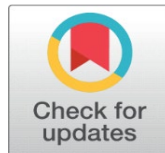
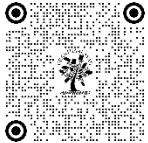


A STUDY ON TRADITIONAL TO COMMERCIAL ASPECTS OF THE BENGAL PATA-PAINTING REVOLUTION

Debabrata Das¹✉, Dr. Gunja Soni²✉

¹Assistant Professor (Department of Visual Arts) FDA, Poornima University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

²Professor (Department of Fashion & Textile) FDA, Poornima University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India



Corresponding Author

Mr. Debabrata Das,
debabrata.das@poornima.edu.in

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.iICETDA24.2024.2034](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.iICETDA24.2024.2034)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

Pata-Painting is a distinct visual representation of West Bengal and Orissa associated with various songs and related Paintings. These artworks which are always aesthetically and visually rich, narrate the social, cultural, religious, and political incidents performed by the patuas (Pata-Painters). This study investigates how the tradition has been recognized as storytelling and wandering folk art. An analytical observation of the Pata-paintings, an extensive literature review, and interviews with the Patuas played a distinctive role in exploring the objectives of the study. From the Depictions of Hindu gods and Goddesses, mythological stories, and scenes from common people's daily life, this study stated its adaptation and evolution over the last two decades. Especially the use of materials and techniques adopted by the new generation of artists. Over the last few centuries, artists have explored the global art market by participating in folk festivals and handicraft fairs inside and outside of the states. By focusing on these unique art practices of West Bengal, this study tries to reflect the enduring historical heritage and cultural significance to enhance and preserve this art form.

This study also aims to indicate the current phenomenon of Pata-painting and how it is serving the demands of intellectual urban members of the metro cities.

Keywords: Pata-Painting, Performing, Patuas, Storytelling, Wandering Folk Art, Mythological Stories, Global Art Market, Demands of Intellectual Urban Members

1. INTRODUCTION BACKGROUND

From the very beginning stages of human civilization in the pre-historic era, we were introduced to cave paintings, which were one of the oldest forms of storytelling and artistic presentation in the world. Pata-Painting or Pata-Chitra is one of the oldest fascinating art forms in the eastern belt of India. West Bengal and Orissa are the two distinct native places for this style of painting. This study focuses mainly on West Bengal, where these vernacular art forms are Bengal Patta Chitra or Bengal Pata- Painting.



The “Pata-Chitra” is a combination of the word “Pata”, which came from the Sanskrit word “Patta”-meaning “Piece of cloth” and ‘Chitra’- meaning Paintings.(Maura Zanatta & Anjali Gera Roy-2021).The word “Patta” was transformed later into the Bengali Language ‘Pat’ or ‘Pata’, which is why the painters are known as ‘Patua’.

Image 1: One Woman Painter of Naya Village is showing her Scroll painting to some foreign viewer.

Sources: https://fli.thgim.com/public/incoming/kzqd41/article66687533.ece/alternates/FREE_1200/Patua-02.jpg

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- **To find out the Historical Evolution of West Bengal Pata-Painting:**
 - Investigate the emergence and development of the West Bengal Pata-painting from its traditional foundation to the contemporary scenario and art practices.
 - Try to gather the documents on the Socio-cultural significances of Pata-paintings and the Painters.
- **To Examine the Journey of Transformation from Traditional to Commercial outcomes of the Pata-painting.**

3. TRADITIONAL STYLES OF PATA PAINTING

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is noticed that the Bengal Pata Painting has its roots in religion, which has evolved, developed, and flourished under various kinds of religious, mythological, regional, and sociological contents. These paintings mainly flourished in a folk

form. It is characterized by a group of village artisans. These artisans have achieved their skills from their ancestors and remain in their community, which is known as the “Chitrakar caste”. (Dr. Ankita Singh Rao, 2019). These painters live in remote

The
'Patuas'.The
village in the
Bengal Pata-
particularly



villages of
Midnapore
largest
Pingla area
painting
from this



district Midnapore, Bankura, Hoogli, etc. district can be called the home of the number of Patuas are located in the Naya of the west Midnapore district. The became known and famous abroad, Pingla’.

