

AESTHETIC CONTINUUM OF CONTEMPORARY FOLK PAINTINGS OF INDIA

:

CASE STUDY OF FIVE TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Shatarupa Thakurta Roy

Department of Design



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI

Guwahati - 781039

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Date:

The research work presented in this thesis entitled '*Aesthetic Continuum of Contemporary Folk Paintings of India*' has been carried out under my supervision and is a bonafide work of Shatarupa Thakurta Roy. The work submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is original and has not been submitted for any other degree or diploma to this institute or to any other institute or university. She has also fulfilled all the requirements including mandatory coursework as per the rules and regulations for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati.

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Abstract

Indian folk artistry is uniquely recognized all over the world not only for rich aesthetics but also as indicators of age-old habitual belief. They comprise of tacit knowledge that is protected by passing on through generations.

Apart from the act of customary decorations on ephemeral foundations, Indian painters-storytellers cum singers perennially depict life and death, victory and defeat, good and evil, in the regional folk paintings. The roving minstrels for over two thousand years have disseminated moral values through their painted scrolls and performance to the rural society that has equally reached past the overseas audiences.

By counting contemporary folk art only as a community practice that strictly adheres to a tradition, may undermine the folk artist as a creative individual who significantly contributes to the tradition to keep it alive. The present study shifts its focus from the conventional ethnographic approach and instead, probes into the responsiveness of present day folk artists who use their freedom of experimentation to move forward.

The contemporary form of Indian folk art primarily focuses on a wide dispersion of the otherwise localized content and hence making it more significant and worthwhile of analytical studies.

Regional folk paintings from five adjoining states in India have been selected for the field study. It shows the paintings distinctively vary in their styles in different regions but connect through the common literary sources. It gives a larger picture of how the country as a whole is integrated by a common cultural profile in spite of immense ethnographic diversity.

The mainstream academic style of art synergized with the principle of vernacular folk and tribal art to boost nationalism and modernism in Indian art scene. Social reformers of pre and postcolonial era particularly realized the role and significance of folk art in the revival of indigenous culture.

20th Century technological empowerments lead to a notable change in Indian popular taste causing a temporary decline to Indian folk art and culture. The research traces how the tradition survived this crisis in spite of trivial patronage and reached its contemporary form. The realization hypothetically reformulates effective means of sustenance of a cultural practice, the practitioners and other stakeholders.

The apparently free flowing examples of folk paintings are canonized by ancient texts hitherto inaccessible are precious indications of their rich cultural roots. Appropriate methodology that duly covers the thematic, iconic and semiotic aspects of visual art must be adopted in order to critically assess and appreciate them.

The study seeks to elucidate its readers about the principle of folk art and proposes certain guidelines to help understand the nature and also validate the nature of change that takes place in a compound cultural scenario. It involves the knowledge of art history, aesthetics and criticism to qualitatively evaluate the artworks. It is to essentially justify their worth of inclusion into contemporary art scenario.

Hypothesis

The in depth cognizance of its stakeholders destines the sustenance of contemporized Indian folk painting.

Background

- Tracing the contemporary flow of visual culture in Indian context involves study in the shifting dynamics of various stylistic trends that caused drastic changes to it, over the time.
- The invaders who were authoritative to determine the nature of practice in this country marked the changes.
- The mechanical printing and mass reproduction trend of the British colonial rulers replaced the *karkhana* tradition popularized during the age of emperors.
- Emergence of photography both in documentation and aesthetic aspect manifested the archeological as well as anthropological sight of India in 19th Century.
- 20th Century was rather marked by the art consciousness featuring two ideological aspects of it. They are the Indian nationalism and the global modernism.
- The uneven reception of the prevalent academic standard did not conform to the dominance of European principle of image making as well as the indigenous traditional culture.
- Finally, during 1950s' the newly achieved freedom influenced the popular aesthetic sensibilities to respond to political symbolism besides the religious acquaintance.
- The realization of modernity through European primitivism was rather elevated as a perplexed identity in Indian cultural margin in the postcolonial era.

- Alongside the limelight of political and academic practice in art, also existed the significant lot of habitual art practices. They shared a common worldview to embody values that are often unidentified by the court and academy and therefore demand parallel inclusion in order to realize the core of all incongruities.



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Chapter 1

Indian Folk Art

1.1 Introductory Comments on Contemporary Folk Painting of India

The aesthetic range of contemporary folk art of India is wide and varied. The folk artists neither place themselves fully in the category of traditional practitioners nor do they proclaim to be under the umbrella of mainstream modern artists (Jain, 1998).

The artworks are living expressions of living people and to be familiar with them, we cannot but treat them as contemporary expressions (Bharat Bhavan, 1987).

Study of Indian Folk Art in contemporary milieu becomes more relevant as it undergoes change. The conventional understanding of folk art is related to ritualistic connections, customary aesthetics and other utilitarian purposes. The common understanding of its function is to authenticate cultural identity of an ethnic society, holding collective community values and aesthetics to reflect the comprehensive expression of world's traditional culture.

Nevertheless the contemporary scenario clearly indicated the practice today is not confined to remote communities who are by any means unexposed to the culture of present world. The folk artists are connected to the museums, government and non- government agencies, foreign patrons, cultural historians and travelers. The artists from different regions are also known to each other as they aspire to participate in state and national level exhibitions, fairs and competitions for state certificates and national awards.

'Folk art in general has obtained a great vogue today precisely because of our revived interests in what we considered automatism and the value of instinctive inspiration.'

(Rothko, 2006)

Contemporary Folk Art subsist its foundation on individuality and freedom of expression. But there is a lack of clarity that persists regarding the changing purpose of these traditional art forms that are still alive in our culture.

"Every government emporium tells the folk artists 'Traditional Banao'. Do we tell modern artists, 'Be Indian'? Repetitiveness can come out of a traditional idiom. Traditional art should develop in a contemporary context. Then it will not stagnate (as it is doing now)."

(Jyotindra Jain in THE HINDU, Online edition, Friday, July7, 2006).

The traditional art forms with an ethnic regional base in our country were treated as a source of commercial revenue generation in the postcolonial policy making. They thrived for long as cultural industry rather than means of artistic expression. It is very recently that the interest is directed to explore the expressive potential of its artistic idioms. The social and cultural anthropologists pioneered in collecting the record and undertook documenting the cultural art forms. The modern artists after some initial hesitation connected with its simplistic principle that was instrumental to support modern expression and aesthetics.

'All visual arts are primarily based on visual facts and our responses to them. Even the so-called non-objective art does not function outside the pale of our responses to visual facts. Our responses to visual facts are built at the bottom on certain natural susceptibilities or genetic predispositions.' (Subramanyan, 1987)

Visual responses vary from person to person. They are often conditioned, as the susceptibilities are bound to culture. Cultural influence plays a vital role in establishing common platforms for visual understanding by continuous stimulation of existing instincts through social interactions.

'there are large areas of conformities in people's responses if their natural susceptibilities have not been cramped or inhibited by ignorance or wrong kind of knowledge.' (Subramanyan, 1987)

In the journey from traditional to contemporary is not a smooth sail. The formation of a visual culture in perspective of a bounded time and space corresponds to the responses generated both from the visual facts and visual arts.

Folk Art practice in today's cultural context is rather understood and appreciated for the nuance of traditional elements it comprises in its content.

At the same time, the practice continuously struggles to achieve a contemporary facelift to cope up with time to ensure its future sustainability.

This conflict revert its definition from time to time, causing the much-acclaimed focus of its study to shift from the search of designation, to the search of a changing idiom. It justifies the relevance of such probes to support pure expression in a visual culture, like in India, that enduringly nurtures traditional values to its core.

Folk painters today, no longer confine themselves within their restricted periphery. Neither the practice solely clings to its religious base. Multiple cross cultural and cross media transactions over the years have caused the art forms to transform, amalgamate, alter, adulterate and change. It is also true to this instance, that the survival of such traditional practices is often questioned in material in the present social and cultural context. Ritualistic tradition of Indian folk art is rich in its narrative component and is based on intriguing visual structure with strategic organization of allegoric space and elementary symbolism. The knowledge here is understood by passing through generations. The much sought after paintings from rural parts of Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and other regional states of India which have reached the pinnacle of their success today, have actually survived in frivolous patronage for ages.

Using basic and natural material, locally available, folk artists and craftsmen create art and artifacts that are appealing in their rudimentary simplicity. They are not mere decorations but spontaneous outpourings of religious devotion. The folk art practitioners continue to create designs on the earthen walls and floors to convene sacred cause of domestic rituals; protective forms and auspicious spaces are created for the well being of their clan. They perpetually engage themselves with the creative act in the name of oneness with the God. This supreme ideology prevents the practice from disappearing; an outcome, that an economic or utilitarian argument may not achieve. While religious conviction explains the cause and survival of customary ritual art, the creative flair describes the spread and the fame of its popular recast that we know as Indian Folk Art.

As we begin to understand these art practitioners we learn that they are continually reworking, redeveloping, and reinventing the folk art that they learn from many sources, combined in many ways; they are always improvising and innovating. Folk art, one must understand is always in a state of change. It can be realized as a tapestry of religious intention well woven with an inbred creative urge of rural folk.

1.2 Traditional principles in contemporary practice

It took long for the critique of Indian art to reach the state, around 20th century, when Indian paintings were judged through Indian vantage point. For long, in imitation of British art experts, only Mughal paintings were worth of any serious viewing and appreciation. Even *Pahari*

miniature paintings¹ (Chakraverty, 2005) of Rajasthan were considered less sophisticated and crude until Ananda Coomaraswamy had appraised the tradition in 1916 (Singh, 1981).

The modern minds of Bengal realized the role of 'folk expression' to establish modern Indian Art, following the 1900's European footsteps. The lack of scientific perspective, apparent free rendering of form and distortion, arbitrary use of colour, were some of the essential features of western modernism. Bengal village scroll paintings known as *patachitra* were matched with the much inspirational Negro sculpture. There are indications of which in the writings of William Archer. Urban folk paintings that are known as *Kalighat Pata*², (Jain, 1999) commenced to be reappraised. The paintings from Western India, chiefly Rajasthan and Gujarat, based on Jain religious themes, came into practice during the 12th century. The painters from Gujarat, who were brought to the Mughal Court during Akbar's reign, were already trained in the local style. After the establishment of Gujarat Sultanate in the 15th century and the Mughal rule towards the end of 16th century, paintings produced in western India retained some of their most distinguished features such as the use of flat and bright colours, delineation of face in complete profile and angular figurations. Reflections of these visual characteristics can still be prominently observed in the regional artworks of the local folk.

Folk art is deep rooted in the grounds of ritualism and ceremonial cause. This intrinsic association of art forms with ritualistic purpose laid the foundation and perpetually insured a continuity of the tradition but above all this; it is the simplicity of mind and creative innocence that has attracted the viewer's attention towards it globally. Even though the interaction with the outside world has increased but still the kinfolk remain intrinsically consorted to their customs. Even now, most of their art works remain anonymous. These artists, a large number of them untaught, are often unwilling to consider themselves as individual producers and only a few of them mark the paintings with their own name. But such traditions have also been generating highly individuated self-conscious artists. As a result and unlike most 'traditional' arts of India - the styles and subjects of their paintings have evolved and multiplied dramatically. Painters displaying an extraordinary vitality have drawn, a new sense of themselves as artists and social actors, and have responded to a wide range of national and international audience and markets. It is the vigor of stylish forms, use of intricate details jubilated with prismatic schemes of exuberant colour exploited to their maximum strength, exceptionally well divided space and an expert handling of composition, which has given the traditions an extraordinary height. The awareness

[TH-960_06610601](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354111111)

of surroundings and visual sensations are the telling factors that surface on considering these art forms and artistic accomplishments of the fellow artists. The works reveal a clear understanding and knowledge of traditional constellations of symbols and shapes and an adept cognition of subjects or themes that often carries this tradition beyond the pictorial facets in both intensity and originality of form.

Much of the visual culture of rural communities reflects the once widely available resources of traditional knowledge. The historical depth of the art practice that is highly regionalized tradition can be discerned from the rich mythologies of the communities and oral histories of artisans. Mystic ideas and concepts find shapes and forms, living and non-living, in the creative minds and hands of folk artists.

Religion is the foundation of folk art. This transcendent resource offers a language different from ordinary language and allows seeing life differently. That transcendent element is an ideological conception in the control of people, not imposed from outside and folk creativity rests upon this language of art as metaphorical form of expression and symbolic communication. The painters have an ability not only to create art works but they are moreover able to speak about their art with a language of their own. That language helps them control, transform, and interpret their art as a system of significance, which helps them to defend it.

Folk art is a living tradition within the framework of which, one observes ways of creativity through symbolic communication, autonomous creative identity, expertise, and everyday wisdom.

The creativity here is not economically or politically grounded. They avail a means of their own to protect their art. Such spirited art works exemplify a naïve model while they concurrently feature exclusive refinement of creative experiences that they have accumulated over the centuries that continues to grow each day. From being essentially religious in purpose these artworks have evolved over the years to become a fusion of various institutions, beliefs and socio-cultural factors. Under the present global economic policy and an open society, the traditional practices face numerous challenges. Major concern today, as in any folk art or craft forms is to preserve the creative values of such traditional arts, to investigate their cultural backgrounds, to acknowledge the unifying traditions that link traditional art to the creation of all art forms, to create an awareness of still-living craftsmanship, and to assist public in locating the fine craft

items and craft workers, patronizing their work, and assuring the maintenance of their traditions. These folk artists stand obligated towards their patrons who count as an essential for them but they quite well understand their responsibilities towards their tradition and its continuance. Even if there are certain adverse elements like abject poverty or immoderate intrusions of the outside winds, the customs to which the art is so keenly associated cannot so easily be interspersed by such mere interventions. Therefore, the time has come that we accept, watch and witness its irresistible growth to any farther with an open mind.

1.3 The Evolving Nature of a Tradition and the Nature of Change

Several tangential factors constantly affect the fabric of all lives and society, inherent traditional values and culture. Attempt to keep them unaffected within a restricted cultural boundary is unpersuasive as a scheme. Proposed research is intended to understand the guiding principle of the aesthetic continuum of today's folk art practice. It is only viable, in today's changing society, to realize the variable features of a traditional culture before proposing methods to manage the nature of change.

There are changes that are taking place in terms of themes, methods and materials and way of execution. Mythological, religious, and social themes are changing with the mode of time. It is perhaps the basic style that holds the spirit and identity of the practice. An imperative need is therefore to realize the variable features and sustain the cultural augmentation; the tradition necessitates therefore be revisiting from time to time.

This research primarily scrutinizes the varied aesthetic range of contemporary folk painting in India. Indian folk art, until half a century ago were vastly unexplored, and were not counted into holdings of the art connoisseurs, museums or art galleries.

It was categorized as a part of the study in the area of anthropology and folklore, with rare mentioning of its aesthetic value or any consideration of them as independent artistic expressions.

The study required investigation in to the remote and isolated regional territories that were difficult to access.

The places of its origin are villages, pilgrimages and similar clusters that are not of any political importance to be counted in the formation of history.

The practice of folk art has been associated with minor rituals, religious superstitions, votive and cult worship, away from the mainstream art.

- The present research probes into the past, to scrutinize the conditions that made it possible for the art practice to come this far, in order to comment on the importance and explore possibilities for further sustenance of the indigenous visual culture.
- It is to make an effort to observe and analyze the visual design that formulates in Indian Folk Paintings, to bring them forth in an explicit state to enable common viewing.
- It aims at possibility establishing, contemporary folk art as a cultural experience to forefront and a meaningful engagement with modernity in order to endorse the flow of change.
- The clichéd association of folk art as being mechanized, repetitive, unaffected and timeless is defied here.
- Can tradition be realized in its docility?
- The research evaluates the aesthetic variety of Indian folk painting, within the purview of its practice in contemporary cultural context.
- The practice of folk painting in India is diverse and sporadic yet homogeneous due to commonly shared religious beliefs and cultural values.
- Indian folk paintings being associated with cultural and religious ceremonies hold a high degree of aesthetic content in them that is austere. The research therefore analyzes the visual principle and elements for interpreting the style in terms of its form and content.

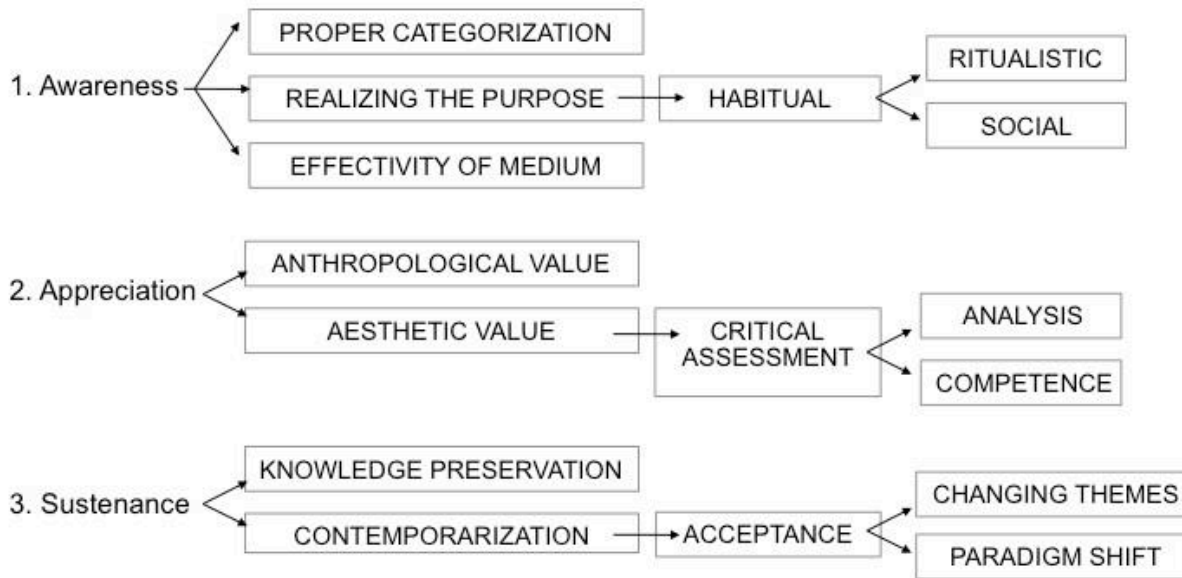
1.4 Aim of Research

The primary aim of the research is:

- To reassess the role and importance of folk painting in contemporary visual culture.
- To lay emphasis on the preservation of the surviving practice to support sustainability of a visual culture.
- To protect the implicit knowledge and spread awareness about the importance of the culture.

The study becomes more relevant as the principle definition of folk art keeps altering with time and its changing cultural dynamics. The research tracks how the change has taken place in an

unwritten and unauthorized manner. Although the journey is still not smooth sailing, there are chances of positive change to come its way. The realization of its need and significance is possible if only there is adequate research being done in this area with proper analysis and conclusion. The flow chart of the process followed for the research is graphically represented below.



1.5 Focus Area of Research

Trade, Temple and Court epitomize the three constituents that constantly endorsed, advocated and influenced the cultural spectrum and aesthetic range of Indian art practice. The research aptly focuses upon the journey of folk painting up till their presents situates and comprehend its shifting trait. Since its formative years, folk paintings have been associated with the temple tradition by laying its foundation on impermanent grounds, unlike the paintings commissioned by the court. Court paintings were done under royal patronage as murals on the wall and ceiling of the shrines, where as folk paintings were made on the backdrop screens to be perpetually taken out to the common people to proliferate the divine message. The paintings were made as souvenirs to be brought and taken away by the pilgrims. The formats were to support the purpose of portability in the form of wall hangings or rolled up painted scrolls. Hence they were made solely for common viewing and devoid of any political persuasions. They were not to be preserved for ages, but meant to be recreated perpetually. They were not meant for one-sided viewing, rather to be performed by the artists to initiate interaction with their audience. The

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ephemeral forms made on earthen walls and floors (Fig. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4) to create auspicious spaces for ritualistic and religious purpose clearly suggests the difference from mainstream court paintings. But the aesthetic continuum of contemporary folk paintings spreads across all aspects of cultural inferences. To name a few, the practice contributes to the tourism promotions, revenue generation and has a massive potential to support the cultural industry. It is still connected with temple traditions and duly made its place in public places, museums, galleries and private collections where it undergoes a serious consideration for preservation and restoration under adequate patronage.

To appraise a tradition it is an essential requisite to know its origin, assess the organized beliefs and thought progression of the community. It is important to realize a few rudimentary factors – interaction within the bounds of physical environs, the cultural structure and the uniqueness of work experience. Some such constants characterize a system and determine or limit their performance.

The study covers the most significant regional folk art practices of the country with a special focus on the continuing single frame and narrative scroll paintings termed as *ekachitra* and *deeghalpatachitra* tradition of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. For example the age-old *chitrakatha* tradition, a ritual performance common in Hindu folk religion, is where the artist displays his art along with a narrative oration. It has played a significant role in proliferation of the doctrines of the popular epics such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Jataka*, *Purana* and other popularly cherished sagas from Hindu pantheon, local fables and folk tales and moral stories. Each tradition is linked to a central deity. Through an assessment of the contemporary range of art works and the existing support system the research enunciates the prospect of its survival, and future sustenance.

Another important constituent of this research is to propose appropriate methods for viewing the artworks with a realization that they continue to evolve and change with time. The way we see it today in its present state is destined to change. Therefore to examine the pattern of change and shift that had taken place in their basic paradigm in order to adjust with the time is certainly an important focus of this research.

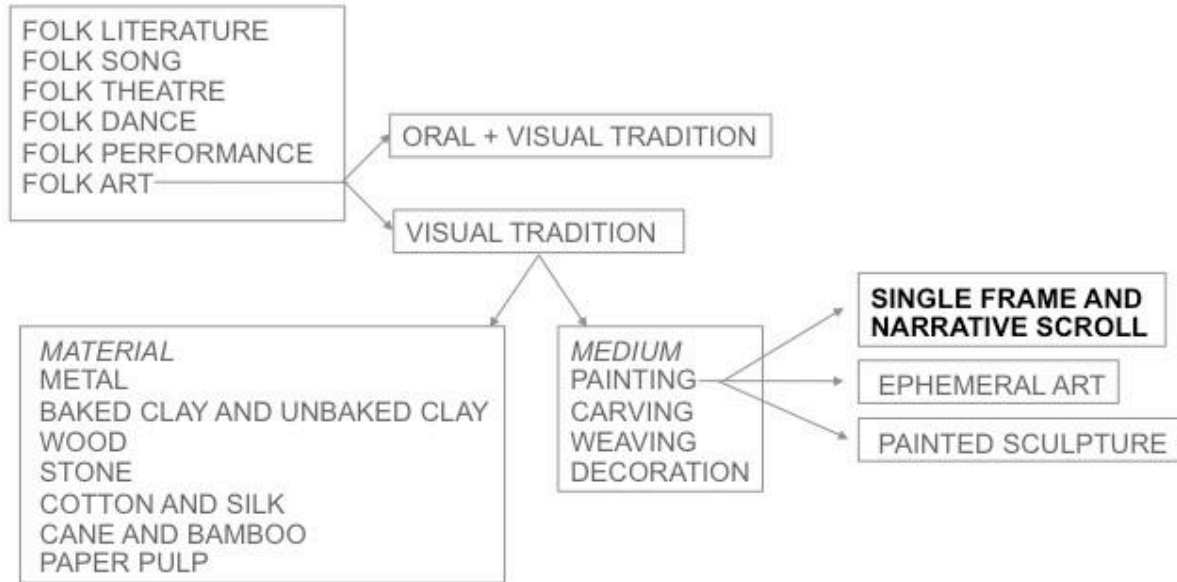
1.6 Research Methodology

The aim for the research is to enquire and realize the aesthetic range and present situation of Indian Folk Art tradition. The foremost step was to categorically identify the descriptive nature of the study. Descriptive research includes surveys and fact-finding enquiries of an unconventional kind. The purpose is to describe the state of affairs as it endures at the contemporaneous. Descriptive research conducts survey methods of various kinds, including comparative and correlational methods. The research is also of an Ex post facto type of research that makes attempts to discover causes even when there is no control on the variables. The research has an approach that is close to pure research. The chief aim of applied research is to uncover a solution for some persuasive everyday problems, whereas basic or pure approach is guided towards finding evidence that has a wide base of application and therefore, adds to the already existing systematized association of controlled comprehension.

The course is based on 'Motivation Research' as a part of Qualitative research that investigates the underlying motives by in depth interviews. It has followed the empirical approach that is based on direct experience and observation, being flexible with the standardized theory. The type of study is assumption based, that requires a working hypothesis close to the probable result, to be supported with adequate data to check the hypothesis. Exploratory method is more applicable during the development of the hypothesis rather than the assessment process. The present research is largely historical that involves historical sources like documents, evidences from remains to study the happenings and ideas of the past that involves individual and collective principle, opinion, ethic and behavior at any remote point of time and space. The outcome therefore is conclusion –oriented and decision oriented. The current research generates results either in non-quantitative form or in the form that is not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis. The research focuses on observation, unexplored evidences, individual and group interviews, depth interviews, projective techniques, corrective measures etc.

Problem identification: Folk art industry in India is unorganized and multifaceted. This is illustrated graphically below.

FOLK CULTURE



Indian contemporary folk painting was chosen as the area of doctoral research; keeping in mind its regional nature with global popularity in spite of the lack of material utility and of pure aesthetic orientation. It bears age-old antiquity with minimum patronization. The unique quality of Indian folk painting is that it has undergone continual change and evolved perpetually and palpably. The mode of change is evident but the documentation is insufficient. The existing works are of high quality stuff but sporadic and handful. Moreover, the problem is prodigiously burning and dynamic that requires continuous evaluation, sensitive handling and thorough understanding.

Literature Survey: As the nature of research is historical, descriptive and qualitative, the study began with a thorough reading on the topic from all possible and available sources. The literature survey leads primarily to Library Research for analysis of historical references that includes historical data, canons, and proposed methods related to the topic.

Field Research: The current research is vastly based on the field research that included documentation through,

- i. Non-participant direct observation
- ii. Participant observation
- iii. Mass observation

- iv. Mail questionnaire
- v. Personal interview
- vi. Depth interview
- vii. Group meeting
- viii. Case study and life history

By recording notes, observing behavioral scales, interactional recording, possible use of audio and video recording, photography, recording mass behavior, interview using independent observers in public places, identifying social and economic background of respondents, schedule with open and closed questions, interview on assumed and existing experience and its effect, cross sectional collection of data for acute analysis, longitudinal collection of data to identify intensive character to replace by subjective quantification to test authenticity.

Documentation: The collected information can be categorized into primary and secondary sources.

Primary Source: Interview, Schedule, and Observation

Secondary Source: Books, Journals, Personal diary and Notes

There are Documentary sources and Field sources.

1.7 Overview of thesis structure

The **Chapter 1: Indian Folk Art** introduces the context of Indian Folk Art, illustrates its aesthetic range and manifestation from the pristine ritualistic connect to contemporary modern expression and situates it within the cultural framework during the different stages. The chapter elucidates the aim and focuses area of this research and adopts an appropriate research methodology to take it further. The aim of research indicates the motivation and relevance of this study, making a suggestion towards the nature of workflow that formulates a node to connect with traditional compulsions, artistic skill, knowledge, information, image constructs, symbols, narratives and their collective response to realize the role and significance of storytelling and image making in today's cultural periphery.

The **Chapter 2: Cultural Historical References** covers a survey of the available literature and historical references from direct and indirect sources to cover the major folk art trends of India. The social, cultural, anthropological and ethnographic data and material studied from museums

and libraries to understand related studies in the area of folklore are mentioned in the chapter. The survey instead of focusing on individual tradition tends to correlate between the natures of analogous practices, with a special focus on how the exponential factors caused the practice to grow by shifting to new means from time to time. The study then moves towards an evaluation of surviving prejudice to comment on the ritualistic and primitive connection intrinsic to folk art.

The **Chapter 3: Context of Folk Art** describes Indian folk paintings as regional art practices that are essentially isolated and disconnected yet coherent due to the common literary source of inspiration. Briefly introducing some of the most prominent regional art traditions, the chapter goes on to determine their position in contemporary visual culture. It further describes the nature of existing value system in such community practices, with intrinsic ritualistic association, to state as to how such practices and their practitioners, be placed as the possessors of a culture. It discusses the role of change, its need and contextual significance. The chapter illustrates the contemporary practice of folk art with a few selected examples where in it deliberates upon the nature of community practice, individual pursuits, role of artist, artist within the origin and outside its periphery and then comments on the tradition and modernity for a complete aesthetic evaluation.

The **Chapter 4: Visual Analysis Contemporary Range of Folk Paintings** aims at identifying the design principles by analyzing some folk paintings made by a few master painters from different states of India. It discusses the initiative of reinterpreting the effectiveness of storytelling through graphic visuals. It elucidates the structure of these artistic expressions in terms of the anatomy of the visual, narrations, physical and communicative navigation. It indicates the basic method and materials traditionally used as one of the ingredients for visual appreciation. Most importantly a three-fold method of viewing and appreciating folk art in layers of semiotic, iconic and thematic aspects of an image is suggested to communicate with the language for common viewing. This is to justify the changing purpose of folk paintings, which are neither decorative nor superstitious anymore and have managed to find their new place in more serious locations such as the collections of museums, galleries and personal collections hence demand an appropriate form of critique and appraisal.

The **Chapter 5 Visual Culture of Postcolonial India: Printing and Paintings** presents a report of the study carried out to gather the background information on Indian art, to better comprehend

the indigenous visual culture and its changing milieu. It has primarily been done through a historical study of regional and vernacular art practice next to academic practice. It comparatively analyses the style, influences and ethnicity for both the parallel trends that had seldom surfaced any collaboration. It further evaluates the idiosyncrasy of modern practices to exploit the potential of regional traditions with insufficient knowledge and attempts to make apt suggestions. Report pertaining to the contribution of individual exponents in survival of traditional art practice, is presented. For a better realization the chapter delves into the conscious initiatives that shaped the history from time to time. It further discusses the role and functioning of museums, exhibitions and other new outlets for Indian folk art with a special focus upon the need for contextualization. Concerns over the practice intrinsically associated to rituals, customs and habitude, being separated from the origin and thereby losing their contextual significance, are raised; the impact on the language and purpose of communication as a whole. The chapter hence, critically comments on the complex position of the art, its origin and its beholders. Describing the potential of folk art to be set up as a cultural industry in India, an evaluation of folk art to be seen as a cultural commodity also has been evaluated with proper critique.

The ***Chapter 6: Conclusion - Life and Future of folkloric practices in Contemporary Cultural Margin*** concludes the discussion with a focus on the predicted future of the indigenous folk art practice and possible shifts in the existing paradigm. It summarizes the context, by tracing the conditions, which made the practice reach this far in spite of severe constraints in patronization. The chapter presents a notion of this paradigm shift in terms of method, material and expression that ensures its prolonged sustainability. It attempts to foresee the future of its survival by suggesting possible means to provide pragmatic support. It makes serious comments on what should be the nature of change and the level of acceptance to prevent setback. The chapter finally confirms the role and significance of this aesthetic identity and opines on how it could be best realized in modern perspective to retain the solemnity of the context.



