoft Word'07, Microsoft Excel'07 and Arc GIS 9.3 Softwares.

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1. Present situation of mask making art in context of folk resource utilization

Chorda village is very well known for its tradition of mask making art. The *Sutradhars* of this village belong to Other Backward Class (OBC) communities. Artisans of Chorda village have proved to have tremendous capacity to cope up with the changing socio-economic as well as aesthetic and cultural environment by using traditional aesthetic

knowledge to shape nature based and nature friendly products into a visually identifiable cultural beauty. The process of converting nature based products into a tangible cultural resource can be revealed with the following figure (Fig. No. 5.1).

The present situation of mask making art in context of resource utilization has been discussed below.

Among 189 people engaged in 25 mask making workshops, 110 are the main artists where as remaining 79 persons work as helpers in those workshops (Fig. No.5.2). Among the artisans, 76% belongs to the OBC category (*Sutradhars*). 11% of the artisans belong to Scheduled Tribe (ST) category. Involvement of General Castes and Scheduled Caste (SC) are 7% and 6% respectively (Fig. No.5.3). 45 % of the artisans belong to the age group of 21-40 years and 15% of the artisans belongs to the age group of 41- 60 years (Fig No. 5.4). 36%

artisans are from the age group of below 20 years. This indicates a good sign of involvement of young workforce in the particular art form. Engagement of people from the age group of above 60 years is low but not nil. It indicates their dedication to their hereditary art.

Most of the artisans (42.65%) belonging to the age group of below 20 years have opted for a secured income as the major reason behind taking mask making as their profession which proves the capability of mask making art for income generation. The artisans in this age group have opined that no matter what situation is there in terms of getting salaried jobs, mask making will provide a certain amount of secured income to them. Most of the artisans from the age group of above 60 years (71.43%) have opted for hobby or passion and family tradition (24.14%) respectively as the major reason to get engaged in this profession. Major reason of engagement in this profession among the people of the age groups of 21-40 years and 41-60 years respectively is the dissatisfaction with the lower chance of getting other option for choosing a suitable profession (49.41% and 6.9%) and family tradition (21.18% and 68.97%), (Fig. No. 5.5).

In recent days masks are being sold well throughout the year (Fig. No.5.6). Now, the sale of masks is less influenced by the month wise variation of *Purulia Chhau* performances (Fig. No.5.7). Even in winter season, sale of masks is moderately well because these months are considered as one of the peak times of tourist attraction in Purulia District though *Chhau* performances seem to be very less.

Moreover, now a days, mask makers are being invited to give stalls in different fairs, festivals and exhibitions or competitions throughout the year, even, sometimes by different govt. organizations (Fig. o.5.8). 65% of the owners of the 25 mask making workshops, have opined that they are satisfied with the govt. initiatives taken for promoting mask making art. On the other hand, remaining 35% of workshop owners have opined that they are not satisfied as they can hardly arrange fund or mass stock of masks for attending the govt. programmes. More over it is easier for the bigger workshop owners to get contracts for the govt. programmes as they can manage the contracts through middlemen. (Fig. No. 5.9).

76% of workshop owners have opined that they want their next generation to be involved in their traditional occupation as they want their tradition what has now been converted to business, to be flourished more. Along with this, in the present context less availability of govt. jobs, they think that making masks and sale the products will provide more future security in terms of income. On the other hand remaining 24% of workshop owners have opined that they do not allow their next generation in this profession. They have argued that their children are being provided good education so that they can live a better lifestyle. So they do not want their children in the same profession (Fig. No. 5.10) .

It is observed that 84% of 68 artisans belonging to the age-group of less than 20 years are interested to remain in the same profession as their ancestors were (Fig. 5.11). It proves the fact that the mask making art in this village has become successful not only to open the gateway to business opportunities to the young generation but also by

providing economic security, helping age old cultural tradition to be revitalized. Only 16% of young artisans have opined not to be engaged in hereditary tradition as they want to search for better job oppertunities after completion of their study.