Image-2: Yasoda & Little Krishna

Source:<https://framemark.vam.ac.uk/collections/2013GK6550/full!/600,/0/default.jpg>

Image- 3:Kalighat Painting

Source:
<https://garlandmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SCROLL->

On the other hand, Kalighat, the southern part of Kolkata was the most important center of Pata Painting during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The content of the Kalighat school of Painting was directly related to the Hindu God and Goddesses. The deities like Kali, Durga, Shiva, Ganesha, and Chinna-Masta have been depicted with full figures with their particular character along with their Vahana (Carrier).

Over the past few decades, the narrative and artistic practices have remained unchanged. It has been presented traditionally by two joint elements- showing their paintings and singing. The particular song or 'Pater Gaan' was the central element of Pata's painting. The Painting was presented to explain the song visually and entertain their audiences. Generally, the songs are divided into three distinct parts- First, the main story behind the painting (Kahini), Second the glorious moment (Mahatya), and at the end of the presentation the artist introduces himself with their name and the residence. (Chakraborty, 2017).

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS OF THE ART FORMS

STORYTELLING PERFORMANCES BY WANDERING ARTISTS

Pata-painters of Bengal have been presenting their performances over time with great collaboration of their visual and verbal activities. They used to travel to other villages for a couple of weeks to narrate the scroll paintings. Visits those villages or localities where they have not been for a long time and which they consider beneficial for their work. It was a very tough challenge to attract the concentration of the men women and children of the villages. The artisan shows about four to five scroll paintings at each performance.



Image- 4: A Painter performing and showing a scroll based on stories of Radha-Krishna

Source: <https://garlandmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SCROLL-PAINTING.jpg>

Popular narrative stories of well-known mythological tales and folk narratives of Bengali Hindus. The tales of Maa Manasha and Behula-Lakhindar, the Incarnation of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Sringar Rasa of Radha and Krishna, and episodes of Mahabharata and Ramayana were the memorable subject matter. Apart from these, various kinds of political and social incidents have also become interesting topics for their narratives. Sometimes natural hazards and their effects or impacts on the general person are also included as their subjects.



Image- 5: An Woman singing and presenting a scroll on Ramayana Stories.

Source: <https://encyclocraftsapr.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Pata-Chitra-narration-Optimized-1.jpg>

A storytelling performance takes about half an hour altogether. After completing it they asked for gifts (dan), or alms (bhiksha). They are given usually Paddy, coins, or used old clothes, and also receive meals rarely from some kind-hearted villagers.

Before the 1970s the Pata-painters performed in the village areas of West Bengal and Orissa. They mostly visit lower and middle-class villager houses. Farmer, daily labors were taken as their first preference. Urban and upper-middle-class people are not interested in their performances. For some Pata painters performing was their seasonal occupation; while it seems suitable and fruitful to move to another locality after harvest.

After the 1970s the Painters of the Midnapore district started to sell their paintings in Calcutta. Where the new urban, so-called modern resident knew how to show their status and value Bengali folk culture. They became started the new patrons and clients of the Patuas. (Beatrix Hauser, 2002)

5. METHOD & MATERIALS OF PATA-PAINTING

The Pata-painters of West Bengal seemed to have vast knowledge of preserving the original appeal of their artworks. What gives Pata-painting a unique platform over other art forms? The process of the Pata-painting begins with the ground or surface preparation. Cloths or canvas were the major elements for Pata-painting surface. The scrolls come in varied sizes, they measure about 1-2 feet in width and 3-25 feet in length. In the olden times, the painters used to paint on Tasar Silk cloths. Gradually continued cotton cloths. Indigenously prepared almost 100% natural colors are mostly preferable. At first, a piece of cloth is washed properly and spread out over the surface on a flat area. The Emli (Tamarind) seeds powder and some hot water mixed with it and prepared the gum. This gum is applied over the cloth. Now another piece of the same size cloth is put on the first cloth before the gum dries up. Then another fresh coating of gum is pasted on the second cloth. After that, the surface is allowed to dry in the sun. After drying it will be prepared for paint. Sometimes the painters used chalk powder like white stone dust to prepare the surface more smoothly. Papers were also used on a large scale later. Sometimes gum of Bel fruits is also used to prepare the ground for Pata-painting. For smoothening the dried cloth khaddar stone is rubbed on it several times.



