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Call for Papers

SARARI: BAYERO JOURNAL OF THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS (Maiden Edition)

SARARI: Bayero Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts is a publication of the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, Faculty of Communication, Bayero University Kano. SARARI is a scholarly Journal that seeks to publish original and well researched articles in Theatre, Performance, and other related areas of research and practice.

SARARI is an annual journal and all articles submitted shall be subjected to blind peer review before they are considered for publication.

SARARI, therefore, invites original contributions from interested scholars for publication in its maiden edition.

Guidelines for Contributors

1. Articles must be original, not published elsewhere nor under consideration anywhere else.
2. All submissions for publication should be in the APA referencing style.
3. Contributors are expected to use Times New Roman font type and Microsoft Office Word Format of 16 font size for the title and name of the author(s), 12 font for the body of the article, including indented paragraphs, and works cited.
4. Articles should be accompanied with an abstract of not more than two hundred and fifty (250) words.

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A SEMIOTIC EXAMINATION OF THE TECHNICAL ELEMENTS IN ICHAHOHO MASQUARADE OF THE IDOMA PEOPLE

Abdulmalik Adakole AMALI, Ph.D

Abstract

In Africa, masquerade tradition is deemed to be a representation of invoked spirits for the society. This makes masquerades a communal agenda with a collaboration of various laws, arts and act to play the role of representing and protecting the society. In this paper, participant-observation, descriptive and interview research methods were adopted as our research methodology. Secondary data were obtained from relevant journal articles, books and internet sources. The paper set to specifically identify the features and characteristics of technical aesthetics in the Ichahoho Masquerade of Idoma land also examine the functional essence of technical aesthetics in the performance and performance process. Findings in this study are that, the masquerade society is primarily concerned with the protection of the people and the maintenance of law and order and that there have been serious modifications to the masquerade society and the masquerade forms to suite the Idoma people within the changing time. It is recommended that, there should be proper documentation and research into the traditional materials used in the masquerade and performances to bring about development and exposure of indigenous culture to the world.

Keywords: Masquerade, performance, culture, tradition and society

Introduction

Performance is a reaction to an orchestration to appease the Sensibility of the participant and the observer usually through rhythmic body movement. This response is primarily pivoted by belief and worship systems which are based on perceptions of the essence of being. Amongst the Idoma people of Benue State, North Central, Nigeria these beliefs and worship systems revolve around life after death, reincarnation, and existence of the spirit world. Thus, the need to exist and survive in the world and the hereafter has strong influence on Idoma culture and reflects heavily in their traditions and practices.

According to oral tradition, Ichahoho organisation has its origin from Anakade to Iyala, a tribe in Ogoja in the present Cross River State. It came into being resulting from the need for the Idoma people to adjust to the hostilities they encountered from neighboring tribes in the sojourn to find an independent State after the break away from the failed Kwararafa Empire.

Ichahoho organisation is made up of strong adult males who serve as the military and also saddled with the responsibility to groom and prepare young adult males to be battle ready. The organisation is primarily meant to defend the people and their territory against external threat or invasion and also to maintain law and order within the society. The masculinity of the Ichahoho organisation is evidently displayed in the warrior-like style of the performance of the masquerade and its acolytes on the performance arena with the possession dangerous props of cutlass and spear.

Ichahoho organisation has few women who are handpicked on recommendation to serve basically in gathering intelligence information whenever the need arises. Women are also used in the entertainment facet as the care taker of the masquerade only on the dancing arena. The Ichahoho organisation has the Ichahoho

masquerade as the totem and a tested warrior as the spiritual head called *Akpala* who is deputised by the *Igbaka*.

This paper, therefore, investigates and defines the aesthetic imprints of Ichahoho traditional masquerade performance. It explores the features of the masquerade in terms of dance, costume and its general accessories in order to establish the definition of technical aesthetics. The paper also highlights the masquerade as a military organisation which sometimes functions as a means of social entertainment and serves as a means of checks and balances in the Idoma society. In determining the aesthetic features of the masquerade performance, the paper explores the costumes, props and other accessories that make up the masquerade performance. The significance of drums, functional performance arena and other paraphernalia that makes up the masquerade and its performances are also examined. The understanding of the masquerade, the holistic structures of the organisation and their components will assist in having a better knowledge and acceptability of masquerade cosmological worldview of the Idoma people.