## 5.2. Present situation of mask making art in the context of sustainability in rural livelihood

Primarily mask making art has been introduced in the study area, only as supplementary to the *Chhau* dance tradition of Purulia District. But now not only *Chhau* masks but also many other kind of masks are made by the artisans of the village (Table No.5.1). Now, the art has become a separate work of excellence and it continues to meet the human needs. The artisans have become able to utilize their hereditary cultural resource as a secured source of income and have successfully develop a rural economy, based on the particular artistic excellence, which have further more become an engine of the rural livelihood of the village. In this study, 39 households have been surveyed to understand how mask making art has become an influential factor of people's livelihood. In this respect, 7 prime occupational classes has been identified based on which (i) average educational level of household members, (ii) average monthly income of the households, (iii) average monthly expenditure of the households, (iv) average building types (based on material used for construction), (v) average availability of toilet facilities, (vi) average consumption to electricity facility, (vii) average level of mobile use, (viii) average consumption to transportation vehicle and (ix) average level of alcohol consumption have been calculated to see the level of rural livelihood. The Z-Score or Standard Score values of each of these components have been calculated and Finally Composite Z- Score Value has been found out to identify the influence of mask making art on the rural livelihood (Table No. 6.2).

The occupational class jointly made by mask making and service holds the highest composite Z-score value (Table No. 5.2 and Fig. No.5.13). On the other hand, cultivation shows the lowest composite Z- Score value (Table No. 5.2 and Fig. No.5.13). Here, it can be said that service itself can provide a better socio-economic condition to the rural livelihood but it is included as an occupational class because in those particular households the service holders belongs to the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and even 4<sup>th</sup> generation of being engaged in mask making art. Actually, it shows a sign that the previous generations of mask makers of these particular households were so capable to sustain their lives and livelihoods that they could be able to provide their children good education along with other facilities that the next generation have gotten the chance to go for a job. The others category including households depending upon one grocery shop and auto driving have the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest composite Z- score because of security of daily income. It has already been stated that Chorda village has become a place of tourist interest; as the village is situated very nearer to Ajodhya hill range which is one of the major tourist attractions in West Bengal. So, Auto driving assures daily income. Basic grocery products are part of people's daily use. That is why; the financial security has imposed a better way of life to the other occupational category. On the other hand agricultural land of this village is basically mono-cropped because of the geo-environmental peculiarities like lower quality of soil, scarcity of water etc. (Map No. 5.1). For that reason the income level of cultivators is very low which has directly influenced low level of literacy acquired, as well as lower level of other components of livelihood and vice-versa. Though some of the cultivators are engaged in a *Chhau* Dance Troupe and perform in different programmes the earning from that source also very negligible. The occupational class of the daily labours holds the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest composite Z- Score value because of low earning as well as lower educational level and higher level of alcohol consumption which leads to a lower socio-economic status.

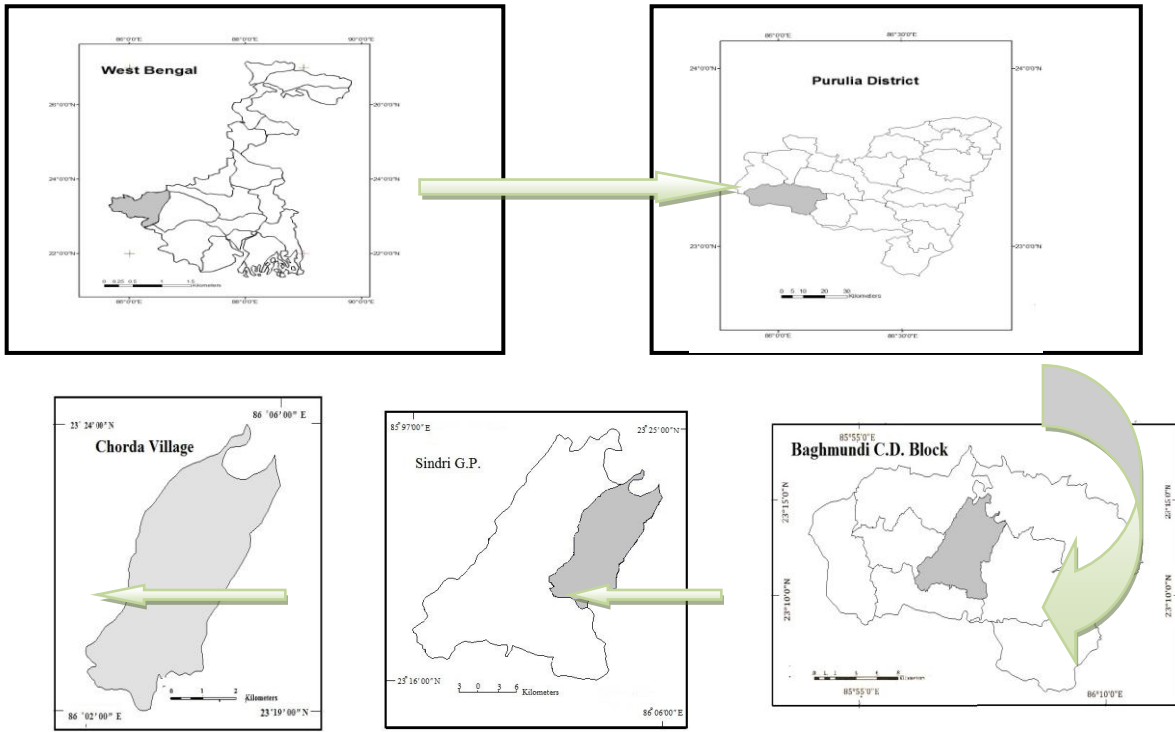
All the households directly or indirectly engaged in mask making activities have positive composite Z- score values which indicates a better livelihood.

