Masks: History, characteristics and functions – Global perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is to expose and to preserve and to reveal the identity of the Folk Performing Tradition and to determine their Customs and Beliefs. And mainly it has been taken an effort to document our Rituals and Performances with Masks. In the World History the Masks have been used in all the cultures around the world in all times and have been important part of people’s life. In ritual, social and religious functions, the participants /the people are wear and to represent spiritual or legendary figures. And the Masks have taken a major role in World Theatre History also. But we have seen a smaller part of usage of Masks in the Indian Region. Because of we didn’t have the data’s of Mask’s Usage in Indian Tradition. So, this paper is mainly to search and research and to expose the Usage and Functions of Masks of World Folk and Ritual Customs and Beliefs. And this paper will describe about the Masks, Masked Ritual Performances, Masked Folk Performances, Masked Festivals, Masked Offerings and also the analytical study about the beliefs and customs of the Mask Making Tradition, Mask Wearing Tradition and the Information about the Masking Sensibility like Transforming, Encountering, Removing, Exchanging, Displaying and Destroying also in Global Perspective.

Keywords: Masks, Rituals, Performances, Disguising, Mask Making Tradition, Customs and Beliefs, Masked Festivals, Ritual Re-enactments, Masks in World Theatre History.

1. INTRODUCTION

Masks are a universal art form. Various cultures around the world, from the Japanese to the Eskimos, have indigenous masks. In different societies masks take on diverse functions ranging from the sacred and spiritual to the mundane and comical.

2. MASKS IN MYTH

Masks... a form of disguise. It is an object that is frequently worn over or in front of the face to hide the identity of a person and by its own features to establish another being. This essential characteristic of hiding and revealing personalities or moods is common to all masks. As cultural objects they have been used throughout the world in all periods since the Stone Age and have been as varied in appearance as in their use and symbolism. Masks may take on a wide variety of forms; some are used to conceal the wearer's face, while others are headdresses worn on top of the head. Sometimes, elaborate facial make-up or body painting serves as a mask. A general definition of a mask would be anything worn or used to help disguise a person's identity. Even though masks have been known to man since prehistoric times, as shown in some cave paintings, modern society still has a profound use for them. This is particularly evident in Modern and Postmodern art. Throughout the world masks are used for their expressive power as a feature of masked performance - both ritually and in various theatre traditions; The ritual and theatrical definitions of mask usage frequently overlap and merge but still provide a useful basis for categorisation. The image of Comedy and Tragedy masks are widely used to represent the Performing Arts, and specifically Drama. The masks have been used in all the cultures around the world in all times and have been important part of people’s life. In ritual, social and religious functions, where participants wear them to represent spiritual or legendary figures. In some cultures it is also believed that the wearing of a mask will allow the wearer to take on the characteristic of that mask’s representation (Donald Condry, 1980).

3. MASKS IN RITUALS

Ritual masks occur throughout the world, and although they tend to share many characteristics, highly distinctive forms have developed. The function of the masks may be magical or religious; they may appear in rites of passage or as a make-up for a form of theatre. Equally masks may disguise a penitent or preside over important ceremonies; they may help mediate with spirits, or offer a protective role to the society who utilise their powers (John W. Nunley Cara McCarthy John Emigh Lesley K. Ferris, 1999).

4. MASKS IN THEATRE

Masks play a key part within world theatre traditions. They also continue to be a vital force within contemporary theatre, and their usage takes a variety of forms. In many cultural traditions the masked performer is a central concept and is highly valued. In the western tradition it is sometimes considered a stylistic device which can be traced back to the Greeks and Romans. In some Greek masks the wide and open mouth of the mask contained a brass megaphone enabling the voice of
the wearer to be projected into the large auditorium. In medieval Europe masks were used in mystery and miracle plays to portray symbolic creatures, and the performer representing Deity frequently wore a gold or gilt mask. During the Renaissance masques and ballet de court developed - courtly masked entertainments that continued as part of ballet conventions until the late eighteenth century. The masked characters of the Commedia dell'arte included the ancestors of the modern clown. In contemporary western theatre the mask is often used alongside puppetry to create a theatre which is essentially visual rather than verbal, and many of its practitioners have been visual artists (David Shulman, Deborah Thiagarajan, 2006). Masks are an important part of many theatre forms throughout world cultures, and their usage in theatre has often developed from, or continues to be part of old, highly refined, stylized theatrical traditions.

5. MASKS IN WORLD HISTORY

5.1 Australian Mask
Rituals are enacted in a lively tradition of dance, painting and music. The Australian tribes paint on cave walls (as early as 25,000 years ago, recent research suggests), on wooden implements and on strips of eucalyptus bark. Their style has one very unusual characteristic; in depicting a living creature the artists like to include the unseen bones and organs within (Douglas L. Congdon-Martin, Jim Pieper, California Heritage Museum, 1999).

