

# Pattachitra

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## 1. Region / location



The village of **Raghurajpur** is where many chitrakars live in an area dedicated to them called the Chitrakar Sahe. This lies in Puri district, 52 kms. (approx.) from Bhubaneswar.

## 2. The origin of paintings

The origin of paintings is traced to a moving legend in the Chitralakshana, the earliest known treatise on painting. It is said that when the son of the King's highest priest died, Brahma asked the king to paint a lifelike likeness of a boy so that he could breathe life into him again and this became the first painting.

## 3. Introduction

Paintings in Orissa are a living tradition. Here, a special technique was developed and perfected in the cloth paintings known as *Patachitra*. (*Pata* is a Sanskrit word

meaning canvas, cloth or veil and *chitra* means picture.) *Patachitra* defines Orissa best with its aesthetic value of Odissi culture, tradition, the picturesque landscape and its unique theme that brings together the immensity of life and the diversity of the Divine to stand as One.

#### 4. Producer communities

In this region many castes exist like Maharana, Mahapatra, Sunar, Swain, Sahoo, Godia, Pandit, Naik, and Pradhan. Castes which master in Patachitra and Palm leaf paintings are Maharana, Mahapatras, Sahoo, and Swain. There are 50-60 families practicing Patachitra paintings and around 30-40 families doing Palm leaf painting. Other castes indulge in making crafts like cow-dung toys, wooden toys, stone carving, papier mache, coconut shell painting. The main occupation of the people here are the crafts they indulge in, apart from these, they practice farming also.

#### 5. Craft tradition

The Patachitra are generally located as the earliest indigenous paintings in the Indian state of Orissa. The tradition of Patachitra is closely linked with the worship of Lord Jagannath and claims a distinct place of its own because of its exquisite workmanship. The origin of the paintings is traced to be the 8th century A.D., from the fragmented evidences of cave paintings in Khandagari, Udaigiri and Sitabhinji.

#### 6. Raw material

The process of painting Patachitra begins with the preparation of canvas (*pata*). Traditionally, cotton canvas was used; now, both cotton and silk canvas are used for paintings. They use old used sarees or cotton cloth for making canvas, as it is much softer and free from starch unlike the new cotton from the mill.

Processing of cotton canvas is a tedious task which starts from dipping of cotton in a solution of crushed imli seeds and water for 4-5 days. The cloth is then taken out and sun dried.





[Photographs: Showing processing of cotton canvas]

Thereafter, the cotton is placed on the *imli* (tamarind) solution and *kaitha* (wood apple) gum is applied over the layer of cloth. Another layer of processed cotton is placed over the previous layer and gum paste is applied on it, this is done to stick two layers. The layered cotton is then sun dried.

After cotton is dry, a paste of chalk powder, imli and gum is applied on both side of the layered cloth and it is sun dried. After drying, *khaddar* stone is rubbed on the cloth several times for smoothening the canvas. When canvas is smooth then *chikana* stone is rubbed for shining the cloth.

The canvas is ready for painting and can be stored and cut into required sizes for painting.



[Photographs: Preparing of canvas]

## 6.1 Colours

Traditionally, only five colours were used for patachitra i.e. white, black, blue, black, red, and yellow. Nowadays, many other colours like green, brown are also used. The colours used are all natural rather than synthetic colours.



[Photographs: Colours]

White is obtained when conch shell is powdered and boiled with *kaitha* gum, till a paste is formed. For use, little of this paste is mixed with water.

Black is formed from lamp black or lamp soot. A burning lamp is placed inside an empty tin, till a considerable amount of soots collects on the underside of the tin. The soot is then mixed with gum and water for use.



[Photographs: Oil Lamp]

The oil used in the lamp is from polang tree seeds which are locally available.

**Green** is made by boiling green leaves like *neem* (Asian Tree) leaves with water and *kaitha* gum.

**Brown** is obtained from Geru stone, whose powder is mixed with gum and water.



[Photographs: brown colour]

**Red** comes from a stone Hingul, which, is a locally available stone. The stone is powdered and mixed with water and gum.

**Blue** obtained from a blue stone called Khandneela found in Orissa. The stone is powdered and boiled in the mixture of water and gum.

**Yellow** is derived from yellow stone called Hartal, which is found in Jaipur. The stone is powdered and mixed with water and gum for painting.



[Photographs: Colours being made]

All these colours are mixed in dried coconut shells. The colours are mixed with *kaitha* gum which acts as a fixative and prevents the painting from decaying. A variety of colours is made by mixing the existing primary colours, like, red mixed with white gives pink. In case the colours dry in the coconut shell then water is mixed in the colour and it is reused.