## 6. Conclusion

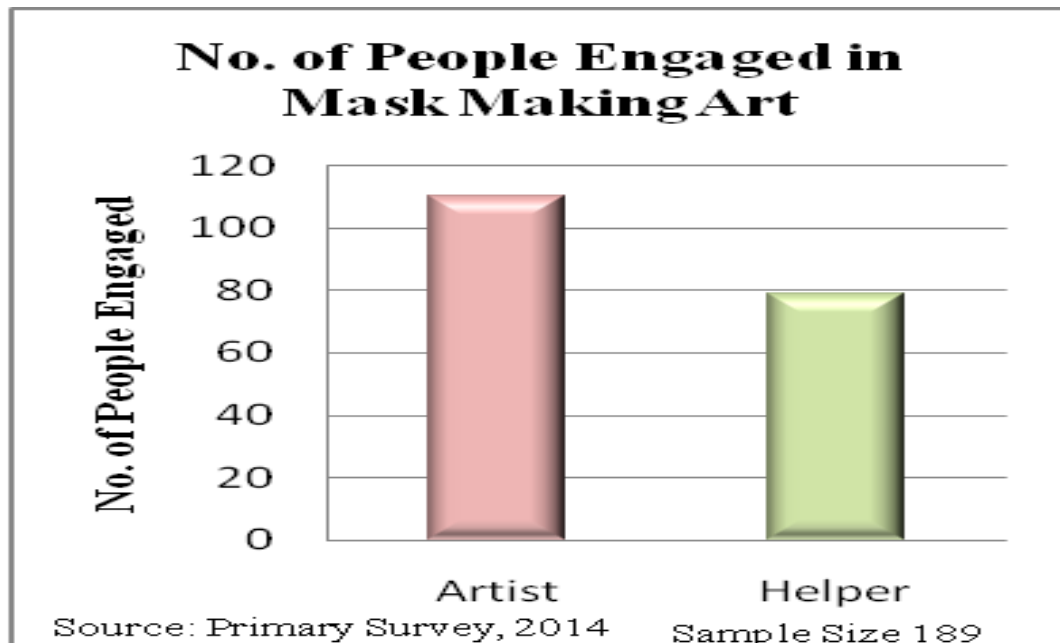
At the end it can be stated that in the present socio-political circumstances mask making art has become successful to generate employment opportunities to some extent. These, furthermore, have helped to maintain a certain level of livelihood status which supposed to be more sustainable than the other occupational categories like cultivation or daily labours etc. This hereditary art is not at all devoid of problems. Some workshops are there with very low earnings and fail to get even any opportunities to access different govt. facilities. So, some frustrations occur among those mask makers. But it can be said, mask making art have immense potentiality to be considered as small scale industry which will provide better scope in future.

