

Pattachitra - An Indigenous Technique

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Pattachitra simply means a painting on pata (Pati) on Patta is a very primitive practice in India. Pata has been derived from the Sanskrit word 'Patta' 'Gulasti' in the Amarakosa composed in the fourth century A.D., depict patta as fabric and cloth. Use of patta or cloth as a ground and carrier for painting is mentioned in old texts such as - Acharyachintamani, Mahavamsa. Aryamanjushree, a Buddhist monk, who came to Odisha (Orissa) in the kingdom of Dharmarakshita for the propagation of Buddhism, states that a picture should be painted on new, white cloth, having no fringes, clean and devoid of any string foreign writers like - Monier Williams, Thumb and Pikorney, interpretes patta as woven cloth, veil - a piece of fabric, screen etc.

Paintings done on paper are also called patta painting in Bengal. The stone plaques of the jainas are called Ayagapatta. The painting on leather done in south India is called Charmapatta. In U.P., Maharashtra a kind of rolled illuminated

horoscope known by the name of Rashi Patta. A square stone slab with the image of Vishnu and his ten incarnations is called Vaisnavapatta and the terracotta slabs of Paharpur in Bengal were termed Mrinmaya patta by C.C. Dasgupta. All these different definitions of patta can only be taken as references, which can give a general idea of the various names of pata.



In the context of Orissan pata, the word pata or patta has special significance since it refers to cloth in early texts. In Orissa Pattachitra is done on pati, a special type of hand made canvas prepared by passing together layers of cloth. Paintings are also done on wooden plaques, either covered with a layer of cloth or directly on the wooden surface. Since the wooden

plaque is known as pata in Oriya, there should not be any confusion between pata painting and patta painting. Moreover, paintings on pata is also known as pata painting in general.

Like the Kalighat painting which are produced around the temple of Kali in Calcutta

for pilgrims and visitors or like the pichwai painting, which evolved around the temple of Srinath in the state of Rajasthan, the Jagannath Yamipatis and the Vaisnavapatas at large have centred on the Jagannath temple. We can say pata painting of Orissa has origin from the Cult of Jagannath, which is a mystery in itself. Through a slow evolutionary process Pattachitra today attained its reputation and identity as an primitive and traditional painting. So far patta painting of Orissa have adhered to only religious sentiments and mostly depict topics related to Krishnalila and Jagannath.

Considered from their major sources of sustenance, patronage and use, Patta painting have three broader prospective. The most important is the temple art on the art of Jagannath temple. Less significant is the court art and the third of the more generalised nature is the art of the society, mostly opposed to temple art, without any specific patronage but with specific use.

Technique :

As an old practice, the procedure of preparation painting follows an indigenous method, including the tool techniques. To prepare a patti on handmade canvas, the artists use, old and used cotton cloth and tamarind seed gum. The first layer of cloth is spread on the cemented floor or on a mat (Hensa), over which gum is applied on the manner of smearing cowdung, after which the second layer of cloth is spread over it and pasted together. The bubbles and patches of gum in between the layer should remove. If necessary small pieces of cloth are pasted to avoid the torn portion of the used cotton cloth. Now it is left in sun to dry. When it is dried, it is taken off the floor, rolled and preserved for painting.

Preparation of gum (tamarind seed gum) follows certain stages - Seeds are crushed on a flat stone bed (sila), then soaked in water in an earthen pot for half a day. Then they are ground and made into thick paste, which is cooked with required water to obtain the gum.

Preparation technique of patta follows by Khadilagi after the pati is dried. The coating is obtained by mixing tamarind gum with chalk in proportion of 50 - 50. But sometime in rainy season due to dampness, the proportion of gum is increased to 5% to avoid *nasama*. This coating is applied by the hand and left to dry. When Khadi becomes a bit dry, it is rubbed with agate stone called 'barada'. Two types of barada is used - Khadada barada (rough) chikana barada (fine). The first phase of rubbing is done with *khadada barada* and the subsequent smoothing is done with *chikana barada*. Rubbing is done systematically by horizontal and vertical movements. Finally a shape is given to the patti by trimming and cutting the *patti* to its required sizes with the help of scissors.

After being trimmed and sized, the patti is ready now to serve the purpose of painting. As the painting procedure is uniform, it differs from places, we are going to discuss the popular method followed by the *chitrakaras* of Puri area. It starts with the demarcation of the border leaving a narrow space around from the last edge of the pati, with the help of scale and ruler. After this sketching is done without going into details like, eye, nose, lips, fingers etc. In sketching the several stances in the pose of figures came out prominently, generally the head is drawn first, a slightly oval form with the suggestion of the chin, there after the torso and legs are added. Generally the master craftsman on the head of the family draws it. Sketching is followed by colouring, and here comes the background first. Hingula (red) is

applied to the background. Although other colours like brick-red on red-ochre blue etc are applied, the red background in pattachitra of Orissa is the most common. Colours are applied to the figures in the next step. Consequently one colour follows the other in sequential order. The body colours of different deities are painted as per their 'Dhyanamanttra'. Mostly yellow colour is applied to the garments including other colours. ornamentation is done after this. It includes colouring the ornaments, head-dresses, border of soris, weapons and attributes. Safeda or white is painted to accentuate the intricate beauty of the ornaments and bring out the details of carving. Rangalekha or redliness is done over ornaments to stabilise the effects produced by the white ornamentation. Thick black line are given to those portions like hair, borders of the garment etc. fine black line or finishing is done thereafter. This is done by the master craftsman. The merit of the artist is judged from these lines. The master craftsman with one sweep of brush without shaking his hand, draws the line with firmness and boldness. The treatment of the background is done with trees and foliage over red background with yellow and white colour. White foliage is called *saru-sankhapata*. Pata is used for the foliage, when the foliage is painted in yellow, it is termed *haladi pata*. The floral motifs like - *pancha anguli* and *sata anguli*, dots called *topi* and a cluster of four or five dots known as 'Punji' or 'machhi' are also done in this stage. The border are decorated with floral motifs, motifs of animal and birds and other geometrical designs. Before lacquering, if some defects are noticed in the course of the painting, touching up is done, which is called Bageiba, finally lacquering is done to give a glow to the painting and to protect the painting from water and moisture. Lacquer is applied to the painting with a wooden stick. This is done in the manner of beating on the surface of the painting.

Then a bundle of cloth called '*kanamunda*' or '*dasi*' is rubbed over the surface to make the melting lac even and smooth.

The tools used in the process of painting like brush (*tuli*), container, *matka*, *gaja* etc. are also hand made and have some technique with them.

Tuli or brushes are used to apply paint over the pati. Brushes of various sizes are made by tufts of hair tied together to the ends of bamboo twins with the help of thread or Kanadhadi. Over the knot liquid lac is applied to bind it firmly. Brushes of fine quality are prepared out of rat and squirrel hair and brushes of coarse quality are made out of buffalo-hair. The workability and durability of the traditional brushes are very good.

Bamboo tube container (Baunsanali) is used to keep the brushes while painting. Coconut shell (Sadhei) are generally used as container for colour. Shell with eyes are not put to use 'Sanas' - earthenware are also used, but these are more easily breakable and so Sadheis are popular. 'Matka' is a ring like thing prepared out of the edges of *saris* and used as the base of the sadheis. This helps the container to sit solidly on the ground 'Gaja' - measuring scale, used to draw lines and to measure distance. This is prepared by incising the lines on a long wooden batten. Thread is also used to measure long distances. Kainchi - scissors is used to cut the patis into required sizes.

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