5.2. China Mask
Masks have been a universal part of the 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 societies in surprisingly similar ways, despite separation over vast distances and historical time. Masks have been used to express and explore emotions, to contact a spiritual world through ritual performances, for group identity, and for bringing good fortune. All of these purposes are found in the masks of China, a nation that has a very long and rich tradition of mask making that continues to this (Xue Ruolin, December 1996).

5.3. Egyptian Mask
Traditional art describes the most popular and studied forms of African art which are typically found in museum collections. Wooden masks, which might either be human or animal, are one of the most commonly found forms of art in western Africa. In their original contexts, ceremonial masks are used by actors and dancers in religious, political or social performances.

5.4. Greek Mask
The mask symbolized the power of Dionysus—the transformation of an individual from the state of reserve to one of emotion. The cult of Dionysus sought to give reign to the darker persona of an individual. Theatre images were popular in Greek and Roman Art, especially in the late Roman Empire.

5.5. Japanese Mask
In the story of Japanese culture and history masks, this uses range from popular entertainment such as NOH drama to religious rituals and courtly performing arts. There are nearly eighty different and distinct characters depicted by the mask used by traditional NOH performers. Only a few skilled Japanese craftsmen have the ability to create authentic NOH masks using the traditional Japanese wood carving techniques. Master carvers in Japan must commit their work to individual NOH performers, so very little time is permitted for making extra masks for collectors. Making a NOH mask is a labour-intensive process that can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months from start to finish (Friedrich Perzynski, Stanley Appelbaum, 2005).

5.6. Kenyan Mask
In Kenya and all over Africa, Tribal masks are used during initiations, rituals, marriages, harvest seasons, and ceremonies as well as to communicate with the ancestors. Masks have also been used to discipline women, children, and criminals or represent ancestors; the masks symbolize consent to control when worn.

5.7. Mayan Mask
Mayan masks were usually worn in special ceremonies or at deaths. When the Maya buried their great leaders and rulers they made a mask out of jade. Death masks were used to identify the dead person so wandering spirits could not find its body. Many Maya lords wore masks that resembled animals of the jungle.

5.8. Peruvian Mask
Many Andean dances use masks as part of the dancer’s costume. The most common pattern includes demons, angels, blacks, Spaniards and all kinds of animals. Masks are made from a range of materials that are as varied as their place of origin: plaster, leather, wood, wire sheeting and tin.

5.9. Tiki Mask
According to Maori mythology it is widely believed that the Maori Tiki represents the unborn human embryo. And in Maori culture this represents a particularly powerful spirit for warding off bad luck, and as such it is regarded as a good luck charm. It is also known to be a symbol of fertility. Many years ago the most valuable tikis were hand carved from greenstone, and were handed down through the generations as treasured possessions. The Tiki today is carved in a range of materials from greenstone and beef bone pendants through to small to medium statues or wall hangings made from native New Zealand timbers.

5.10. Vietnamese Mask
In the traditional Vietnamese theatre each actor is responsible for the preparation of his own makeup; and except for the Tho dia (God of the earth) who wears a real mask, all masks are painted on the extremely faces of the actors. Vietnamese Decoration Masks are usually made by vietnamese traditional material: bamboo, coconut, and lacquer. There are different figures and have different emotions. Each one expresses an emotion of one character.

5.11. Indian Mask
In India the use of masks is found in dance rituals, dramas, folk songs, temples, and different socio-cultural practices . In South India Face Painting Masks are worn by Kathakali, Teyyam, Koodiyattam, Theru – koothu Performers, to depict good and evil characters from Epics. Masks find an important place in Religious Festival celebration such as Durga Puja, Kulasekaran pattinam Mutharamman Dhassera Festival (Thoothukkudi District of Tamil Nadu in India), Mysore Dhassera Festival, Ram Navami and in so much of ritual festivals based on the agriculture in south Tamil Nadu. There are variety of
rich & rare collection of wooden & bronze masks of varying type representing the period stretching from 17th and 18th Century. The cultural life of people who lived in the different historical period is revealed in these various masks of different shapes and designs. The origin of masks could be traced to ancient societies which employed human figures to symbolize deities. Masks are of God/Deity mask, Fantasy mask, Human mask and Animal mask. The God/Deity mask and the Fantasy mask represent the metaphysical and super human traits. Krishnattom, mask dance of Kerala Kuruttikali, a folk art, Pachai Kaali – Pavala Kaali Aattam, Kilavan Kilavi Aattam, Pulii Aattam, Simma Nadanam, Karadi Aattam, Bommai Nadanam, Naai Aaattam, Aazhi Nadanam, Pei Aattam of Tamil Nadu are some of the Dance Art Forms with Masks.

6. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MASKS

Masks have been designed in innumerable varieties, from the simplest of crude “fake faces” held by a handle to complete head coverings with ingenious movable parts and hidden faces. Mask makers have shown great resourcefulness in selecting and combining available materials. Among the substances utilized are woods, metals, shells, fibres, ivory, clay, horn, stone, feathers, leather, furs, paper, cloth, and corn husks. Surface treatments have ranged from rugged simplicity to intricate carving and from polished woods and mosaics to gaudy adornments.

Masks generally are worn with a costume, often so complete that it entirely covers the body of the wearer. Fundamentally then, the costume completes the new identity represented by the mask, and usually tradition prescribes its appearance and construction to the same extent as the mask itself. Costumes, like the masks, are made of a great variety of materials, all of which have a symbolic connection with the mask’s total imagery. Ideally the costume should be seen with the mask while the wearer is in action.

The morphological elements of the mask are with few exceptions derived from natural forms. Masks with human features are classified as anthropomorphic and those with animal characteristics as theriomorphic. In some instances, the mask form is a replication of natural features or closely follows the lineaments of reality, and in other instances it is an abstraction. Masks usually represent supernatural beings, ancestors, and far-fetched or imagined figures and can also be portraits. The localization of a particular spirit in a specific mask must be considered a highly significant reason for its existence.

The change in identity of the wearer for that of the mask is vital, for if the spirit represented does not reside in the image of the mask, the ritual petitions, supplications, and offerings made to it would be ineffectual and meaningless. The mask, therefore, most often functions as a means of contact with various spirit powers, thereby protecting against the unknown forces of the universe by prevailing upon their potential beneficence in all matters relative to life (W. Anthony Sheppard, 2001).

7. THE MAKING OF MASKS – PERSPECTIVE OF WORLD HISTORY

Masks have traditionally been made by professionals who were either expert in this particular craft or were noted sculptors or artisans. In societies in which masks of supernatural beings have played a significant ceremonial role, it is presumed that the spirit power of the created image usually is strongly felt by the artist. A primary belief involved in both the conception and the rendering of these objects was that spirit power dwelled in all organic and inorganic matter, and therefore the mask will contain the spirit power of whatever material was used to make it. This power is considered a volatile, active force that is surrounded by various taboos and restrictions for the protection of those handling it. Certain prescribed rituals frequently have to be followed in the process of the mask’s creation.

A spirit power is also often believed to inhabit the artist’s tools so that even these have to be handled in a prescribed manner. As the form of the mask develops it is usually believed to acquire power increasingly in its own right, and again various procedures are prescribed to protect the craftsman and to ensure the potency of the object. If all the conventions have been adhered to, the completed mask, when worn or displayed, is regarded as an object suffused with great supernatural or spirit power. In some cultures it is believed that because of the close association between the maker and the spirit of the mask, the artist absorbs some of its magic power. In Tamil Nadu, Kulasekaranattinattam Mutharamman Dhasserra Festival, the devotees are worn variety of Masks with Costumes for their ritual offering to their Deity Mutharamman. In this festival of wearing and disguising with Masks, the Traditional Community of Panar have traditionally been made Masks with certain rituals. And they believed the Masks have great supernatural/metaphysical power (Jennifer Foreman, 1997).

8. THE WEARING OF MASKS - PERSPECTIVE OF WORLD HISTORY

The wearer is also considered to be in direct association with the spirit force of the mask and is consequently exposed to like personal danger of being affected by it. For his protection, the wearer, like the mask maker, is required to follow certain sanctioned procedures in his use of the mask. In some respects, he plays the role of an actor in cooperation or collaboration with the mask. Without his performing dance and posturing routines, which are often accompanied with music, the mask would remain a representation without a full life-force.

Upon donning the mask, the wearer sometimes undergoes a psychic change and as in a trance assumes the spirit character depicted by the mask. Usually, however, the wearer skill fully becomes a “partner” of the character he is impersonating, giving to the mask not only an important spark of vitality by the light flashing from his own eyes, but also bringing the character alive by his movements and poses.

The mask is an object worn over or in front of the face to hide the identity of a person and by its own features to establish another being. This essential characteristic of hiding and revealing personalities or moods is common to all masks. As cultural objects they have been used throughout the world in all periods since the Stone Age and have been as varied in appearance as in their use and symbolism.