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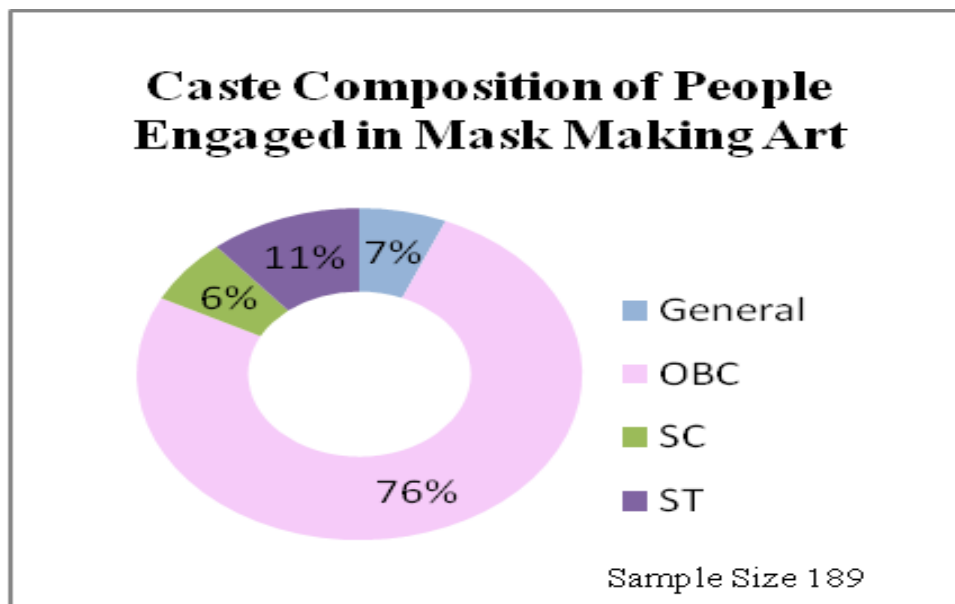
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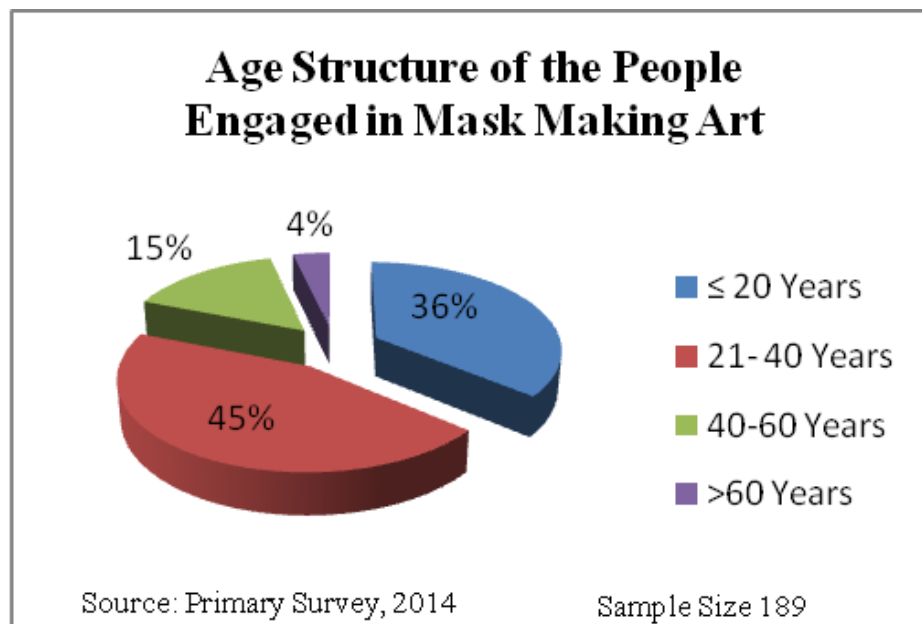
**Map no. 5.1. Location map of the study area**