Fig. 1.1 *Durga*, Wall Painting, 1996, Jitwarpur, Madhubani



Fig. 1.2 Ephemeral Art Form of Kerala, 2012, Photo Courtesy Chantal Jumel



Fig. 1.3 Ephemeral Art Form, Mami Kadai, Mylapore, 2012, Photo Courtesy Chantal Jumel



Fig. 1.4 Ephemeral Art Form, 2012, Photo Courtesy Chantal Jumel

AESTHETIC CONTINUUM OF CONTEMPORARY FOLK PAINTING OF INDIA

:

CASE STUDY OF FIVE TRADITIONAL PRACTICES



Chapter 2

Literature Review and Historical References

Indian Folk Painting as a topic of research is inadequately explored or discussed and therefore the number of books and publications on the topic is just a handful. Although the available texts are rich in their content and significance, they are not vastly reproduced and sold. Readers are limited in numbers and the texts are to be found in the collection of the libraries associated to the prominent government and nongovernment initiated craft museums that are fewer in number.

2.1 Organization of Available Literary Resources

Segregating the available texts in two categories eased the literature survey for the thesis.

The literary sources that are categorized as inspirational were kept at the rereading and reinterpreting category to attain finer realization and newer findings.

The other category included readings in the related areas of study and new arrivals.

The stages focused on understanding the principle and elements of the traditional practice, the rules that governs the practice and it's viewing, mentioning in early literary sources and most importantly the modern critiques on the topic.

2.2 Reflections on History and Myth

A large segment of practice in the category of folk painting is still ephemeral in nature, which is created on mud walls and floors with removable paints. The paintings done on textile-base or on paper are also not of a great permanence in terms of the method and materials that are used traditionally. The reason is not the unavailability of a more permanent medium, but the prevalent principle of keeping the practice fleeting and to pass on the trend by repeating and reproducing. Folk paintings embody creative freedom in its execution being dissociated with political commissioning of any sort but holds obligation of reaching out the common people and to proliferate knowledge for social cause. Ephemeral drawings are made within the bounds of specific rules and guidelines for colour and form delineations. The artists then skillfully and wisely combine their experiments to the existing iconography. The guidelines related to the myths and legends are not always written but passed on through generations as canons to be strictly followed. Like in Kerala, the ground paintings are known as *Kalam eluttu* (Fig. 2.1, 2.2). They are part of a ritualistic performance conducted by the drummer community, combining drumbeats, dance and chanting, using anthropomorphic depiction of the deities. The *Ambalavasis*

(meaning temple inhabitants) perform the main worship of *Ayyappan* as the prime deity. *Pulluvans* are offered to the *Naga* cult.

The *Parayans* (known to be awful enchanters) worship local deities that do not even belong to Hindu pantheon. Ground paintings are formulated on folk foundation but often feature images close to classical dance performance of *Kathakali*. Use of colour in spite of being aesthetically impeccable, are mandatory that represent conceptuality and emotion. The five colours are corresponded to the attribute of each deity. They use rice powder for white colour, pounded curcuma roots for yellow, extracts of acacia leaf for green, mixture of curcuma and soaked lime for the colour red and burnt paddy for black.

The worshipers bring the cult to life by means of specific *mudras* (hand gestures), chants, lyrics and drum beats, offerings of flower, essences, harvests that pick into a trancelike experience for the participants to a level of satisfaction, ending the ritual by sweeping away the ground paintings. The gesture is a metaphor of the world's transience characteristic to address fertility. Interestingly the rituals of *Kalampattu*, *Kuruntinipattum*, *Malayarattam*, *Pulluvanpattum* support tribal medicine and health care. They often perform rituals of this kind to relieve a pregnant woman from the evil that causes miscarriage and sterility. The act of exorcism involved in making and destroying an image of this great artistic expression impacts the patient's psychology and fastens the recovery to a great extent by means of its visual impact. In Tamil Nadu the floor paintings are called *Kolam*. *Kolam* patterns are created on floor with flowing rice powder by joining or surrounding dots in complex geometric and organic formations. *Kolam* is associated to the *Pongal* (new harvest) ceremony and performed on a regular basis by the women community. In Kerala, the analogous ephemeral practice, performed by men, is known as *Mandala* and *Kalam*.

They are associated with,

1. *Yantra* and *Mandala* from tantric foundation celebrating the Goddess *Ayyappan*, the Lord of *Sabarimala*, *Bhadrakali* and *Naga* (Snake) cult
2. *Yakshi-Yaksha*, *Gandharvas* in *Kalampattu*, *Kuruntinipattum*, *Malayarattam*, *Pulluvanpattum*
3. *Cattan* and *Bhutam*, evil spirits (God for some) by *Kutticattantam* and *Karimbhutamkali*

The forms, emphasized on a massive scale are created on the ground. The sacred performance is a combination of singing, acting and trance that involves great energy from preparation of colours to their application, chants that comprise mythological instances, description and erasing ceremony where in the performers employ complete body movements with actions like rolling over on the ground and wiping off the image.

To trace the building blocks of image making in Indian folk art, one should not ignore the classical influence of the theme of folk art that is based on texts, ranging from fables to epics. During 12th Century A.D. the central political powers of India underwent a decline, marking an obvious dearth in royal patronage for large-scale projects except for a few temple structures constructed in Rajasthan, Bengal and Orissa i.e. Dilwara temple of Mount Abu, Rajasthan and terracotta temples of Bengal and Orissa. Though Muslim rulers did not support the initiatives of sculptural structures, but the period contributed gloriously to the Indian art with treasure of illustrated religious manuscripts from Hindu, Buddhist and Jain sects. The illustrated *punthi* (manuscripts, Fig. 2.3) were being created in Bihar and Bengal in Eastern India, under the tutelage of Pala style for Pala dynasty kings who were Buddhists and in Rajasthan and Gujarat of Western India in Jain miniature style. They are examples of beautiful calligraphy and illustration art done on palm leaves.

Rajput Miniatures and Mughal Paintings reached their pinnacle during 16th to 19th Century A.D. Stylistically Rajput paintings are reminiscent of Ajanta murals combined with the sensibilities of folk painters, whereas, Mughal painting added Persian flavour to the Rajput miniatures. Folk artists pulled necessary influence from the illustrated texts and narrative panels on the temple relief sculptures. They exchanged the mainstream sensibilities as they wished. It is also speculated that the folk painters were often outsourced to royal courts on a trial basis whenever the court had a dearth of manpower with no evident success. Local artists of Gujarat, who were trained in Jain miniature style of art were brought to Mughal court during Akbar's rule and they added new dimension to the prevailing style with local features like use of bright and bold primary shades of colours and for the figurines a complete profile or three quarter view with protruded eyes typical of Jain miniature style. But when the practice of Jain miniature painting faced a crisis due to the lack of artists, the folk painters could not make up for the deficiency, for the strict rules of paintings and pressure of mass production refrained them from experiencing the same level of artistic freedom they were so used to.(Fig.2.4)

Perhaps that was a cause for their periodical expulsion from their own community. This caused them to convert their religion to Islam. But intrinsically they remained neither Hindu nor Muslim with free access to both religious households. In Bengal their religious identity is a matter of great exception. They practice and propagate *Namaz* as a compulsion for Islam and paint pictures of Hindu deities narrating Hindu sagas. They claim that they belong to a religion of their own as the special children of God *Visvakarma*. In *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, an ancient text, there is an indication of how the artist community came into being. Lord *Visvakarma* and Apsara *Ghrithachi* fell in love and perennially took birth to unite and that resulted to the birth of their nine sons *Malakara* (Flower Sellers), *Karmakara* (Blacksmith & Carpenter), *Shankhakara* (Conch shell carver), *Kundibaka* or *Tantubayee* (Weaver), *Kumbhakara* (Potter), *Kangsakara* (Metalwork artisans), *Sutradhara* (Carpenter), *Chitrakara* (Painter) and *Swarnakara* (Goldsmith). Out of those nine sons, *Brahmins* cursed three of them - *Sutradhara* refused to collect wood for sacrificial fire; *Swarnakara* for stealing money from a *Brahmin* and *Chitrakara* made a painting, which was defective, and not according to the Brahmin's order.

Parashurama's Sloka further supports this fact stating that, deviation from the normal form has led the *patuas* to be exiled by the curse of the Brahmin Society.

*“Vyati Karmena Chitrang Sadyashchitra Karaeshtta
Patita Brahma shapena Brahmananancha kopita”*

Reference: Published materials and interviews of researchers and curators of Gurusaday Museum, Kolkata

However, from the very mentioning of nonconformity to a rule it is suggestive that there existed rules. *Vishnudharmottara Purana* is another text written around the same time, little before the Common Era, with mentions about canons of painting. So it may be assumed that the painters were abiding by those norms to some extent.

In reality *Patuas* are considered untouchables and ostracized in the society. Most of the stories related to their existence end with some clue of the painters being expelled for some reason or the other. There is a myth that an ancestor of the present day *Patuas* once drew the portrait of *Mahadeva*, without seeking his permission. After completing the drawing the artist apprehended that the lord would be angry and that may lead to some disaster. So the painter hid his paintbrush

inside his mouth as *Mahadeva* came by. *Mahadeva* instead of being offended at the picture said that the artist would have thrown the paintbrush away instead of making it inauspicious by putting it inside his mouth. So he had to curse him and his community by declaring that they would neither be Hindus nor Muslims. They would have to perform Muslim religious rites and paint stories from Hindu pantheons.

The artist must not be known by their religion but their art and the art is their sole religion. Interestingly, the *patua* community being unorthodox in their religious austerity enjoyed greater acceptance in both communities. Many of the *Patuas* till date, move from door to door reciting their oration and unfolding their painted scrolls to earn their daily living. They hold in their mind the obligation to inject moral principles for the betterment of the society. It is an observation by many that they visit common houses during the midday and afternoon when the male members of the household are usually away for work. So their target group remains the women members of the household and most of the popular stories are therefore aimed at strengthening their moral character. The concept of virtue and vice, good and bad, moral and sin are assimilated with the notion of faith and fear, reward and punishment, possibilities after death and hence in the next life. Female characters in the stories are compulsorily entitled to grave punishment for committing a sin whereas the moral character of men as a topic is carefully avoided in most cases. With the changing times and expression, presently the feminist subject matters are getting more importance.

“The form of Bengal’s generalized Hindu religion is quite separate from the Scriptural religion devoted only to Brahma. The eternal, independent imaginative Bengali soul could not conform to a fixed regulation set up by a scripture while performing religious rites and creating images of deities. Rather, the Bengali Patuas have formed and molded the images of deities according to their own imagination and expression. As a result Bengal has its own forms of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Shiva and Durga. They bear no similarity to their original mythological forms.”

- Gurusaday Dutt

There is a sense of localization that characterizes folk paintings. In a painted scroll from Bengal, Rama and Sita’s wedding ceremony would always be shown similar to Bengali wedding whereas the same characters from Madhubani would follow the local norms.

2.3 Primitive Connection

Functionality, Utility and Aesthetics are no more merged as a concept in present culture, unlike the formative years of human civilization. It is irrelevant, necessarily in today's cultural purview, to assess any form of art for its utilitarian aspect as an obligatory criteria. Therefore if the aesthetic content remains invariable, the purpose of folk painting should neither be questioned in the changing dynamics of the modern society nor must one apprehend the possible disappearance of such rich traditions only on the basis of their non-utility in material terms.

'A completely aesthetic purpose for art is, as we know, a rather recent concept; it is only in the last few centuries that the aesthetic and the functional have been condemned to isolated polarities, needing special efforts at reconciliation.'

(Subramanyan, 1987)

The purpose of art remains the center of the inquiry. The content of art with the support of form provides us with the visual clue of what the art is meant for. At the same time we also look at it from a pure aesthetic purpose, where the meaning is free from its manifestation. In the context of folk painting the purpose have had a direct connection with the daily ritualistic practice. Traditionally, religion and art were inseparable. But the time has come when it cannot be confined to its conventional purpose. The contemporary practice is rather more promising as, identifying oneself as a traditional folk painter is still highly regarded, but no more at the outlay of being a modern man who responds to the current happenings around him. So the contemporary practice reflects an added nature of choice to the existing purpose of its creative pursuit. The context of folk art stands phenomenally important as the practice has evolved and grown in our society, despite trivial patronage. Any work in the area of folk art is traditionally categorized as a study in anthropology.

It deals with habitual practices, customary beliefs and rituals of ethnic and clannish life that involves the rudimentary artistic instinct of mankind. Folk art endures an exclusion from the mainstream art. They belong to the class of naïve and primitive expression. But due to the relatively new realization of its pure aesthetic value, the worth of study and research in the area of folk art in today's context can no more be done in a single way.

Although, being instinctive and primitive by nature has never been counted as a demerit for modern art, folk art of India, holds the potential to fall under a different subgroup, which is perhaps still unnamed. We can neither call it primitive if we associate primitivism in Western Avant-grade principle of modernity, nor can find any academic sophistication in its technique that transports it to the main stream. The Avant-grade artists in the west, included revived primitivism to defy classicism. They set the appreciative parameters for modern expression to overrule the illusion of space and confronted a new mode of idealism, conforming to the basic simplicity, similar to primitive and prehistoric culture. In colonial and post independent India primitivism was rather associated with nationalism by the activists who initiated a revival of indigenous art. During this time the revivalist scholars realized the importance of folk art that was regional, religious and vernacular in nature.

2.4 Relevance of practice to match nationalist ideals

For a long time the folk aesthetics have confronted doubts whether the paintings are worth of any serious discourse. But eventually with the endorsement of Nationalism, context of folk art drew thoughtful attention as a newly found alternative aesthetics. W.G. Archer found the tradition, to be of some importance due to its primitive connection in the light of the pioneering avant-garde movements in the Europe. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and E. B. Havell's study between the years 1909-1935, on Indian art practice outside the mainstream Mughal court painting placed the regional art forms on a higher pedestal. They opined on the potential of folk paintings, to contribute in the rise of modern Indian art under nationalistic spirit. E. B. Havell noticed the tradition as a turning point to revive indigenous style of visual expression. Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose and other nationalists from Bengal school commented over and explored the possibility of including the style and aesthetic principles of folk painting in their works. Partha Mitter , Debasish Banerji and R. Siva Kumar are amongst the writers to assess the significance of these experiments in their recent writings.

2.4.1 Inviting modernism

Sunayani Devi and Jamini Roy's (Fig.2.8) works rich with folk components are discussed thoroughly in Mitter's book - The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avante-Grade, 1922-1947. Partha Mitter prodigiously highlighted on some lesser-known aspects of Indian art focusing at the turbulent end of British colonial era when the dawn of modernism offered Indian

artists of early 20th Century with a commanding device of colonial confrontation. Bauhaus exhibition in 1922, Kolkata marked an entrance of European modernism in India to potentially intervene and mingle with Indian nationalism. The decline of oriental art, changing nature of imperial patronage, rise of feminine voice, realization of primitive elements for independent artistic expression marked the modern India.

The second chapter of this book unveils inventing the Indian peasant to assess the primitive reception in modern art as a partial disillusion and ostentation. It was not only the western intake for Indian art, but Stella Kramrisch introduced the modernity of style in urban folk painting of *Kalighat* and *Katha*-embroidered images of rural Bengal to European Avant-grade.

2.5 Recognizing the aesthetic perspective

Until about fifty years ago, the researchers involved in study of regional folklore and anthropology did not count on the potential of self-expression and aesthetic value of folk paintings. The paintings were made in the pilgrimages and sold to temple visitors as souvenirs. They were valued for the rituals that they were associated with.

It was in the beginning of 20th century that a handful of scholars started recognizing the aesthetic prospective of the regional artistry and threw light on them through their writings and speeches. In 1916 Ananda Coomaraswamy commented on less-sophisticated *Pahari* paintings of Rajasthan (Fig.2.9) with great regard, unless of which the connoisseurs could only know of Mughal art as worthwhile for appreciation, hence collection. It was Coomaraswamy, to rehabilitate all forms of Indian art, regardless of academic or nonacademic style, to the European audiences. His writings enabled the viewers to grasp the aesthetics of rural and vernacular term of artistic expression.

1900s was a time when the contemporary art scenario of Europe was experiencing the dynamic idea of modernism. Painters from Germany and France showed significant zing to vitalize and reshuffle the existing norms of pictorial expression every now and then. They dared to rebuke the classical norms of image making to engage themselves in new experiments. For a very long time the cultural enthusiasm for folk art was confined to Bengal. The exponents of Bengali region could sense the mode of European modern art that had corresponded to a liberated style that encouraged distortion, arbitrariness, symbolism and real space to achieve a rudimentary simplicity similar to folk art. In Europe the changes were caused by their newly beholden

ventures of African art and Japanese *Ukiyo-e* woodcut prints and later the two-dimensional quality of Persian carpets.

The educated and visionary art lovers and art collectors of Bengal could identify the unique virtue of Indian Folk Paintings in nonacademic category. They threw light on the archaic yet bold expressions, fresh spontaneity, confidence, simplicity of means, and the very distinctive style of the folk art.

Art critic, Ajit Ghose and artist Mukul De in 1920s were amongst the pioneers who began to collect and preserve the living folk art works of their time. In 1930s, Guru Saday Dutta, an Indian Civil Service official, travelled the remote villages of Bengal and made a large collection of folk art of a great significance. Slowly more centers of folk paintings were located all over the country.

'The term 'folk paintings' here encompasses pictures made in Indian villages, by both men and women, for ornamentation of their abodes, portrayals of their gods and for their various rituals; and, by local professional painters or artisans for use of the local people. The term also includes pictures made in the bazars by hereditary painters to cater to the needs of the urban population, and those made at centres of pilgrimage by traditional professional painter families. All these paintings were produced in a variety of styles and themes. History, sociology and geography infused the painting of each region with local flavour. To some extent their style and quality depended on the materials available in the place in which they were executed 'These very factors help us to identify them region wise. And yet, through all the apparent diversity there runs an underlying unity which makes them 'Indian'. - Jagdish Mittal

<http://jigyasa0.tripod.com/folk.html>, accessed on 1st November 2012

Gurusaday Dutt's contribution to the Folk Art of Bengal is counted as superior to all. He took interest in folk art to strengthen the social culture at large as a colonial administrator. During his tenure as the district magistrate of Birbhum, Bengal, he initiated the first exhibition of *Patua* art in 1932 by collecting numerous scroll paintings and songs associated to them. The collected papers in torn condition preserved in Gurusaday Museum's covered cases with restricted access reveal useful literature on folk arts and crafts of Bengal. In his article titled, Folk Art and Its Relation to National Culture, The Soul Characteristics of Each Nation Should be Preserved, [TH-960_06610601](#)

Gurusaday Dutt divided human activities into three departments respectively to Reason, Imagination and Emotion to realize that a distinctive characteristic of a particular is not conditioned to any race or nation. According to him the cultural contacts between races and nations, although alarming, must not be restricted to enable enrichment in the existing cultural wealth.

“..the importance of folk art is realized as the fountain for renewal of national inspiration and for the resuscitation of national culture. For the folk art of a nation is the sincerest and most spontaneous collective expression of its essential philosophy of, and outlook on, life and of the distinctive moral and spiritual ideas of the race - of its simple joys and sorrows as well as of its highest aims and aspirations expressed through an art language especially suited to its race-genius and embodying the imagery, turn of expression, tonality and rhythm peculiar to it and evolved through countless centuries by operation of the physical environment and spiritual and cultural values”

[Gurusaday Dutt, The Importance of Folk Art and Its Relation to National Culture, Page. 4]: Source Gurusaday Dutt Museum, Kolkata

2.6 Cultural Inheritance

K. G. Subramany in his book Living Tradition rose a very curtail point on cultural inheritance, that neither should be counted as indisputable nor as obsolete. It is rather a question of originality that is also not free from preconceived notions and antecedents. Traditional practice and contemporary context is based on how the artist as a creator combines his personal contribution to a tradition in sync with the former precedents to maintain the life that is irresistible. According to him, it is a circuit that makes the creative individual to contribute to its growth and receive a contribution in to his own personal growth as well. In his view, the rationale of creativity in traditional art forms is operated by collective identities but validity lies on their agreement to the needs and values of time. The collectiveness comprises of factors like ethnicity, regional identity or nationalistic obligations that led people once to identify the characteristic features of indigenous art tradition of India. It was unfair for the ruling governance of colonial India to undermine the unbroken tradition of existing regional art and craft, which continued unbreakably for years.

Other than, E.B. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswamy, there was Okakura Kakuzo, to pledge a 'Pan-Asian Indigenism'. Sister Nivedita, George Birdwood tried to look at the tradition to boost nationalism. On the contrary, in 20th century Europe, artists like Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani, Paul Klee welcomed modern expression in light of world's traditional culture, drew great impetus for likeminded artists and art lovers of India. Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose realized the need of an exposure to folk art forms and language to broaden the sensibilities of modern art practitioners. Nandalal Bose worked with the Patuas of Bengal and his Haripura posters are the apt examples of his success. Gurusaday Dutta indicated a two-folded process with examples from European nationalist ideologies. One is to hold onto their folk art to rejuvenate patriotic feelings and the other is to reinvestigate primitive spirit to reintroduce simplicity. With this realization he ventured to save the folk art of Bengal with utter promptness that resulted in inspiring many. To Dutta's opinion,

“unlike the cultivated arts of the sophisticated stages of society in all countries, often marred by a complicated formality and artificiality, an excessive elegance and an over-refinement of mannerism bordering on efficiency, the folk art of every nation has a primitive purity, directness, vitality and robustness which serve as a perennial fountain for the rejuvenation and strengthening of national life and art from age to age.”

Based on a lecture delivered at the Postgraduate Department in Arts, University of Calcutta, on 7th April 1932, and published in *Prabuddha Bharata*, October 1932, Dutta strongly stated,

“ Let every child born of Bengali parents be placed from the earliest years in possession of all those things which are the distinctive products of the Bengali race, and he will , to echo the words of Cecil Sharp, thereby know and understand his country and countrymen far better than he does at present; and knowing and understanding them, he will love them the more, realize that he is united to them by subtle bond of blood and of kinship, and become, in the highest sense of the world a better citizen and a true patriot.”

[Gurusaday Dutt, *Folk Art and Crafts of Bengal: The Collected Papers, Folk Art and Its Relation to National Culture*, Pg.10]: Source Gurusaday Dutt Museum, Kolkata

It is clear from the statement above that injecting nationalistic notions had been an immediacy of time. K. G. Subramanyan's comments made much later in 1987 on the context of cultural inheritance reverberates a similar spirit with more hardheaded term.

“Each human being inherits when he is born into a society of any sophistication a large inheritance of culture that feeds, nourishes and gives direction to his growth; and to him this society assumes a parental status. So his reaction to it is filial in a sort: it is torn between a feeling of affection and gratitude on one side and of resentment and rebellion on the other. Fundamentally, however, a tradition is based on a complex of situational factors or what we may call a work-circuit—the motivation and rationale of the activity, its conceptual and technological components, its emotional undercurrents; from these emerge its formal characteristics. When these factors hold constant one can safely expect continuity in these characteristics, and when they change, expect a corresponding change.”

(Subramanyan, 1987)

It is evident therefore from the fact that revival of folk art principle aided the nationalistic movement in our country during the pre-independence era and even long after the independence when nationalism lost its immediate significance, folk art did not lose its relevance that marks the core of creation. Folk art practice implies the fundamental question of inheriting and eventually contributing to a tradition, steering its growth further.

Folk paintings being deeply rooted to life and living crosses the initial paradigm of spiritual foundation to respond to the real happening and thereby constantly shuffles its creative modality pertaining morality, adjusting to the values of contemporary society with traditional value system. It faces the challenge of constantly balancing between the modern sensibility, promptly responses to the current happenings and the responsibility as an inheritance of an age-old ethical foundation.

2.7 Patachitra - early literary sources

Pata means clothe in Sanskrit and *Chitra* is picture. Pictures are of two kinds. They are drawings with brush line and chisel-sculpted relief sculptures or engraved images. The practitioners are

called *Patua*. *Patuas* often mention their paintings as writings, because of the emphasis that the *patas* have on the narrative aspects of the content.

History of the origin of *patachitra* from partial and authentic sources and common sayings claim that the painted scrolls have been widely used for the purpose of social reformation to educate and morally train the common people. Literature reveals that during the time of Buddha, there were communities titled as *Mashkari* who were appointed for such tasks.

Abhigyan Shakuntalam and *Malavikagnimitram* by the great poet Kalidasa from the 5th Century have mentions of *patachitra* practice and viewing, in them. Vanabhata's *Harshacharit* from 7th century and Bishakhdutta's *Mudrarakshasa* from 8th century mention existence of *Yamapata* that proves the ancientness of this tradition. In *Mudrarakshasa* it is mentioned that the *Mashkari* community used to demonstrate painted scrolls against alms from the common households. In their narration and paintings they showed how the messengers of Yama, the God of death, destined sinners to punishment for their misdeeds. Even now, the *Patachitrakars* of Bengal region often conclude their religious demonstrations with the unavoidable end episode of 'after death' scenes, that embodies the court of Yama, the God of Death and the ultimate sentence. In Vikrampur, Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, they call this kind of demonstration as *Pata-nachano*, which means to make a painted scroll dance, to emphasize upon its performance aspect. Ancient text *Shukraneetishar* indicates many forms of *pratima* that are cult images for mother Goddess.

Pratima saikati paishthi lekhyā lepyan mrinmoyee/

Vakshi pashan-dhatutha sthiragneya yathottara// (11/4/4)

The text categorically mentions *lekhyā*, which were to be painted as two-dimensional pictures for worshipping. Further, painted and rolled up narrative scrolls attached to wooden sticks (Fig.2.5) find mentioning in *Chandimangal kavya*. The Christian missionaries during 1st & 2nd Century AD used papyrus for the same purpose. Those paintings are kept at Vatican till date.

The cave paintings of Ajanta also have some stylistic reminiscence, from the 1st & 2nd Century B.C.E depicting stories from Jataka display a similar formation of continuous narration. Sanchi stupa complex has combination of miniature carvings as stone relief sculptures on its narrative panels. **Devaprashad Ghosh in Bharatiyo Shilpadhara [Page.1]** mentions of Buddhist monk from the 6th Century B.C.E named Mathaliputta Goshala, a well-known philosopher, who was the son

of a *Pata Chitrakar* from Nalanda. Patanjali, the author of *Yogasutra* in his reinterpretation of *Panini sutra* mentions of a painter community named *Shoubhik* who created scrolls to demonstrate and took it as their profession. Earlier in 4th Century B.C.E, Panini wrote in his book *Ashthadhyae*, of two distinct groups of painters.

1. Village Painters: those who paint to cater to the need of rural folks
2. Court Painters: those who create according to the wish and taste of the king. (Fig. 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 2.14)

2.7.1 General classification of *Patachitra*

The paintings primarily are of two types; based on shape and theme.

1. Theme based paintings can further be classified into two categories, dealing either with religious themes or with secular subject matters.
2. The shape-based classification separates the narrative scrolls (*Jorano pata* or *Deeghal pata*) from single frame paintings (*Ekachitra*) that are rectangular, square, tetragonal and circular in shape.

Narrative scrolls are either horizontal (*Aare latai pata*) or vertical (*latai pata*). Horizontal scrolls are usually divided into seven rectangular chambers. They are mostly 400 cm in length and 15 to 20 cm in width. Vertical scrolls with 25 or 30 rectangular chambers are around 150 to 700 cm in length and 25 to 30 cm. in width. This very tradition of scroll painting with narrative continuity in the depiction can be compared with the narrative scrolls of Tibet, Nepal, China and Japan. Narrative *Deeghala Pata* or *Jorano Pata* is often embedded with songs sung by the painters. The themes are generally centered on Gods and Goddesses.

Ekachitra or single-framed paintings are of two categories. They are tribal paintings such as *Santhal* painting and urban folk painting of *KalighatPata*. Urban folk art includes subjects from daily life activities, flora and fauna, static pictures, mythological portraitures, social and historical theme based pictures, humorous and sarcastic comedy and caricatures. *Deeghala patachitra* (scroll painting) is perceived as a combination of some miniature paintings having a narrative continuity in their prevailing visual style. Individual frames of the scroll are slightly larger in their scale than a miniature painting, due to the purpose of public display and visibility during the performance. There are evidences of similar scroll paintings in the Shiva and Vishnu

temples of Odisha and Assam. They also resemble *Tanka* paintings that are preserved in the Buddhist monasteries and caves of Nepal and Tibet. Both *Ekachitra* and *Deeghala patachitra* are derivatives of traditional miniature tradition. *Patachitra* of Bengal, Orissa, *Mithila* paintings from Bihar, Rajasthan's *Pabuji Ka Phad*, *Jain Patachitra* of Gujarat, *Warangal* and *Ligonda* of Andhrapradesh, *Tanjore* Paintings from Tamilnadu can all be categorized in these two shape-based formats.

Then there are *Gajir Pata* painted along with doctrines of local *Islamic* saints, *Jishupata* (Jesus Christ scroll), *Patachitras* based on Hindu mythological stories like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Chaitanya*, *Krishnaleela*, *Santhali* tribal *pata*, *Yama pata* depicting life after death, *panchakalyani pata* and *chakshudan pata*. Further, the state rulers patronized artists, to paint the quest and entertainments and their aristocrats. The bankers and merchants or who could afford art went for religious, literary and mundane subjects. These became the general subjects for the artists to paint during the 18th century deriving imperial Mughal standards.

Ancient *Tamralipta*, of southwest Midnapur of undivided Bengal, presently named as Tamluk, happened to be the cultural capital connecting Odisha and Bengal. *Patachitra* tradition of *Joranopata* and *Choukapata* vastly flourished from Tamluk and stretched to the adjoining districts of Bankura, Murshidabad and Birbhum.

2.7.2 A religious connect

Scroll painting tradition is most suggestive, having the combination of narration, form and content; narrator being a painter and a singer at the same time. It is a synchronization of story, poetic rhythm, painted visual and the oration. The community of these painters disseminates a sense of secularity. Despite being Hindu by origin are converted to Islam due to the negligence and humiliation that they had received from their own religion. The painter community is free from prejudice and shows an integrated religious bent in their theme and expression. It helps them achieve a greater acceptance among their targeted viewers. Except for the painters from Purulia district, all other painters of West Bengal maintain a peculiar status of being neither Hindu nor Muslim. They are divided into four groups, which are, *Duari pato*, *Phulkata pato*, *Lamphakata pato* and *Shanbandha pato*; or in a different opinion, *Chitrakar patua*, *Maal patua*, *Bede patua* and *Mashkata patua*.

Jaranopata or painted scrolls never represents any sense of volume, mass, and spatial depth through one or two point perspective. They were two-dimensional and non- decorative. Their artworks are based on imagination with least affinity to academic realism. *Patachitra* therefore are not conventionally classified as examples of Fine Arts but Folk Art. They are not perfect in academic parameter but truly mature in style and aesthetics. The remarkable style and it's established identity has made the tradition popular over the globe. The tradition and practice of *pata* painting having been born from the magic belief of agrarian matriarchal society, has now shaped into the recourse of wealth for the males.

For more than two thousand five hundred years, depending on the collective memory of the sages, the Vedic tradition had been preserved orally. They apprehended that transcribing the content would have detracted them from their sacrosanctity. Certain evidences establish that the grammarians were aware of some form of alphabetical construction. They had demarcated the syntax of the Sanskrit language by the fifth century B.C. but there were no suggestions found of an early script that could be categorized as Sanskrit. In sixth century B.C. the tradition of oral scripts included the theological doctrines and the canonical literature of the two heterodox religious systems; Jainism and Buddhism. Although it is not known whether writing was practiced in Vedic India, the Indus Valley Civilization had evinces of a pictographic script about 3000 years old. The traders from Mesopotamia reintroduced writing in the eighth century B.C.E. But writing did not popularize as an effective medium for recording and transcribing the wide literary heritage. Such omnipotence of the oral literature sustained until about the fourth century B.C.E. (Doshi, 1985).