9. THE FUNCTIONS AND FORMS OF MASKS-PERSPECTIVE OF WORLD HISTORY

Masks are as extraordinarily varied in appearance as they are in function or fundamental meaning. Many masks are primarily associated with ceremonies that have religious and social significance or are concerned with funerary customs, fertility rites, or curing sickness or offerings. Other masks are used on festive occasions or to portray characters in a dramatic performance and in re-enactments of mythological events. Some of the Masks are also used for warfare and as protective devices in certain sports, as well as frequently being employed as architectural ornament.

9.1. Social and Religious Uses

Masks representing potentially harmful spirits were often used to keep a required balance of power or a traditional relationship of inherited positions within a culture. The forms of these masks invariably were prescribed by tradition, as were their uses. This type of mask was often associated with secret societies, especially in Africa, where the greatest range of types and functions can be found. They were also widely used among Oceanic peoples of the South Pacific and the American Indians and are even used in some of the folk rites still performed in Europe.
Masks have served an important role as a means of discipline and have been used to admonish women, children, and criminals. Common in China, Africa, Oceania, and North America, admonitory masks usually completely cover the features of the wearer. It is believed among some of the African Negro tribes that the first mask was an admonitory one. A child, repeatedly told not to, persisted in following its mother to fetch water. To frighten and discipline the child, the mother painted a hideous face on the bottom of her water gourd.

Others say the mask was invented by a secret African society to escape recognition while punishing marauders. In New Britain, members of a secret terrorist society called the Dukduk appear in monstrous five-foot masks to police, to judge, and to execute offenders. Aggressive supernatural spirits of an almost demonic nature are represented by these masks, which are constructed from a variety of materials, usually including tapa, or bark cloth, and the pith of certain reeds. These materials are painted in brilliant colors, with brick red and acid green predominating.

In many cultures throughout the world, a judge wears a mask to protect him from future recriminations. In this instance, the mask represents a traditionally sanctioned spirit from the past who assumes responsibility for the decision levied on the culprit. Rituals, often nocturnal, by members of secret societies wearing ancestor masks are reminders of the ancient sanction of their conduct. In many cultures, these masked ceremonials are intended to prevent miscreant acts and to maintain the circumscribed activities of the tribe. Along the Guinea coast of West Africa, for instance, many highly realistic masks represent ancestors who enjoyed specific cultural roles; the masks symbolize sanction and control when donned by the wearer.

Among some of the Dan and Ngere tribes of Liberia and Ivory Coast, ancestor masks with generic features act as intermediaries for the transmission of petitions or offers of respect to the gods. These traditional ancestral emissaries exert their spirit power a social control for the community. Particularly among Oceanic peoples, American Indians, and Negro tribes of Africa, certain times of the year are set aside to honour spirits or ancestors. Among non literate/oral literate peoples who cannot record their own histories, masked rituals act as an important link between past and present, giving a sense of historic continuity that strengthens their social bond. On these occasions, masks usually recognizable as dead chiefains, relatives, friends, or even foes are worn or exhibited. Gifts are made to the spirits incarnated in the masks, while in other instances dancers wearing stylized mourning masks perform the prescribed ceremony.

In western Melanesia, the ancestral ceremonial mask occurs in a great variety of forms and materials. The Sepik River area in north central New Guinea is the source of an extremely rich array of these mask forms mostly carved in wood, ranging from small faces to large fantastic forms with a variety of appendages affixed to the wood, including shell, fibre, animal skins, seed, flowers, and feathers. These masks are highly polychromed with earthy colours of red and yellow, lime white, and charcoal black. They often represent supernatural spirits as well as ancestors and therefore have both a religious and a social significance.

Members of secret societies usually conduct the rituals of initiation, when a young man is instructed in his future role as an adult and is acquainted with the rules controlling the social stability of the tribe. Totem and spiritualistic masks are donned by the elders at these ceremonies. Sometimes the masks used are reserved only for initiations. Among the most impressive of the initiation masks are the exquisitely carved human faces of west coast African Negro tribes. In western and central Congo (Kinshasa), in Africa, large, colourful helmet like masks are used as a masquerading device when the youth emerges from the initiation area and is introduced to the villagers as an adult of the tribe. After a lengthy ordeal of teaching and initiation rites, for instance, a youth of the Pende tribe appears in a distinctive colourful mask indicative of his new role as an adult. The mask is later cast aside and replaced by a small ivory duplicate, worn as a charm against misfortune and as a symbol of his manhood.

Believing everything in nature to possess a spirit, man found authority for himself and his family by identifying with a specific nonhuman spirit. He adopted an object of nature; then he mythologically traced his ancestry back to the chosen object; he preempted the animal as the emblem of himself and his clan. This is the practice of totem, which consolidates family pride and distinguishes social lines. Masks are made to house the totem spirit. The totem ancestor is believed actually to materialize in its mask; thus masks are of the utmost importance in securing protection and bringing comfort to the totem clan.