**Fig. No.5.2. No. Of people engaged in mask making art**

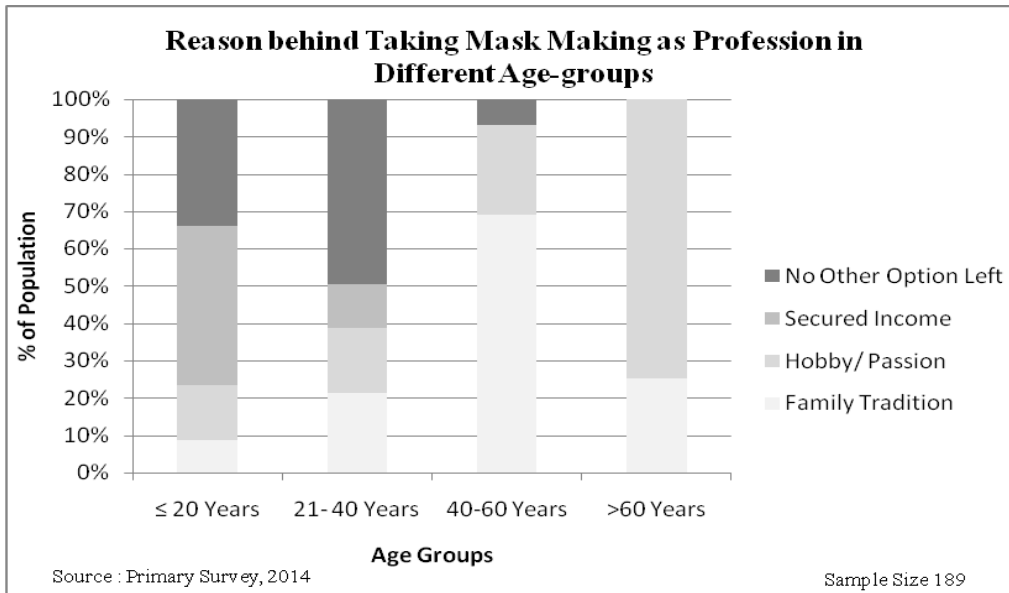


**Fig. No. 5.3.caste composition of people engaged in mask making art**

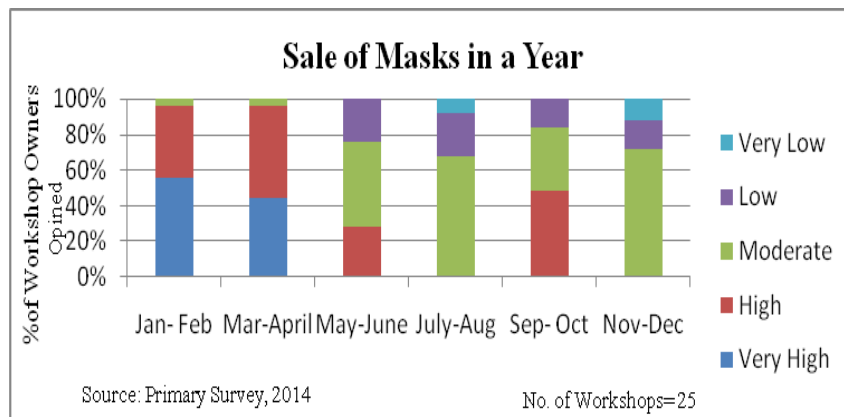


**Fig. No. 5.4. Age structure of the people engaged in mask making art**

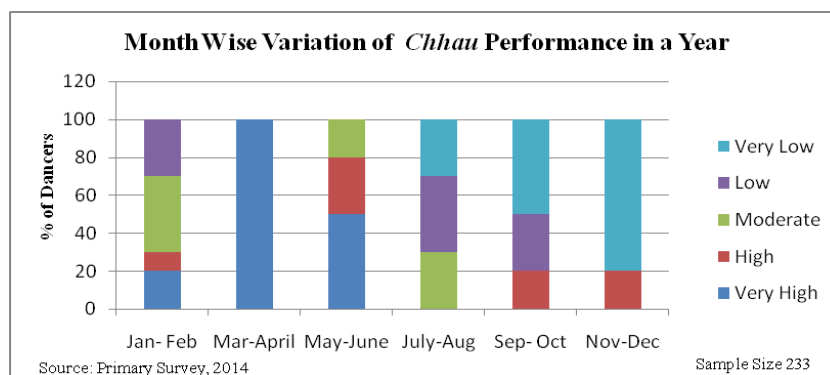




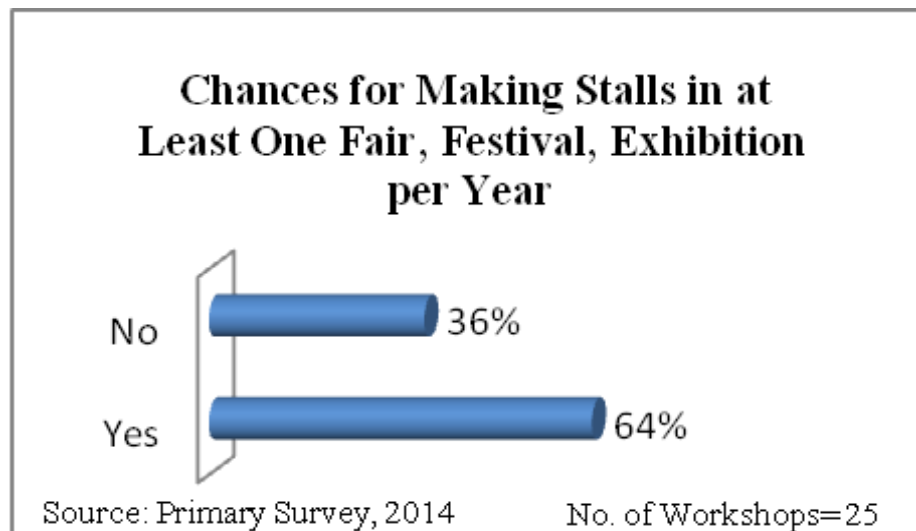
**Fig. No. 5.5. Reason behind taking mask making as profession in different age-groups**