## 7. Tools

### 7.1 Brushes

The finer brushes used by the *chitrakars* (painters) are made of mouse hair which have wooden handles. These are used for the finer work they do like ornamentation, face etc. Other plane brushes, which are not as fine as the mouse hair brushes, available normally in the market are also used by the *chitrakars*. All the brushes these *chitrakars* use lasts for 7-8 months, when they work daily.



[Photographs: Different types of brushes]

### 7.2 Pencil and Eraser

HB pencils are used for drawings, rough sketches and outlines before painting on the canvas.

7.3 Scissors is used for cutting the desired size of the canvas.

### 7.4 Rubbing Stones

There are two types of stones which are used:

Khadar stone is used for smoothening the canvas, which is whitish-pinkish in colour.

Chikana stone is used for shining the canvas. This stone is yellow- brown in colour.



[Photographs: Stones]

## 8. Process

Borders are an integral part of painting and this is drawn first on the painting on all the four sides of the patta consisting of two or three lines according to the size of the painting. The outlines of the figures are drawn first with pencil and then very thin lines in white are drawn.

The body colours are then added followed by colouring the attires.



[Photographs: Process]

The figures are then adorned with ornaments and coloured.

Outline of other motifs are then thickened with a thick brush with black colour.



[Photograph: Painting on the canvas]

Then small and fine decorative motifs are painted in white. It is interesting to note that the chitrakar begins his painting with the colour white and ends with it too.

The eyeballs are the last to be inserted on the painting.



[Photograph: Giving final touches]

Sometimes a painting is done only in black and white. With perfect mastery over fine line drawing, the chitrakars make the paintings come alive with their skill and workmanship.

Some of the important themes are Thia Badhia (representation of the Jagannath temple), Krishana lila (Jagannath as Krishana demonstrating his childhood feats), Dasabatara Patti (The ten incarnations of Vishnu), Nabagunjara (a figure comprising nine different creatures), Kandarparath (Cupid's Chariot - Krishna on a chariot fully composed of colourfully dressed, playful women). Rama - Ravana Judha (War between Rama and Ravana), Kanchi Abhijana (Expedition against the Kingdom of Kanchi).

## 9. Market

*Patachitra* is famous all over the world as a glorious craft of Orissa . It basically started with the paintings of Jagannath for the purpose of worshipping. Earlier it was sold in the local markets of Orissa. Now patachitra has found some new market with foreign tourists and 'art lovers'. Now patachitra can be seen on cotton and silk cloth which is mostly sold as wall hangings.

As the market of *Patachitra* is expanding day-by-day and it crosses the boundaries of the country, some new range of products is also coming in the market like bookmarks, greeting cards, to reach maximum people. Now patachitra paintings and other utility products based on patachitra are available in every craft shop, emporium and exhibition.

## 10. Changes over the years

### 10.1 Technology

The technology used for the paintings is still same as it was before. The only difference is that now they use painting brushes made up of mouse hair for more detailed work.

### 10.2 Design

Patachitra started with religious paintings of Lord Jagannath and other mythological stories. With the change in the market conditions, chitrakars started making motifs like flowers, plants, geometrical shapes and animals also. One more change which is noticed over the years is that, the earlier paintings used to be less detailed and the minuteness which is seen today in Patachitra did not exist before.



### 10.3 Market

Paintings were made only for religious purposes and were traditionally painted on a cotton canvas. New market is now demanding Patachitra on tussar silk which is usually being sold as wall hangings.

## 11. Products and their uses

- Worshipping
- Wall hangings and gift purposes
- Book Marks
- Greeting Cards

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### **Interview with master craftsman**

Sarat Chandra Swain is the master craftsman of this well known craft in Orissa. He is a farmer by profession but is titled as Maharana because of his skill. He is working on Patachitra and palm leaf paintings since 1974 when he was just 13 years old and from then he devoted his life to make this craft known to this world.

He is based in Raghurajpur, District Puri, Orissa. This is a village known for its craft traditions. The whole village is engaged in some or the other craft. Craft practiced by most of the people here is Patachitra and Palm leaf painting.

An organization called “PARAMPARA” works for marketing of the products made in that village as well as provides with other facilities like workspace, arranging raw materials etc. According to the mastercraftsman, initially they had problems regarding raw materials but now they have found people and places who can keep a regular supply of raw materials for the entire village.

The craftsmen here are very happy with their socio-economic status. According to them whatever is their input, they are paid appropriately.