The Papuans of New Guinea build mammoth masks called hevehe, attaining 20 feet in height. They are constructed of a palm wood armature covered in bark cloth; geometric designs are stitched on with painted cane strips. These fantastic man–animal masks are given a frightening aspect. When they emerge from the men’s secret clubhouse, they serve to protect the members of the clan.

The so-called “totem” pole of the Alaskan and British Columbian Indian fulfills the same function. The African totem mask is often carved from ebony or other hard woods, designed with graceful lines and showing a highly polished surface. Animal masks, their features elongated and beautifully formalized, are common in western Africa. Dried grass, woven palm fibres, coconuts, and shells, as well as wood are employed in the masks of New Guinea, New Ireland, and New Caledonia. Represented are fanciful birds, fishes, and animals with distorted or exaggerated features.

The high priest and medicine man, or the shaman, frequently had his own very powerful totem, in whose mask he could exercise evil spirits, punish enemies, locate game or fish, predict the weather, and, most importantly, cure disease.

The Northwest Coast Indians of North America in particular devised mechanical masks with movable parts to reveal a second face—generally a human image. Believing that the human spirit could take animal form and vice versa, the makers of these masks fused man and bird or man and animal into one mask. Some of these articulating masks acted out entire legends as their parts moved (Henry Pernet, Laura Grillo, 2006).

### 9.2. Funerary and Commemorative Uses
In cultures in which burial customs are important, anthropomorphic masks have often been used in ceremonies associated with the dead and departing spirits. Funerary masks were frequently used to cover the face of the deceased. Generally their purpose was to represent the features of the deceased, both to honour them and to establish a relationship through the mask with the spirit world. Sometimes they were used to force the spirit of the newly dead to depart for the spirit world. Masks were also made to protect the deceased by frightening away malevolent spirits.

From the Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1786 BC) to the 1st century AD, the ancient Egyptians placed stylized masks with generalized features on the faces of their dead. The funerary mask served to guard the spirit of the deceased back to its final resting place in the body. They were commonly made of cloth covered with stucco or plaster, which was then painted. For more important personages, silver and gold were used. Among the most splendid examples of the burial portrait mask is the one created c. 1350 BC for the pharaoh Tutankhamen. In Mycenaean tombs of c. 1400 BC, beaten gold portrait masks were found. Gold masks also were placed on the faces of the dead kings of Cambodia and Siam.

The mummies of Inca royalty wore golden masks. The mummies of lesser personages often had masks that were made of wood or clay. Some of these ancient Andean masks had movable parts, such as a metallic death mask with...
movable ears that was found in the Moon Pyramid at Moche, Peru. The ancient Mexicans made burial masks that seem to be
generic representations rather than portraits of individuals.

In ancient Roman burials, a mask resembling the deceased was often placed over his face or was worn by an actor hired
to accompany the funerary cortège to the burial site. In patrician families these masks or images were sometimes preserved
as ancestor portraits and were displayed on ceremonial occasions. Such masks were realistic portraits painted in encaustic on wood during a person's lifetime; when the person died, they were attached
directly to the facial area on the mummy shroud.

The skull mask is another form usually associated with funerary rites. The skull masks of the Aztecs, like their wooden
masks, were inlaid with mosaics of turquoise and lignite, and the eye sockets were filled with pyrites. Holes were customarily
drilled in the back so the mask might be hung or possibly worn. In Melanesia, the skull of the deceased is often modelled over
with clay, or resin and wax, and then elaborately painted with designs that had been used ceremonially by the deceased
during his own lifetime (Z. S. Strother, 1999).

9.3. Therapeutic Uses

Masks have played an important part in magical-religious rites to prevent and to cure disease. In some cultures, the
masked members of secret societies could drive disease demons from entire villages and tribes. Among the best known of
these groups was the Fake Face Society of the North American Iroquois Indians. These professional healers performed
violent pantomimes to exercise the dreaded Sahadarogoka gogosa (demons who plagued the Iroquois). They were grimacing,
twisted masks, often with long wigs of horsehair. Metallic inserts often were used around the eyes to catch the light of the
campfire and the moon, emphasizing the grotesqueness of the mask.

Masks for protection from disease include the measles masks worn by Chinese children and the cholera masks worn
during epidemics by the Chinese and Burmese. The disease mask is most developed among the Sinhalenses in Sri Lanka
(Ceylon), where 19 distinct rakasa, or devil, devil masks, have been devised. These devil masks, have ferocious aspect, fanged,
and with startling eyes. Gaudily coloured and sometimes having articulating jaws, they present a dragon-like appearance.