Masquerade Culture and Idoma Believe System

Oral history has it that the Idoma people originated from Apa, a part of the Kwararafa Empire in the North Central, Nigeria and migrated down to the lower Benue using the river as the guide for their movement to arrive at their present location. The Idoma people are predominantly farmers due to rich soil of the middle belt region where they are now located. They largely produce farm products like yams, cassava, beans and soya beans among others.

The Idoma people have masquerades like most of their African counterparts and believe that the power of the masquerade is superior to that of the human race. These masquerades have human spiritual heads whose functions are to mediate between the dead and the

ancestors of the people. Despite the belief in the power of the masquerades, the Idoma people do not equate the power of the all mighty *Owoicho* (God) to anything. *Owoicho* is believed to have power over all things and decides actions of man in terms of punishment or reward in this life and hereafter. To the people of Idoma, this world consists of the four cardinal points of *Enone* (East) and *Enochi* (West), *Icho* (air) and *Aje* (land). The Idoma cosmos believes in evil forces and the supernatural powers. "These worldviews continue to be shaped by the strong assumption that supernatural powers control the universe and the various human groups residing in it; and that for an individual to survive, he or she must function as part" (Falola, 2003, p.212). These forces according to the Idoma worldview are affected by the composition of how an individual "*ekochei*" has been fortified by his personal creator to guard him to the path that could give him a good or bad result in the world. The Idoma religious cosmos is flexible thereby containing God and other gods to serve together for the general wellbeing of the people. This view tends to be common among Africans as (Falola, 2003, p.208) agrees that "African indigenous religions exhibit features of flexibility and tolerance which make it easier for their practitioners".

As part of the Idoma traditional performances and cultural expression, the Idoma people have various masquerade performances such as *Ikpokwu*, *Ibo*, etc but for the purpose of this paper emphasis will be placed on the Ichahoho masquerade.

Ikpokwu serves as the police and enforces law and order. It accompanies the Odumu masquerade and protects it whenever it comes out. The two masquerades (*Ikpokwu* and Odumu) though move together, have different purpose, mission and leaders. The *Ibo* masquerade performance is purely for entertainment purpose. It comprises young adult males. In appearance, *Ibo* masquerade has a

great resemblance with the Ichahoho in terms of costume. However, what greatly differentiates them is that the *Ibo* is a stilt masquerade.

The Idoma cultures and traditions are mostly accompanied by performances that are usually based on their beliefs. These beliefs are manifested in the physical form by the masquerade system "as an embodiment of the peoples' culture and heritage. It is one's tradition that personifies, in the most tangible form, a phenomenal criterion that underscores the corporeal framework of the people's cultural communication and expression" (Anyebe, 2012, p. 455). Culture of the people could be seen as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, law, morals, customs and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" Talior (1891). Andah (1982, p. 45) adds that culture is that which "embraces all the material and non-material expressions of a people as well as the processes with which these expressions are communicated. It has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic and technological expressions and processes of a people usually ethnically and/or nationally or supra nationally related, and usually living in a geographically contiguous area; what they pass to their successors and how these are passed on" as cited in Edewor (2003, p. 196) Edewor, (2003, p.196) in continuation emphasizes, "that culture is the totality of a peoples way of life. It covers various spheres of human existence ranging from the political, economic and social systems of a society, to the technology, religion, language and even the festivals". It is largely believed, that we are all from one family but broken into fragments of families due to natural disasters and wars. These gives rise to the reason why there is a little of one culture found in another. Based on this notion, it therefore means that culture can be seen as the collected record of human ideas which existed from our past activities influenced by continuation of our experiences, that has emerged or emerges to form our believe, tradition, language, agriculture, religion, dressing, oral tradition, theatre and performances.

Methodology used in appraising Technical Aesthetics in Ichahoho masquerade

For better understanding and appraisal of the aesthetics inherent in the masquerade, the descriptive analytical method supported with photograph shall be used to foreground the masquerade and its organisational aesthetics which are concerned with translating and analyzing the properties that makes structure and performance.

