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Patachitra of Orissa: A Case Study of Raghurajpur Village

Nibedita Das

Research Scholar, Department of Visual Arts, Assam University Silchar

Abstract

Patachitra paintings are the pictogram of the most popular living traditions in the art world of Orissa. The paintings are traditionally practiced by local artisans in the village of Raghurajpur. Patachitra paintings of Orissa exhibit the strong line and brilliant colour that are the two principal aspects of Orissa folk painting. The paper looks at the history of evolution of the patachitra styles, technique and use of raw materials. Article focuses on the present scenario of patachitra paintings of Raghurajpur and how the village painters express their skill through colours and lines. The paper draws upon the analysis of the treatment of lines applied in the paintings.

I

Eastern India has a long tradition in folk arts, including Madhubani miniature painting, patachitra painting, manuscript painting, palm leaf painting, pottery and other crafts in various medium. Orissa is also renowned for its own indigenous art tradition. Traditional Paintings of Orissa have been classified into four main groups; they are (I) Mural Painting (II) Patachitra Painting (III) Palm Leaf Painting and (IV) Paper Painting. The village Raghurajpur of Orissa is very famous for patachitra painting. The Pata Painting has deep- rooted connection with the cult of Sri Jagannath and the temple practices (Baral and William: 2007). About the origin of pata painting Sangeeta Mishra mentioned, “Pata Painting or Patachitra usually means painting on cloth. The origin of Pata Painting seems to be very old. Buddhist monks in the ancient times were known to carry long scrolls of cloth paintings on the life and teachings of

the Buddha to preach his gospel. Many evidences show that painting on cloth flourished in Orissa in 15th and 16th century and later”. Patachitra artist of Raghurajpur, Sisir Kanta mentions that “**Pata chitra** is a form of painting that is done on clothes. The art form can be traced to as early as the 12th century A.D and has evolved around the Jagannath cult in Orissa. Even to this date certain ritual in the temple of **Lord Jagannath** is incomplete without the Patachitra. The Debasnana Purnima is generally associated with the ritualistic bathing ceremony of the Lord Jagannath. After this the deities become sick for fifteen days and the devotees don't have darshan of the Lord in his seat, the Ratnavediriod is known as Anasar. During this period, three Pata paintings of the Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are worshipped”. Therefore, it can be assumed that the ritual of Orissan Patachitra generated due to the RathaYatra festival.

Artist Sisir Kanta Satapati, Sangita Devi, Narayan Das all has expressed same opinion about the history of Orissa patachitra. Patachitra and palm leaf paintings are practiced till date in the villages of Raghurajpur, Sonpur, Banki, Khandapada, Dhenkanal, Jaypur, Khalli, Kote and

Bhubaneshwar etc. Some artisans of Raghurajpur who are still working, are Sisir Kanta Satapati, Rabindra nath Sahoo, Narayan Das, Sushanta Sharangi, Sudhir Maharana, Dr. Jagannath Mahapatra and so on. Among them some artists are national awardees and state awardees.



(Figure.1) Orissa patachitra depicting Radha and Krishna,

II

Raghurajpur is a small village in Puri district renowned for patachitra, a traditional form of painting, a place where arts and crafts have reached its stage of brightness. There are one hundred three households having three hundred eleven artisans in the village. The village is around 1.5 km from Chandanpur and 14 km away from Hindu pilgrimage town of Puri, on the southern banks of river Bhargabi (Bhargavi). This is also the only village in India, where each family is engaged in one craft or the other such as *patta* paintings, palm leaf engravings, stone carvings, papier mache toys and masks, wood carvings, wooden toys, cow dung toys and tusser paintings.

A close survey of the village makes one realize that thematically patachitra paintings are not only confined to the subject of Lord



(Figure.2) Orissa patachitra depicting Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra.

Jagannatha, but also inspired from other subjects; such as nature and the Dasavtara, series of Sri Krishna leela, stories from the Bhagabata, Ramayana and Mahabharata are depicted. The individual paintings of Gods and Goddesses are also painted. The Patachitra style is juxtapose of folk and classical elements but is more inclined towards the folk forms. Artist Narayan Das states that, the costume in the paintings reflects the [Mughal](#) and Rajasthani influences, and the design and decorative motifs are influenced by the paintings of Rajasthani miniature. Its uniqueness lies in its overall finesse and rhythmic juxtaposition of elements.

The chitrakaras of patachitra almost follow the same process of preparing the canvas for painting. It is clear that this process is traditionally going on from one generation

to the other, only some kinds of raw materials are replaced to readymade product for lack of storage in nature. Gokul Behari Patanaik who is 76 years old, is one of the oldest renowned artisans of patachitra from Bhubaneswar. He went to Lucknow to learn commercial art and started palm leaf engraving around 1961 and he is practicing scroll painting since in 1963. He received national award in 1968. He had trained a lot of students for the last many years. About process of making canvas he expresses his view, *“the cotton cloth is first dipped in a solution of tamarind (imli) seeds and water for 4-5 days. After that a paste of chock powder and gum is applied on it and khaddar stone is rubbed on the cloth. This is done to smooth the cloth. The cloth is then taken out and sun dried. The layer cotton is then sun dried. When cloth is smooth the chikana stone is rubbed on it to give it a shining. The solution and kaitha (wood apple) gum is on the cloth. Another layer of processed cotton is placed and gum is applied on it. This is done to stick the two layers. The painting is done on the prepared canvas with the help of earthen and vibrant colours.”* The artisans are used very fine brushes for their painting. Brushes of fine quality are prepared out of mouse’s hair fixed on wooden handle.