Image- 6: Village Women of Pingla are preparing colors from vegetables and Natural resources.

Source: <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/MZ9eCviZnUY/maxresdefault.jpg>

Natural glues like Emli and Bel fruit gum act as pesticides and make the paintings last for a long time. Sometimes a small quantity of Blue vitriol is also mixed with the glue to make it more pesticides. The Painters collected their colors from many natural resources, white is prepared from Conch-shell powder. Turmeric or Haritala (a kind of stone) for yellow color. Lotkan fruits have been used for saffron color. The Aparajita Flower is used for blue shading. Hingula is Black from burning lamps and coconut shells and green colors from various types of leaves.



Image- 7: Pata-Painters' using the Natural & Vegetable colors for their Paintings.

Source: https://live.staticflickr.com/7205/6817756998_b830886a7a_c.jpg

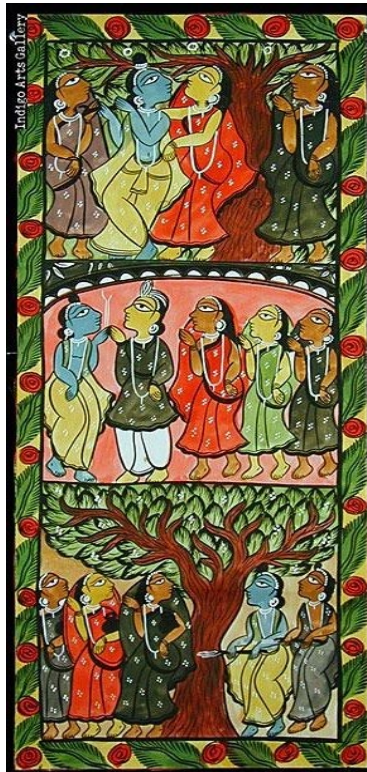
Contrast and strong colors are applied by using three types of brushes, which are fine, medium, and broad sizes. These brushes are prepared out of the hair of some domestic animals, like hairs of Buffalo, calf, and squirrel respectively.

6. CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCES OF PATA-PAINTING

India is a fertile soil of several traditional art forms. Bengal Pata-Painting is such traditional scroll painting, that is closely intertwined with the cultural and religious heritage of West Bengal. The Paintings often narrate religious subject matters, epics, folklore, and mythological stories- specifically focusing on the Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Rama, Krishna, Kali Durga, and others. (Das, A, 2023).

The contents of Pata-Painting are mainly religious, depicting scenes from Hindu mythology and Epics like The Ramayana and The Mahabharata, the life of God Krishna, and the worship of the regional deities. These paintings are also used as audio-visual storytelling sacred activities during their religious programs. It also applied to ritualistic prayers.

Image- 8: A scroll Painting based on Mythological stories of Lord Krishna & Radha.



Source: https://live.staticflickr.com/784/41477657831_0472035758_b.jpg

Apart from these religious subjects it has been also utilized to portray ongoing social issues and memorable historical incidents and works as a medium of social commentary. So this unique form of art is a sign of the majestic cultural heritage of West Bengal. It has been continuing through generation by generation where artists individually add their distinct styles and interpretation. In such a way, it serves as an indicator of cultural identity for the communities.

7. CHALLENGES FACED BY THE ARTISANS

The Pata- painters of West Bengal are facing several challenges, which threaten the sustainability of the glorious art form. The social and economic challenges reflect the major issues that affect many traditional art practitioners in India. In the case of Pata-Painting, the younger generation migrates from the rural areas to the urban areas in search of more economic opportunities.