Technical aspect of the theatre is the combination of costumes, light, sound, prop, make- up, music, dance, drama, material and equipment. When properly utilised, enhances and gives a production the desired outlook and concept creating a harmonized blending for a performance. Technical aesthetic in a performance is a collaboration of interactive art to bring out a meaning which affects the people through the use of mediums that are understood by them.

When we see a performance; what gives the actors and performance its identity and meaning that we appreciate are the technical aesthetic result as Suru (2008, p. 176) agrees with this that, "the audience comments of 'the play is beautiful', 'it is very interesting', 'the dances were good', 'and I love the play' and so on" reflect on the quality of technical aesthetic used in production.

Technical aesthetics in traditional performance are those things that are created or natural that is culturally applied in the performance, performance process and the performer to convey meaning to the audience and establish a patent peculiar to the performance.

Technical aesthetics are those technical elements and aids that are combined to produce a work of art and to give it a pleasant result with each aesthetic element and aid, performing its function to give the overall picture to the performer as well as observer.

What makes the aesthetics of the Ichahoho masquerade under examination are sequenced in the following ways for better understanding:

A. Properties. These consisting of:

- (i) set props
- (ii) hand props and
- (iii) props worn as costume.

B. Costumes. These are:

- (i) clothing
- (ii) Accessories

C. Musical instruments. These includes:

- (i) aerophones
- (ii) membranophones
- (iii) idiophones

D. Performance Arena

- (i) Open arena
- (ii) Closed space

Ichahoho Technical Aesthetics

Technical aesthetic is the art medium that are meaningfully used to interact with the people to give a meaning to the arts and performances. These mediums are as follows:

A. Properties

- (i) Set prop

Okpa: this is the spear which is carried only by the custodian, the masquerade, the leader of the group and established warriors. It is forbidden for a non member or a woman to come in touch with it. It is believed that it contains the "power" of the organisation. The spear is the symbol of their strength and authority as it also used as the effigy for which the new initiates swear their oath. It is also used as final show of strength to its member who has died. The spear has its sharp end usually covered with the hand by whoever is in its position as it is

believed contains poison and will kill if it accidentally touches anyone and brings out blood. It is also used as a hand prop.



Fig. 1 Okpa (spear)

(Photographs taken by the researcher)

(ii) *Hand props*

Ukala: this is a designed flat wood carving like a cutlass held in performance process. It is a replacement for the real cutlass because the mask is believed to possess the actor in the masquerade and puts

him in to battle mood and if the real cutlass is used, the masquerade could actually strike the spectators.

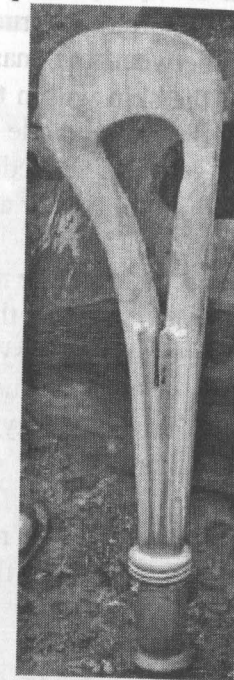


Fig. 2 Ukala

(Photographs taken by the researcher)

Ola: is the fire torch flame carried to the performance arena by the *Okwogola*; the torch bearer. With the *Ola* he holds the rule, determining who enters the performance arena apart from the members to perform. The *Ola* is used for both day and night but when used for night operation or performance is for easy visibility of the environment and identifying non members. It is also used at all the time for pushing back spectator from coming too close to the performance.

(iii) *Pops worn as costume*

Oblutu and *Aja*: are a combination of feathers pierced on a hand woven grass straw hat on the head and a piece of cloth covers from the back of the head and knotted underneath the chin of the actor thereby concealing the gap between the mask on the actor and the clothe costume not allowing the skin within the chin and neck region to show. The feathers peers the masquerade with kings and warriors symbolizing that the masquerade has exceeded the powers of human realm. This qualifies it to seat on the laps of anyone in the arena while resting after any round of dance.

Mbele: this is a skinned fur from the neck of a fluffy ram worn by the masquerade on the back and on the hands to enhance its performance in dancing process and as a symbol that it's a warrior. The *Mbele* can only be worn by the masquerade, tested warrior and head carriers. The *Mbele* gives dexterity to the masquerade in performance as it moves to the rhythm of the drums when the masquerade is in performance.