Written scripts began to get incorporated with the Pali Buddhist canons of fifth century B.C. inscribed on leaves, wooden base and metal sheets. Jains and Buddhists having been lesser orthodox than the Vedic religious group had not inherited a colossal and well-established vestige of tradition. Jains experienced the disadvantage of memory based oral transmission during a famine that hit Magadha during the fourth century B.C.E. A large number of Jain monks then migrated to south from Magadha, died of starvation or suffered memory lapses caused by malnutrition. As a result, many unwritten Jain canon were bewildered and hence lost. To inhibit added disintegration, the Jains formed a Council of Monks at Pataliputra and began to retrieve the canonical teaching with some immediacy. The monks who migrated during the famine to south, had returned back to find the newly formed canons as inauthentic and declared themselves

as the *Mula Sangha* (the original council) and broke away from the *Digambaras*. The contents of the canonical texts known as *Shastra-Bhandaras* (treasury of canons) opens up a persistent tradition. It contains numerous illustrated documents, containing paper and palm leaf manuscripts and *Patachitras* on clothes.

“Over the centuries each sect has established centres throughout India. Both illustrated manuscripts traditions serve to supplement and complement one another. And together they have contributed valuable evidence towards determining the historical unfolding of Jain painting in particular, as well as towards the history of Indian Miniature Painting in general.” (Doshi, 1985).

It is often difficult to disassociate myths, legends and sagas from the facts; scholarly indications suggest that the miniatures replaced the tradition of painting in the caves. During the middle half of 8th century Bengal was ruled by the Pal and Sen dynasty. This was after Bharata wrote his *Natyashastra* to set the doctrine of aesthetics in classical art forms. During the reign of Pala dynasty in Bengal, codification of canon in all official forms of art came into vogue with the scholarly writings of Bhamaha, Anandabhardhan and Abhinabagupta. Pala miniature painting of Bengal is to be counted as analogous to the earlier mentioned Jain miniature tradition. This was amongst the most significant indigenous miniature traditions of India, which in spite of being regional and provincial had found a national eminence due to its scrupulous adherence to the grammar.

Folk painters on the contrary did not follow the canons and were therefore exorcised from the mainstream practice followed by a further expel from the Hindu community. We make an assumption that this appellation positively resulted in to the formation of a parallel practice that was free from the classical restrictions. The *patachitra* tradition had rather achieved a reclusive identity in isolation that was much grounded and thrived as wild flowers within common populace.

2.8 Ethnographic perspective on the study of Folk Art& Culture

Study of Folk art and culture is multidisciplinary in nature. The life and growth of folk art depends on the geographic location, climatic condition and the economic stability of a region. On the other hand it maintains indifference with the political ups and downs. Even though, folk art

and culture is responsive to the society and political happenings, the practice is seldom dependent on political patronization.

Study of Folk culture has two structural divisions; they are form centric and oration centric. In India, traditionally folk art and crafts included industries such as Metal-craft, Clay-models, Wood-craft, Stone-craft, Shola-craft, Weaving, Cane & bamboo craft, Mat work and Paper Mache. Clay work may be divided into subsections of baked and unbaked terracotta and metal craft into brass, bronze and gold crafts in terms of their material. They also can be classified in terms of their building methods; such as Painting, Carving, Weaving, and Decoration.

Pradyot Ghosh, in his book, *Banglar Lokashilpa (Folkart of Bengal)* refers to a group of anthropologists who embrace folklore as a holistic cultural phenomenon. Samuel P. Beard in his writing on folk culture indicated the all-including quality particular to this kind of study. According to Kenneth W. Clark & Merry W. Clark,

“Folklore is a universal topic, its substance includes material from all areas...”

(Bayard, 1953), (Basu, 1975)

Study of Folk-lore according to Prodyot Ghosh include food, mental acts, language, amusement and recreation, festivals, health and treatment, body language and art. Folk life, similarly include cookery, faith and belief, folk literature, sports and comics, religious festivals, medicines, dance performances, art and craft. Folk culture includes domains like History, Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Fine arts, Aesthetics and Linguistics.

Folk art, despite of being discernible in a progressive society, is separated from the mainstream gentleman culture due to probable geographic or cultural reasons. Folk art follows the need of local inhabitants in terms of taste and the use of method and material. Folk art is seen as a successful culmination of complex primitive emotions (Basu, 1975). Binay Ghosh in his book *Pashchimbanger Sanskriti*, refers to Gordon Childe's Social Evolution Theory that prescribes another model of classification in the area of folk lore as being, evolutionist, diffusionist, functionalist and structuralist in nature (Ghosh, 1976).

In Europe these kinds of art practices are recognized as Peasant Art, Rural Art, Traditional Art, Colonial Art, Regional and Provincial Art and Naïve Art. Nevertheless, the art forms have fine differences between them. They flourish in unique but restrictive conditions such as isolation,

lack of academic (conventional) education, lack of (material) wealth, regional confinement, local medium, mechanically simple process, characteristically accomplished non-mechanically, lack of accuracy, uncommon imports, single craftsmanship, orthodox style, repetition of common mode of style from time immemorial and free from foreign influences.

The outcomes are best assessed through an understanding of the style with structural forms, hereditary inclinations, conservativeness in method, selection of medium, symbols, motifs, colour symbolism, use of colour to maintain space, distinct decorative penchants and overall depiction.

The artistic impulse is matchlessly mingled with elements of natural endowment, hereditary skill, environmental ethics and cultural awareness that ensure its cognitive qualities. Art is all about expression. In folk art, expression is based on thought or cognition, feeling, affection, simple and complex emotions, act of willingness, volition and conation. Cognition is based on sensation, perception, image, memory, imagination, conception and reasoning.

Patachitra or Painted scrolls from Bengal like a few analogous traditions comprises of vertical scroll paintings that are narrative in character. Mural paintings, floor decoration (*alpona* in West Bengal, *aripan* in Bihar), painted clay and wooden dolls are also popular. The rhythmic expression and vibrancy of colours mark the reputed identity (Ghosh, 1976). Professor Deviprasad Ghosh observed that *Patachitra* of Bengal has peculiarity in style that is evident in the provincial divisions. It is interesting to see that the style changes with the location. In Midnapur the painted scrolls have many characters, elaborate decorations, and images of deities in grand scale to mark their importance. Use of green that is extracted from beans is to be counted as a unique feature. The portraits in the *Patachitras* of Birbhum are either in three fourth views or full frontal with joined eyebrows, an Indian red ground, a compulsory frame or border, flower, fruits or just dots to decorate them. In Bankura the faces are in profile, the drapes of deities are embedded with floral motifs. One can observe here knotted and plate like line and patterns and an Indian red colour in the base. *Patachitras* of Hugli district have a dark brown base with execution in linear pattern (*rekhamandalbala*). Paintings of Manbhum show non-confined space, a formal approach with impressions of deep Indian red, white and yellow colours. In Santhal Pargana the colours green, blue, yellow silhouette are on white base and the images have a childlike rendering with studied spontaneity and two-dimensional motifs. These

observations come handy to provide visual clue when looking at assorted evidences of old and ragged scroll painting with no mentioning of their origin. It remains a crucial question as in how the classical norms rule the elementary compositions of a folk painting. The paintings rich in mythological content seldom have arbitrary notions in the conception and execution. The myth, moral, grammar, cosmology, lexicography, genealogies, metrics and rhetoric of *Veda*, *Purana*, *Upanishada* and similar ancient texts, as a passing knowledge, periodically influenced the fabric of Indian folk paintings. *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, third *Khanda* is a source of such information that govern all traditional and ritualistic activities of ancient time.

[Kramrisch, Stella, *The Vishnudharmottara Part III: A Treatise On Indian Painting And Image-Making*. Second Revised and Enlarged Edition, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1928, p.3 to 5.]

Vishnu Purana may not have been there earlier than the 2nd half of the 4th century CE. The chapters of the *Vishnudharmottara* that deals with paintings must have been compiled in the 7th century CE. The text canonized the measurements of the body, leg, face and proportions through a conversational discourse between Vajra and Markandeya.

“Markandeya said: Without a knowledge of the art of dancing, the rules of painting are very difficult to be understood. Hence no work of (this) earth, (oh) king, should be done even with the help of these two, (for something more has to be known).

Vajra said: Please speak to me about the art of dancing and the rules of painting you will tell me (afterwards) for, (oh) twice-born one, the rules of the art of dancing imply (those of) the art of painting.

Markanda said: The practice of (dancing) is difficult to be understood by one who is not acquainted with music. Without music dancing cannot exist at all.”

(Kramrisch, 1928)

So the expression of painting is not self-sufficient and gets multiplied in effect with performance and reaches completion. Ultimately the text uncovers rule of colour application, composition, scale, proportion and style to achieve the aesthetic parameters to strike a balance between the subjectivity and objectivity of artistic expression. In order to analyze the contemporary range of folk paintings it is considered important to link them with the ancient texts to follow the thread of change in the execution and the truth of conformity to traditional roots.

Bharatshilpe murti, (Translated by Sukumar Ray, Some notes on Indian Artistic Anatomy) and Sadanga, or Six Limbs of Painting. Abanindranath Tagore, The Indian Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta, 1921 are the two very good sources for information related to the rule of traditional art in Indian and Chinese context.

The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts, Kapila Vatsyayan, Second Edition, 1997, by Abhivav Publication is another very important source where the doctrine of Indian art and aesthetics is duly documented. The practice of folk painting is regional that grows in isolated locations, varies in style and execution but are integrated by means ritualistic norms, which are common to the religion. They are based on a ritualistic foundation that decides the compositional organization connected to the ritual of *Vedic Yajna*, *Natyashastra*, *Vastu-purusha*, *Silpa-panjara* and *Sangita-purusha*, that is largely followed by the artists, architects, sculptors and performing artists working with Indian principle. They are studied to realize the common connection that holistically identifies a style in spite of apparent diversity.

2.9 Exponents

The above-mentioned findings from infrequent texts do not necessarily suffice; the thorough recognition of each individual from the beginning of 20th century, who has realized the significance, appreciated the aesthetic content, contributed to the growth of practice through worthwhile research and duly supported the tradition of Indian folk paintings to bring it to the present form. Art and cultural historians E.B. Havell, Kakuzo Okakura, A. K. Coomaraswamy, Sister Nivedita, Stella Kramrish, social worker Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, political thinkers M. K. Gandhi and B. R. Ambedkar, civil servant Gurusaday Dutt, anthropologist G. S. Ghurye, Verrier Elwin, artist, poet and writer Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Jamini Ray and Sunayani Devi are some of the exponents who contributed to the cause. For educated the realization centered on the thought to bring about a deeply rooted culture to confront the superficiality of contemporary elite society. The connection that folk culture shared with the classical heritage was duly marked as worth of absorption to the socio economic and cultural surroundings. Their acts for nationalist spirit building through art and culture echoed William Morris and Kakuzo Okakura's initiations respectively in England and Japan. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay is remembered as a pioneer reformer to introduce co-operative policies for cultural upliftment in the craft sector in post independent India. The life, work and

publications of K. G. Subhramanyan, Jyotindra Jain, Komal Kothari, J. Swaminathan, Tapati Guha Thakurta, Partha Mittar, Pupul Jayakar, Bhaskar Kulkarni and Mulkras Anand are worthy of laudable mention.





Fig. 2.1 *Kalam eluttu* (detail), Ephemeral Art Form of Kerela, 2012, Photo Courtesy Chantal Jumel



Fig. 2.2 *Kalam eluttu*, Ephemeral Art Form of Kerela, 2012, Photo Courtesy Chantal Jumel
TH-960_06610601



Fig. 2.3 Jain Pata Painting, Western India, Albert Hall Museum Jaipur

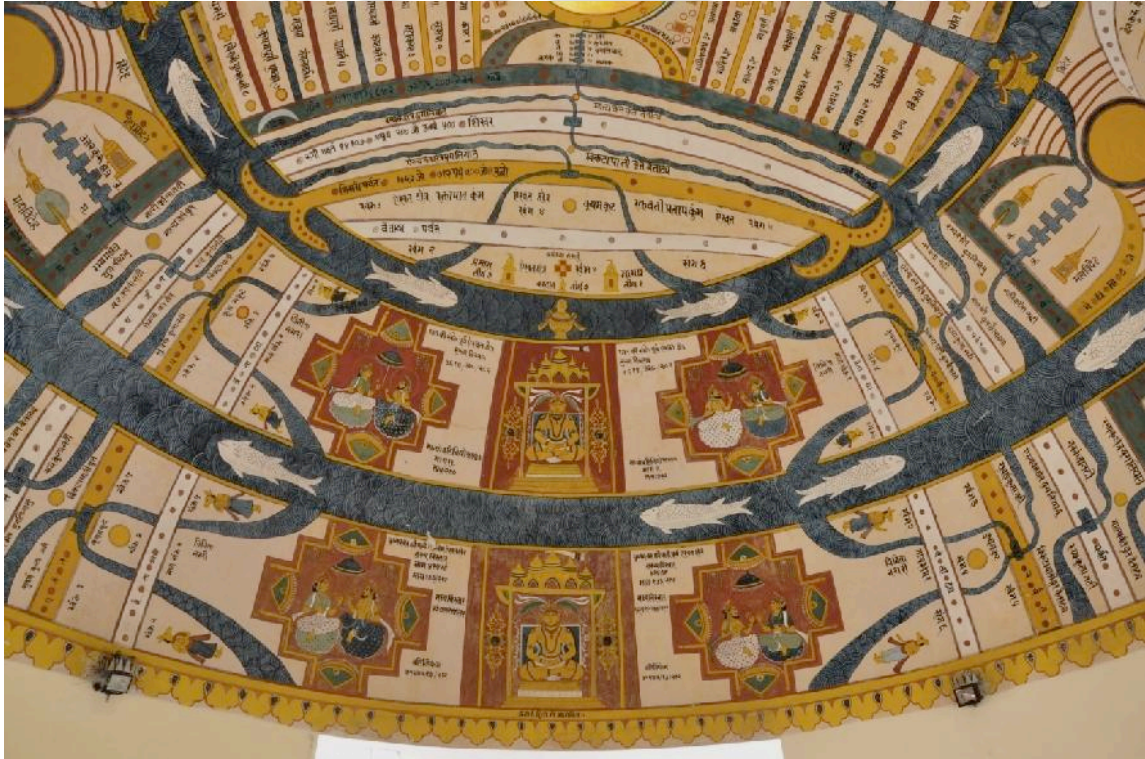


Fig. 2.4 Navagraha Theme, Ceiling Mural by Srilal Joshi, Jawahar Kala Kendra Jaipur



Fig. 2.5 Moyna Chitrakar demonstrating her painted *Patachitra*, 2012, Nayagram, Bengal



Fig. 2.6 Gita Devi drawing on paper, 2006, Jitwarpur, Madhubani



Fig. 2.7 Painting on a Temple Wall by Sita Devi, 1997, Jitwarpur, Madhubani



Fig. 2.8 *Taraka Vadh*, Jamini Ray, Early Phase, Gurusaday Museum Collection, Kolkata



Fig. 2.9 *Geeta Govindam*, Pahari Miniature Painting, Albert Hall Museum Jaipur, Collection



Fig. 2.10 *Ramayana* (Detail), Scroll Painting (Paper), Birbhum, 19th Century A.D. Bengal, Gurusaday Museum Collection, Kolkata



Fig. 2.11 *Rama's Wedding* (Detail from *Ramayana*), *Deeghal Pata* (Scroll Painting, Paper) Murshidabad, 19th Century A.D. Bengal, Gurusaday Museum Collection, Kolkata



Fig. 2.12 *Wedding Scene*, *Ekachitra*, 19th Century A.D. Birbhum, Bengal, Gurusaday Museum Collection, Kolkata

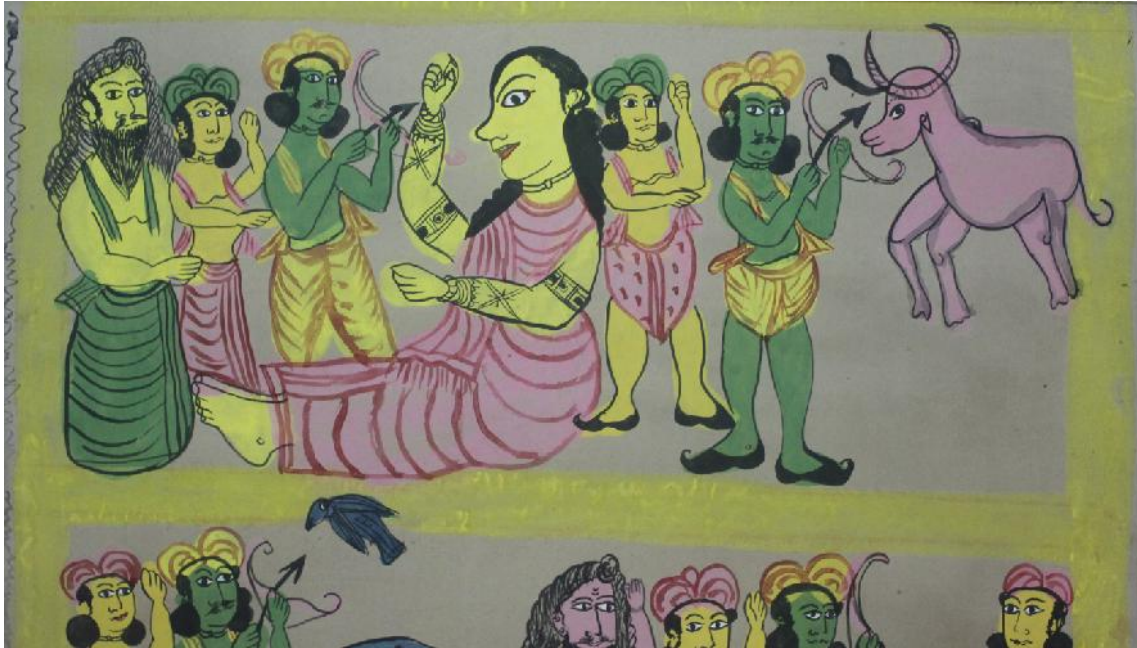


Fig. 2.13 *Rama and laxmana killing Taraka* (Detail from *Ramayana*), *Deeghal Pata* (Scroll Painting, Paper) Midnapur, 20th Century A.D. Bengal, Gurusaday Museum Collection, Kolkata

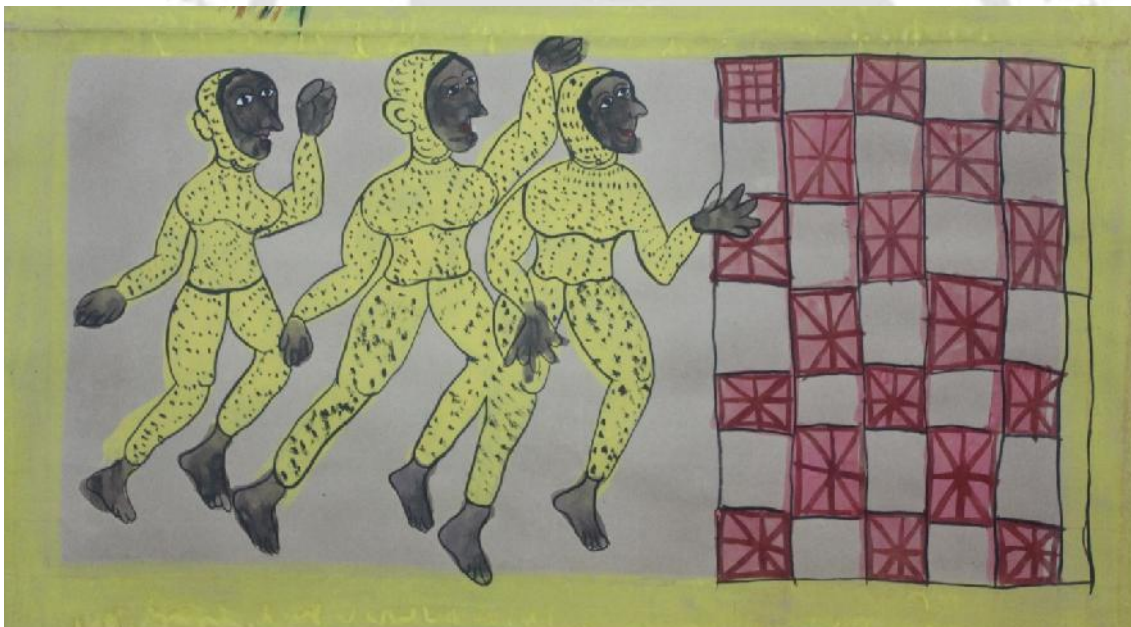


Fig. 2.14 Detail from *Ramayana*), *Deeghal Pata* (Scroll Painting, Paper) Midnapur, 20th Century A.D. Bengal, Gurusaday Museum Collection, Kolkata

AESTHETIC CONTINUUM OF CONTEMPORARY FOLK PAINTING OF INDIA

:

CASE STUDY OF FIVE TRADITIONAL PRACTICES



Chapter 3

Context of Folk Art

3.1 Purpose of Practice - Ritualistic and Social

Folk art is a countenance of traditional culture. The intrinsic association of art forms with ritualistic and religious purpose laid the foundation of folk art practice in India and perpetually insured a continuity of the tradition. It is also the inherent simplicity of folk art that has often drawn the viewer towards it. These traditions have been generating highly individuated and conscious art practitioners. The folk painting traditions of India are intrinsically associated to the customary rites. To trace the principle origin, one must understand its religious compulsion, which operates the flow of the practice and is primarily responsible in shape up its stylistic identity. They have often grown in the vicinity of the Hindu temples, to be used as sacred wall hangings, harmonizing the walls around the chambers and passageways of the temple. Roving minstrels (*Kathakas*, story tellers) painted mythological figures and carried them to places, displaying them with an oration of the words of God. The painters over ages have been performing the role of a reformer by promoting the flare of rectitude in the minds of the common populace, not as a preacher but entertainer with their artistic ability of painting and singing.

'The meaning of art is similarly a mystic experience for which one needs divya chakshu, the inner perception. For understanding Indian traditional art, or for that matter, any art form, one needs Divine vision to understand the message of the artist. Beyond the outer image is the inner meaning, which can be perceived and shared both by the artist and the viewer. It is this vision, the shared experience that reveals the Soul of Art.'

(Ramani, 2007).

The present study in the context of folk art is an indication towards the perception of viewing and appreciating artworks to conduct a comprehensive art critique. The art works, created by these artists, not educated in academic style in urban art schools, who inherit the skill and carry it through the generations, may seem to contain elements in them that are ageless and primitive or could even be crude or amateurish. They are far beyond the representational norms of realism and naturalism and can be totally idealistic in nature. Folk art being a community practice almost every inhabitant of the cluster has certain level of skills, but only a few qualify to be the master. The rest of the people perform as followers to contribute to the process as skilled craftsmen.

3.2 Contents of the chapter

The present study selects five different and distinct traditional practices out of ten to twelve analogous traditions to represent the perspective of Indian folk painting. Geographical location of these folk clusters is shown in the schematic map of India in page no. 82.

Folk practices are as under:

1. **Madhubani Paintings of Bihar** – the discussion focuses on the practice that was restricted to the women for centuries and now for the last two decade showing signs of change with male members of the community taking it up as profession. It also describes the difference in style based on the cast system and how these styles are merging in present days.
2. **Wall Paintings from the state of Jharkhand** – this portion of the study is based on observation and interviews conducted to investigate the ritualistic compulsion of the image making. The images are spontaneous and rich in tribal aesthetics but vastly unexplored as a surviving tradition that is centered around *Jadapatia* and their *Yamapata* passing the test of time.
3. **Patachitra of Nayagram and Midnapur from Bengal** – this part focuses primarily on the phenomenon of change caused by the new wave of exposure to the community of *Patuas* who experiment new means to continue their practice.
4. **Patachitra of Raghurajpur in Odisha** – The study here focuses on a family of master painters, having immigrated long ago, carrying a refined sensibility and passing that on through generations and yet keeping their individuality alive.
5. **Kalamkari paintings of Srikalahasti, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh** – focuses on the individual artists who mastermind the community practice. The concerns over various human and socio political factors that constantly influenced and altered the fabric of this age old entity.



Madhubani Paintings of Bihar

3.3 Folk Art Tradition of Madhubani- A Feminine Preserve

Habitual and customary practice of paintings in Madhubani, emerged in its formative years to meet the requirements of the daily ritualistic chores. The artworks embody a harmonious and rhythmic quality in them. The forms are apparently simplistic and extremely pleasing to the eye. They contain numerous motifs, immersed with symbolic significance. Even if connected inherently to the regional customs, these art forms, endorse a universal appeal. The paintings are often accentuated with symbolism as they represent the intrinsic livelihood metaphorically rather than directly. The art stringently establishes its scheme, remains adaptable to the usual representational restrictions and at the same time remains open to the external influences. The women folk from Madhubani continue to create designs on the earthen walls and floors to convene sacred cause of domestic rituals; protective forms and auspicious spaces created for the well being of her kinfolk. They perpetually engage with the creative act in the name of oneness with the God. Precisely this transcendent ideology prevents the art form from disappearing; result that a simple economic or utilitarian argument may not achieve. While religious conviction explains its survival, the creative flair describes its universal spread and fame.

“The folk painting in Madhubani (Mithila region, Bihar, India) emerged as a successful culmination of customary art practice.”

(Archer, 1946)

Traditionally a feminine preserve, the art of Madhubani, for nearly half a decade now has not only brought in fame and recognition but also substantial economic benefits to the community. The sanctimonious process enlightens existence in entire region. One is left mystified with the magnificent aura commencing out of the widespread usage of art and creative designs in every nook and corner that retains the primordial values of its age-old entity.

Following a prolonged ecological crisis, in 1966-68 an endeavor to promote art of Madhubani yielded some favorable outcome. To generate sources for non-agricultural earning, the women folk were persuaded and encouraged to transform their artistic legacy into marketable artifacts. Initiative also regulated art production and initial marketing of the art works. Had it not been the exogenous factors of the patronizing bodies, would Madhubani paintings appreciate the same recognition and acknowledgement that it bears today? The heart of the old society was the farm, community and cultural values. They have their own language and dialects and a characteristic sense of regional personhood that accords back to ancient times. Art forms have been essentially

associated with the agrarian culture. Common instincts of decor for ritualistic purpose worked as a major cause for the continual of tradition. Although most of the individual communities were not totally isolated, the inhabitants were practically self-sustaining with little need of contact with the outside world. The chief means of communication between country dwellers and the outside world were the local government officials, and occasional trade.

Essentially, the cognitive content has been conveyed to this generation, mainly by the women folk. It is a legacy of a visual language inherited by the daughters from their mothers. This particular feature of Madhubani folk art tradition is a unique phenomenon that is unparalleled to any other comparable folk art trends.

“The Mithila Paintings of Bihar are related to the marriage ceremony, and depict various deities and symbols of fertility and prosperity. The wall paintings, practiced by women of the Brahmin and Kayastha families, have preserved their distinctive character in an unbroken tradition through generations.”

(Archer, 1966).

The very fact that Madhubani's fame, its prominence and distinction world over is due to the resourcefulness and efforts of only the women folk who have endowed Madhubani with this fame throughout the world. With due acknowledgments to all creative endeavors of the women folk, one must not cease to value the external resources also to which the popularity and recognition of Madhubani paintings today is beholden. The women painters of Madhubani (Fig.3.1, 3.2) are duly credited for their contribution and one must also not undermine the role of the various external resources to which the fame is additionally owed to. During 1950's the *Walter and Sons*, a publishing company printed a calendar (Fig.3.3, 3.4) with black and white reproductions of the native wall paintings. The beginning of Madhubani paintings on paper, close to the form that we see today were created in the year 1967 when an aid worker for the Indian Government, *Bhaskar Kulkarni*, encouraged the rural folk and presented the idea of translating onto paper, the paintings traditionally practiced on walls and floors. One can observe extended miscellanea of pictorial elements, varied imageries constantly being introduced to paintings over the years. With the introduction of a new, rather intimate surface, their individual artistic abilities were for the first time provoked by some external factors. Attaining a freedom of expression, out of the so-called ritual obligations, they felt freer to express their melodic themes and thoughts

virtuously on paper. Madhubani painting till date is recognized for its high-spirited vitality and innovativeness. Has this step outside edge affected the foundation of heritage? How did the artists react to the change, for such openness also lead to deterioration, as it has been observed in similar traditions? The various initiatives to popularize and to provide its practitioners with due gratitude caused changes, but the creators know in their mind what is changeable and what is invariable in the due course of creation. The author aims to assess the socio anthropological concerns associated to the growth and evolution of this age-old tradition. Like any other folk-art tradition, paintings from Madhubani also mirror the periodical changes and traditional values of the society. The tangential factors time and again affect the fabric of all lives and society and inherent traditional values. Attempt to preserve culture unaffected, within a controlled environment is an unpersuasive scheme. Rather an imperative need is to realize the variable features and preserve the cultural augmentation; the tradition necessitates be revisiting and not re-examining from time to time. This artistic legacy can be well realized if viewed from the grass root echelon of life in Madhubani.

“Paintings on paper are conceptualized as a whole and done freehand without prior sketches. With rare exceptions, artists begin by painting a border or frame with a geometric, floral, or faunal design that often will reflect the intended subject of the painting. Turning them to the subject, they begin in the middle of the paper, outlining the image and then work toward the edges. Details are added after the figures are drawn. The eye is filled in last to give a figure life. As this suggests, the paintings are rooted in an indigenous aesthetics, neither derived from, nor seriously influenced by, Western or colonial schools, museums, galleries, or patrons.” (Szanton and Bakshi, 2007).

3.3.1 *Shaily* or the School of Styles in Madhubani

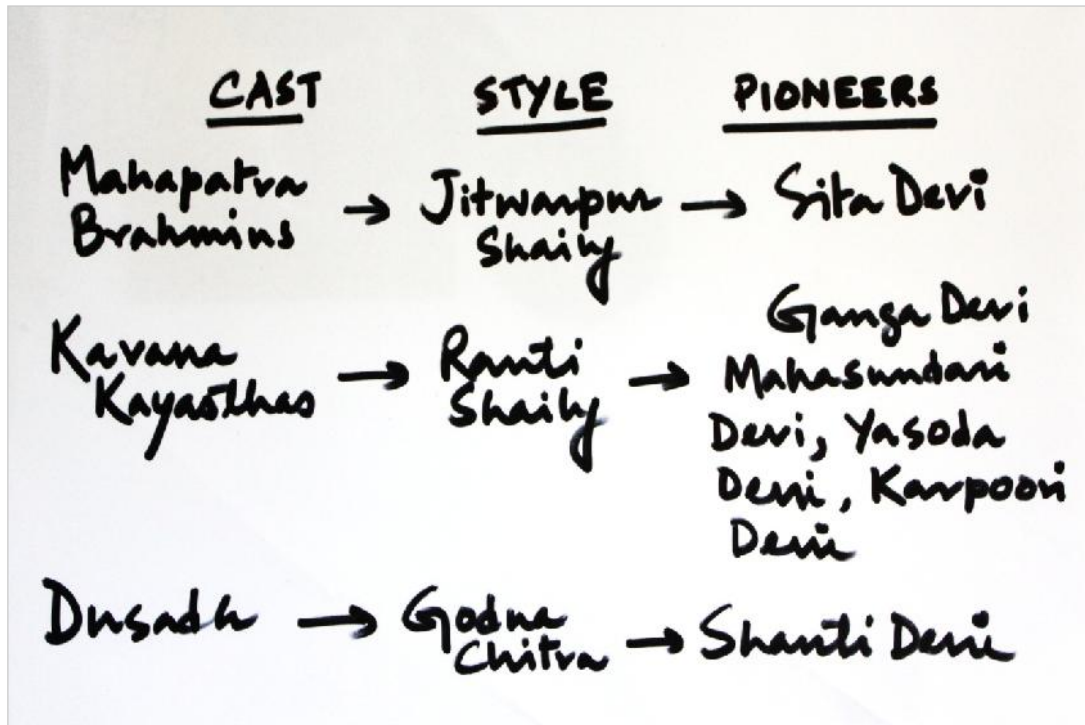


Fig. 3.4 *Shaily* (School of styles)

Transformation in the art of Madhubani came about in the context of stylization and image delineation due to the changes in the surface factor and also the stiff religious and cast/sect distinctions that originated into a development of three different *Shaily* (school of styles).