Image- 9: An Woman is painting Pata-Painting Forms on T-Shirt

Source: <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/MZ9eCviZnUY/maxresdefault.jpg>

The Painters faced increasing competition from the cheaper and mass-produced art as their traditional patronage has declined. In these circumstances, many Patuas started to experiment with contemporary themes, motifs, and products that would appeal to their new customers to survive economically. As a result, they started to create more compact, smaller, and portable art pieces. On the other hand, they incorporate their designs and ideas into various daily life products like jewelry, textiles, and items of interior decoration. (S.K. Sarkar, 2017)



Image- 10: Painters decorating Umbrellas, Ladies Kurti, T-Shirts etc. by Pata-Painting Forms.

Source: https://imgmedia.lbb.in/media/2018/08/5b84d87de5fe93409cfa0de0_1535432829508.jpg

8. DIVERSION FROM THE TRADITION

Whenever we try to recall our past timeline, then we have to look at many cultural heritage of our society. Pata- painting or Pata Chitra is such traditional art practice that evolved and developed in certain unknown remote areas of Bengal and Orissa. It had an indigenous value with traditional appeal but this distinct art form was gradually converted by its migrated creators. The central areas of each Painting are portrayed by the main characters, which tells a unique story. Another thing we can spot out the border of every painting which was decorated with various types of flower motifs or floral designs, which are mainly embodied into the painting to increase the aesthetic beauty.

After the 1970s the socio-spatial and political environment of West Bengal had started to change gradually. Family planning, literacy campaigns; environmental awareness, and planting of trees to rescue forests like events organized by several social organizations. Some of them offered suitable jobs to several Pata-painters. Among the interested Painters welcomed their golden opportunities. Due to the development of movie presentations and television programs, almost all rural people have lost their interest in watching scroll painting presentations. It was a challenge to the Pata-painter that how they attracted concentration towards painting; by composing new rhymes and painting about all kinds of contemporary topics. (Beatrix Hauser, 2002).

The major effect of globalization also affected the Painters suddenly, their repertoire has continued to provoke to include contemporary global affairs. It was started mainly during colonialism, besides religious and epic contents, there are also given importance to their ritual life, tribal life, wild animals, and many interesting folk tales like a marriage of birds and fishes. Secular themes are also reflected through their presentation from Bengali society. Thus socio-political themes also have emerged systematically. From the late 1980s – 1990s Pata-painters of Bengal received more inspiration from contemporary incidents- like terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and many important political personalities and events. Besides these reasons, some external influences like the arrival of tourism, introduced various new forms of entertainment, such as television programs, radio programs, Bollywood, Hollywood, and Tollywood films played a very crucial role in the diversion of the painter's traditional streams. Many Pata painters were forced to give up their traditional occupations and migrated to urban areas to survive. But at the end of the 20th century, few painters still pursued their works.

Image- 11: One Woman is Painting various form like Fish, Floral Motif on different types of Ceramics Flower vase.



Source: . <https://thumbs.dreamstime.com/b/female-artisan-woman-painting-clay-pot-local-art-fair-bengal-india-41334253.jpg>

9. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. Table- Chronological journey of the Pata-Painting forms and its surfaces:

S. No	Styles of Art Forms	Subject Matter	Surface and Medium	Time	Origin	Area of the Claims/ Consumers
1.	Distinctive figurative and floral forms	Hindu Mythological stories, Deities	The clay walls of the rural hut and Natural Colors	19 th Century	Women of Rural areas of Midnapore district.	Villagers

2.	Distinctive Human, Animal & Fish forms	Hindu Mythological stories, Deities	Clay walls and Wooden Doors and Natural Colors	Mid- Let 19 th Century	Women of Rural areas of Midnapore district.	Native Villagers
3.	Scroll Pata-painting Form	Hindu Epics like Ramayana & Mahabharata, Lord Krishna	Cotton Cloth surface and Natural Colors	1 st half of 20 th Century	Men and Women Naya Gram, Pingla Area mainly	Native Villages and Native Districts
4.	Scroll, Calendar, and Album Form	Hindu Mythology, Local Deities, Local Myth,	Cotton Cloth, Natural Mats (Madhur), Handmade Paper etc.	Pre and Post-Independence era	Men & Women of Naya Gram, Pingla Area mainly	Native Villages and Native Districts
5.	Scroll, Rectangular shape, Album, etc	Mythological Stories, Folk stories, Regional Stories, Natural Hazards like Flood, Cyclones etc.	Cotton Cloth. Handmade Paper, Mill made Paper, Bengali Sitalpati (Cool Mat)	Post-Independence era	Men & Women of Village areas of Midnapore including Pingla and Naya Gram	Native Districts of Midnapore and all over West Bengal
6.	Stylistic Pata-Painting Form, Handicraft Form, Folk Forms	Single Figures or Motifs, Designs, Fish/Animal, Contemporary Incidents or Subjects	Sari, Mat, Wall Hanging, Tapestry, Kurti, Panjabi, Hand Fan, Flower Vase etc. household materials	1 st quarter of 21 st Century	Men & Women of Village areas of Midnapore including Pingla and Naya Gram	Urban and Sub-urban areas of major cities of West Bengal, Out of the state and Abroad also.