Ikpekwu: is the mask worn as a means of concealing the identity as well as transforming the actor to the spiritual realm.

B. Costumes

(i) Clothing

Omu : the Ichahoho masquerade is costumed in an *Omu*, cotton woven clothe usually malty colour covering the actor living only his hands and the head region exposed. The head region is covered with a wooden carved mask for the face, which is primarily to conceal the identity of the wearer and placing him in the spirit realm, giving him power over all. The mask is painted white with the lips and eyes in an emphatic black lining.

Ajanja: is a combination of folded cloth materials of multiple bright colours woven round the waist of the masquerade to give it beauty while enhancing its performance.

(ii) Accessories

Ekpo: this is a rattle anklet with sound made of iron or woven palm front that helps to accompany the dancing steps in rhythm with the drums and the movement the masquerade.

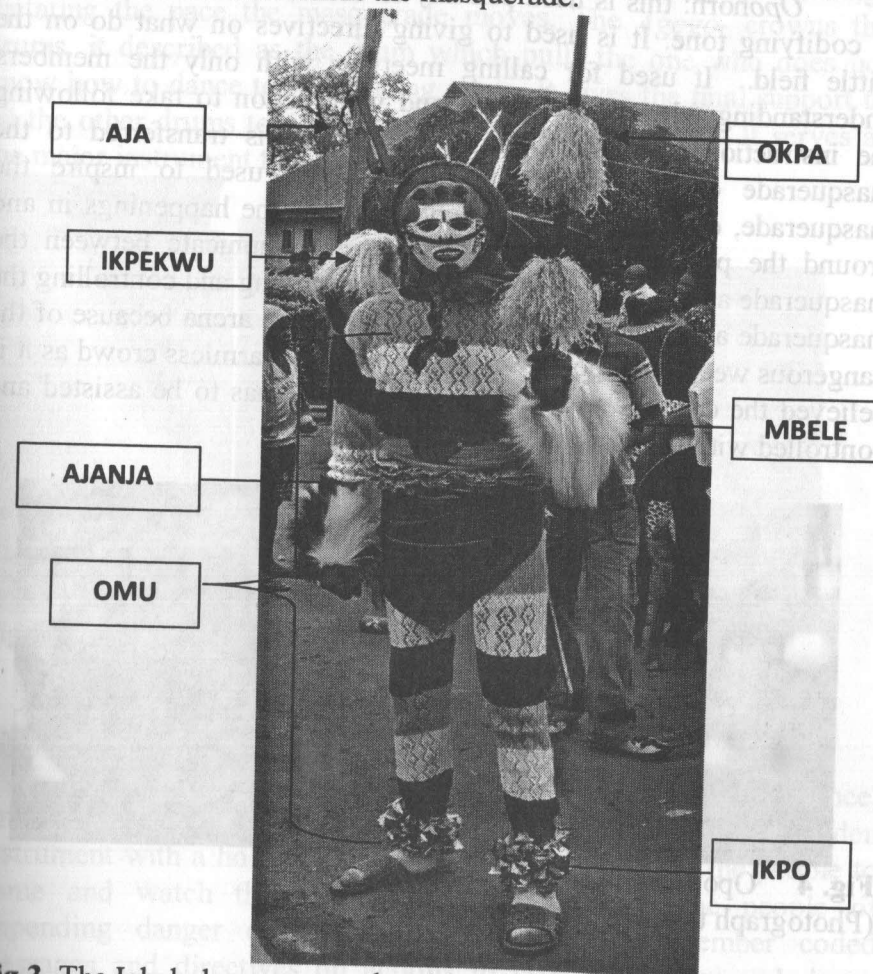


Fig.3 The Ichahoho masquerade with all the technical aesthetic (Photograph taken at by the researcher)

C. Musical Instruments

(i) Aerophones

Opohorn: this is used primary to communicate to its members in codifying tone. It is used to giving directives on what do on the battle field. It used for calling meetings with only the members understanding why, where, when and what action to take following the instruction from the *Opo*. Similar action is transferred to the masquerade on the performing arena. It is used to inspire the masquerade, dictating its movement, telling it the happenings in and around the performance arena and also communicate between the masquerade and its members. It is used for guiding and controlling the masquerade and its excesses on the performance arena because of the dangerous weapons it possesses in the midst of harmless crowd as it is believed the costume possess the actor and he has to be assisted and controlled with the assistant of the *Opo*.