The *chitrakaras* designed various decorative motifs like trees, animals, birds, flora and fauna in their paintings. The human figure is considered the best among all other forms a painter draws and paints. It has engaged the best attention of both the painters and sculptors in all times. The Orissan painters have also shown remarkable proficiency in drawing and painting the human figures. (Pathy: 2001). The style is characterized by formal and linear economy, expressive gestures of figures, stylized forms and quality brushwork of decorative motifs. A particular style of portrait paintings; in which noses are extended, chins projecting

out somewhat from the face, and the eyes are elongated and the faces are always shown in a profile manner.

So far as colour sceme is concerned the pata painter mostly used earth, tone and mineral colours by tradition although now a days poster colour are also used. In patachitra mainly five colours are used. They are Vermilion (Hingula) yellow (Harital) White (Shankha) Black (Kala) and Indian red (Geru). Historically artisans used red as a background colour but at present, besides red, they use pink, white, blue, and black colour. The very common colours used by the chitrakaras are red, blue, yellow, green, black, white, and pink. They also make paintings only on black and white combination. It is very noticeable that, there are some common characteristics of patachitras are based on the mythological texts and iconography, those are; they used blue for Krishna's body (figure.1), white for Balarama's body, yellow for Radha's body (figure.1) as well as for the bodies of other *gopis* (cowherd girls), and the use of green for Rama's body ([Cesarone](#) and [Gallery: 2001](#)).

Patachitras are usually painted in a regular series of steps. First a border is drawn around the pata. Then the outline of the figure is drawn in white pigment. Next the background between the border and the part of the figures is painted in solid colours using different colours for different areas all done in bold rather than fine brush work. Then increasingly fine decorations are added to the picture. Applications of lines in the paintings are very smooth and finest in character creating many beautiful decorative designs. Eyebrows, nose, lips, eyes, jewelry, dresses all are prominent painted by very strong lines. Outline of the figure indicates its rhythmic gesture (figure 3). Trees are very stylizing in character; at first artisans draw it by charcoal or chalk, then they

applied colours and finally they ornate it by

decorative design (figure.4).



Figure.3 linear treatment of figure of patachitra
The border of paintings is very much important like that of the central theme. Use of double lines is found on the borders of paintings. It is clear that lines and designs are not only equal in sizes, smooth and minutely detailed and intricate lines are shown in detailed (figure.6). The inner border of the painting often uses a sort of leaf-and-scroll motif and is narrower in width than the outer border, which often uses a floral motif (figure.7). The postures



(Figure.4) Detail study of tree of Orissa patachitra painting are largely well defined and repetition as a style creates an interesting aesthetic appeal. One of the important aspects of patachitra is that it doesn't incorporate any "Depth" or "Perspective Visualization". Patachitra is a two dimensional art form but application of strong and rhythmic lines and use of bright colour in the painting give an extraordinary dimensional appeal.



(Figure.5) Border design with black lines



(Figure.6) Border design with colourful lines



(Figure.7) Treatment of natural motifs with colorful lines

III

After visiting the Raghurajpur village and observing their paintings we can sum up that the Patachitras are symbolic, simplicity, and technical in character. The paintings are a set of representation which enlighten us about the social structure as well as cultural identity of Orissa. The folk culture of Orissa as especially patachitra painting has rich heritage. It has achieved eminence in the international art market. To conclude one must consider that in the absence of patachitra painting there is no identity of culture in Orissa and the Rathayatra festival of lord Jagannatha temple. If any art lover likes Indian art and crafts then he have to visit Raghurajpur. The big attraction of Raghurajpur is that the whole village

community is involved in making different kind of art and crafts. Traditionally they use different raw material for making their art works but according to time and people medium has changed. Now most of the artists use poster colours and fabric because these products are easily available on the market and as well as in order to time saving. But they maintain the traditional characteristics and style and themes of paintings although the medium has changed. The media of pictorial expression of painting are basically based on colour and linear design. Patachitra paintings give aesthetical feelings and remind us about the native life through their colourful line drawings.

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We had interviews with some artisans of Raghurajpur village (Puri) and Bhubaneswar between 05/07/2012 to 10/07/2012). They are:

- I. Sisir Kanta Satapati (Raghurajpur)
- II. Narayan Das, (Raghurajpur)
- III. Sushanta Sharangi, (Raghurajpur)
- IV. Dr. Jagannath Mahapatra (Raghurajpur)
- V. Gokul Bihari Patanayik (Bhubaneswar)
- VI. Shangita Devi (Bhubaneswar)