**Fig. No. 5.6. Sale of masks in a year**



**Fig. No.5.7. Month wise variation of chhau performance in a year**



**Fig. No.5.8. Chances for making stalls in at least one fair, festival, exhibition per year**



**Fig. No. 5.9. Govt. Initiatives and satisfaction of workshop owners**

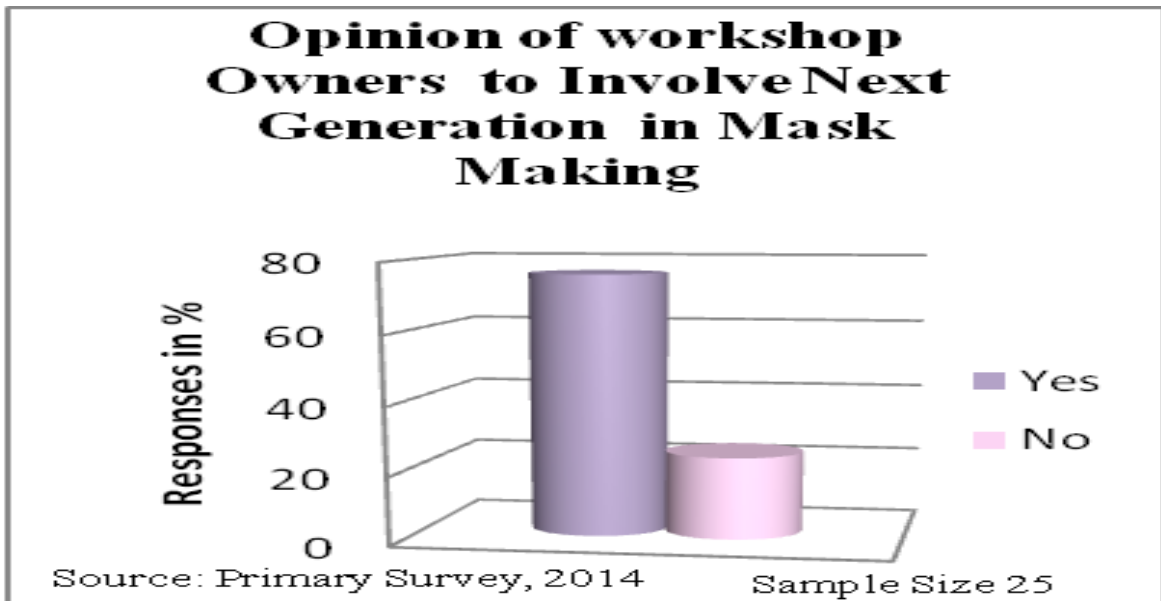


Fig. No. 5. 10. Opinion of workshop owners to involve next generation in mask making