Fig. 4 Opo Horn
(Photograph taken by the researcher)

(i) Membranophones

Enuba- the mother drum is the biggest of the drums that is used to start the drumming.

Ulaga- is used to enhance the rhythmic strength of the *Enuba*, after which the *Ikpikpili*- the smallest of all the drums, it is used to usher the masquerade to the dance floor to commence dancing; dictating the pace the masquerade moves. The *Agogo*- crowns the drums, it described as the drum which pulls the one who does not know how to dance to the dancing arena. It gives the final support to all the other drums to give pleasant and moving rhythm. It serves as the major instrument that gives motivation to dance.



Fig.5 *Ulaga* *Enuba* *Ikpikpili*
(Photographs taken by the researcher)

(ii) Idiophones

As part of instrument used in enhancing the *Ichahoho* dance, entertainment and performance, the *Agidigbe*- a big carve wooden instrument with a hole at the centre is used for inviting the people to come and watch their performance or notifying the people of impending danger or war. The *Agidigbe* gives member coded messages and directives on actions to take during war and dance performances. It gives instruction on who next is to come in to the performance arena to perform, the speed and rhythm at which the

masquerade moves. It is used to praise the warrior on the dance floor on how well he has performed on the battle field while reminding the other warriors around the strength of the warrior on the dance arena; using the *Agidigbe* to specifically announce the amount of head the warrior dancing has to his credit. Only a head carrier warrior can place his foot on it during performance. It serves a similar purpose with the horn but has an edge over it because its instruction can be heard in a longer range where horn cannot be heard.

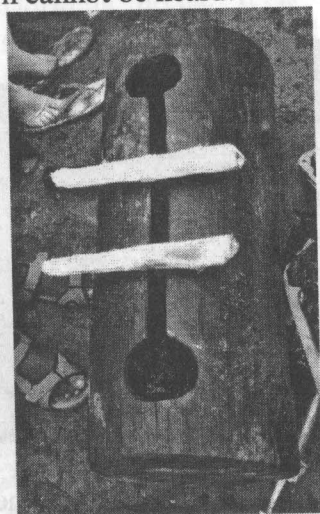


Fig.6 *Agidigbe*

(Photograph taken by the researcher)

Since Ichahoho is a warrior, it cannot just appear unannounced or at will. Its appearance must be herald by *ama*: the bell carried by the *Ankpile* the bell carrier. He goes round the community announcing, using the sound of the big bell notifying them the precise reasons for its appearance; when, where and why Ichahoho is coming out to perform.



Fig. 6 *Ama*

(Photograph taken by the researcher)

The *Ifebe* follows up with verbal announcement to further emphasize the reason for the outing and the performance. This is important because the mind of the people has to be put at rest so that there is no false alarm or fear as if there is an emerging danger. The Ichahoho is a deadly strike force and there must be a reason before it comes out.

D. Performance Arena

(i) Open space

Ogbo: is the area within the performance arena that is marked with the piercing the *Okpa* on the ground; establishing it as their territory for performance. This is to create a zone for themselves to checkmate sudden entrance by spectators or any enemy. It gives them a vantage position to enable them see whoever is approaching the group. This is part of the strategy in sustaining their ever ready nature for battle.

It is of note that all Ichahoho entertainment performances takes place in *Ogbo* a marked spiritual stage within a stage in an established arena which is not only for defense but also serves as *Suru* (2014, p.

178) captures as “the availability of space allows for playing aesthetics. The space is vital because it creates avenue for dexterity of the players to be expressed, the art of singing, dancing and dramatization to have aesthetics value”. This also allow interesting audience members to participate from a reasonable distance and a clear view for all to see any where around the arena as Ododo (2015, p.129) confirms that:

Even those that perch on trees and stand on top of the surrounding storey houses to watch, seize auspicious moments to be part of the choric effects and dance too. Sometimes a number of people leave these positions to join the main performance arena. Everyone has something to do at any given point depending on their location at the performance arena. Those at the centre of action, i.e. on the booth stage and the immediate ring of people formed round it are ever active. Apart from the Anchor Men that remain active throughout, the pool is constantly refurbished with fresh artistic vigour as those who have had enough of participation recede for others to have their shares. The dynamics of the performance is so intense that all the participant-audience often find themselves in a different location other than the ones through which they joined the performance.