SitaDevi's (Fig.3.5) characteristic *Brahmin* technique is done using a frayed straw wrapped in cotton / brush, to both outline and fill in the outlines of the figures of gods and goddesses with large masses in the vibrant colors. Locally, this technique is known as *bharni* literally meaning 'filling' (Fig 3.6, 3.7).

Internationally acclaimed *Kaysthakalakars* also transferred their long-standing *Kayastha* wall painting technique onto paper. Their paintings were done with fine black and red ink pens, a technique locally referred to as *kachni*, (Fig.3.8) or line drawing.

One style epitomized by the prolific and continuously innovative work of *Shanti Devi*, using doubled outline of boldly drawn figures, from *Dusadh* (Fig.3.9) pantheon and spaces between them filled with colored floral motifs. Reflective of *Brahmin* style but colours less bright due to the use of natural colours, those artists extract from the different flowers and roots of a variety of plants.

Yet another style of painting by Channo Devi, is based on the *Dusadh* tradition of small protective bodily tattoos known as *godana* (Fig.3.10) which are simple figurative motifs with upturned arms, animals and birds of regular sizes are drawn, within rows of lines or circles all across the standard white paper coated with cow dung.

Apart from these paintings on paper, painting on earthen walls and floor is a regular domestic activity for a Mithila village girl. Not all of them, but some have shown remarkable proficiency in adding more aspiring elements and eventually establishing themselves as painters. The others are not full-timers as artists and are involved with just domestic work but ensure continuance of the tradition simply by contributing to the ephemeral art practice.

Although the *aripans* on floor are painted with white rice paste called *pither* and occasional red dots of vermilion (*sindur*), the walls both inner and outer as well as the *mandapas* at the courtyard are colourfully painted. Earlier, the pigments derived from lampblack, lime, geru (laterite) and other oxide and earth colours, local berries, flowers, twigs, branches, leaves, soils, burnt branches, etc. goat milk, cotton tipped frayed straws and bamboo stick were used to colour-fill the broad areas. Acacia-gum was used as fixative binder for the water-soluble paints. The paintings done on paper are open to paints available in market. They often apply *Multani mitti*, China clay and cow dung tint to have a feel of mudwall on handmade papers.

3.3.2 Male Painters from Madhubani

With the introduction of paper as a medium, a small but growing number of men from the community have taken up painting as their profession. Some male artists from the family of Tantric priests paint avatars of *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, and *Shakti*. They paint *yantras*, the transcendent *tantric* patterns corresponding to those figures. Krishnanand Jha – a *tantric kalakar* of 1980s worked on the complex geometrical formations of *yantra*. He continues to work on the mythological episodes from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Harishchandra*, *Shakuntala* alongside the current topics like the chronicle of a murder in the village that indicates his responsiveness to the social issues. Gopal Saha – worked on the local scenes in a perplexed humorous style. Dushad artist Sarup Lal Paswan, began painting images from the adventures of their cultural hero, Raja Salhesh. Santosh Kumar Das a habitat of *Ranti*, *Madhubani*, studied painting at M. S. University, Baroda in academic style and then explored Madhubani paintings to express a wide range of subjects. This effort stands quite significant adding a new dimension to move the tradition further

more. He was appointed as the director and primary instructor at the Mithila Art Institute, Madhubani, in 2004.

Among the newer generation, perhaps the most talented painter who with his creative skill, experimentation and freethinking made some mark is Rambharos Jha (Fig.3.11). It is interesting to observe that the men practicing Madhubani style of painting have a freer choice of subject matters as compared to the women painters. The male members of the community joined the profession only after the introduction of paper. The men stay away from painting the walls or indulging in floor painting rituals. *Kohbar*, cosmological icons and *Aripan* remain the center of women's range. Men work on secular subjects and political issues. They respond and express their reactions to the current happenings. They also have folktales, moral stories and other literary sources to include in their subject matters. Nevertheless, their paintings have strictly adhered to the traditional style and identity and blend suitably in the general presupposition of Mithila painting tradition being a feminine preserve. Although the new generation women painters are also showing inclination towards a similar choice of subject to the men, the men were innovative since the beginning and have contributed commandingly to the rapid growth to uplift the tradition.

“... while about ten women have received state or national awards over time, the village-based male painters seem to have been precluded from this honor. Ironically, two male Mithila painters recently received national award, but both are based in New Delhi.”
But, then it is certainly the women of Madhubani who solely held the tradition for years, seamlessly and for no material benefit in mind. They deserve the credit to maintain the simplicity of their beautiful minds to stick to their faith despite the apparent difficulty and hardship of their daily livelihood. So, the rewards are well deserved.”

(Szanton and Bakshi, 2007).

Yamapata, Pytkar and Other Folk Paintings of Jharkhand

3.4 Yamapata, Pytkar and Other Folk Paintings of Jharkhand

Jharkhand as a state is situated between *Bihar* and *Bengal*. The location where the practice takes place abruptly covers the whole state. Apart from the *Jadopatia* and *Pytkar* community live ethnic and tribal communities who are inclined towards wall paintings that bridge a stylistic gap between *Madhubani* painting and the *Patachitra* of Bengal.

3.4.1 Yamapata by the Jadopatias

History of the origin of *Jadopatias* who live in Dumka and Sinbhum district of Jharkhand is still debatable as there are several opinions. However in the context of current research we are looking at their art works and positioning them in the contemporary visual culture. The themes of these artworks are related to the funerary rites of the *Santhal* tribe. They are known as *Yamapata* (3.12, 3.13,3.14,3.15,3.16) and 'death' remains the primary subject of these paintings; figurative images with human forms but initially they are devoid of eyes on them. *Jadopatias* paint during the months of *Falgun* and *Chaitra* (Spring to Summer) season. They are called on the occasion of a death in the family. The community believes that the *Jadopatias* are like the Brahma, who can give the dead person eyes to get released and travel through the darkness of death with light and eyesight that leads the dead to the heaven. They believe or even persuaded, that the dead person suffers in darkness till the *Jadopatia* intervenes and paints eyes on their *Yamapatas* initially devoid of eyes. The *Jadopatias* receive gifts that range from utensils to cattle against this performance that combines painting and singing. In the corners of those painted scrolls called *Yamapata*, the *Jadopatias* paint the objects that they receive.

The *Jadopatias* live and work from the places like Durguri, Naosar and Dumka in the state of Jharkhand. They belong to the ethnic Bengali community who speak local Bengali and work for the Santhal tribes. They claim that the tradition is at least a century old. It has been in practice since the inception of Santhal tribe, the largest homogeneous ethnic community in India. The Bengali *Jadopatias* share a synergetic bond with the tribal Santhals since ages, and they are like gurus to them. It is believed that the *Yamaraja* the God of Death and Forgiveness listens to the *Jadopatias* and takes care of the departed souls in their journey after life. Like the folk painters of Bengal, they also use the title *Chitrakar* (painter) as their surname/title. Late Basudev Chitrakar had taught the art to his disciple Kamalapati Chitrakar, a senior artist from Dumka with a

commanding hand. Nitai Chitrakar has aptly made his name in the new generation. Nitin Chitrakar, Ganapati Chitrakar and Mahapati Chitrakar are amongst the regular practitioners.

The subject matters revolve around the concept of reward and punishment; a bad donor getting brutal physical torture after his death, the people of the God of forgiveness take out his tongue with a forceps. There are people being haunted by *Kalkiyari* ghost, thus not able to relieve from the disease that caused the death. Family members of the deceased are expected to satisfy the *Jadopatias* with their desired simple gifts. There are *Santhal* stories based on *Karam Vinti* literally meaning an appeal for misdeeds.

The *Santhal* society recognizes the artists as the funerary priests. The *Yamapatas* have songs and visual narratives arrays from the memorable death events of characters from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. They modify the stories maintaining subsequent authenticities combining with the existing *purana* stories with characters like *Chitragupta*, a *Brahmin*, who keeps a count of virtue and vices and thus makes decision of the afterlife destiny of the mankind in the assembly of *Yamaraja*, the God of Death and Forgiveness. The *Jadopatias* often appear as characters to add to the popular epics, performing the funerary rites of *chakshudaan* in those stories.

They enduringly include stories related to the inception and the regenerators of the *Santhal* tribe. They make images of the first couple, *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Buri*, (old man and the old lady) as they die. The scrolls have the dead bodies in the burning ghat, a *Jadopatia*, and the progenies of the couple offering gifts to them against their *chakshudaan* (bestowal of eye-sight) performance. The name comes from *Jado* > *Jadu* > *Magic*; *Patia* > *Patua* > *Painter*. The painters acknowledge that they cannot do without a *guru* (a master). (Fig.3.12,3.13,3.14,3.15,3.16)

The exclusive characteristic of *yamapata* lies in the spontaneity of image making that is rare within the regimental traditional art. The execution has limited scope of individual expression as the art works are seldom purposed for aesthetics for their subject being the funerary rites. The free flowing line, composition, and continuity of narration render a magical vivacity that is too subjective to describe in words.

In the year 1932, Gurusaday Dutt, in his essay 'The Tiger's God in Bengali Art' mentions about the *Jadopatia* tradition. He compared the art form with the primitive Negro sculptures. Dutt, then indicated that while Negro art was extinct, *Jadopatia* (*jadu Patua*) remains an analogous tradition still living and therefore needed required attention. William G. Archer having informed by

Gurusaday Dutt, in 1940s, accumulated a collection of *Jadopatia* scrolls and published them with a review by his wife Mildred Archer. She appreciates the style of *Yamapatas* for its salient modernity with a primitive spontaneity. According to her the colour application was as dynamic and rigorous as action painter like Jackson Pollock. William G. Archer in his book on *Santhali* song and poetry 'The Hill of Flutes', 1974, has mentions of the *Jadopatias*.

3.4.2 Narratives of the *Pytkar* Painters

A similar tradition is alive in *Amadubi* village of Singbhum district where the artists are known as *Pytkar* Painters (Fig.3.17). The artists are titled either as *Chitrakar* (painter) or *Gyne* (singer). They work on narrative visuals based on the stories of Hindu pantheons, such as *Durgapata*, *Kalipata*, *Manasapata* and secular scenes like *Dobauh* Santhali dance, harmfulness of deforestation, daily village life. *Amadubi* village was reputed for its *bhajan* and *palakirtan* performances and impressed by the talented inhabitants *Amadubi mouja* was allotted to them. They follow a tradition of making colours and painting scrolls similar to the Bengal's folk art tradition.

3.4.3 Sohari painters

The tribes like *Orao*, *Kurmi*, *Damru* and *Prajapati*, other than the *Santhals* are also indulged in their own habitual art practice surrounding the Hazaribagh district in Jharkhand. It is believed that the wall painting tradition of this region dates back to fifteen thousand years. The assumption is based on the motifs of prehistoric ISCO cave paintings that resemble the living wall painting tradition. The ISCO cave is of an archeological importance; located in a place named Chotipahadi, block Baragoan, close to Hazaribagh district. The surviving evidences of these ritualistic wall paintings practiced by the female members of the agrarian families are found in Bilwara located 30 km. east of Hazaribagh. They paint on the occasion of Karma festival. *Sohari* (Fig.3.18) is an art form of *Hazaribagh* that celebrates the return of Lord Rama during the Diwali festival in the month of *October-November*. They paint horses, flowers, birds, beetle leaf etc. Parvati Devi and Rupkini Devi, Sohari painters from the region draw linear images on marriage ceremony called a *khovar*, similar to the Madhubani painters, to celebrate fertility. Another purpose of painting is to ensure protection from evil spirit. The paintings are often quite graphical and the process involves making the ground ready by repairing the surface and making it even with mud layers. They apply a layer of black soil (lamp black mixed with mud) beneath a layer

of yellow mud. They draw the images by scratching off the yellow layer with a scraper so that the black layer reveals eventually. The wall paintings are energetic and stunning in their looks. The portable versions are made on mud-coated papers following the same method and materials.



Patachitra of Nayagram, Midnapur, West Bengal

3.5 Patachitra of Nayagram, Midnapur, West Bengal

The new wave of exposure to the artists in the recent years have improved the social condition, encouraged a thriving production with experiments and increased the possibilities for innovation. The dwelling places of the painters' community in Nayagram, Midnapur etc are being identified as clusters with high potency for cultural tourism. However, it is the aesthetic sensibility of the artist that should be the focus of our concern. It is important to investigate whether the artists with global exposure are able to effectively align with the quality of mainstream practitioners? Whether there is a possibility of symbiotic collaborations? Have they been able to inspire and contribute to the forthcoming global art scene?

The *Patachitra* practice of Nayagram, Pingla, Pashchim Midnapur, WestBengal, is a more serious phenomena in terms of its contemporary sociological situate. In these places the artists no more remain confined to their village, state or country but have reached out the global periphery with due acceptance. Although, unlike experimental modern art practice, there is no question about the aesthetic excellence of folk painting in common mind, the exclusiveness factor remains a matter of consideration that puts the price of folk painting on a much lower side.

On an interview with a contemporary painter Amritah Sen the author tried to understand how the folk artists and their works are taken by the modern mind. Amritah Sen shared her experience at Tara Books publication as an artist coordinator in a project of making an autobiographical graphic novel based on the life of Swarna Chitrakar.(Fig.3.19)

Author: How much familiarity did you share with a village painter as a practicing artist?

Amritah Sen: *Swarna is what is popularly known as a "patua", a specific artistic clan of Bengal who paints and sings mythological stories to local people. I was more interested to find out that this particular clan is Muslim by their religious belief, though they traditionally paint Hindu mythologies.*

Author: What was your experience with Swarna Chitrakar?

Amritah Sen: *Interviewing Swarna intensely for a stretch of seven consecutive days was a rather rewarding experience for me; to take the fact I am a painter myself. To look into some other artist's life so minutely, to find out smallest details of her life as well as artistic*

sensibilities were almost exhausting. But it was fantastic to discover, that though we belong to two very different 'social class', or have been trained into two very different kind of art language or understanding, there are so many things in common when artistic attitude is concerned.

Author: Does this difference matter to Swarna also? Will you through some light on her confidence level?

Amritah Sen: *The first and most important thing that is noticeable in Swarna, that she is a superbly spirited woman. In one word she is smart. This smartness is visible in her appearance as a person, as well as an artist. After I heard her life (and we squeezed out small details which was all there inside her, but she did not mention on her own) I had an impression that she fought the difficult days and accepted the success with same kind of courage. Getting so much of exposure was not an easy thing to handle for anybody, but she did it with conviction. It shows how much her horizons have broadened, and she admits even the uncomfortable experiences brightly, with a pinch of humour. She has a fantastic sense of humour. That was the glow of success I felt, as though she had a very hard early life, it is true that she has never seen a setback in her life or career till now. She brightly told us the story about how she upgraded her looks, taken off her 'ghomta' and even wore a salwar kameez one day at Chennai for the first time.*

With that, I found her quite conscious like any other contemporary artists about her appearance to people and even a sense of rivalry about her colleagues.

Author: And what about her poise as an original creator with an obligation to keep the legacy intact?

Amritah Sen: *Watching her making the drawings was another experience. She seemed equally bright in picking up instructions and following them. Patuas generally have their very own kind of compositional sense, but though I found her extremely proud about their tradition, here for the sake of the book she twisted and turned her drawings without thinking twice. This openness is something very rare, I think, in every genre of artists. But she came up with very unconventional and even brave compositions, as a result. I saw her with a kind of awe that how quickly she follows and draws the verbal instructions. And she*

did them perfectly. Her capacity of picking up things so fast must have taken her this far in her career.

Author: Did you observe any difference in her work process that put her to a parallel platform than that of yours?

Amritah Sen: *For me it was also interesting, because she starts her drawings from completely different angles than us! And yet she makes them perfectly proportionate. Swarna ended up giving me a very strong feeling of universality of art languages and spirits. Though it is a bit too cliché, but that was only true!*

The exemplary cultural scenario of today's Nayagram makes one forget the initial purpose of age-old scroll paintings; communication and knowledge dissemination through pictorial depiction in the form of a *pandulipi* or manuscript as substitute to literacy. The themes of the painted scrolls range from mythological stories to current happenings. The village is becoming more and more popular with the tourists, interested in viewing art attached to its context. Cultural tourism ventures of this kind do not involve a conventional infrastructure and service. The tourists prefer to stay overnight in the artists' residences mingling and adjusting to a different living condition that may be edifying. The artists have built up an environment friendly resource center in the village to preserve and expand the tradition, which includes a guesthouse run by the villagers. This center serves as a retreat for the tourists to view the treasure of fade away collections of *Patachitras*, understand the evolving tradition, listen to the lost soundtracks and live songs and collect *Patachitras* in legitimate price directly from the creators. The profit that they make from here takes care of the running and development cost of the centre. The next chapter discusses some interesting and unique experiments on folk idiom by the *Patuas*.

In Bengal *Patachitra*, Patua Village at Nayagram, Pingla, Paschim Midnapur the *patuas* derive their colours from nature in multiple ways. The list below gives a description of the process for extracting colours.

Black (soot): Previously the source of black soot was from oil lamps, cooking fire, burnt rice grains or burning bamboo. Now a more modern method is from scraping the soot out of dirty lorry exhaust pipes with a stick. The soot is collected in a plastic bag, decanted into a coconut shell, worked over with the finger to compress the powder in the coconut shell. Then a cap full of

gum is added to the compressed soot to make a watery paste. The gum is bought from market and it is produced from the Bel fruit. The black colour is ready to use immediately.

Red (Segun/Teak): The new leaves of Segun tree are selected and plucked. The leaves are crushed and the colour is squeezed out in a coconut shell. The colour is left to dry in the sun before adding natural glue (from Bel fruit). The colour becomes darker each time it is kept to dry in the sun.

Red-Jafran (Saffron) The seeds of saffron are used to extract colour. The seeds grow in spiky pods which grow in clusters at the top of the tree. The seeds are removed from the dry fruit pods. The seeds are rubbed by hand and the colour is collected in a dry coconut shell. The colour is dried in the sun and then natural glue is added to it.

Blue (Aparajita) The blue flower whose name means 'lady who cannot be defeated' grows prolifically as a creeper and the petals are plucked. The flower is sometimes rubbed directly onto the paper to transfer the blue colour. Or the petals are crushed in a coconut shell and then a cap full of gum is added to make a paste.

White (Kusum Mati) Kusum mati is a special type of clay and only the whiter stones are used in order to produce the white colour. White stones are collected and then rubbed onto a plain surface forming a white paste. Then the white paste is collected, put in a pot and left to dry. A small amount of gum is added to the paste. This gum is used to ensure that the paint stays on the scrolls.

Red (Pan/betel leaf, Chun/lime, Khayer/Catechu) these are mostly brought from the market to make a red colour. The ingredients are crushed together and the colour extracted. The colour is collected in a coconut shell and left to dry in sun. Natural gum is added thereafter.

Green (Kundri) The leaves of Kundri are used to make the green paint. The leaves are collected and crushed by a pestle. The colour is squeezed out and collected in a coconut shell. The colour is dried in the sun and then natural glue is added to it.

Green (Barbati/Runner beans)

Yellow (Turmeric) Turmeric is a plant in the ginger family. Its roots are the source of a bright yellow spice and dye. The Patuas use this plant to produce the yellow colour. In the next step the turmeric is crushed into small pieces using a pestle stone. Then the small pieces are gathered and

squeezed and the yellow juice is poured into a coconut shell. This liquid is left to dry for a few days and then the gum is added. Different shades of yellow can be obtained using direct sunlight. To get a darker colour the pure juice is left more days in the sun but if a bright colour is needed then the mixture has to be kept out of the sunlight. The leaves are collected. The colour is extracted by squeezing the leaves and collected in a pot. It is dried in the sun and natural glue is added to it. Green is also extracted from the leaves of Seem (or flat beans). Bheranda and Kesut (Bottle green).

Brown (Teak/Segun) The matured leaves of Segun are collected. The stalks are removed. The leaves are crushed using a pestle. The colour is extracted and collected in a coconut shell. It is dried in the sun before natural gum is added to it. Adding a cupful of gum {made from Bel9Wood Apple) fruit} to each crushed colour and mixed with the finger. The coconuts containing the colour are then left in the sunlight to deepen the colour, the amount of sun exposure equates to the darkness of colour.

The patuas mix these natural shades in a coconut shell to achieve new shades. They use paintbrushes available in the market. The traditional handmade brushes are made from goat or squirrel hair, the hairs are aligned carefully around the wooden stick and a cotton thread (pulled from the fabric of an old sari) is wound around to bind the two together. The hair would be cut carefully from the scruff of the goat's neck; the goat needs to be at least 6 months to one year old.

Compilation by banglanatak dot com, 58/114 Prince Anwar Shah Road, Kolkata.

There are initiatives to map the village and create family tree of the painters (*chitrakar patuas*). (Fig. 3.20, 3.21)



Patachitra of Raghurajpur, Odisha

3.6 Patachitra of Raghurajpur, Odisha

The village of Raghurajpur, home to Odisha's *Patachitra*, is situated 14 km away from the pilgrimage town of Puri (known for the Jagannath Temple) on the southern banks of the river Bhargabi (Bhargavi), amidst groves of mango, coconut and palm trees, with over 120 houses, mostly decorated with wall paintings. In the year 2000, after a two-year long research and documentation project carried out by INTACH, the village was promoted as state's first heritage village and further augmented as a Crafts village. Villagers were also trained to provide heritage walks to the visitors by the organization, and have since become a template for heritage tourism in the region.

3.6.1 Purpose of Patachitra painting

In the first half of 19th century the entire village was involved in the practice of painting *Patachitra*. But now there are only eighteen odd families continuing the tradition. During the month of Jaishtha (May-June) the *Snanyatra*, an age-old customary ritual, is performed in the famous Jagannath Temple of Puri; the wooden idols of *Jagannatha*, *Balarama* and *Subhadra* are soaked and bathed continuously during the period as a part of the ritual. In reliance to the custom, idols are then put away from common viewing for sometime under the pretense of health impairment (fever) caused due to a month long bath that is known as '*Anasar*'. This act, washes off the paints from the idol's surfaces, hence necessitates that the idols be repainted. In the absence of idols, the local artists are commissioned to paint the images of *Jagannatha*, *Balarama* and *Subhadra* on *Patachitras* that temporarily replace the idols in the temple complex. Such paintings known as '*Anasar Patachitra*' (Fig. 3.22) are based on the theme of Lord Sri Krishna, the original form of *Jagannatha*.

3.6.2 Method and Materials

Artists earlier extracted colours for their paintings by grinding stones or other natural ingredients. They prepared yellow from *Haritaki*, red from *Hingul* and used lampblack for line and white clay for white. They had a restricted palate of colours to complete their paintings. The thick brushes for filling in colours were made from the hair of a calf; the medium brushes were made out of the hair of a goat from the lower abdominal part, finer brushes were made out of the fur of a rat. They also used cow and squirrel hairbrushes with sheer perfection. A gum made of tamarind seed extract is still used to prepare the base that is known as a *pat* or canvas by pasting the layers of

cloth. A decorative border is a must to begin with the painting. The multiple lined borders have repeated rhythmic motifs known as *Kamal or Kangura* (Lotus), *Nagabanna* (serpent), *Chandramukhi* (Sunflower), *Lata* (creaper) and *Chouka* (square) as explained to the author by Shilpaguru Ananta Maharana.(Fig.3.23) Some sources describe it in a slightly altered way, if not too dissimilar. There are two kinds of borders, floral and geometric; common motifs painted in these borders are called *dahaniya macchi*, *kangura*, *lahara macchi*, *goolai*, *sapa* and *chauk*. The colours used in the pictures are mandatory and according to the instruction from *Shastras* or ancient texts. They avoid any empty space in their paintings and fill up the areas with floral and leafy patterns. Adequate coats of paint are applied in layers and finally the pat is heated in a high coal flame to fix melted raisin and lacquer dust on the surface as a protective layer on the painting. The women of the household usually conduct this fixing process by heating the painting with skillful control. Raghurajpur is the centre but the practice of painting can also be observed in Puri and Dandshahi, though in a small scale. Bengal *patachitra* artist follow a similar process of colour making.(Fig.3.24) In Raghurajpur village the wall paintings are also done using the same paints (Fig.3.25)

3.6.3 Exponents of Patachitra, Odisha

Interference by middlemen on the sales, leading to exploitation, enormously affected the painter community who refrained from taking it up as a profession. Around 1950's Ileana Gili an American visitor impressed by the works of a painter from Dandashahi named Panu Maharana, purchased his entire stock of work directly from him. The legacy passed on through generations from Atmanaguna Maharana to Panu Maharana to Ananta Maharana to Bibhu Maharana. The family was perhaps of a Rajasthani origin to have migrated to Orissa years back. The Maharana family brought with them the western Indian style of meticulous rendering to the *Patachitra* of Odisha. It has a sense of perfection similar to paintings executed under the royal patronage. The folk paintings of Odisha do not represent any naïve or primitive quality unlike Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar. Several authentic sources in the area stated that Ileana Gili, the American art connoisseur was informed about Raghurajpur being the main centre of the painting tradition from a shopkeeper of Chandanpur. Following her visit to the place, she actively involved herself to the cause of improving the condition of the painters and thereby ensures the continuance of this age-old practice. She organized a competition to encourage the painters already disappointed and apprehensive about the growth of this tradition.

Agadhu Maharana from Raghurajpur village was declared the winner of that competition. But later it was revealed that Panu Maharana originally painted it. As a result the painters from Dandashahi, revolted against the Raghurajpur painters. Jagannath Mahapatra was the most reputed painter from Raghurajpur at that time that had not participated in the event. He temporarily worked as a mason during the daytime and acted in the folk play after the fall of the night. The painter community of Raghurajpur village went to him, explaining the incident related to faking of the painting and to seek some solution for bringing the situation to some settlement. This opened a new chapter to the history of Odisha *Patachitra* as on his initiation several competitions were organized and every time he would win the first position to his credit. Envious of such happening the painters from Dandashahi spread the rumor around the untimely death of Jagannath Mahaparta. Troubled and dismayed Jagannath left home only to return in 1959 to start a Gurukul Ashram in Raghurajpur. The Government then rewarded him with a doctoral degree. In the year 1965, he started training the *patuas* at the Collage of Craft. Susanta Mahapatra, son of Jaghannath Mahapatra is a practicing artist who readily demonstrates the works of his father to the visitors.

3.6.4 Stylistic influences

Debaprashad Ghosh preview on the collection of Paintings of Orissa preserved in Ashutosh Sangharahashala, Calcutta University, throws light on the stylistic influences that has shaped up the tradition for past three decades. His findings are based on the collection comprising of more than 250-chronicled coloured paintings from Odisha reportedly kept in chronological order. The first painting 18.1/3 x 7'1/4 in size is a part of a larger painting collected from Ranpur. It is a court scene demonstrating a dazzling assembly hall where the king of Orissa meets a Muslim messenger. Except for one *Habsi* guard, the other guards in the picture are drawn in profile. It is assumed to be an illumination of some significant historical fact related to the description of a messenger from Golkunda to the court of Orissa as mentioned in *Ain-e-Akhbari*. The predicted timeline of this painting is the later part of 17th century AD. The painting explicitly demonstrates influences of Mughal, Western Indian and South Indian styles. The painting adheres to a palate of Red, Yellow, Green, Rust and Orange. Unlike Mughal painting the main character is not placed on a high pedestal. The figures are energetic, lively and active with slightly tilted head, all placed in a zigzag linear formations, with stretched body gestures, their hands raised in various postures, with fine curvature of their swords, flags and rods, having alert facial expression,

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wearing intricately decorated and brightly coloured costumes. A white dot in each eyeball enlivens the expression, which is highly individualistic and not archetypal and repetitive. The scheme of colour is reminiscent of Mughal paintings, over decorativeness, typical of Orissa's existing artworks, detailing in the draperies as similar to the South Indian style. As compared to the exuberance of these figurations, the courtesans of Jahangir and Shahajahan's assembly from pure Mughal Paintings look more archaic and as stiff as the dolls from Rasaleela ceremony.

The folk paintings of Odisha are much more refined and balanced as compared to other folk traditions. The subject matter of *Patachitras* can be broadly divided into six categories. Picture of Lord Jagannath, episodes from Hindu epics, themes from folklores, ritualistic themes related to worship of various Gods and Goddesses, animals and birds and Erotic themes. The composition, hierarchy, space divisions are still quite regimented and according to the fixed doctrine. In the next chapter there is an elaborate discussion based on visual analysis of a Patachitra from Raghurajpur.

Kalamkari painting of Srikalahasti, Andhra Pradesh

3.7 Kalamkari painting of Srikalahasti, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh

The Deccan Plateau of India is situated at the south of Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges in isolation from the north, causing some cultural difference due to infrequent communication. The two rivers Godavari and Kaveri flowing down eastwards to the Bay of Bengal, fortify the cultural endeavor in their banks. Also, its stretched coastline with natural sea-ports provided openings for cultural contacts through trades with the foreign countries. The interaction they shared with Far Eastern and European market included Indonesia, Italy and China. The merchandise for trade included spices, muslin, cotton, silk and indigo. Vijayanagar, established in 1336, on the banks of river Tungbhadra, surfaced as a centre for power in South India. Tamil kings were dethroned and a large part of Tamilnadu, came under Telugu dominance and then later Tanjavur, as a business capital under Maratha dominance. Telugu was recognized as a state language and intruded all art forms. *Kalamkari* originated and grew under this patronage and conceded the stimulus of Tamil, Telugu and Maratha art and culture.

Kalamkari refers to the surface decoration on a readily woven fabric. The patterns are not simultaneously developed when the fabric is weaved in a loom. There were two distinctive techniques developed since the formative period.

1. Decoration using freehand drawing with a nib – religious scroll painting for use in temples (Fig.3.26, 3.27)
2. Decorative wood block printing – printed on textile to be used as dress material for the elites

“The temple tradition of Kalamkari had a larger role to play than the mere making of pictures. The ceremonial requirements of the temple, like smanagiri, canopies, cylindrical thombais to be tied to the processional chariots, the banners and flags which were carried during the procession, were all made by Kalamkari craftsmen. Ceremonial flags with auspicious figures like the bull or hamsa, the torans, known as vasamalai (garlands for the doorway), were first painted in vibrant colours and then cut and stitched into appropriate shapes. This particular activity can still be seen at Sikkinaickenpet in the Tanjore district, close to the temples of Kumbakonam and the Tiruppanandal mutt, a Tamil Saivite monastery.”

(Ramani, 2007).

3.7.1 Ancient centers of *Kalamkari*

Long before the Common Era, Indian textile tradition of dyeing and printing existed, not only as a religious art, but also as an industry with high erudition on design motifs and vegetable dye. *Kalamkari*, the name came in to use only during Muslim rule, as the sultan of Golkunda, identified the artisans who painted on fabric with a *kalam* (pen) as qalamkars. It has slowly lost the Islamic connection. The practice of this 3000-year-old tradition of Andhra Pradesh was centralized in two major places named Srikalahasti and Machilipattanam.

Srikalahasti style – drawing on cloth using a handmade pen and dye, inspired from the narrative relief panels on the walls of Hindu temples, based on Hindu mythologies.