Masks have long been used in military connections. A war mask will have a malevolent expression or hideously fantastic features to instil fear in the enemy. The ancient Greeks and Romans used battle shields with grotesque masks or attached terrifying masks to their armour, as did the Chinese warrior. Grimacing menpo, or mask helmets, were used by Japanese
samurai.

Many sports require the use of masks. Some of these are merely functional, protective devices such as the masks worn
by fencers, baseball catchers, or even skiers. To protect their faces in sports events and tournaments of arms, horsemen of
the Roman army attached highly decorative and symbolic masks to their helmets.

Perhaps the earliest use of masks was in connection with hunting. Disguise masks were seemingly used in the early
Stone Age in stalking prey and later to house the slain animal's spirit in the hope of placating it. The traditional animal masks
worn by the Altaic and Turungus shamans in Siberia are strictly close to such prehistoric examples as the image of the so-called sorcerer in the Cave of Les Trois Frères in Ariège, France.

Since agricultural societies first appeared in prehistory, the mask has been widely used for fertility rituals. The Iroquois,
for instance, used corn husk masks at harvest rituals to give thanks for and to achieve future abundance of crops. Perhaps
the most renowned of the masked fertility rites held by American Indians are those still performed by the Hopi and Zuni
Indians of the Southwest U.S. Together with masked dancers representing clouds, rain spirits, stars, Earth Mother, sky god,
and others, the shaman takes part in elaborate ceremonies designed to assure crop fertility.

Spirits called kachinas, who first brought rain to the Pueblo tribes, are said to have left their masks behind when sent
to dwell in the bottom of a desert lake. Their return to help bring the rain is incarnated by the masked dancer. Cylindrical masks,
covering the entire head and resting on the shoulders, are of a primal type. They are made of leather and humanized by the
addition of hair and a variety of adjuncts. Eyes are represented by incisions or by buckskin balls filled with deer hair and
affixed to the mask. The nose is often of rolled buckskin or corncob.

Frequently the mask has a projecting wooden cylinder for a bill or a gourd stem cut with teeth for a snout. Horns are
attached to some masks. Many colours are used in their painting; plumes and beads are attached, and the sex of the mask is
distinguished by its shape: round head indicates male and square indicates female. In the western Sudan area of Africa many
tribes have masked fertility ceremonies. The segoni-kun masks that are fashioned by the Bambara tribes in Mali are
aesthetically among the most interesting.

Antelopes, characterized by their elegant simplicity, are carved in wood and affixed to woven fiber caps that are hung with
raffia and cover the wearer. The antelope is believed to have introduced agriculture, and so when crops are sown, members of
Tj-were society cavort in the fields in pairs to symbolize fertility and abundance (Sharon Strong, 2005).

9.4. Festive Uses

Masks for festive occasions are still commonly used in the 20th century. Ludicrous, grotesque, or superficially horrible, festival
masks are usually conducive to good-natured license, release from inhibitions, and ribaldry. These include the Halloween,
Mardi Gras, or “masked ball” variety. The disguise is assumed to create a momentary, amusing character, often resulting in
humorous confusions, or to achieve anonymity for the prankster or ribald reveller.

Throughout contemporary Europe and Latin America, masks are associated with folk festivals, especially those
generated by seasonal changes or marking the beginning and end of the year. Among the most famous of the folk masks are the
masks worn to symbolize the driving away of winter in parts of Austria and Switzerland. In Mexico and Guatemala, annual
date festivals employ masks for storytelling and caricature, such as for the Dance of the Old Men and the Dance of the Moors
and the Christians. The Eskimo make masks with comic or satiric features that are worn at festivals of merrymaking, as do the
Ibos of Nigeria (Barbara Mauldin, 1999).

In India also masks are associated with the Folk Ritual Festivals, such as Madurai - Vellaloorie Ezhai Kaathamman
Madhukkudumeduthal Festival, Kulasekaranappitnam Mutharamman Dhassera Festival, Chathirappatti Kalliamman Vaigisp
Pongal Festival, T. Kallippattu Poomariamman Koli Chithirai Pongal Festival and Kaali and Sudalai Maadan Deity’s Temple
Festivals (Tamil Nadu, India). In those Festivals the Masks are as a part of the festive ritual. Without Masks the Festival/Ritual has not fulfilled. The Devotees or the Performers are worn Masks and they do the Offering or Performance in
Festivals (Tamil Nadu, India). In those Festivals the Masks are as a part of the Festival Ritual. Without Mask the Festival/Ritual has not fulfilled. The Devotees or the Performers are worn Masks and they do the Offering or Performance in
Front of the Deity at the Temple. God/Deity’s Masks, Animal Masks, Human Masks, Imaginative Masks are worn in those

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festivals. The People who wore Masks, they have given thanks to their Deities for their Agriculture, Disease Curing, Economic Growth and other life achievements.