As such, this gives enough space for all not only to see, but, also participate if they desire.

(ii) Close space

Iga: This is usually an enclosed place where the costumes and instruments used for the masquerade are kept. It is the official house of the masquerade where practices or rehearsals take place. It is also the venue where initiation takes place in some cases. It is respected as a property and a secluded area for the masquerade and its members only at all times whether there is an occasion or not. On other hand

where the *Iga* is too far for the masquerade to take off from, a make shift *Iga* is usually constructed where the actor is costumed into the masquerade. It is of a close distance to the venue and usually made of palm fronds or leaves or both that could form an enclosure. A large number of the group assembles there so that when the actor is eventually costumed there will be no clear identification of who is actually adorning the masquerade costume.

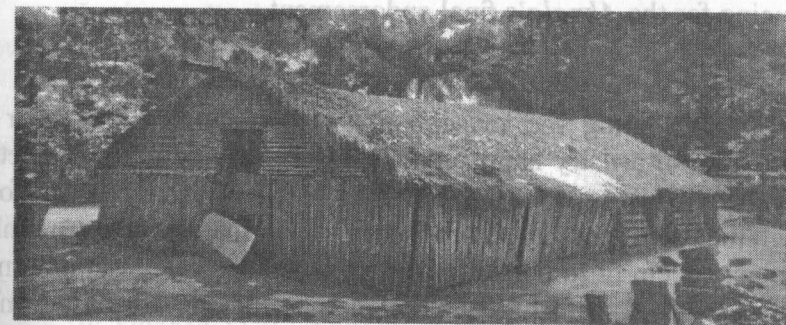


Fig. 7 A permanent *Iga*
(Photograph taken by the researcher)

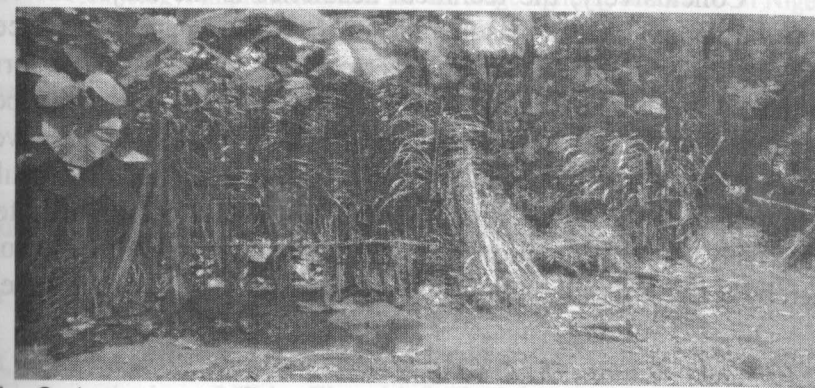


Fig. 8 A temporary *Iga*.
(Photograph taken by the researcher)

The Ichahoho organization is headed by the *Akpala* – who is the chief and must be a tested warrior and a head carrier. He is the spiritual head and has the final say. He gives directives on what happens in the organization both social entertainment and on the battle field.

He is assisted by the *Oji* – who serves as the judge, presiding over the affairs of the organization. He presides over the final sentencing for the *Akpala*'s final endorsement.

Conclusion

In presenting the masquerades as an iconic image for the society, a lot of artistry is put in place to give it a befitting aesthetical appearance. This is done in the most artistic and creative forms through the use of costumes, props and so on that the artist, members and society deem fit to personify the masquerade. These paraphernalia that are used to transform, translate the masquerade are based on the ingenuity of indigenous artistry in conjunction with legislated authorities and elders of the community.

Conclusively, the technical aesthetics is the major factor that give the appeal to the masquerade on how it is perceived, accepted and related to by its members and non members. This form of aesthetics give the physical and deeper interpretation to the beauty associated with the masquerade which has contributed to gave the Idoma people an identity while helping to strengthen their cultural base within and around their neighbours. This has contributed to effectively identify functions and accomplish the need of the society thereby earning respect, admiration and recognition by the people.

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