9.2 CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

The present scenario of Pata-Painting in West Bengal is one of the resonant cultural heritage juxtaposed with the opportunities and challenges of contemporary times. Its need to valuable efforts towards its revolution and commercialization, united support, and newness is very essential to assure its development and sustainability.

Image- 12: Painters tried to portray their Painting based on the subjects of Covid-90.

Source: <https://www.indiaartndesign.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/The-evolving-art-of-patachitra-indiaartndesign.jpg>



After the 1980s and onwards Pata –painters introduced and participated so many global art fairs, where they sowed their works. Once traditional mythological themes were most popular but now some artists are experimenting with global contemporary subjects, and ongoing social issues, and are trying to portray personalized narratives to fulfill modern tastes. Now Paintings are available in local markets, handicraft fairs, and many international exhibitions. There are many growing demands for these new forms of Pata-paintings among consumers and collectors. So they started to demonstrate the social status of elite class society. Applied their traditional skills and knowledge to create many commercial household items like T-shirts, Kurtis, Umbrella decorations, Table cloths, Bags, hand fans, lamps, and jewelry items.



Image- 12: Painters tried to portray their Painting based on the subjects of Covid-90.

Source: <https://www.indiaartndesign.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/The-evolving-art-of-patachitra-indiaartndesign.jpg>

Parallel the Govt. of India and West Bengal have taken many fruitful steps to promote and preserve this unique art form and have also taken initiatives to provide financial support to the painters through exhibitions and workshops. Many painters have been recognized from national level and international level. Received valuable awards like the President's Award and Seal of Excellence award by UNESCO.

10. CONCLUSION

Pata-Chitra was the medium of communication and Interaction among the general people. It also played a role in social documentation and spreading unknown news through Patta-chitra like today's Electronic media. This performing art is probably like the first stages of an Animation movie. Traditional Pata-painters were used to perform as their profession and Contemporary Pata-painters also practicing and producing right now, there is a far difference between their objectives.

Modern Patuas are producing artworks to fulfill the demands and utility of society which is like crafts work right now. Modernization is a common and expected characteristic of every art practice, in this context; it is need to think about Pata-painting, and how it will be upgraded along with its exclusive heritage and tradition.

So the chronological evolution and diversification of the themes and ideas of the Bengal Pata paintings are carried forward by the amalgamation of cultural, technological, economic, educational, and some individual factors. This progressive interplay ensures that the unique art practices remain relevant, creative, vibrant, and continually developing to reflect the changing times.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None

REFERENCES

- Zanatta maura and others, 2021. Facing the Pandemic: A perspective on Patachitra Artists of West Bengal. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts10030061>
- Hauser Beatrix, 2002. From Oral Tradition to "Folk Art": Reevaluating Bengali Scroll Paintings. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/117879>
- Singh ankita, 2019, Kalighat and patachitra, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337210924>
- Sarkar S.K, 2017. Storytelling Art: A Reconsideration of Patuas Performance. <https://www.theachieversjournal.com/index.php/taj/article/view/202>
- Samantaray Prafulla kumar, 2005, Patta Chitra-Its Past and Present.
- Das, A. (2023). A Study of Scroll Painting in Indian Art With Special Reference of West Bengal Folk Art. *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, 4(2SE), 98–108. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v4.i2SE.2023.485>