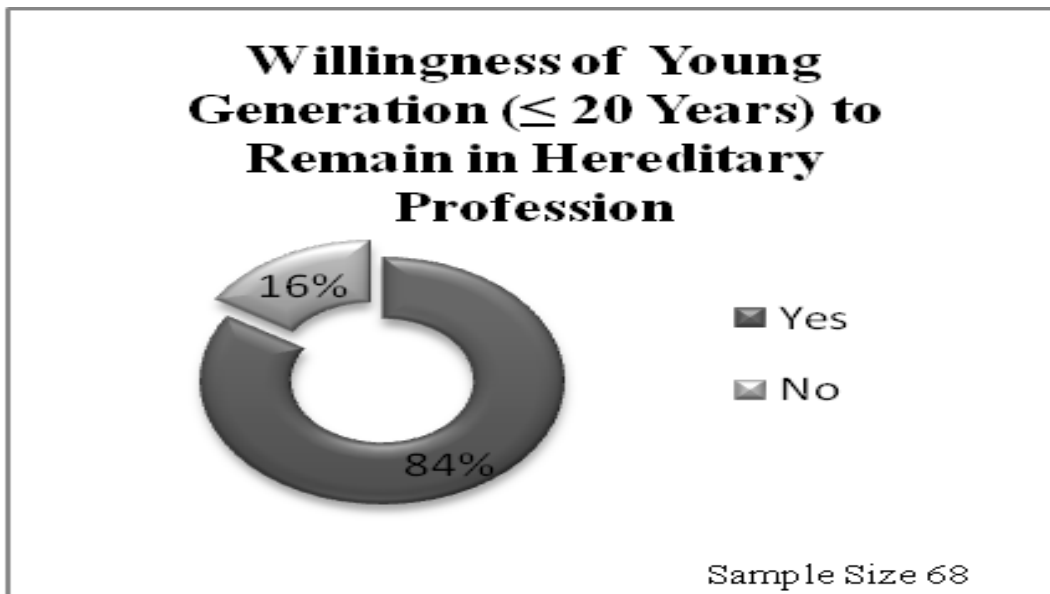
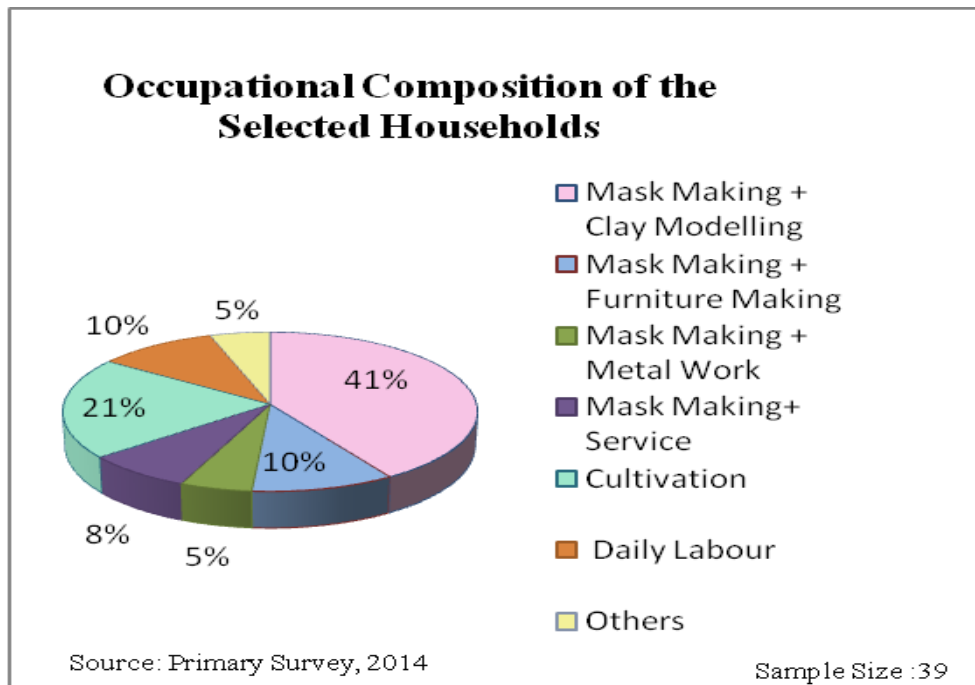
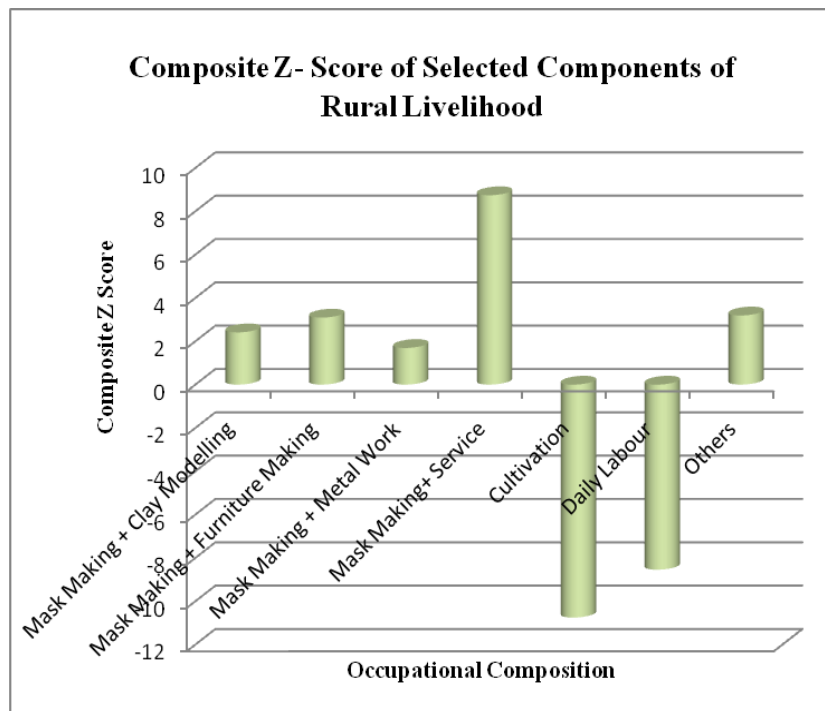


Fig. No. 5.11. Willingness of young generation ( $\leq 20$  years) to remain in hereditary profession