Machilipattanam style – a distinct Islamic influence caused by Qutub Shahi rule, the style involves drawing with a *kalam* (pen) as well as engraved wooden block with nonfigurative patterns for printing on the fabric.

Qutub Shahi rulers influenced a strong trade connection with the Persian Safavid Empire, which ensured a regular purchase of Kalamkari textiles. The Sultan of Golkunda as well as Mughal rulers favoured the practice. The aesthetic catered to the Dutch and British taste and evolved accordingly. Machilipattanam, being a port town, managed its production range to suit the demands of a particular religious taste of a market thriving in the Middle Eastern; imageries included floral *butas*, *mihrab* of the mosques, cypress tree depicting traditional tree of life, animals mentioned in *Sufi* literature and *Quran*. Decline of Islamic rule in Andhra Pradesh indicated a downfall in the craft tradition for obvious reasons.

Cloth used for Kalamkari should be unbleached, calico or silk, duly soaked in cow dung, castor oil and bleaching soda to remove starch and glue (sizing) if there is any to make it fully penetrable. Myrobalam (nut family, harhar, hartaki) mixed with sticky buffalo milk is the solution that is used to prepare the ground for painting. The milk content prevents the colour from spreading and smudging. The drawing is then made using the *kalam*, typically made out of bamboo stick, sharply pointed at the end and tied by cotton threads that hold the liquid dye to be squeezed and dropped as the artists execute the images with a smooth and continuous flow.

Myrobalam produces greenish yellow ochre, as the seeds are grinded into powder and made into a paste by diluting it.

Kaseem is the black made out of iron scraps and jaggery solution brewed in claypots. Jaggery helps the fermentation process. Alum and salt are used to develop rest of the vegetable dyes and the process is often complex. Diluted alum produces an intense red while applied on myrobalam-dyed surface. Surulpattal for purplish brown, Manjishtha (rosé madder), Thomachakka (branches for rust), yellow from *peori*(urine of cow that is fed mango leaves), pomrgranate seed, dried yeallow flowers of *dadup*, and Indigo blue, dried raw mango powder, *kathha* are used extensively.

After the final development the painted clothes are washed in running river water and dried on the riverbank under Sun for permanence.

3.7.2 Contemporary scenario

In Srikalahasti, a socio-economic empowerment programme, ceased the art from dying. *Dwarakanath Reddy and Ramanarpanam Trust* funds a programme in which the whole cluster could foster a sustainable promote aiming at global market, duly keeping the present users in mind. They are prompt in maintaining websites and connect directly to the buyers. Machilipattanam on the contrary is not so easily accessible for the fact that, once a major international trading port has now been shrunken to an unfledged fishing village. Although the fading of exquisite Islamic motifs remains a matter of concern, it is remarkable how the artisans are moving towards the hand painted *Srikalahasti* style for better scopes of innovative production.

During the field study in Srikalahasti and Hyderabad, the author happened to interact with many artists and artisans to understand the present scenario and workflow. Amongst many an apprehension regarding the future and sustainability issues, there are two significant comments that are apparently unrelated as concerns could be counted noteworthy. Both the concerns require two steps of actions. First is a thorough intellectual scrutiny to the production parameters and secondly, a possible alteration to the existing production management.

M. Nagaraja, Kalamkari Master Craftsman, A.P. Govt, VTI Award Winner 1983,(Fig.3.28) expresses that it is not important how many artists are practicing the craft and responding to the demand of the customers as much as to what extent they are paying attention to the glory of the practice. He says no production can attend eternal demand and no art is demand based. Therefore we need to be more careful in handling the principle purpose of this tradition with regard to its

historical significance. The urge of business and production should not stop the artists to devote adequate time and attention that ensures quality. Not everyone masterminds or creates but a handful and the majority follows them. He beautifully explains the difference between the role of a *karigar* (craftsman) and a *kalakar* (fine artist), and how important it is to understand that the life of a community art is dependent on their combined effort. If the social environment does not favour the fine artists to indulge in continuous creativity and innovation, the market demand by no means can solely ensure sustainability as the trend survives on quality and not on the need. A mindless repetitive action is not to be encouraged and if so happens, a thoughtful replacement should be counted as superior. (Fig.3.29)

Another concern, raised by Suraiya (Dominic Hassan, Traditional Weaves & Crafts, 1-86, Darga Hussain Shah Wali, Raidurg, Safrani Memorial School's Premises, and Hyderabad) who has been dedicatedly trying to revive the lost weaving traditions like *Himbru* and dying Hyderabad *ikkat*, over many years now, is quite alarming. There is just one master craftsman now who knows how to weave a *Himbru* textile who is being encouraged by her to train others to learn the hard technique.(Fig.3.30, 3.31) The process is extremely time consuming and it needs proper awareness to be able to appreciate and value the craft. This particular tradition of textile died out of shrunken patronage from the Muslim elites who were its prime users. The vanishing Islamic motifs and themes inspired by Quran and other Islamic texts caused the valuable expertise to die an untimely death. But the skill and sensibility that the artists still possess is not to be faded out that easily. The tradition survived massive lack of demand in mid 20th century due to a changing social pattern under different rulings that had worn down the number of practitioners to reduce to minimum. The cause of this grave situation still remains the same, but a timely intervention of the Handicraft Board, GOI rescued the tradition from complete extinction.

Kalamkari tradition for that matter owes to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, under whose visionary leadership the surviving craftsmen were traced out and a training centre was established in Srikalahasti by the Handicraft board to encourage an authentic carryover of a significant tradition with a rare aesthetic value. Besides, the revival of technique, method and material, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, involved designers like Nelly H. Sethna to make sure that the aesthetic sensibility steps up with time. The essentials of *Kalamkari* lie in its soulfulness, which is typical for any village art. It is natural and eco-friendly. An alteration that may be required to the core of this practice therefore should be following its basic principle. The technological emancipation

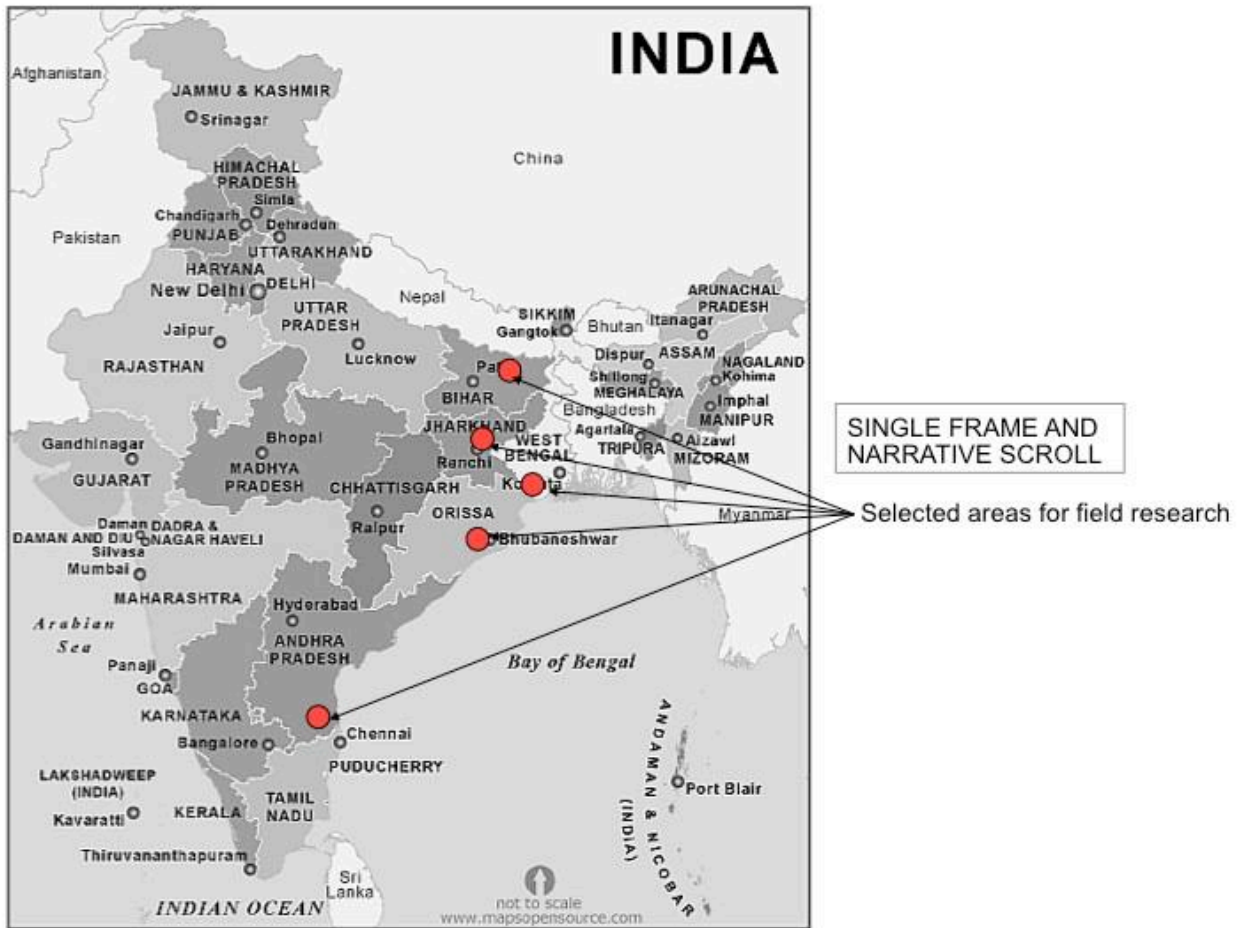
has opened up new avenues of knowledge, empowering traditional lore mostly to boost mechanization and mass production, but unless there is a correct vision and a right effort, the technological imputes and interventions may push this legacy in the peril of being lost forever. The survival and growth of the tradition is unquestionably essential and not easy a task. But what is more important is to make it meaningful in the present context.

Despite remarkable variety and distinct identity, one observes, a stream of evident cultural homogeneity in the regional practice. In some cases, it is just a matter of pride to protect the individual identity. The symbiotic concoction is welcomed for many to widen the scope of significant innovations. During an interview session Bibhu Maharana explains to the author that apart from visits to foreign countries these days, there are frequent art camps that are being initiated by various Government and nongovernment organizations. Artists from different regions and states gather under one roof and demonstrate their painting process. This enables them with an opportunity for interaction and to learn and amalgamate the different ways of executions. But to him it is a matter to ponder over very seriously instead of simply getting carried away by newer influences and provocations to explore new means without going deeper in to the principle of the tradition. Adoption and unification may be fascinating to take up for many, but it is also to remain aware of one's own identity. Bibhu Maharana says that he holds a great admiration for Madhubani painting and he enjoys watching his co-participants practicing the style with utter expertise avoiding all possible angularity to reach a particular organic formation that in spite of being decorative, is rich in its expressive content. But he knows that he does not have the right temperament to experiment with the style for his own expression, as the principle of image making is way too different.

Another artist, Mayna Chitrakar, from Nayagram, Midnapur, playfully responds to the question of such possibilities of symbiotic collaboration in her own casual way by stating that she would not mind trying out her hand into some other styles, but *patachitra of Bengal* is what makes her what she is and it is so keenly connected to her identity that she may not venture to change her style. If she feels like experimenting more, her own style provides her with ample opportunities because of its versatile nature. She fondly demonstrates how she had picked up the craft of papier-mâché from one of her fellow artists and modified its technique successfully with some locally available materials such as *multani mitti* (fuller's earth) that she otherwise uses for her daily beauty treatment. However, the protection of community proprietorship of a traditional

skill has been taken care of by several policies that include the protection of intellectual property by copyright and patenting, by trademark and certification to authentication. There are legal acts associated to a particular cultural artifact within its geographical location.

During one of the visits to Jitwarpur village, Madhubani, the author experienced Laudi Paswan (Husband of eminent *Godna* painter, Late Channo Devi) making a remark to a few young practitioners who stated that they did not have any paintings to show readily as they were running out of their stock; he said, a folk painter should never remain empty handed and they should always be ready with at least twenty complete works to show them to the visitors. Statement relates to the possible cause for sustenance of the cultural heritage. Are these hasty norms, that operate the nature of practice or is it the pride behind a faith – foundation that emerges from tradition itself. *Kalamkari* painter M. Nagaraja expresses his concern regarding the triumph of mass production that is causing a permanent damage to the soul of decorative art. He adds, once the soul is missing, it will not remain art any further. Nagaraja was advised by different art connoisseurs to produce lifestyle products with his skillful and meticulous use of the nib. But he refrained from doing that, as he deeply believes in the cosmological connections involved with *Kalamkari* that cannot be disturbed at any cost. He said, he does not approve of people advising him on better earning possibilities at the cost of tampering the core principle of a traditional art form. Further he says he would rather choose to move to other professions in the time of crisis. Like any other creative individual he confesses that he gets something from his art that cannot be measured materially. That is perhaps one of the causes why such practice survives without adequate patronage. The sustainability of a traditional culture rests on several such factors that are delicate and needs careful handling.



Geographical location of folk clusters

Areas of field research in five adjoining states of India

Madhubani – Bihar

Hazaribagh- Jharkhand

Naya, Midnapur- West Bengal

Raghurajpur- Odisha

Srikalahasti- Andhra Pradesh



Fig. 3.1 *Kumari Kusum* painting Durga on earthen walls of her house, Jitwarpur, Madhubani,



Fig. 3.2 Wall Painting, 1997, Jitwarpur, Madhubani

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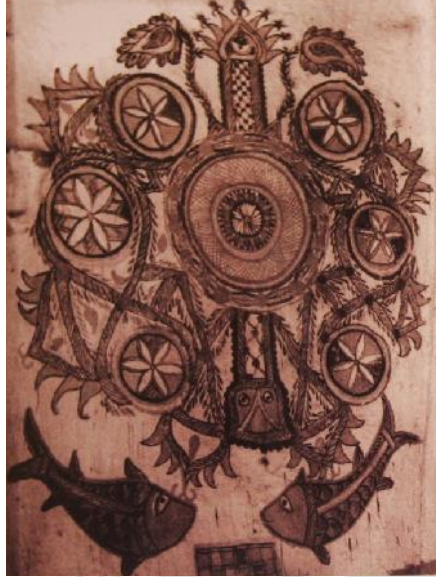


Fig. 3.3 *Kohbar, Bamboo Grove, 1937*
Photograph Archer, Mildered



Fig.3.4 *Attendant 1937,*
Photograph Archer, Mildered



Fig. 3.5 *Padmashree* recipient *Sita Devi* in front of her work and awards

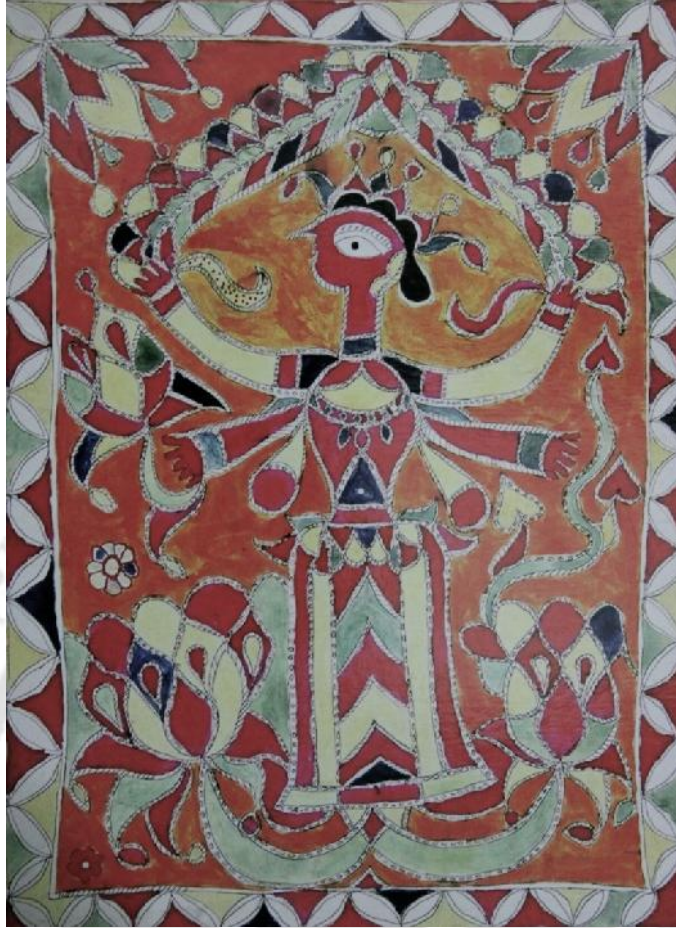


Fig. 3.6 Painting using the *Bharni* technique, Jitwarpur, Madhubani



Fig. 3.7 Artist at work on *Bharni* technique, Mahapatra Brahmin home, Jitwarpur

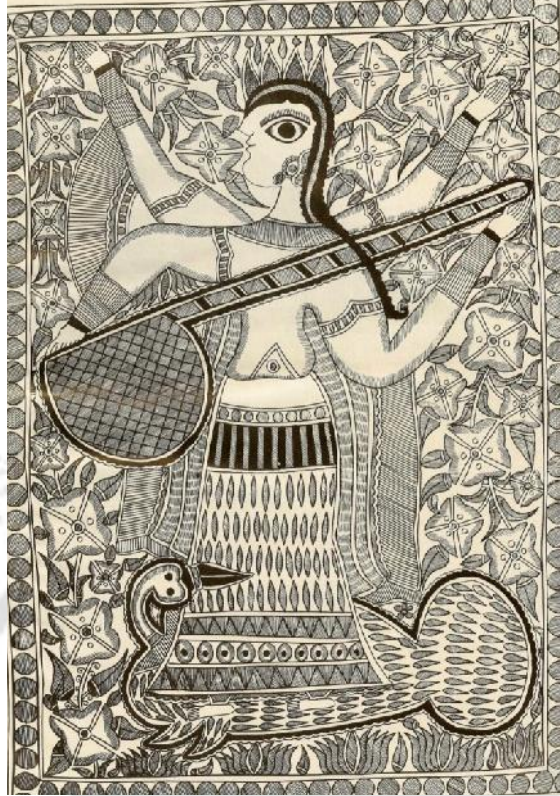


Fig. 3.8 Painting using the *Kachni* technique, Ranti, Madhubani

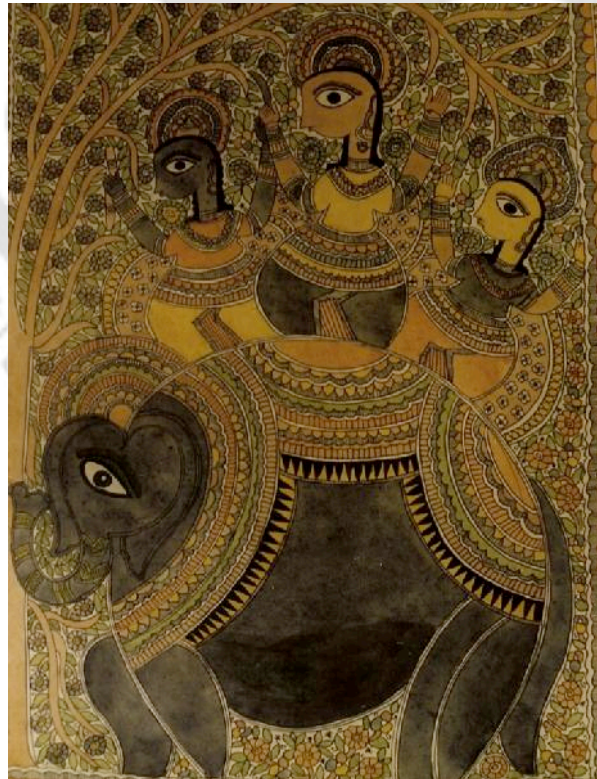


Fig. 3.9 *Raja Salhesh*, *Dusadh* painting, Jitwarpur, Madhubani

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Fig. 3.10 *Raja Salhesh, Godna painting, Jitwarpur, Madhubani*



Fig. 3.11 *Nagkanya, Rambharos Jha, 2006*

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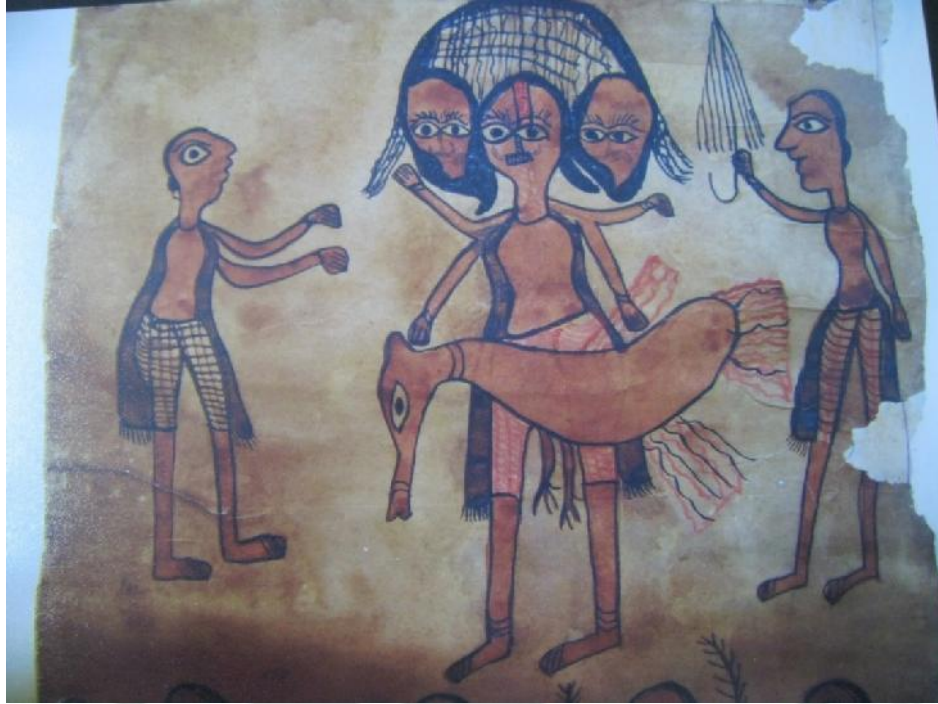


Fig. 3.12 *Yamapata* by Jadopatia, 2006, Jharkhand, Photo Courtesy Dipak Kumar Baropanda, GSM



Fig. 3.13 *Yamapata* (Detail), 2006, Jharkhand, Photo Courtesy Dipak Kumar Baropanda



Fig. 3.14 *Yamapata* (Detail), 2006, Jharkhand, Photo Courtesy Dipak Kumar Baropanda

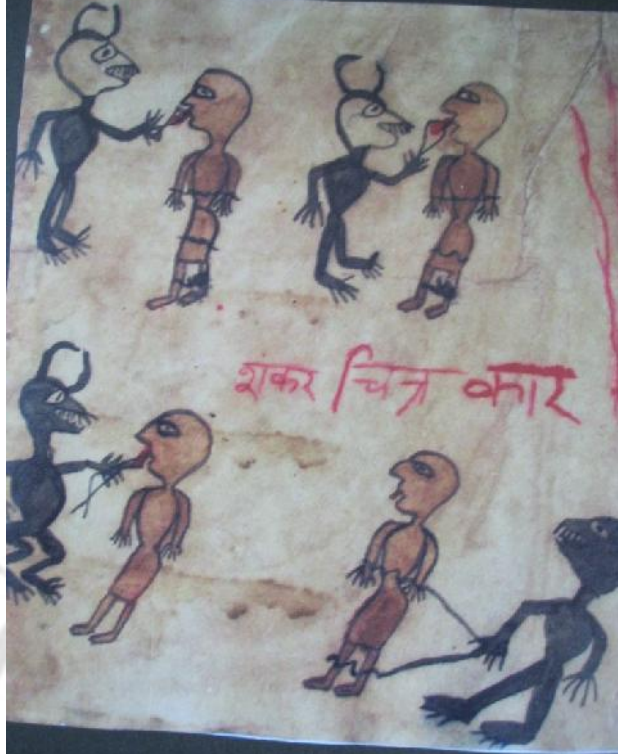


Fig. 3.15 *Yamapata* by *Jadopatia*, 2006, Jharkhand, Photo Courtesy Dipak Kumar Baropanda, GSM



Fig. 3.16 *Yamapata* by *Jadopatia*, 2006, Jharkhand, Photo Courtesy Dipak Kumar Baropanda, GSM



Fig. 3.17 *Pytkar* Painting, Bhootnath Gyne, Amadubi village of Singbhum

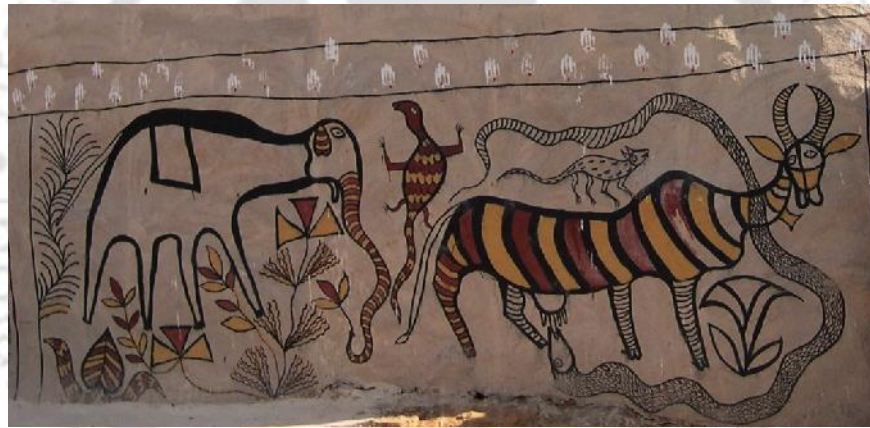
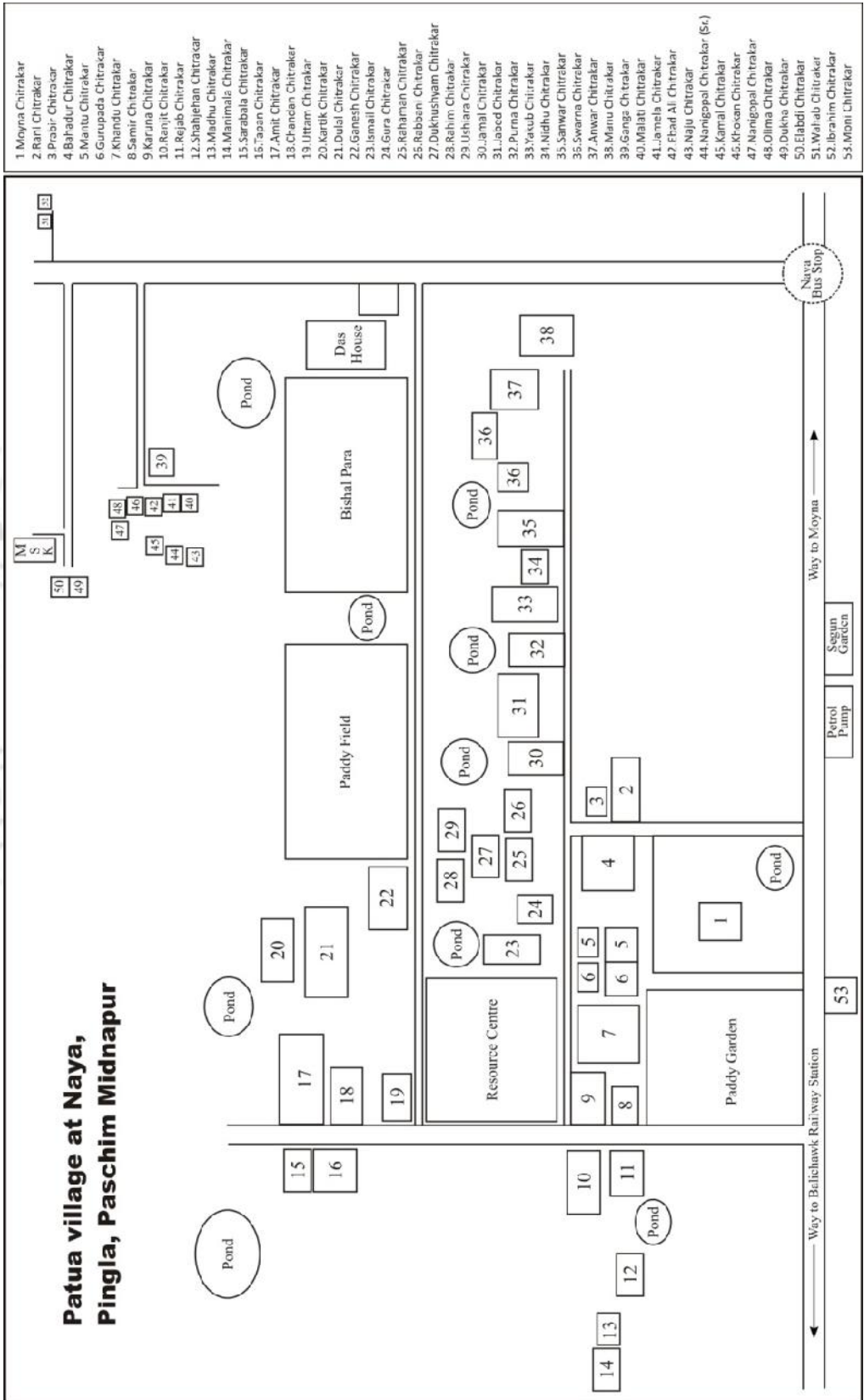


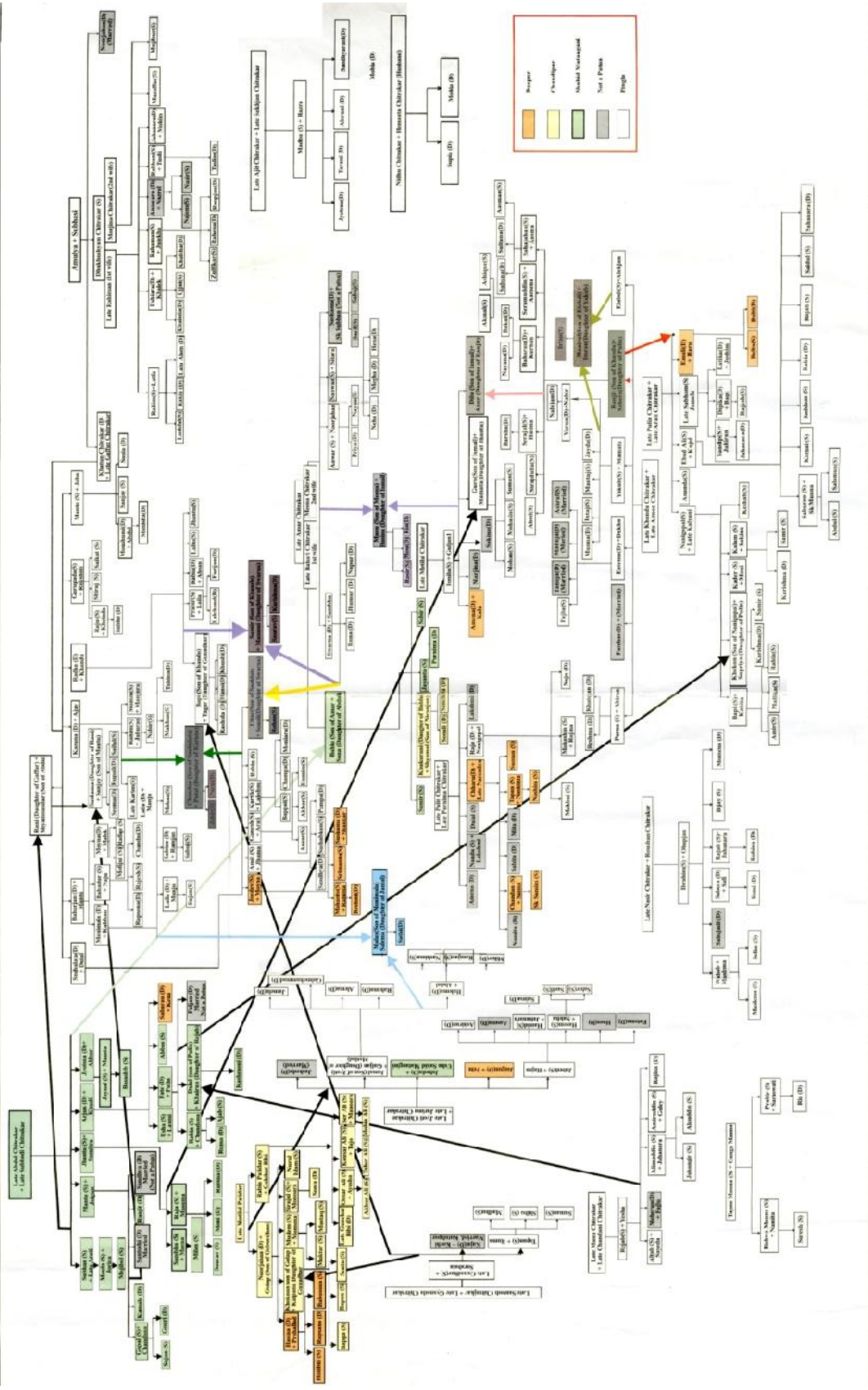
Fig. 3.18 *Sohari* painting, Hazaribagh, Jharkhand