9.5. Theatrical Uses
Masks have been used almost universally to represent characters in theatrical performances. Theatrical performances are a visual literature of a transient, momentary kind. It is most impressive because it can be seen as a reality; it expends itself by its very revelation. The mask participates as a more enduring element, since its form is physical.

The mask as a 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 communicants' attempt to impersonate the deity by donning goat-skins and by imbibing wine eventually developed into the sophistically of masking. When a literature of worship appeared, a disguise, which consisted of a white linen mask hung over the face (a device supposedly initiated by Thespis, a 6th-century-BC poet who is credited with originating tragedy), enabled 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.

In Greece the progress from ritual to ritual-drama was continued in highly formalized theatrical representations. Masks used in these productions became elaborate headpieces made of leather or painted canvas and depicted an extensive variety of personalities, ages, ranks, and occupations. Heavily coiffured and of a size to enlarge the actor's presence, the Greek mask seems to have been designed to throw the voice by means of a built-in megaphone device and, by exaggeration of the features, to make clear at a distance the precise nature of the character.

Moreover, their use made it possible for the Greek actors—who were limited by convention to three speakers for each tragedy—to impersonate a number of different characters during the play simply by changing masks and costumes. Details from frescoes, mosaics, vase paintings, and fragments of stone sculpture that have survived to the present day provide most of what is known of the appearance of these ancient theatrical masks. The tendency of the early Greek and Roman artists to idealize their subjects throws doubt, however, upon the accuracy of these reproductions. In fact, some authorities maintain that the masks of the ancient theatre were crude affairs with little aesthetic appeal.

In the Middle Ages, masks were 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 brought to stage life by the use of masks. Constructed of papier-mâché, 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 contrivances. But again, no reliable pictorial record has survived.

Masks used in connection with present-day carnivals and Mardi Gras and those of folk demons and characters still used by central European peasants, such as the Perchten masks of Alpine Austria, are most likely the inheritors of the tradition of medieval masks.

The 15th-century Renaissance in Italy witnessed the rise of a theatrical phenomenon that spread rapidly to France, to Germany, and to England, where it maintained its popularity into the 18th century. Comedies improvised from scenarios based upon the domestic dramas of the ancient Roman comic playwrights Plautus (254?–184 BC) and Terence (186/185–159 BC) and upon situations drawn from anonymous ancient Roman mimes flourished under the title of commedia dell'arte.

Adopting the Roman stock figures and situations to their own usage's, the players of the commedia were usually masked. Sometimes the masking was grotesque and fanciful, but generally a heavy leather mask, full or half face, disguised the commedia player. Excellent pictorial records of both commedia costumes and masks exist; some sketches show the characters of Arlecchino and Colombina wearing black masks covering merely the eyes, from which the later masquerade mask is certainly a development.

Except for vestiges of the commedia in the form of puppet and marionette shows, the drama of masks all but disappeared in Western theatre during the 18th, 19th, and first half of the 20th centuries. In modern revivals of ancient Greek plays, masks have occasionally been employed, and such highly symbolic plays as Die versunkene Glocke (The Sunken Bell; 1897) by the German Gerhart Hauptmann (1862–1946) and dramatizations of Alice in Wonderland have required masks for the performers of grotesque or animal figures.

The Irish poet-playwright W.B. Yeats (1865–1939) revived the convention in his, 'Dreaming of the Bones' and in other plays patterned upon the Japanese NOH drama. In 1926 theatre goers in the United States witnessed a memorable use of masks in The Great God Brown by the American dramatist Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953), wherein actors wore masks of their own faces to indicate changes in the internal and external lives of their characters. Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943), a German artist associated with the Bauhaus, became interested in the late 1920s and '30s in semantic phenomenology as applied to the design of masks for theatrical productions.

Modern art movements are often reflected in the design of contemporary theatrical masks. The stylistic concepts of Cubism and Surrealism, for example, are apparent in the masks executed for a 1957 production of La favola del figlio cambiato (The Fable of the Transformed Son) by the Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936). A well-known mid-century play using masks was Les Nègres (1958; The Blacks, 1960) by the French writer Jean Genet. The mask, however, has unquestionably lost its importance as a theatrical convention in the 20th century, and its appearance in modern plays is unusual.

In many ways akin to Greek drama in origin and theme, the NOH drama of Japan has remained a significant part of national life since its beginnings in the 14th century. NOH masks, of which there are about 125 named varieties, are rigidly traditional and are classified into five general types: old persons (male and female), gods, goddesses, devils, and goblins. The material of the NOH mask is wood with a coating of plaster, which is lacquered and gilded. Colours are traditional.