**Fig. No. 5.12. Occupational classes of the selected households**



**Fig. No. 5.13. Composite z- score value of selected components of rural livelihood**

**Table no. 5.1. Types of masks made in different workshops**

<b>Masks Used for Chhau Palas Related to Ramayana</b>	Ram, Lakshman, Hanuman, Sita, Ravan, Bali, Jamboban, Sugrib, Bivishan, Meghnad, Kumbhakarna, Biswamitra, Parasuram, Rakshas, Daitya, Mahavir etc.
<b>Masks Used for Chhau Palas Related to Mahabharata</b>	Yudhisthir, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul, Sahadev, Karna, Avimunyu, Duryodhan, Vishma, Sakuni, Sri Krishna, Drona, Bokasur, Gosingha, Agasur, Brahma, Vishnu, Nrisingha, Maheswar, Vakta Prahlad, Byadh, Kirat, Kiratin, Baraha etc.
<b>Masks Used in Ganesh Vandana Pala</b>	Ganesh, Kartik, Durga Shiva, Parasuram, Mayur, Indur, Singha, Pencha etc.
<b>Masks Used in Mahisasura Mardini Pala</b>	Durga, Mahisasur, Ganesh, Kartik, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Pencha, Indur, Mayur, Hansa etc.
<b>Masks Used in Chhau Palas Related to Social Messages etc.</b>	Saheb, Fauj, Virsa Munda, Sidhu, Kanhu, Police, Mahish, Jocker etc.
<b>Masks Used For Decoration Purpose</b>	Adivasi Purus o Mohila, Bagh, Mayur, Hati, Tiya, Mayna, Harin, Hindu dev-Devi, Ghora, Budhadev, Kakatua, Magur machh, Ruhi Machh etc

Occupational Class	No. of Household	No. of Population	Selected Components of Rural Livelihood																		Composite Index	Composite Z Score
			Level of Education of Household Members		Monthly Income of Households (Rs.)		Monthly Expenditure of Households (Rs.)		Building Types (Based on Material use for construction)		Availability of Toilet Facilities		Consumption to Electricity Facility		Level of Mobile Use		Consumption to Transportation Vehicle		Level of Alcohol Consumption			
			Avg. Score	Z Score	Avg. Score	Z Score	Avg. Score	Z Score	Avg. Score	Z Score	Avg. Score	Z Score	Avg. Score	Z Score	Avg. Score	Z Score	Avg. Score	Z Score	Avg. Score	Z Score		
Mask Making + Clay Modelling	16	82	4.44	1.09	4.56	0.49	5.38	0.2	3	0.44	2	0.62	2	0.62	3.38	0.43	1.63	-1.33	1.13	-0.15	27.515	2.41
Mask Making + Furniture Making	4	22	3.18	-0.16	5	0.78	6.75	0.87	3	0.44	2	0.62	2	0.62	3.25	0.29	2.5	0.06	1	-0.43	28.68	3.09
Mask Making + Metal Work	2	15	3.46	0.12	3	-0.53	6	0.5	2.5	-0.08	2	0.62	2	0.62	3	0.01	3	0.86	1	-0.43	25.96	1.69
Mask Making+ Service	3	19	4.47	1.12	6	1.44	7	0.99	3.67	1.15	2	0.62	2	0.62	4.67	1.85	3.33	1.38	1	-0.43	34.14	8.74
Cultivators	8	50	2.02	-1.31	1.38	-1.6	1.75	-1.59	1.125	-1.53	1.125	-1.74	1.375	-1.79	1.875	-1.23	1.75	-1.13	1.75	1.17	14.15	-10.75
Daily Labour	4	29	1.79	-1.53	2.25	-1.03	2	-1.47	1.25	-1.4	1.25	-1.41	1.5	-1.31	1.75	-1.36	2	-0.73	2	1.7	15.79	-8.54
Others	2	17	4	0.65	4.5	0.45	6	0.5	3.5	0.97	2	0.62	2	0.62	3	0.01	3	0.86	0.5	-1.49	28.5	3.19
Total	39	234	23.36		26.69		34.88		18.045		12.38		12.88		20.93		17.2		8.38			
Mean			3.34		3.81		4.98		2.58		1.77		1.84		2.99		2.46		1.197			
S.D			1.01		1.52		2.03		0.95		0.37		0.26		0.91		0.63		0.47			

**Table no. 5.14. Computed composite index and composite z- score**

### Acknowledgement

This work would not be completed without the kind help from Mr. Anil Sutradhar, eminent Chhau dancer and mask maker, his son Mr. Jayanta Sutradhar, Mr. Ananta Gorai, the villagers of Chorda village and all the officials of BLRO office, Baghmundi C.D. Block, Purulia District of West Bengal.