Fig. 3.19 Swarna Chitrakar with Amritah Sen at Tara Books, 2013, Chennai
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- 1 Moyna Chitrakar
- 2 Rani Chitrakar
- 3 Probi Chitrakar
- 4 Bahadur Chitrakar
- 5 Mento Chitrakar
- 6 Gurupada Chitrakar
- 7 Kishodu Chitrakar
- 8 Samir Chitrakar
- 9 Karuna Chitrakar
- 10 Renjit Chitrakar
- 11 Rejib Chitrakar
- 12 Shaljehan Chitrakar
- 13 Madhu Chitrakar
- 14 Manimala Chitrakar
- 15 Sarabala Chitrakar
- 16 Jagan Chitrakar
- 17 Amit Chitrakar
- 18 Chanda Chitrakar
- 19 Uttam Chitrakar
- 20 Kartik Chitrakar
- 21 Dulal Chitrakar
- 22 Ganesh Chitrakar
- 23 Ismail Chitrakar
- 24 Gura Chitrakar
- 25 Rahaman Chitrakar
- 26 Rabban Chitrakar
- 27 Dukkushyam Chitrakar
- 28 Rahim Chitrakar
- 29 Ushara Chitrakar
- 30 Anil Chitrakar
- 31 Jaed Chitrakar
- 32 Purna Chitrakar
- 33 Yacob Chitrakar
- 34 Nidhu Chitrakar
- 35 Sanwar Chitrakar
- 36 Swarna Chitrakar
- 37 Anwar Chitrakar
- 38 Manu Chitrakar
- 39 Ganga Chitrakar
- 40 Malati Chitrakar
- 41 Anneli Chitrakar
- 42 Foad Ali Chitrakar
- 43 Niju Chitrakar
- 44 Nangopal Chitrakar (S)
- 45 Kamal Chitrakar
- 46 Kfozan Chitrakar
- 47 Nangopal Chitrakar
- 48 Olima Chitrakar
- 49 Dukha Chitrakar
- 50 Elabdi Chitrakar
- 51 Wajabi Chitrakar
- 52 Ibrahim Chitrakar
- 53 Momi Chitrakar



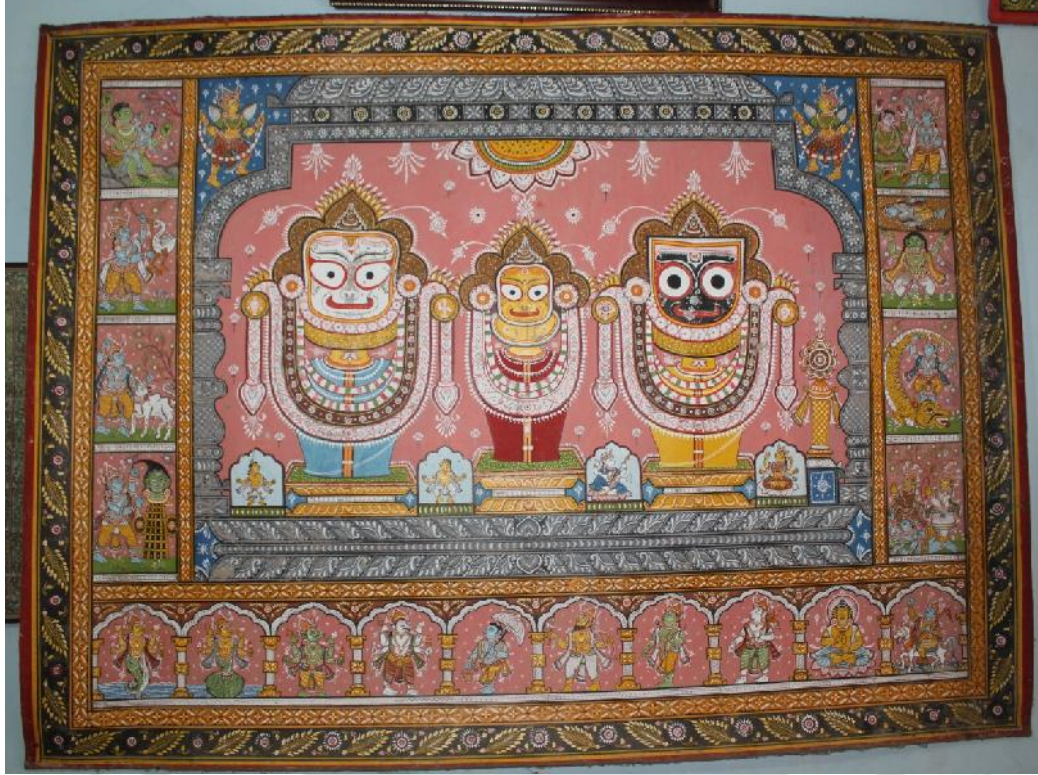


Fig. 3.20 *Jagannatha Balarama Subhadra*, Panu maharana, Odisha Patachitra, Raghurajpur



Fig. 3.21 Author with Shilpaguru Ananta Maharana, Bibhu Maharana, 2012, Raghurajpur

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Fig. 3.22 Paints in coconut shell bowl beside a *patachitra*



Fig. 3.23 Wall painting, 2012, Raghurajpur, Odisha



Fig. 3.24 Dashavatara, Kalamkari, 1994, Srikalahasti



Fig. 3.25 Drawing with a *Kalam* (nib) on cloth, 2010, Srikalahasthi, Andhra Pradesh



Fig. 3.26 M. Nagaraja, Kalamkari Master Craftsman, 2010, Srikalahasthi, Andhra Pradesh



Fig. 3.27 Wife of M. Nagaraja, 2010, Srikalahasthi, Andhra Pradesh



Fig. 3.28 Revival initiatives for lost Islamic motifs, Hyderabad



Fig. 3.29 Surviving Weavers for Traditional Islamic Motifs

AESTHETIC CONTINUUM OF CONTEMPORARY FOLK PAINTING OF INDIA

:

CASE STUDY OF FIVE TRADITIONAL PRACTICES



Chapter 4

Contemporary Range of Paintings

4.0 Roots of folk art: a probe

Changes in the cultural perception prove that there is no universal definition that determines academic art. Artistic expression in modern term can only be understood in the functions of specific social and political contexts. But artists are ideologically defined on the basis of their academic background. The consciousness is of central significance to contemporary theorizations of art practice and its role in the society. The role of art appreciation as a discipline must be realized in relation to the values of a particular culture, that directs the making of art, in line with the interests of the critic authority. Artistic representations may be academic, traditional, naïve, amateurish, conventional or professional in nature, but are scrutinized in terms of their aesthetic merit and methods they employ to construct an artistic version of a narrative idea.

The next important concern is the ability to comprehend a 'genre' that indicates, the sort of image being looked at. The compositional formation of religious and secular compositions is different. Conventionally in Europe, religious themes include biblical illuminations, pictorial depictions of saints performing miracles, visions, martyrdoms, and fragments of great epics. Secular subjects range from landscape, portrait, and still life to commercial images as main genres. Such themes of art for ages were subjected to academic hierarchies, which were eventually confronted by the wave of modernism. Allegory and symbols, which literally means 'speaking with alternative terms' as a common feature of a particular time, associates artistic acts in terms of conveying a meaning of an idea, by means of something else. This act ends up creating immense ambiguity for viewers with different cultural orientations. Some examples of those symbolic meanings were; to conjure the idea of 'Eternity' artists included a snake biting its tail, winged women symbolized 'Victory', human figure holding a olive branch to depict 'peace', florid female figure bearing a sheaf of wheat for 'Prosperity', an old hag with shrunken breasts for 'poverty', 'Love' by Venus, 'War' by Mars, 'Creativity' by the Muses, 'Christ' by tree of life, 'Heaven' by golden stairs, and so on. Religious and mythological contents were supportive of allegories. A presence of allegory in art notifies its viewer about an additional layer of meaning hidden beyond the line, color, form, and texture, which are apparent on the surface (Cavallaro, 2007).

Indian Folk paintings fundamentally adhere to a few norms by either following them or simply negating them. In either case, a viewer requires some prior cultural reorientation to decode the visual images. General viewing of these compositions may not lead to their identification as religious or secular, as religion here is meant to reach out the common people and therefore not bound to maintain a centralized, symmetrical outer structure. There are images that are secular but due to their propagative content are full of icons and symbols. Nevertheless, all folk expression has a religious root and that is evident in the compositional formations and elementary styles. In contemporary scene, the definition of folk art can be free flowing and ever changing.

“All ritual first establishes a point, a metaphorical centre, around which lines are drawn to make triangles, squares and circles of great symbolic value. Notions of space and time are comprehended through it.”

(Vatsayan, 1997)

To decipher the orderly construct of space in traditional folk paintings we cannot depend on a single image but to the genre. This is an image from Madhubani, Bihar, commonly devoted to the wall of a bridal chamber, a significant ritualistic practice of the region that is locally known as *Kohber*, (Fig.4.1) The lotus pond and paired fish symbolizes female beauty and fertility. The bamboo stands for male lineage. Pairs of fish, lovebirds, snakes and turtles with the beaming Sun and moon are common element that elicits prosperity.

The conception of the space division is centralized and symmetrical to ensure harmony in the composition. The image is linear and radically balanced with a distinct point at the centre, around which images that are symbolically related to fertility are drawn to adequately fill up the space in an orderly formation. The apparently intricate and semi-recognizable motifs are the derivatives of natural elements such as flowers, weeds, seeds, aquatic animals, amphibians and reptiles. The compositional formation is confined within the boundary of squares and circles with decorative and repetitive patterns to ensure a clear readability to the heavily crowded visual.

An example of *Pichhvai* Paintings of Rajasthan (Fig. 4.2) confirms this centralized formation of space that is based on several circles and squares. The word *pichhvai* means backdrop and the tradition is related to the worship of Shrinathji, at Nathadwara temple, Rajasthan.

The metaphorical image of Shrinathji in the paintings done in traditional Indian miniature technique may be visually analyzed with reference to the figure above. The length of the idol from the crown to the base of the feet can be primarily divided into four equal circles. A larger circle surrounds the entire body that touches the crown and feet. The unseen geometrical formation provides the composition with optimum balance and harmony.

'Non-dualism or 'not-two' is that which Pre-manifestation is. It is the complete, whole un-differentiated point, bindu (dot), into which all will ultimately withdraw.'

(Lazaro, 2006)

This aptitude for centralization is not limited to the stand alone symmetrical compositions. In this image of Ramayana inscribed on the body of *Hanumana* (Fig.4.4) painted by Shilpaguru Ananta Maharana, Raghurajpur, Odisha, one can observe (as it has been pointed out to the author by the artist's son Bibhu Maharana) that, all happy episodes are put on the face of *Hanumana*, while episodes related to *Ravana*, the antihero in the epic, are drawn around the lower body. The composition evokes ingenuity even as such the images being governed by pre-formulated and preconceived solutions; the style here is at its most expressive vibrancy. The considerable difference in the scale of *Hanumana* and the rest of the figures etched on his body in a tattoo like formation, together strike as being increased and reduced to formulae, severally repeated with little variation. Ostentatiously orchestrated, the narrative configuration owes the ornate appearance to the replication of various geometric motifs. The polychromatic palate emphasizes on chromatic scheme with radial distribution of colours to enhance a centralized visual tension.

We observe similar organization in traditional Jain illustrations, where the content overpowers the figurations. *Virata-rupa* or *Viswa-rupa* form of Shree Krishna assuming his universal manifestation, to persuade *Arjuna* to fight against his near relatives for his right, on the battlefield of *Kurukshetra* provides the scope for a painter to reduce the multiplicity of form into a singular location per say a human body. The joyous aspects of life are always highlighted through the *Maha-rasa*, the great circular dance of Krishna surrounded in a circular order by the *Gopinis* on the bank of river Yamuna in the full moon night.

4.1 Contemporary Face of Indian Folk Painting

The method of three-folded analytical study of semiotic, iconic and thematic aspects can be aptly applied in the study of contemporary folk painting. The tradition of narrative folk paintings emerged and grew in remote and isolated locations but they are not confined to the temples and rituals anymore because of cross-cultural exchanges. They are rich as artistic expression and potent enough to amalgamate and evolve with time.

'today's art galleries come forward to request artists to do something new...paint in the circular or miniature format, design furniture or costumes, even wear the latter and walk around. They set them all kinds of odd themes to respond to...In art magazines, art advisers of various kinds prognosticate the trends of the future, curators stipulate what will go and what will not on the global art scene and the themes and devices that can give one access to its attention.'

(Subramanyan, 2007).

He adds further that all these can be seen as a tendency or an effort to make of art, an industry, and force it to perform the dictates of the taste of the times. Whatsoever the intensions may be, it is interesting to view that such efforts are being also carried out to bring the regional folk painters to the forefront.

In 2010, a large scaled group exhibition organized by Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, titled '*VERNACULAR, in the CONTEMPORARY*', was curated by Jackfruit Research and Design and led by Annapurna Garimella. The first part of this project aimed at *Working*, and the part two and three aimed at '*Working Consciously and Reflectively*'.

'We felt some parameters for ideating were necessary since it would be difficult to ensure an even platform without actually building one. Prior to meeting each of the artists in Bangalore, we sent them A3 size sketchbooks of archival paper. We wanted standardized sizes so that everyone's ideas occupied the same real estate plot in the exhibition. A noble intention but one that needed to be adjusted several times over.'

(Garimella, 2010)

Contemporary scene of Indian Folk Painting noticeably differs from its early phase in some way. The folk artists today do not and are not allowed to practice in isolation. They are being perpetually cultivated as assets for the nation. The artistic sensibility of them is now being intellectual nurturing that seldom focuses on the required nourishment of the practice. Therefore, it is time to pivot on grounded solutions as how the attention could be shifted from the ethno-maniac preservation of a culture being solely guided by the urban fascination for exotica, to a culture of continuous and serious critical appreciation of the artworks, which they duly deserve.

4.2 Three Layered Method of Appreciation

Pleasingly simple appearance of Indian folk painting can be deceiving, as they have phenomenally evolved into a more complex and intricate contemporary expression. Like any other mainstream art, they also require a complete criticism duly considering all three aspects of semiotic, iconic and thematic analysis. In the iconic level it is not simply sufficient to recognize a figure but also to identify it with the prior knowledge of history and mythology that refers to the thematic level. The layer of semiotic comprehension though, applies to a critical analysis free from any foreknown information. Non-representational and abstract images are read applying this very level of critique. In the semiotic level the artwork can be viewed and analytically appreciated regardless of any prior knowledge of its history, background, method, medium or material. In this level each and every dot and pixel can be analyzed and communicated. In the semiotic level the critic directly approaches the elementary part of an artwork. It is read in terms of the elements such as quality of line, form, shape, volume, colour, texture etc. They establish a language for improved expression. The perception of an artist in this level makes an entry in to the language of art. The vocabulary of visual art adds to the possibility of communication and connects it with the desired message irrespective of its existing cultural fabric.

Indian painting tradition that spans over two millennia, in spite of a remarkable variety does not include folk art, in the family of its major distinctive styles. Folk art practice has emerged and grew independently in regional spaces there by holding the core essence and spirit of the soil. In the present study, author focuses on the mandatory regulations that prevail in them to assess how stringently they adhere to the rules. This is to scrutinize the tradition and change. That is to probe into the nature of free spirit, prevalent in a folk art practice. This is to identify the design principles present in and followed by the practitioners. The semiotic analysis of the space in

artworks hence is being presented in this chapter with a few relevant visual examples of Indian folk paintings, created by the master painters from different regions of India.

Folk art practice in India, in spite of being vernacular and varicoloured, has shared much commonality in them. The age-old *chitrakatha* tradition of narrative scroll paintings with oration and other art practices intrinsically associated to the temple rituals are intrinsic part of Hindu folk religion that has played a significant role in the proliferation of the doctrines of Hindu epics and moral stories. The space division aims at an optimum clarity for impelling communication. The dimensions are often mandatory rather than arbitrary. For example the *Sahebpata* Scroll from Bengal depicting stories of Indian independence movement always follows a horizontal order. The aesthetic often overpowers the thematic aspects.(Fig.4.5)

Contemporary Folk Painting as a term has been an oxymoron in Indian context for a very long time. The authenticity of Folk Painting was judged only by its traditional adherences. It is until very recently that Folk Paintings are being identified, viewed and appreciated with some solemnity and not just as prescriptive notions of traditional substance.

The principle of folk art follows a similar concept of space organization. The narrative scrolls emerged as a substitute for ancient texts, which were not comprehensible to the common people. But they did not agree to deprive themselves from the benefits of these visionary texts. The paintings although self sufficient, but are complemented by long narrative songs in simple vernacular language. The narrative asymmetry is flexible to its religious compulsions and often human in its principle objectives. Despite ritualistic compulsions, and ever since its inception folk art practice in India has made its way to come close to the mainstream practice often showing superior understanding with due responsiveness.

4.3 Effectiveness of Story Telling

Story telling may not be of serious consideration in today's world. But the significance and effectiveness of storytelling cannot be denied even in this age of information, as it ensures continuity and helps memorization. Story allows imagination and visualization and empowers its audiences to inculcate a common ethical aspiration. Narrations supported with visuals have entertained and educated the viewers even to an addictive extent. The visual possibility touches the details with strategic minimization of limited frame narratives and yet illuminates the whole concept. Most importantly, human being is instinctively connected with the magical means of

storytelling without much rational consideration and therefore, it is difficult to remain ignorant to the possibilities related to storytelling for improved communication. Narrative story telling has many faces and it has undergone many changes and many modes since the beginning of human civilization. In the Indian folk art, the components of story and its order of formation gives the visual images the intended depth. The aspect of story and the urge to tell that in the right way through pictorial effect extends the visual representation to a higher level than functioning merely like a pleasing decorative piece.

In the contemporary version the expressions are being more emphasized, as they are less constrained with the ritualistic obligations and trying to simply communicate through the medium. Today, more and more people from outside the regional community are coming forward to experiment with the style incorporating it in their own subsequent projects. In a way these ventures if carried over with proper depth, may ascertain prolonged sustainability of the folk art forms by connecting to a new breed of audience through new mediums such as illustrated books, animation films, and graphic novels and so on. It is important to restrict one within the dialects that evokes the essential stylistic identity.

It is important to observe that the storytelling in folk narrative painting has some basic difference with the animation and graphic novel. The difference is most obvious in the storyboarding or planning of the sequences where the repetitive movement is involved. In graphic novel, the idea or the happening is initially fragmented into many parts to pick up the most effective frames as key frames to depict the active motion. In *patachitra*, the stories are popular and already known, causing the actions rather frozen with no obvious climax as an emphasis to the narrative visual. The most active frames are merged in continuous flow. Animations on the other hand are built up with fragments of effective dialogues and moving actions of frequent visual push and pulls.

Manasamangala Patchitra of 20th century Bengal (Fig.4.6, 4.7) is an example of a medieval narrative based on the popular *Mangalkavya* tradition. It is probably archetypal of Middle Ages where the painter could afford to depend on the viewer's ability to recognize the characters on the basis of the attributes that accompanies it. For *Manasamangal Kavya* the character of *Manasa*, the vindictive snake Goddess, can be identified with a snake accompanying her. *Manasamangal patachitra* from Midnapur, in the Guru Saday Museum collection (No.182) is 8 feet x 1foot 4.5inches in size made in 20th C, with entire story told here in twelve panels. The

pata starts with the panel showing marriage procession of *Behula* and *Lakkhindar* and ends with the panel showing sons of *ChandSawdagar* coming to life, worship of *Manasa*; *ChandSawdagar* and *Sanaka* before *Manasa*. The vertical scroll clearly emphasize on two dominant primary colours; blue for the water, as river is a prime component of the narration and red as background with nuances of yellow, green, black and white.

The narrative scroll does not seem to aim at inducing any spatial depth, but the white drapery with delicate red lines on them, brings some of the figures onto the foregrounds. The presence of colonial costume evokes the time element in it. The story provides a lot of scope for movement through the scroll, as it starts with the marriage procession of *Behula* and *Lakkhindar*, and moves towards *Behula*'s journey to *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva* in heaven by a river route. *Brahma* with four heads, *Vishnu* with blue body and *Shiva* in his big belly and robe made of tiger skin are identified.

The narrative sequence is as follows

Goddess Manasa, Snake

A group of Kirtania (roving singer devotees)

Chand Sadagar and his family

Marriage Procession of Behula and Lakkhindar, black snake biting Lakkhindar

Behula with dead body of her husband Lakkhindar floating on a bhela

Right- Behula detailed at Goda; Left- Behula near ghat of Apu

Behula before Neta in the guise of a tiger

Behula before Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva in heaven

Chand Sadagar, his wife Sanaka, Behula and Lakkhindar lying.

Seven sons of Chand come to life, the goat sacrifice before Goddess Manasa.

4.3.1 Ramayana in different regional styles

Ramayana is among the most popular religious texts of India. The central characters of this epic namely *Rama*, *Lakshmana*, *Sita* and *Hanumana* are worshipped as incarnations of God and God themselves. Episodes from *Ramayana* in *Ekachitra* as well as complete *Ramayana* both as narrative scrolls and single frames are to be found in almost all the regional folk clusters. The

narrative that is orated with these pictures tell the stories in regional languages. In the past those narrations must have been the only source for the common people to learn the incidents and the paintings worked as illustration adding life to it. The paintings also have functioned as wall hangings inside the temples. The story of Ramayana as all other epics have been told and retold for ages but never to lose their significance. Regardless of the text, paintings is high on its aesthetic value, which can be appreciated independently as pure visuals irrespective of any clue to the story. The space is two-dimensional in general with no intension to create any illusion of depth. The use of perspective is aerial rather than linear. The compositions are dominant with linear qualities and all the characters and objects are confined in well-defined contour lines.

The narrative sequence is as follows (Fig.4.8)

Ramayana, Birbhum 19th Century, Paper and cloth, Gurusaday Museum (1652) 27ft 3inches x 2ft 4inches with 17 Panels

1. Dasaratha with Shani (Saturn), almost damaged
2. Dasaratha and Jatayu
3. Hermitage of the blind sage
4. Dasaratha kills Sindhu
5. The king brings the corpse to the hermitage.
6. Dead bodies of Sindhu and his parents on the pyre.
7. Dasaratha's three queens and some sages
8. Scene of sacrifice for the birth of a son
9. Sacrifice
10. Goddess Manasa (Snake Goddess)
11. Goddess Kali
12. Goddess Durga
13. Dead Ravana
14. Reunion of Rama Lakshmana and Sita
15. King of Death
16. Scene of Hell (3 scenes)
17. Jagannatha Trinity (Different from Vishnu)

In Madhubani painting of Bihar, complete *Ramayana* is not so common. Episodes of *Rama's* wedding, *Hanumana's* faithfulness, *Ravana's* abduction strategies for *Sita* and *Ravana's* defeat to *Rama* are most popular as subjects. (Fig.4.9) They use the technique known as '*bharni*' that literally means to filling. The painting styles differ between the casts, but this process in general, is to draw the contours and fill them up with colours and decorative patterns. Empty spaces without any filling are rarely observed here, which enhances the decorative quality in these paintings. Angularities of all sorts including the limb joints are totally avoided in these works to ensure the harmonious lyricism. Visual abstraction achieves a representational dimension, rich with naive aesthetic excellence, as the figures appear in their most descriptive features with faces in profile, with a frontal eye and torso, with hands and legs in their sideways view. The lines do not show any rendering of light and shade on them. They follow an idealistic style with no variation of line that may be indicative of a naturalistic quality anywhere in them.

Narrative scrolls depicting the story of *Ramayana* from Midnapur, Murshidabad and Birbhum, Bengal is not different as far as the principle of image making is concerned. The delineation with repetitive forms and decorative lines induce all required movements to the image in an otherwise static space. In Bengal the narrative scrolls are known as *dighalpata* and *jaranopata*, which has related meanings. *Dighal* means long, *jarano* means rolled up and *pata* means the canvas space. The dispersion of image is based on continuity. Continuity in composition is caused by means of repetitive forms and well-calculated proximity within the images. Even when the episodes are essentially separated and confined within a boundary the similarity in form causes the entire scroll to look united and harmonious without any visual break.

The narrative sequence is as follows Fig.4.10

Ramayana, Midnapur 20th Century, 14 panels, GSM 1646, 18'7"x1'10"

Visvamisra's visit to Dasaratha

Rama and Lakshmana killing Taraka and other demon

Demons disturbing the sacrifice of the sages

Lamentation of Dasaratha for exile of Rama

Sages greeting Rama, Sita and Lakshmana- Rama on the way to the forest with Sita and Lakshmana

Rama and Sita engaged in conversation

Lakshmana chastising Surpanakha

Surpanakha's complain to Ravana, Marich being magic deer.

*Rama killing the magic deer (maya-mriga); Rama, Sita and Lakshmana in the cottage
Sita and Lakshmana*

Sita and Ravana asks alms to her, Rama's collapse

Suparsva attempting to deroun the chariot of Ravana, Jatayu relating the story of

Sita's abduction to Rama

Monkey army of Rama at the gate of Sanaka

Angada as ambassador to Ravana

Fight between Rama and Ravana

Resend of Sita and her fire ordeal

*Ramayana, Murshidabad 19th C, Gurusaday Museum GSM No.1626, Paper and
Cloth, 16 panals, 10'10" x 2'1"*

Absence

Rama's alliance with Guhaka

Sacrifice of the sages and killing of demon by Rama

Marriage of Rama and Lakshmana

Marriage scene of Bharata and Shatrughna

Rama's return to Ayodhya along with brothers and Sita and other new brides

Humiliation of Parasurama by Rama on his way to Ayodhya

Marriage Procession

Sacred reception of the newly married couples

Dasaratha and his sons, Kaikeyi and Manthara

Sorrow in the palace at the news of the exile of Rama

Death of king Dasaratha

Rama on the way to the forest scene of departure

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana on the boat of chandala king Guhaka

They are on the bank and they are received as guest at the house of Guhaka.

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita worshipping Shiva image

Complete *Ramayana*(Fig.4.11) in *Kalamkari* technique on cloth painted in *Srikalahasti*, Andhra Pradesh, incorporates *Telugu* scriptures in the borders horizontally dividing the space. These regional scriptures blend so well and effectively with the drawing style that even if one is unable to read the script, they do not cause any hindrances to the smooth viewing of the visual narrative. Painter M. Nagaraja in his conversation with the authors puts stress on that. It is indeed interesting to see how the *Telugu* script acted as a decorative pattern for the people who cannot read the language.

Complete *Ramayana* painting made by the master painter of Raghurajpur, Orissa still follow a regimented norm in the distribution of space in their composition. The skeleton structure if studied properly takes care of the marvelous balance with a preconceived and convincing repetition of circles, squares and rectangles.

Documentation Report, *Patachitra, The Traditional Painting of Orissa*, Shilp Guru Ananta Moharana,(4.12) Danda Shahi, Puri, Orissa Sponsored by: Office of the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) Government of India, Ministry of Textiles, New Delhi.

1. Rushisrunga was brought by the prostitutes.
2. Rushishringa conducted Jangya.
3. King Dasrath gave chalu to the queen
4. Rama, Laxman, Bharat, Satrughn took birth
5. Rama, Laxman, were named

6. Rama, Laxman played with their mother.
7. Dashrath gave advice to Rama and Laxman
8. Rama and Laxman were educated on operation of bow and arrow.
9. Discussion between Dasrath and Balmiki.
10. The killing of Taraka.
11. While guru was conducting jangya, to guard him
12. Rama, Laxmana nursing their teacher
13. To recoup Ahalya
14. Breaking of Shiva Dhanu (Bow)
15. Marriage ceremony of Rama and Sita
16. Rama met Parasurama
17. Rama, Laxman, Sita, Balmiki returned Ajodhya
18. Talking between Rama and Sita
19. Discussion of king Dasarath to declare Ram as a king
20. Manthara persuade Kaikeyi
21. Kaikeyi pulled out her ornaments and slept with irritation
22. Kaikeyi blessed Ramachandra
23. King Dasrath ordered Rama
24. Rama, Laxman, Sita went to the forest
25. Rama, Laxman, Sita took blessings from Balmiki
26. Rama, Laxman, Sita crossed the river with a boat
27. Death of king Dasrath
28. Bharat and Satrugan beat Manthara
29. Bharat went to the chitrakuta mountain to bring back Rama with his soldires
30. Bharat met Rama
31. The sandals of Rama was worshipped putting them on the throne of Ajyodhya
32. Sradha ceremony of Dasrath
33. Bharat gave protection to Rama and Sita
34. Laxman cut off the nose of Surpanakha
35. Surpanakha infoirmed to Rabana
36. Magic Deer roamed near the cottage of Rama

37. Ram run after the magic Deer
38. Laxman went after Ram after cutting three straight lines
39. Ravana theft Sita
40. Ravan killed Jatayu
41. Sita remain in the Ashoka forest
42. The killing of Kabandha
43. Funeral of Jatayu
44. Rama, Laxmana met with the Sabari
45. Rama, Laxman met Hanuman who was in the dress of Brahmin
46. The friendship of Rama with Sugriba
47. The fight between Bali and Sugriba
48. The killing of Bali
49. To see Lanka sitting on the property of Asthasambhu
50. To locate Sita, Rama gave his ring to Hanuman
51. Hanuman jumped Mahendra hill in the sea
52. Hanuman met Lanka Devi
53. Lanka Devi blessed Hanuman
54. Hanuman met Sita in the Ashoka Forest
55. Hanuman fought with demons in the Ashoka Forest
56. The killing of Askhaya kumar
57. Hanuman was brought to king Ravan
58. The tail of Hanuman was lighted with fire
59. Hanuman put fire in the city of Lanka
60. Hanuman gave Mathamani (Head jewel) to Rama
61. The monkeys constructed to dam
62. The inauguration of Setubandhana
63. Ravan beat Bibhisan and drove him away from the house
64. Bibhisan surrendered before Rama
65. Indrajit lifted the foot of Angada
66. Queen Mandodari requestyed Ravan to free Sita
67. Ravan put Ram and Laxman in Nagaphasa (Snake attack)

68. The fight of Indrajit with Laxman
69. Saktiveda of Laxman
70. Bharat attacked Hanuman in his bow
71. Kumbhakarna wake up from the sleep
72. Kumbhakarna was killed
73. The jangya of Indrajit was spoiled
74. Indrajit was killed
75. Mahiravan conspired to sacrifice Rama and Laxman
76. Ravan shown magic head to Sita to fear/scare her
77. Ravan arranged jangya to please deity
78. Ravan donated one hundred eight lotus to please goddess Durga
79. The army of Ravan fled
80. The gods presented Ram the devine chariot
81. The fight between Rama and Ravan
82. The ten heads of Ravan was cut off
83. The killing of Ravan
84. The examination of Sita through fire
85. The incarnation of Rama as king
86. The return of Rama, Laxman, Sita to Ajodhya by puspak (Fig.4.13)

4.4 Independent Expressions in Contemporary Folk Paintings

The various government and nongovernment initiatives have created many innovation possibilities in the domain. The practice has lost its relevance in the society from time to time with the introduction of new ways of living. Comic books and television serials, with their big budget and glossy productions have replaced the practice of oration and painted illumination. The new modes of communication have left little scope for the folk painters to play any role that is vital and indispensable for a society. Nevertheless the condition like this, has offered newer openings to the folk art practitioners to create with no bindings and obligations. The folk art market today is based on pure aesthetics. The master artists who have always been extremely innovative and talented are now getting a platform to experiment and explore depending on various stipends and awards. The numerous trained artists from the community and from outside the community who are not involved in any form of innovation related to the image making are

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engaging themselves with the industries that deal with lifestyle products and earning their livelihood by trying their painting skill on designer saris, wall hangings, lampshades etc.