White is used to characterize a corrupt ruler; red signifies a righteous man; a black mask is worn by the villain, who epitomizes violence and brutality. NOH masks are highly stylized and generally characterized. They are exquisitely carved by highly respected artists known as tenka-ichi, “the first under heaven.” Shades of feeling are portrayed with beautifully sublimated realism. When the masks are subtly moved by the player's hand or body motion, their expression appears to change.

In Tibet, sacred dramas are performed by masked lay actors. A play for exorcising demons called the “Dance of the Red Tiger Devil” is performed at fixed seasons of the year exclusively by the priests or lamas wearing awe-inspiring masks of deities and demons. Masks employed in this mystery play are made of paper mashes, cloth, and occasionally gilt copper. In the Indian state of Sikkim and in Bhutan, where wood is abundant and the climate is destructive to paper, they are carved of durable wood. All masks of the Himalayan peoples are fantastically painted and are usually provided with wigs of yak tail in various colours. Formally they often emphasize the hideous.

Masks, usually made of paper mashes, are employed in the religious or admonitory drama of China; but for the greater part the actors in popular or secular drama make up their faces with cosmetics and paint to resemble masks, as do the Kabuki actors in Japan. The makeup mask both identifies the particular character and conveys his personality. The highly didactic sacred drama of China is performed with the actors wearing fanciful and grotesque masks. Similar to this “morality”
drama are the congratulatory play lets, pageants, processions, and dances of China. Masks employed in these ceremonies are highly ornamented, with jewelled and elaborately filigreed headgears.

In the lion and dragon dances of both China and Japan, a stylized mask of the beast is carried on a pole by itinerant players, whose bodies are concealed by a dependent cloth. The mask and cloth are manipulated violently, as if the animal were in pursuit, to the taps of a small drum. The mask’s lower jaw is movable and made to emit a loud continuous clacking by means of a string.

On Java and Bali, wooden masks, tupeng, are used in certain theatrical performances called wayang wong. These dance dramas developed from the shadow puppet plays of the 18th century and are performed not only as amusement but as a safeguard against calamities. The stories are in part derived from ancient Sanskrit literature, especially the Hindu epics, although the Javanese later became Muslims.

The brightly painted masks are made of wood and leather and are often fitted with horsehair and metallic or gilded paper accoutrements. They are ordinarily held in the teeth by means of a strap of leather or rattan that has been fastened across the inside. Occasionally an actor interrupts the unseen narrator, the Dalang, who is speaking the play. The mask is then held in front of the face while the player says his line. The use of theatrical masks in Java is exceptional, since masks, being forbidden under the prohibition of images, are practically unknown in the Islamic world.

In the 19th century, with the breaking down of primitive and folk cultures, the mask has increasingly become a decorative object, although it has long been used in art as an ornamental device. In Haiti, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, and Mexico, masks are produced largely for tourists. The collecting of old masks has been a part of the current interest in so-called primitive and folk arts. Masks also have exerted a decided influence on modern art movements, especially in the first decades of the 20th century, when painters in France and Germany found a source of inspiration in the tribal masks of Africa and western Oceania (Iris Hahner, Maria Kecskesi, Laszlo Vajda, 2007).

In the present situation, the Modern Theatre Goers and the Folklore Researchers who have started to imbibing the Folklorism concept in Modern Theatre Practices in Tamil Nadu and as well as in India. From that initiative the Modern Theatre Goers used the Variety of Masks in their Modern Drama Productions. The Actors are wore the Masks for a symbolic representation of the Characters. And they used the Masks as part of the set design to create the situation. In the Abudram Drama, the Dramatist used the Masks for creating the Absurdity through the Masks. In Tamil Nadu, Koolthu-pattarai, Nija Nataka iyakkam, Thannane, Aptist, Vilimbu, Muruga Boopathy’s Theatre Group, Aazhi which are some of the Modern Theatre Troupes they used the Masks in their Theatre Productions still now.

10. CONCLUSION

In the Contemporary World the human society has no time to reveal their identity and their culture. Because of the society is full of money minded and a master of selfishness; And we, the Society last their customs, beliefs and the Culture also. We, the Society are creating a worst and dangerous model of culture and also we teach that culture is our Native Culture to our coming generation. So, in the future generation nobody knows about our traditional performances and indigenous arts and their importance. This is the present situation, so we, the scholars and academicians from performing arts, folklore and cultural studies should document our tradition, customs and beliefs through articles, papers, books and films etc., It is one of the way to preserve and protect our culture.

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