An abrupt patronage that has helped the practice to sustain and come this long a way deserves a parallel study. The contribution of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Gurusaday Dutt along needs an essential mentioning here. The folk painters are taking interest in exploring the possibilities of new media. They are contributing and collaborating in animation projects and book illustrations that are not away from their own principle purpose of image making. A few successful initiatives from recent time where the eminent folk painters of contemporary India took part that needs to be mentioned here are Moyna Chitrakar's Sita's Ramayana, Dulari Devi's Following My Paint Brush, Swarana Chitrakar's The Patua Pinocchio and Monkey Photo, T. Balaji's Mangoes & Bananas, Radhashyam Raut's The Circle of Faith, Rambharas Jha's Waterlife, and many more published by Tara Books. Having written in English and also translated in other foreign languages now, they have crossed the limitation of vernacular communication. However, it is the semiotic comprehension that proves to be the best way of communication outreach that has an appeal, beyond all limitations and universal. The understanding is based on the fundamentals of human gesture that is deeply rooted in the cosmos.

Tradition, religion, time, change and words like those if considered, as the keywords for this article may sound as an oxymoron in the present context, where the validity and significance of all these factors are primarily based on the uplifting of folk art as a thriving cultural industry for our country. The variety yet integrity in the folk styles hold the potential to establish a distinct cultural identity and also mirror the living visual culture of India. The process of semiotic viewing gives emphasis to its expressional prospective that is universally recognized and appreciated with due round of applause.

Change in theme: As explained by anthropologist David Szanton, co founder (in 1980) and president (till 2003), Ethnic Arts Foundation, 1980s onwards, several artists began painting images on social themes in Mdhubani. Apart from daily life activities there were paintings depicting political events such as election, by Shanti Devi (the art work is now preserved in Berkeley Art Museum) having political party symbols. The male painters are regular in secular themes and painting on current issues. The thematic range include global terrorism, pollution,

patriarchy, global terrorism, benefit and costs of capitalist development, woman power and glory, literacy mission etc.

The traditional image of *Kohbar* is the image that created the auspicious space for marriage. The lotus pond and paired fish call forth female beauty and fertility. The bamboo stands for the male line. The image of Gauripuja suggests union of the ideal couple, surrounded by pairs and fish, lovebirds, snakes, and turtles with sun and moon beaming from above. In the contemporary range of *kohber*, there are instances of deconstruction by Pinki Kumari 2004, with a couple of elements like lotus pond and flowers being absent. Playfully, the lotus and bamboo transforms into pairs of fish. The painting titled *A Modern Kohber*, 2003, adds an image of Goddess of wealth Laxmi as well as a heart sign for love marriage.

There are abundant feminist themes in the contemporary range of Madhubani painting. Social constraints, equal rights for both genders, right to education for girls, female foeticide, ill treatment by the husbands and mother in laws, bride burning, are common as themes for paintings. (Fig.4.14)

This painting by Rupam Kumari is a combination of six frames that narrates the theme in a sequential order, with no apparent continuity created Rupam Kumari, *Bride to Bride Burning*, 2012 (Fig.4.15) (Szanton and Bakshi, 2007) with any object that links between the frames other than the figures being repeated in the frames. Visual analysis of traditional folk paintings from many different regions, in this chapter, establish that the artworks hold similarity in subject matters, expressions and purposes in spite of the heterogeneity in the cultural and lingual surrounding, in India. Amrita Das's painting *Srilanka Tsunami* is also quite new in terms of theme and execution. (Fig.4.16)

As described in the Price list of an International Traveling Exhibition, 'The Central swastika figure symbolizes Capitalist Prosperity that produces the green revolution, industrialization, globalized trades and consumer goods, and light and education, that all brighten the world. But on either side it also produces rockets, guns, alcohol, drugs and disease, auto, farm and noise pollution and cosmetics which all darken the world, creating toxins the pass on to Shiva. But can be again allow the toxins and again save humanity?' (Fig.4.17)

Seen in the picture is an ongoing ultrasound x-ray of an expected mother. A scaled up and emphasized motif of snake symbolizes the horror of female foeticide. (Fig.4.18) There are

imaged of girl children compared with beautiful flowers that are picked up from the twigs with severe brutality (Szanton and Bakshi, 2007).

The artist did not seem to have followed the conventional compositional norms. Yet, have maintained the core characteristic of Madhubani painting style in this fine linear work with utter intricacy.

One of the most path breaking examples of recent artworks from Madhubani art is this collage painting made by Rambharos Jha. The artist explains how he had synthesized his painting to depict a dreamlike reality combining his interpretation of water and woman as the two metaphors of life. The title of the painting is, Underwater Montage. (Fig.4.19)

In paintings titled Outside Inside (Fig.4.20), Transformation (Fig.4.21) and Breaking Earth (Fig.4.22), Rambharos has enjoyed his artistic freedom by experimenting and exploring the traditional style in his contemporary expression.

Amtita Jha, an young Madhubani painter has been innovatively exploring the possibilities of Madhubani tradition in her new works. (Fig. 2.22, 2.23, 2.24, 2.25)

Amrita Jha Taking the concept of *Ardhanariswara* a step further, noted, “If male and female are interdependent and complementary among gods and humans, they must be so throughout nature, even in snails.”(Fig.4.26)

Shalinee Kumari’s drawing on *Ardhanariswara*, the idea of complimentary and interdependence, she depicts two aspects of women, radiating power and energy into dark world, but with head bowed, also sexually and socially submissive to the *naga*, the males in her life. The *naga* (snake) on the female’s (probably self image) forehead, as interpreted by the artist is, “they have even captured our minds.”(Fig.4.27)

Examples of Collaborative Painting

‘Regional Interactive Camp of Contemporary, Folk, Tribal & Traditional artists’ has been an initiative of Lalit Kala Academy, Regional Centre, Lucknow. The camp and workshop was held during 8th - 22nd November 2013. (Fig.4.28, 4.29, 4.30, 4.31, 4.32, 4.33, 4.34)

The participating artists were divided in two main categories. They are

1. Contemporary Artists and
2. Traditional, Folk and Tribal artists.

Mainaz Bano, Akash Kumar Seth, Mohan Lal Jat, Pramod Kumar Singh, Preeti Kahar and Nandubhai A Rathwa were amongst the contemporary artists and the latter category had Gulab Chand Prajapati, Vishnu Narain Agarwal, Shanti Lal Joshi, Dinesh Chandra, Mohan Lal Kumhar, Mohanbhai Rathwa, Manubhai Chunilal Chitara.

Artists from both the categories were made to work together on a collaborative painting and an individual painting during the course. The artworks executed in the camp were then displayed on 22nd November 2013.

Nandubhai A Rathwa, a practicing artist and professor in M.S. University, Vadodra, Gujarat and Pithora style painter Mohanbhai Rathwa worked together on a single canvas frame. Interestingly both share the same ethnic root as they come from the same region. While Nandubhai Rathwa proceeded to pursue his academic training in art from a government art collage, Mohanbhai Rathwa learned and practiced the habitual art forms, as any other traditional artists would do without any formal academic training. Nandubhai A Rathwa shared his experience, upon asking comments that Mohanbhai's paintings get completion with ritualistic performances. His traditional root conceives the space of painting in a different way than his art school training that never lets him remain ignorant of the devices that cause illusion of spatial depth in a picture.



Fig. 4.1 Kohber, Abha Das, 2003, Ranti, Madhubani

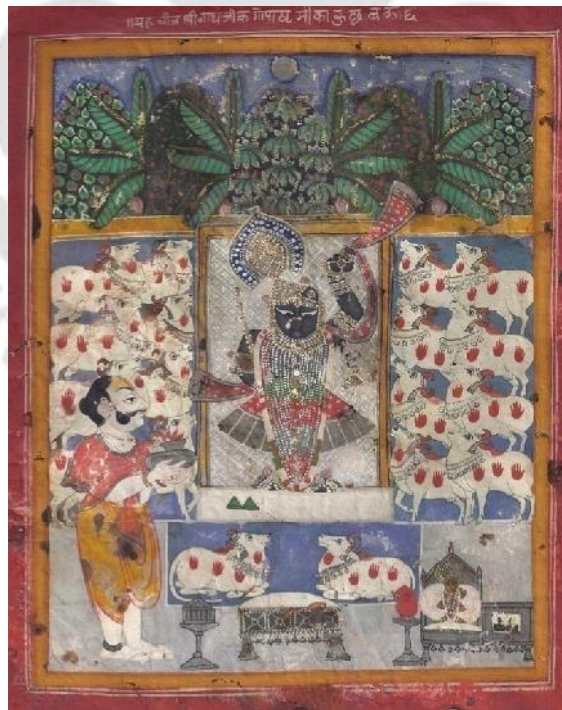


Fig. 4.2 *Shrinathji*, Nathdwara temple tradition, *Pichhvai* Paintings from Rajasthan

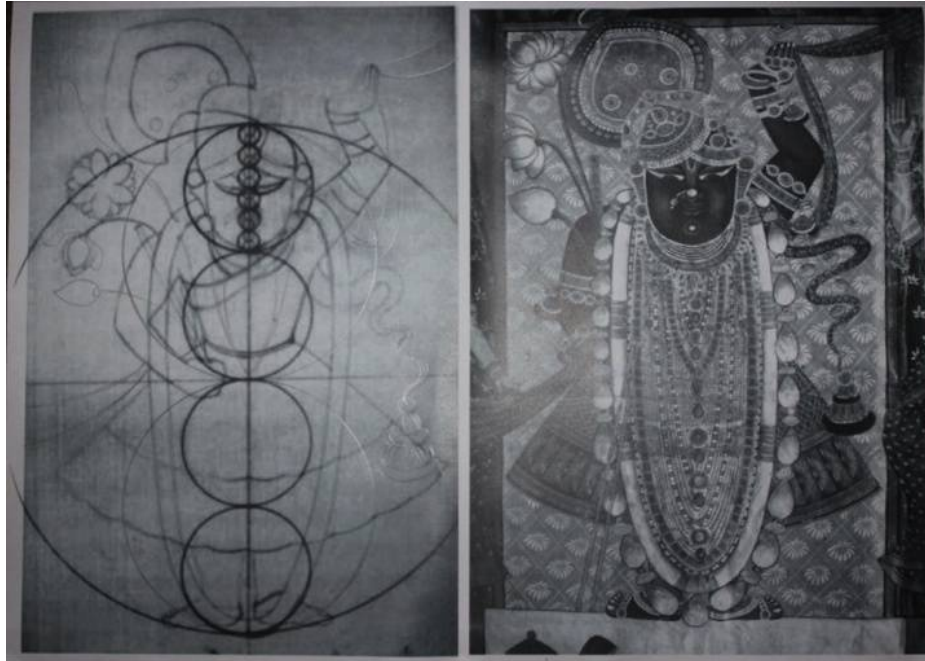


Fig. 4.3 Standard Proportions *Shrinathji*, *Nathadwara* temple tradition, *Pichhvai* Paintings



Fig 4.4 *Hanumana* (Details), 2012, Shilpaguru Ananta Maharana, Raghurajpur, Odisha



Fig. 4.5 *Sahebpata* Scroll (Detail), Bengal
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Fig. 4.6 *Manasamangala* Patchitra (Detail), 20th Century, Bengal



Fig. 4.7 *Manasamangala* Patchitra (Detail), 20th Century, Bengal



Fig. 4.8 *Ramayana*, Frame 13-15, Birbhum 19th Century, Paper and cloth, Gurusaday Museum

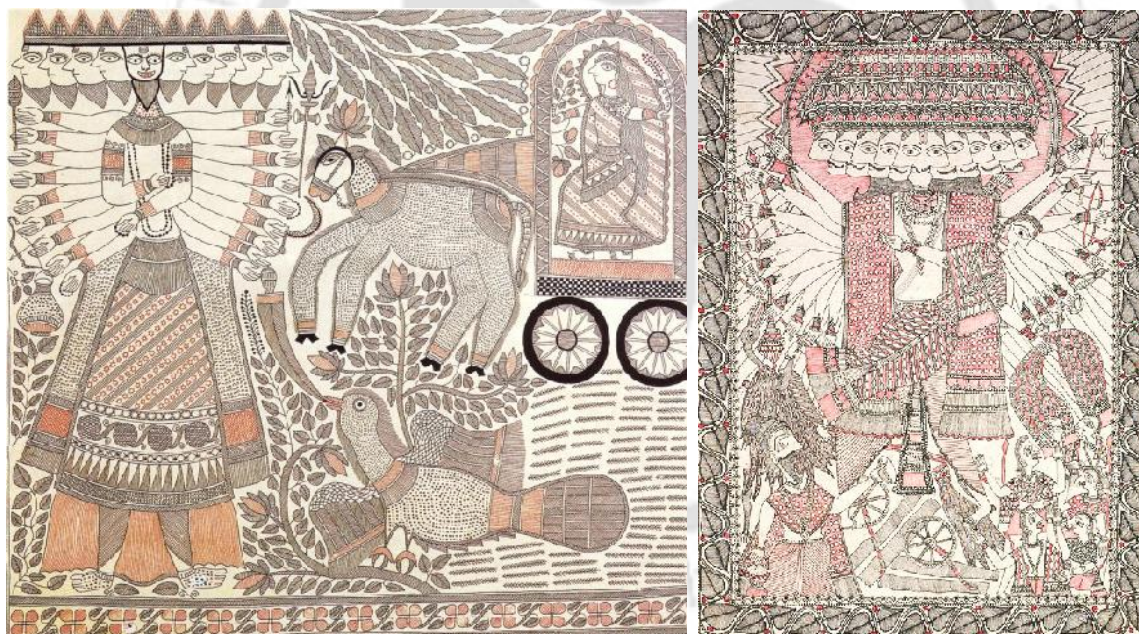


Fig. 4.9 *Ravana abducting Sita*, Kachni on paper, 1995, Ranti, Madhubani



Fig. 4.10 *Ramayana*, Midnapur 20th Century, 14 panels, Gurusaday Museum



Fig. 4.11 *Ramayana*, 2010, M.Nagaraja, Srikalahasti, Andhra Pradesh



Fig. 4.12 *Ramayana*, Shilp Guru Ananta Moharana 2012, Raghurajpur

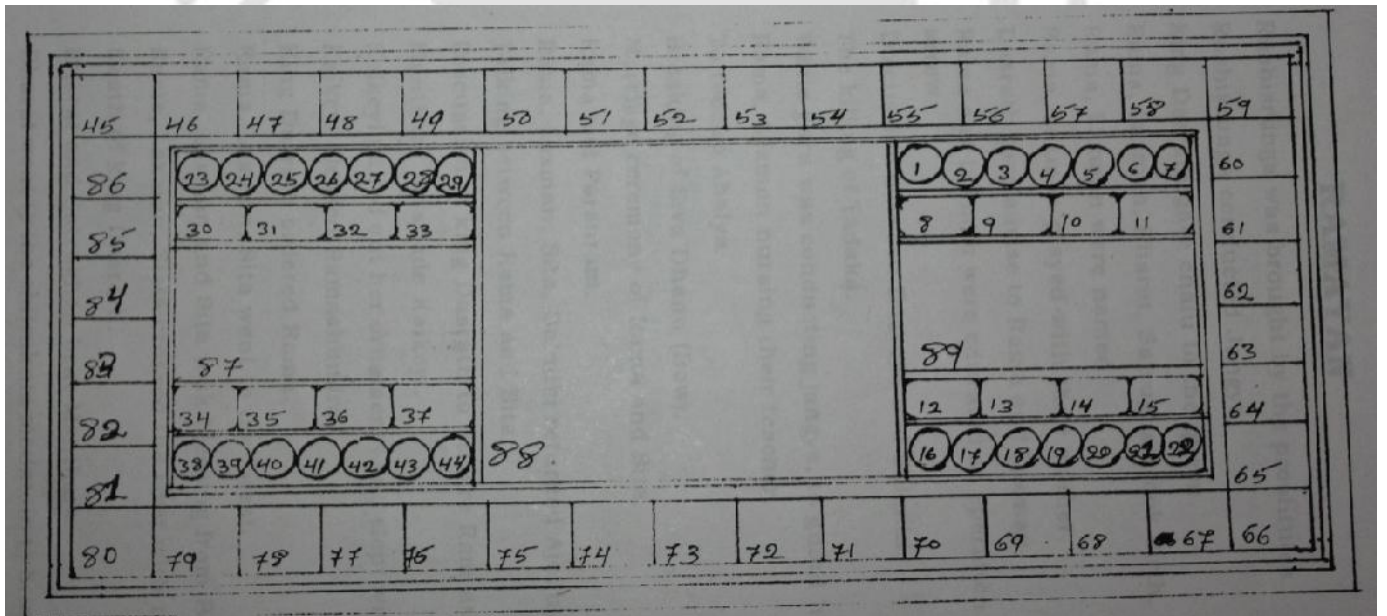


Fig.4.13 Space division for Complete Ramayan drawn by Shilpaguru Anantha Maharana



Fig. 4.14 Medical service offered to the rich but denied to the poor (detail) Dulari Devi, Ranti, 2004 (collection of Susan Wadley, Syracuse, New York).



Fig. 4.15 *Bride-to-Bride Burning*, Rupam Kumari, 2012, Madhubani

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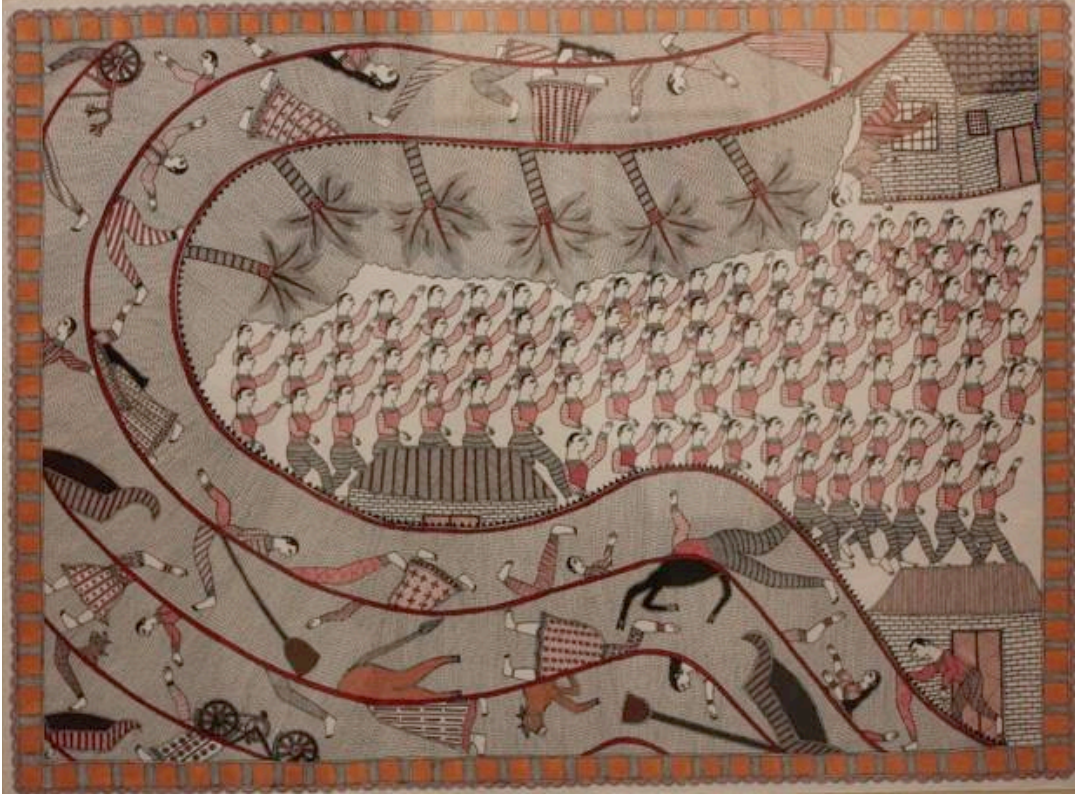


Fig 4.16 Amrita Das, The Sri Lanka Tsunami, 2004



Fig.4.17 Shalini Kumari, The Benefits and Costs of Capitalism 2005

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Fig. 4.18 Rani Jha, The Abortion Clinic 2004



Fig.4.19 Rambharos Jha Underwater montage 2005

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Fig.4.20 Rambharos Jha, Outside Inside

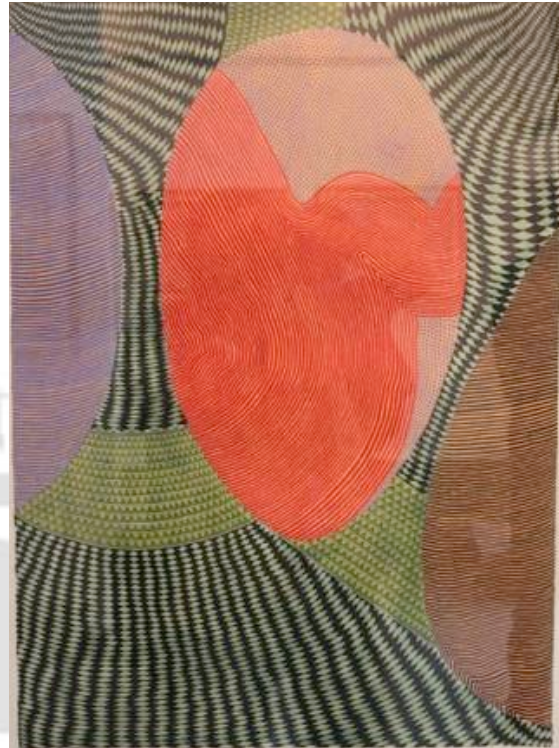


Fig.4.21 Rambharos Jha, Transformation



Fig.4.22 Amrita Jha and Rambharos Jha



Fig.4.23 Amrita Jha, Tiger 2011



Fig.4.24 Amrita Jha, Strange Birds 2012

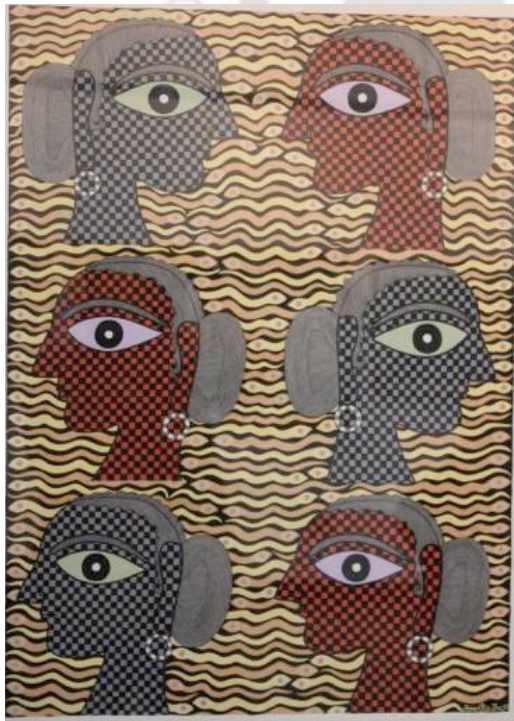


Fig.4.25 Amrita Jha, Identity Crisis

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Fig.4.26 Amrita Jha, Two snails 2008 (Faizo Collection)



Fig.4.27 Shalinee Kumari, Woman as Radiant, Woman as Submissive 2008



Fig.4.28 Mohanbhai Rathwa and Nandubhai A Rathwa



Fig.4.29 Bamboo-brushes made and used by Mohanbhai Rathwa



Fig.4.30 Collaborative painting by Mohanbhai Rathwa and Nandubhai A Rathwa



Fig.4.31 Collaborative painting by Manubhai Chitara and Pramod Singh

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Fig.4.32 Manubhai Chitara and Pramod Singh together at work, photograph courtesy: Siddhartha Ghosh



Fig.4.33 Mohanlal Jat and Shanti Lal Joshi together at work , photograph courtesy: Siddhartha Ghosh



Fig.4.34 Unfinished collaborative work by Mohanlal Jat and Shanti Lal Joshi

AESTHETIC CONTINUUM OF CONTEMPORARY FOLK PAINTING OF INDIA

:

CASE STUDY OF FIVE TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Chapter 5

Visual Culture of Post Colonial India: Printing and Paintings

5.0 The Social Formation before Independence

In the course of identifying a time visually, by understanding its cultural profile, rests on the imperative need to study the essential social structure and the technological providence that operates the outer happening. For example, during the formative years of urbanization in Bengal the living was locality based. The social formation adhered to the doctrines of *Manusamhita*, *Brahmabaibartapurana*, *Maitriupanishada* and similar ancient texts, the instructions of which brought people of similar profession together as working communities. This is evident from the name of the localities that still exist, such as *Beniatola* (business-class-locality), *Patuatola* (painters-locality), *Kumortuli* (potters-locality), *Dorjipara* (tailors-locality) etc. This structure experienced a change under the British rule as they shuffled the communities in an attempt to make Kolkata the second London. There were Portuguese, Dutch and French intruders before the British who concentrated mainly on trade, but the British aimed to establish their colony as well as their culture. With a rapid urbanization the land price increased and the painters (*patua*) moved to the nearby villages.

Jone Jofania Hallowell, a collector in the British ruled city of Kolkata, in 1767/68 published an elaborate illustrated document of Hindu God and Goddess in the book titled, '*Interesting Historical Events, related to the provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Hindostan*', published by T. Becket and P. A. D. Hondt. Kolkata was not introduced to printing press at that time. The first printed book in Bengal named '*A Grammar of the Bengal Language*' by Nathaniel Brassi Halhead was printed in 1778. Hallowell conducted his documentation during his decade long stay at Kolkata. British draftsmen engraved the illustrations printed in his book on metal plate in England but the pictures stylistically suggest resemblance with Bengal *patua* tradition. Those Gods and Goddesses were devoid of signs mentioned in classical texts; they were much localized in their image formation (Som, 1993). Apart from these apparently incoherent observations, 18th century vernacular art scenario, although not totally devoid of painting and cultural practice, was vastly oppressed by the British urbanization. It is possible that many of those village painters migrated to Kolkata in search of luck. The next *patachitra* tradition flourished in the urban location in the beginning of 19th century as a temple tradition in Kolkata with the Kalighat Mandir as a central haven. When the urban *Patachitra* tradition sheltered Kolkata the entire folk art panorama was directed toward a new sensibility that was introspective of the means

of time. K.G. Subramanyan, expresses that, the present cultural scene is obsessed with the sense of time, that gives it a semantic location. They reinterpret history, and set assorted synonyms of time such as colonial, postcolonial, modern, postmodern.

'Since most of them talk in terms of hard-drawn dichotomies, history is no more to them a placid stream of growth and continuity but a turbid channel of conflict.'

(Subramanyan, 2007)

The history is always palpable in the purview of its visual culture. The changing colour of time leaves impression that stimulates the visual identity of a time period. The guiding factors here are, the aesthetic sensibility that is largely dependent on the pragmatic method, available material and technological progression. Another important factor is the communication outreach, an advancement of which causes a shrink to bring the isolated closer, expand the outlook with easy interaction, and alter lifestyle to overcome standardized conditions.

5.1 New Aesthetics

After the independence, the new experience brought in every Indian mind a keenness to get the taste and feel of an indigenous aesthetics. The popular culture responded to nationalistic movement and hereafter, to the technical empowerment and evolved. The images flagged a blend of folk and urban flamboyance, which was well established as a path to reach the common mind and to accept their own brands and identities. Indian manufactured products are long recognized for their palpable package graphics. They often stand out for their loud imageries such as religious heads, deities, famous persona or flora and fauna. They are brightly coloured and commonly contrasted with bold and obvious contour lines. The style was a mixture of traditional, eclectic, popular and often kitsch representation of imageries. Indian visual culture considering, such environ, may be looked at as a passages to the age-old culture.

5.1.1 Early Prints

The hand painted and printed imageries that emerged during the colonial rule and then, obtained its facelift during the post independent era, shows how the popular images mirrored the cultural taste of a particular time. The need of mass production instilled a

change in the existing tradition that was accountable for the new aesthetics. Apart from the improved functionality, the new aesthetics perpetually thrived its blatant identity with a lasting impact. Between the mid sixteenth century and the end of the eighteenth century printing activities were already in vogue in different parts of the country. But it only flourished after the new system of education covered the middle class majority and the backward or less fortunate mass of the society.

'For the transcription of manuscripts still remained exclusively the concern of the royal court or the temple priests. It was the age of patrons. Knowledge and the fine arts were part of the privileges of an elite. The people as a whole had no access to these. Hence the hand written manuscripts were enough to cater to the limited demand, and the artist's brush by itself could satisfy the aesthetic yearning of the feudal overlords.'

(Sarkar, 1983).

In the book *Balbodha Muktabali*, printed in Tanjore in 1806, can be found the earliest known printed illustration appearing in a woodblock print. The first example of an illustration printed by an Indian artist was part of the Bengali book, entitled, *Onoodah Mongal*. The book was published by Ganga Kishore Bhattacharjyee and printed at the Ferris and Company press, Calcutta, in 1816. There are two wood-engraved illustrations in this book, along with the inscription 'Engraved by Ramachand Roy' (Das, 1994).

5.1.2 Bat-tala Prints

Although printing started in Western India mainly to print Biblical text to proliferate Christianity, it flourished with an intrusion of mass literacy in British India. During 1830's printing presses established in Shobhabazar, Dorjitola, Ahiritola, Goranhata, Simulia and Baghbazar in North Calcutta. The popular urban traditional pat painting of Kalighat came upon the pressure of increasing demand of lowering the cost of their work. During 1860 to 1870 an analogous practice known as *Bat-tala* in the Shova Bazaar and Chitpur areas of Calcutta, became the heart of Indian printing activities. The printing and publication industry that had flourished in this area came to be known as the country's most important publication centres until the end of the 19th century.

'...Kalighat Pats and Battala woodcuts remain the only two instances of a popular art in Calcutta. They have an appeal to our times, not entirely nostalgic, but by virtue of the domestic consciousness shown by the artists in their endeavour to produce art not for a particular class but for the entire community, and offer it to the people for a pice a copy.'

(Sarkar, 1983).

The decline of Kalighat pats ran through 1885-1930, the Battala woodcuts declined between the eighties and nineties during the 19th century. The influence of Kalighat on the urban folk or bazaar art of Calcutta was evident.

'Not the Art Studio and the Battala engravers alone, but oil painters too have followed the Kalighat models.'

(Sarkar, 1983).

5.1.3 Artist Block Makers and A New Hybrid Aesthetics

Moreover, after the very decline, they were the artist block makers from this urban folk art and craft style who found their new job of making almanacs, stock blocks, labels, handbills and advertisements etc. (Sarkar, 1983).

Consequently, these graphic-representations aimed at capturing the regional sentiments. It also formed into an industry that served the daily ritualistic cause and practices of the urban and rural mass. The implementation and practice of printing added a flavour of modernity to the way of living. The common mass got introduced to printed almanacs, advertisement pamphlets, product package levels and felt a sense of attachment with anything that is printed and mass produced as a part of modern life. These were mainly created using wood cut and wood engraving techniques in the beginning followed by black and white and coloured lithography techniques later.

"There was a slump in the market however even before it could really build up. The rapid advances of the technology of printing that had created the setting for the patua with his brush and the engraver with his chisel brought about the early death of this art, as the lithograph and oleograph were locked in bitter competition."

(Sarkar, 1983).

The practice was significantly massive in scale as observed from the documents printed and published in vernacular press. The popular art practice, well known as ‘bazaar art’, established an individual identity and a style that evolved with time. There had been simplification in style for better communication. Images in general maintained a semi realistic and unambiguous approach. The technical possibilities provided by the mediums had its obvious influence on the style of image making. We observe a definite flow in the process. Wood and metal engraving as a technique offer the image to have a dotted and linear appearance. Printing as a medium is never as direct as painting. It allowed a limited tonal possibility. Printed and mass produced images thus fell under a stylistic category with a blatant graphic quality. Lithograph and oleograph in the later phase provided with more tonal possibilities. But the use of colour gradient was unexplored. The rise of nationalistic movements in early 20th century formed the basis for a particular awareness, which came about among the local mass to maintain a separate identity for indigenous and foreign merchandise simply through the graphical representations. After the country’s independence in 1947, the new experience encountered a new aesthetic; an entirely indigenous experience that was long sought after. The images on indigenous commodities flagged a noticeable popular style, so very inviting, with a blend of folk and urban flamboyance that was well placed to influence the common mind. The graphical representation of those images was basic, mundane and somewhat crude due to the technological limitations of that time. But surprisingly that apparent not-so-glamorous trend of image making continued to remain unchanged for decades.

Many of the popular visuals today follow a similar aesthetics in spite of all the technical advancement that is apt to provide finer results. The technology evolved over the period. Colour lithography, wood and metal engraving as mediums had their own technical restraints what influenced the making of the images. In the initial years the restricted colour palate caused by the technical limitation and economy in printing cost added to the style a new minimalist sensibility that continued for a long time. Even when the restrictions were lesser with the introduction of offset press, the old images prevailed. One cannot ignore the typicality caused by the limited possibility of the old medium. The obvious basic colours, well-defined edges with the compulsory use of crude contour line and decoration still stand as a characteristic feature of a particular taste. Most interestingly, there are brands that

wanted to keep up with the trust they gained over the time by remaining as unchanged as possible in their printed package graphic images. The contemporary scene of hybrid aesthetics is an obvious outcome of mixed possibilities. The boundary is wider than ever before and the urge of timelessness is a choice and not a compulsion. Ours is an old civilization with a contemporary presence that has made its entry into modernity through the colonial gateway.

'In each colony, after the initial consolidation of their power, the colonizers tried to educate the colonials into being their collaborators, trying to emphasize in the process their own superiority and indispensability to the colony's advancement.'

(Subramanyan, 2007).

India was not an exception but as compare to the other colonies it had a considerable number of visionary leaders in opposition. The political move from the part of the foreign rulers to control that robustness of constant opposition was initially directed to the education system that has the sole power to manipulate a generation to come under colonial control. The intellectual minds at that point of time realized the immediate need,

'to catch on to the ropes of the new education (whatever its inadequacies) and hoist themselves out of stagnation; to step out into the modern world.'

(Subramanyan, 2007).

5.2 Modernity, Nationalism and Folk Idiom

The whole occurrence of stepping into this modern world, however subject to complex evaluation, took place in many different ways. The foremost attempt was made by the Nationalists to clear the cloud regarding, what is the index of India? The answer to that swivels around ethnicity, origin, indigenesness, spirituality, identity, antiquity, ethics, aesthetics and analogous factors of consideration that formulates the cultural structure of a community and hence contributes in the making of a nation. The eclectic characteristic that has successfully conformed Indian modernity of today's time also necessitates maintenance to proceed farther. The concept of modern Indian identity was not free from European norms. In Indian History of about five thousand years, it is merely six hundred years that the country has been ruled by Indians. This has resulted the modern Indian art and culture to attain a discreet eclectic feature. The change evidently ranges from 100 B.C to 1900 A.D that

has added characters of multiple- ethnicity to the Indian culture and society. The reshaping caused by the Islamic and British rule is significantly most distinctive in the discipline of Indian visual culture. In spite of attempts to keep up with the global upgrading, modern Indian culture holds much dissimilarity; reason enough to create an anomaly within the global margin. It requires extensive research and study in the area of Indian visual culture to scrutinize this condition.

Indian Contemporary Visual Culture is a widely ranged phenomenon with multiple divergent features that are noticeably salient to intensify the context. The vernacular and minor art of India is remarkably pure in its intramural identity because of its remote situate that had kept it untouched and unnoticed for a very long time and provided with a free environ to stretch its branches in freer directions. The practice was low-keyed, noncommercial and very unambitious as far as the monetary gain was concerned.

“Since the mid-nineteenth century, the revival of ‘lowbrow’ or practical arts of India had formed the central plank of government policy, a policy that was later adopted by the nationalists. Kalighat pat or scroll painting, a ‘lowbrow’ art of urban Calcutta, was the first such to receive prominence, at the exhibition in London in 1871.⁸ However, the primitivism that identified folk, popular and tribal art-in short, all forms of ‘low’ art- as an ‘authentic’ expression of Indian soul was something entirely new. In addition to its nationalist implications, it embodied the modernist aesthetics that preferred bold simplification to Victorian over-ornamentation and the simplicity of village life to the ‘decadence’ of urban existence.”

(Mitter, 2007).

The modern aesthetics in Indian context was coincidentally associated with nationalism. The core concept of modern art nevertheless was synonymous to simple expression that is an outcome of free and on time thinking. It is the kind of aesthetic concern that recreates life that is attached to its rudimentary simplicity. The correlation of this free aesthetic implementation that simultaneously remained obligated to a dogmatic purpose was evident in the *Haripura Poster* series by Nandalal Bose.

5.3 Contextualizing folk idioms to express the spirit of Nationalism: Haripura Posters

Nandalal Bose, a versatile artist, art educationist and nationalist fostered the idea of creativity that is limitless and free and at the same time duty-bound to its history and cultural heritage. He experimented this ideology all his life through his art practice. He endorsed the worth of urban and rural folk art that was perishing to the threat of foreign aesthetics. Nandalal Bose's conviction in favour of folk aesthetics to work as a tool for shaping up indigenous art, nurtured his own creative endeavors all his life that resulted in numerous significant individual and community projects that he took up with his students and co artists.

'Even after he a renowned artist and educator, he continued to see art and artisan practice as a connected panorama that ensured aesthetics creativity in a modern environment.'

(Subhramanyan, 2008).

It was in 1935 that Nandalal Bose took up the project to install an art show at Lucknow session of Congress requested by Mahatma Gandhi as a part of his nation-building endeavors. It was a collective work accompanied and assisted by Benode Behari Mukherjee, Vinayak Rao Masoji, Prabhat Mohan Bandopadhyay and Asit Haldar. Then, in February 1938, at Haripua congress, Bardoli, Gujarat, Nandalal Bose set an exemplary demonstration of environmental art project using local materials and artistry. The environment was duly complemented by his paintings depicting Indian daily life scenes, much famed as Haripura posters (Fig.5.1). It followed a work process close to the community folk art practices where a master painter leads the production in a team. Nandalal painted nearly eighty posters by himself, in an approximate size of 2ftx 2ft, and his associate teammates made close copies of those paintings to multiply the number close to 400. Nandalal Bose admitted that he had chosen the *pata* style (Fig.5.2) of painting for Haripura posters (Bose, 1999).

The paintings were made in confined frames to maintain symmetrical order, with a purpose of public display. The paintings were made at the outer periphery of the pavilion with the prior envision for effective public viewing as the prime concern. The strategic use of locally available earth colours ensured vibrancy to the scheme. Nandalal Bose used bold and long brush strokes to minimize the intricacy in order to make them more obvious and expressive.

The lines and colours were bold, brilliant and energetic with simple graphic flatness that provided the paintings with a fresh and smart appearance. The figurative compositions were apparently decorative and semi abstracted, but there was a distinct dynamism in each composition that dragged the posters to a greater depth. The obvious contours were needed for distant viewing. So brush strokes were large, continuous and well rendered as well as the use of colour was patchy, calculative with an intention to create maximum effect through minimum application, typical of mural art. The characters performing various activities like playing musical instruments, haunting, controlling cattle, carpenters and blacksmiths at work, women cooking, are derivatives of experiential realism. The compositions were rhythmic with dynamic forms to emanate cheery energy. The expression overpowered decorativeness reminiscent of the spontaneous spirit of Kalighat pata and other forms of folk paintings. (Mitter, 2007).

Nandalal Bose recorded for posterity, the likeness of the last Kalighat painter, Nibaran Ghosh. Abanindranath Tagore wrote a booklet on Bengali women's ritual art in 1919, sought to capture the rugged quality of Bengali folk art in his paintings based on the religious texts, name, *Kabikankan Chandi and Krishnamangal*. Deviprosad Roy Chowdhury met Abanindranath with a view to get trained under his guidance, the master advised the young artist to study Kalighat Patachitra. Stella Kramrisch drew the attention of the European avant-grade to the bold simplifications of Kalighat in 1925. The following year, Ajit Ghosh's influential article altered the reading public to the importance of this 'folk art', comparing its formal boldness to that of Cubism.

5.4 Academic Practice vs. Vernacular Practice

In order to abbreviate this colossal task, the study may follow a time line of past one hundred years of art education policies and art practices of all layers of societies that has influenced and made an impact to the fabric of Indian visual culture in the global scene.

5.4.1 Academic Art during Colonial India

The modernization in the Indian social context came about with the British rule. The British Governance in colonial India took up policies of improvisation for business, communication and rules and regulations focusing on their own benefit. The not-too-far-fetched-trust that the ruling authority gained, nevertheless restructured the education system, established

uniformity in law and also reformed the existing religious postulates. The efforts made were intended towards a materialistic culture that has favoured the British ruling system making it smooth and advantageous for them. In such a situation the offshoots of Nationalistic ideals inevitably entered the cultural tapestry. The post independence cultural scenario of India faced an ideological conflict that according to K. G. Subramanyan, led *'into a sort of cultural schizophrenia'* (Subhramanyan, 2006).

The apparent complexity in the cultural milieu was not caused only by the cross-cultural concoction. The change had been largely caused by the gradual collapse of the craft league system that flourished on a state based patronage during the Mughal rule, before the British invaded India. (Som, 1998)

The British superintendents who had been appointed as principals of the art schools of British ruled India were not recognized artists of their native lands. Ernest Binfield Havell was appointed as the superintendant in 1838, when Madras School of Industrial Art was declared a government organization. Twenty-three years old E. B. Havell was a fresh graduate at that time, trained in draftsmanship from South Kensington School of Design in London. E. B. Havell (1861-1934) prioritized on the development of Indian local traditional crafts to begin with. Havell is considered a visionary to follow William Morris (1834-96) and his contemporary John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Roger Fry (1866-1934) and their ideology of the revival of traditional craft in reaction to the principle of Industrial Revolution of Europe, thrived to revitalize the traditional handicrafts. E. B. Havell later, studied Indian art, religion and philosophy deeply and established himself as one of the precursors of nationalistic movement in India. He has profoundly influenced the art sense of great masters like Rabindranath Tagore and Abanindranath Tagore. Havell experimented with his notions of art education for the Indian students that is indigenous in nature and do not merely follow the western trends. Though his proposals were rejected by the ruling authority of that time, he should be considered the foremost visionary even before Mahatma Gandhi, to have thought of stimulating Indian handloom industry. Later, he placed his support from faraway England to Gandhi, praying for his success. In 1896, Havell was transferred to the Government Art School in Kolkata. Havell left Government Art School Kolkata with much exasperation and left for England in 1906. Abanindranath Tagore, as a

professor of Government Art School Kolkata had conflict with Parsi Brown and resigned in 1915.

Deviprashad Raychowdhury (1899-1975) was appointed as the first principal of Indian origin to the Government School of Art Madras, in colonial India in 1929. A year ahead of it, in December 1928, the vice chancellor of Madras University S. V. Ramaswami Mudlia and legendary social servant Kamaladevi Chattapadhyay had recommended Deviprashad Raychowdhury to the post of vice principal of the institute. In 1900, (nominated in 1899) Laurence Barns (1863-1929) joined Bombay School of Art as principal. He could not support Havell, as he desolated the western notion of teaching for Indian students in Government Art Collage, Kolkata. Laurence Barns, did not approve Persi Brown's way of separating the departments of Western style and Indian style for Government Art Collage, Kolkata either. In Laurence Barns (1863-1929)'s opinion, naturalistic study of western norms should have been given equal importance in academy with the traditional art. Art Schools are meant to teach fundamental skills to its pupils, that opens their eye to art in general. Training of traditional skill introduces its practitioners with styles that appears and disappears from time to time and are subjective in nature. Without the fundamental training the students should not be taught any style. During his tenure, an autonomous department named, Sir J. J. School of Art and Architecture opened in Bombay. Laurence Barns was a perfect disciple of Birdwood who was a referee of the Indian collection in South Kensington Museum and had no faith in the revival of traditional art. For him they were as dead as Greek classical art. He meticulously prepared catalogues that contained traditional ivory craft, gold and silver filigrees, old maps of Bombay Island and old photographs that holds importance in the study of Indian craft. During Gladstone Saloman's tenure as a principal in Bombay School of Art, Persi Brown with some help from Jaminiprakash Gangopadhayay overruled E. B. Havell's systems in Government Art School Kolkata, separating Indian style of art education from Western style and emphasized on academic figure drawing, antique study, cast drawing, transparent water colour painting technique for representational art works, still life study and analogous conventional western academic wisdoms. Those who supported Persi Brown were against Abanindranath Tagore's principle of art education.

5.4.2 Exponents of the Bengal and Bombay Schools

This was the time when two different schools of contemporary Indian Art became prominent. One is known as the Bengal School under the vision of E. B. Havell and Abanindranath Tagore and the other was Bombay School with the vision of Gladstone Salomon, who perpetually criticized Havell, Abanindranath and Rabindranath negatively in his book 'Essays of Mughal Art' in 1932.

Before E. B. Havell and Gladstone Salomon the conflict had never been so apparent between the art practice of Kolkata and Bombay schools. Bombay school of art was primarily influenced and motivated by the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma. With origins from Kerala, Raja Ravi Varma, was a Bombay based painter. He was immensely popular among all Indians. His photographic realism and perfection of western oil painting technique to portray Indian mythological characters won the heart of every Indian. No one raised a question about the aesthetic value of his artworks. Raja Ravi Varma rather became the parameter to assess all other artworks of his time. We find in Swami Vivekanada's comment on Indian art and culture, a different comment on Ravi Verma. He spontaneously states that mimicking the European art may give birth to one or two Ravi Varma. Native *pata* paintings with *chalachitra* are rather better; at least they are brightly coloured. Ravi Varma puts him in grave shame. Gold paintings of Jaipur and backdrop paintings of Durga are superior to that. Their limited ways tried to expound the quality and virtue of traditional institutions to cynical modernists, whether of the new intellectual class in India or of the British administration. The attitudes of modern Indian artists to their art traditions were to some extent coloured by their expositions.

'Both Havell's and Coomaraswamy's readings of the Indian art tradition had a considerable influence on Indian artists: some they inspired to look for a distinctively national or oriental style, some they scared away into taking cover under personalized statements.

(Subramanyan, 1987).

By and large, they motivated the educated Indian to take a serious interest in his cultural facts, his art styles, his folklore, his crafts, his religion and ritual and their symbolic vocabulary. The traditional artists of India were largely untouched by their expositions,

except probably in gaining a sense of pride and status, and a desire to keep some of their languishing skills alive. Although both of them, especially Ananda Coomaraswamy, had studied the structure of traditional art practice with remarkable thoroughness, their effort to build up a unified, generic image of the tradition with a homogeneous logic of growth led them more and more into their conceptual archetype and language of symbols, and less and less into their skill and formal characteristics and environmental roots. (Subramanyan, 1987).

In 1915-16 Rabindranath expressed great concern at the slow disappearance of these forms from our cultural scene and stressed the need for their collection, conservation and study. He was particularly interested in them as ‘art forms’, for their ‘art language’, not for their historical and anthropological value. He felt that an exposure to various categories of folk literature could clear the horizons of our writers, and that an exposure to folk art forms could enrich the sensibilities of our artists. Almost about this time Abanindranath motivated his favourite student Nandalal to study the works of the *patuas* of Bengal and emulate their work methods. He also wrote his now well-known monograph on the ritual floor graphics of the region- *Banglar Barta*. In 1923, when he went to Santiniketan and addressed the art students of the newly formed Kala Bhavan, he laid special stress on their need to sustain and reactivate folk and village arts. Nandalal was already involved with this. As an artist who wanted to place the foundations of a new art movement with indigenous moorings, he tried to analyze the linguistic structures of many of the country’s traditional art forms- their techniques, their formal break-up, their visual bases, and functional specialties. For all his limitations he was the first person in this country to make a serious and methodical effort in this direction. Many other artists of his time, and later, responded with enthusiasm and empathy to these art forms, but their responses were often limited by the lack of analytic grasp.

5.5 Contemporary Face for traditional Folk Art

Stella Kramrish was the first to curate any serious art show of Indian folk and tribal art as an endeavor to historicize them in their contemporary cultural contexts. The world-art since emergence and the formative years knew no conflict between utility and aesthetics. It is only much later as the civil society was introduced with homogeneous mass production; the

context of pure aesthetics prominently comes to the scene. In our country the existing art practice surfaced on a classified spectrum, as per the colonial way of viewing it. The rapid urbanization caused a watertight division between the village and city, causing a lack of flow in the universal culture. The art practice intrinsically connected to daily living was identified as specimens for ethnographic importance, as a part of material culture. In Folk art, the principle of repetition is connected to rhythm that enhances perfection, where as in colonial academic term it is counted as a principle to be avoided to elude monotony. Beginning postcolonial era till present, they are being valued primarily for their economic potential, generating foreign revenue, promoting tourism and self-employment in the time of crisis. They were categorically identified as 'industrial art', 'handwork' by the underprivileged peasant communities, who are coincidentally untouched by the academic training and thus create from their basic instinct. The free nation exploited that potential to titillate sentimentality and carefully ghettoize the traditional practice under the purview of Ministry of Industry and Commerce (first five-year plan), where as the other art and archeological forms were placed under Ministry of Culture. Until very recently, folk art did not have any contemporary or modern face. The superficial association of tradition with the folk art has forced its viewers to judge it in antique parameter. The authenticity of folk art was judged in a conventional term where a mildest indication of individuality, innovativeness, creativity, introduction of new imageries, any reflection of contemporary events, unseen imageries, unexpected thematic, time bound dichotomy leading to any departure from the age-old way of expression and execution were counted as a demerit. Ironically the folk art is always priced much lower than high art with no specific criteria. It is commonly understood that the repetitive quality is the sole reason to give them a derogatory status. Moreover, the social status of the practitioners places them away from the elites to look down upon them. The intellectual scholar category determines the destiny of academic art with a classical measure to control its course.

5.5.1 Folk idiom in the paintings of Jamini Roy: A need of time

It is the same context of a possible symbiotic coexistence of folk and academic practice that has rarely been effective in the modern art scenario. Behind the simplified line and colour formations, Jamini Roy made a conscious effort to bring in the nuances of modernity in his artistic expressions that was obligatory rather than instinctive.

“The goal is to re-examine Jamini Roy. We wanted to contextualise him. The exhibition shows the way he projected the rural and indigenous community. I wanted to show he was experimental. When he moved to the folk idiom, the figuration, lyrical lines and idyllic pastoral scenes evoke a certain kind of feeling and mood, which is very close to the atmosphere of Krishna and Vrindavan. On the other hand, his figuration in his Christ series is so different. There, the figures are erect, straight with hieratic poses. He was narrating a story that belonged to an alien culture but there was certain intimacy. But still it manages to create a sort of timeline like in 1919-1920 when he rejected European academism. He painted a series of sensuous Santhal women though he was still using oil. There is ‘Santhal Dance’ which is horizontal panel depicting Santhal women... Towards the end of 1920s, he had moved to pure folk idiom.”

(Shailaja Tripathi, The Hindu, June 21, 2013)

Jamini Roy's bent towards folk idioms justifies his intention to paint images that everyone could decipher and relate to. So it is a matter of borrowing an aesthetic sensibility from one's own root and retuning it with added refinement. Jamini Roy had exploited the vernacular of folk-aesthetics effectively, to draw the attention of art lovers towards Indian aesthetics and succeeded to a great extent.

5.5.2 Interaction with Kalam Patua: a contemporary practitioner and the idiom of an extinct urban folk painting (Fig. 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12)

Kalam's ancestors were idol makers and not scroll painters of Kalighat, but the entice of market brought them to Kalighat. Those who prospered settled down in the purlieu of the Kalighat temple in Kolkata to drill and continue with the newly formed urban genre. Kalam, impressed by the expressive boldness and the potential of this popular Kalighat style made a

conscious effort to master the art from under the tutelage of his uncle Baidyanath Patua and adopted this style for his artistic expression.

The Kalighat pat belongs to a temple tradition that thrived in 19th century Kolkata. The paintings initially depicted images of deities and picture scrolls depicting Ramayana, Krishna-leela, and Chaitanya-leela, among other themes. Eventually the narrative extended to secular and social themes satirizing the high middle class group of people known as *babus* who ridiculously were into superficial emulation of the European cultural values leading to cultural disasters. The *patua* expression of this time embodies the nuances of that predicament that evoked in simplicity of style and expression.

Kalam Patua's art goes beyond his ancestry to invoke the same social intelligence in a contemporary situation. He is moderately vocal in his language of ridiculing the obsessed consumerism of the new urban middle class. A postmaster by profession, his works range from modest portrayals of childhood memories of pastoral life, to caricaturing the sudden rise of urban middle class and their deceitful charge, to blatant physicality. Absorbing the *patua* traditions of Kalighat painting of robust lines and tones, he inculcates his range with a unique harmonious blend of the traditional and contemporary. Kalam's paintings branch out from the obsolete Kalighat *patachitra* once practiced profusely.

He was included in the retrospective show of Kalighat paintings at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) from the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum. In 1990, Kalam was commissioned to paint a scroll illustrating the story of French Revolution by the Alliance Francaise in Calcutta and later, explored communal violence and dowry deaths as themes of his paintings. The Victoria & Albert Museum, London, has entered and exhibited Kalam's work in its touring exhibition across South Asia. His works are also in the collections of The National Museum in Liverpool, UK, the Museum of Civilization in Canada, the Chicago Children's Museum, and the Lekha and Anupam Poddar Collection. Kalam Patua works as a postmaster in Chandpara sub-post office in West Bengal. With the unchanged presence of sarcasm and humor, it is not the 18th century *babus* mocked by ancestors; his contemplation is aptly clung to his proximate hinterlands. Kalam's second solo exhibition at Gallery Espace inducts a series of paintings based on simple watchfulness

towards the trivial life events in a fine detail to trace the social sensibility and a tongue-in-cheek interpretation of contemporary happenings and prejudiced notions in current contexts. For a fortnight (January 24 to February 7, 2013) Kalam installed an “Open Studio” at Gallery Espace open to public viewing, to demonstrate his work process, including the traditional techniques of his creative community, and his own individual style in Kalighat painting over the past two decades portrayed by the use of pastel crayons and watercolour washes in the role of a true contemporary exponent of the Kalighat style of painting. The displayed works are organized into separate classifications. They were, autobiography, photo-studio, erotica and traditional subjects. Autobiographical work is a recent addition. He stands isolated at the opening of his own art show, observing the crowd from a distance with hardly anybody interested in the art but more keen on conversations. He said, he has observed that the contemporary artists come to see his shows but maintain distance as they belong to a different schooling. They avoid discussion fearing a difference in their wavelengths. He draws inspirations from television shows to films to literature and the latest news. Moved by the brutal gang rape of Delhi, Kalam said he was working on a series of paintings on the issue.

5.6 Between Amateur and Professional

For contemporary Indian art and indigenous identity in Indian art, the concern shifts its focus more than the conflict of vernacular or academic to the amateur and the professional.

‘Our educational system has broadened and diversified in the last few decades but despite this; we are left to wonder whether it is tailored to our real context. Not only does it seem to have lost sight of its basic objectives but also of our immediate social needs, such as employment and ordered group behavior.’

(Subramanyan, 2007).

What we do is natural and how we do is a cultural imposition to that. Education, responsive to social needs and profession, reflective of society, can contribute to effective human operation. It concerns better functionality that mends the gap between nature and culture within the social periphery. The aim of education if only is to create a culture, then the norms of that culture should be verified with greater responsibility. If showing pictures and singing songs against alms is considered derogatory as a profession, the education system

should be refined enough to indoctrinate the essential worth of the traditional act, rather than eliminate it from the academic discourse.

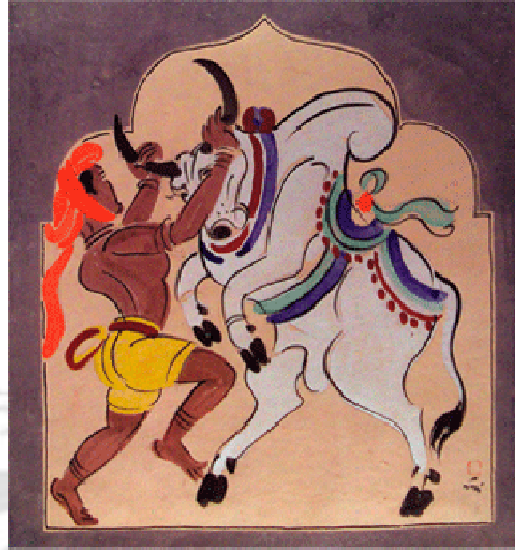
'When societies were not so large and complicated, most human activities grew out of human beings' concern for themselves, their fellow beings and their environment. And the links between these were reasonably clear and transparent, giving rise to a sense of total order or something close to it.

(Subramanyan, 2007).

The stylistic elements in art, that is closely associated to our way of living within a cultural boundary, are factors we are best identified with. In many occasions they act as the most expressive means of universal communication and appreciated for their ageless quality. Illustrated narrative scrolls emerged as an effective tool for communicating the illiterate or semiliterate populace. It functioned as a mode of educating common mass with the ethical knowledge of ancient texts and current happenings. Today when literacy level is comparably better and there are alternative means of communication, the role of a folk painters instead of losing the significance, surfaced with a new identity; that is, of natural artist's, who are able to extract aesthetic possibilities from anything that is available to them. The effortless ease of this artistic expression in many an instance, is capable of challenging the academic notions of creating art. The academic curriculum lags behind in many ways to establish that discipline with a probability of solicitation. However, the folk art practice on the other hand should also be cautious not to be wedged by the tide of mass production that may cause damage to the soul of their expression.



Senhai Players, Image Courtesy: Rhythms of India Catalogue, SDMA, California, USA, 2008



Bull Handler, Image Courtesy: Rhythms of India Art of Nandalal Bose Catalogue, SDMA, California, USA, 2008

Fig. 5.1 *Haripura Posters, Nandalal Bose, 1938 (Soumik Nandi Majumdar)*



Fig. 5.2 *Traditional Santhal Patachitra, Bengal (Soumik Nandi Majumdar)*



Fig. 5.3 *Exhibition*, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi



Fig. 5.4 *Exhibition*, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi
[TH-960_06610601](#)



Fig. 5.5 *Exhibition, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi*



Fig. 5.6 *Exhibition, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi*



Fig. 5.7 *Exhibition*, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi



Fig. 5.8 *Exhibition*, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi

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Fig. 5.9 *Exhibition*, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi



Fig. 5.10 *Exhibition*, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi

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Fig. 5.11 *Exhibition*, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi



Fig. 5.12 *Exhibition*, Kalam Patua, Water Colour on Paper, 2013, Gallery Espace, New Delhi

AESTHETIC CONTINUUM OF CONTEMPORARY FOLK PAINTING OF INDIA

:

CASE STUDY OF FIVE TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Life and Future of folkloric practices in Contemporary Cultural Margin

6.0 Life and Future of folkloric practices in Contemporary Cultural Margin

The study aimed at elucidations towards the possible means of sustainability of a traditional culture in contemporary social surrounding. The field study focused on scrutinizing the existence of tradition in contemporary practice as well as the existence of contemporary elements, in introspection to time bound obligations, within the contemporary range of a traditional practice. A habitual culture is meant to survive naturally within a society through its day-to-day customs. In India there are such ceremonial practices that have crossed its cultural margin to reach a global platform. The need of the time therefore is to generate the right awareness to categorically identify them. The purpose of the art forms also needs re-realization in the changing society. The art forms are rooted to the ritualistic customs that may not be vastly popular over the time, but the aesthetic components agelessly survive marking a strong impact. It justifies the changing purposes that keep it alive in an unfavorable social condition. In the presence of numerous alternative social media the practice of narrative painting and orations lose its exclusivity to disperse social messages. But the condition also favors the culture to survive solely as an aesthetic contribution.

Folk art practice in its contemporary form is more bound towards placing the aesthetic legacy to a stage of culmination where the art forms demand proper critical approval. Apart from its socio-cultural and anthropological acclaim, the art forms have always been competent enough to conquer the global art scenario. The analytical appreciation of the artistic expressions is therefore recommended to judge its proficiency.

The sustainability of culture adequately requires means preservation of knowledge that is intrinsically related to it. At the same time it needs the right tolerance to accept positive change that stimulates the flow of its natural fabrication.

Mindful analysis and critical appreciation justify the change in theme and ways of execution and let the culture survive by evolving and adjusting to the need of time.

6.1 The Present day interest

Understanding the present day interest for folk art through the field study for the research leads to several realizations. The outcomes of interviews with the experts are directive of many an aspects.

In the context of Madhubani Painting, Professor Shrutidhari Singh holds a critical question. ‘*What makes the ceremonial art forms of Madhubani so uniquely significant in presence of many similar practices in the surrounding locations?*’ There are several congenial factors that can be hypothetically identified that have operated the flow of practice in Madhubani. Was it the ancient literary tradition of *Mithila* region, and the existence of the tattoo practice that worked in favor to give Madhubani a global identity? Was it because of the intervention of Bhaskar Kulkarni or Pupul Jayakar who provided the artists with papers to enable the art forms grow out of mere ephemeral foundations? David Szanton and his initiative to form Ethnic Art Foundation to institutionalize the traditional art practice have significantly contributed to the refurbishment.

Famed as a feminine preserve, the art forms of Madhubani are now appreciably practiced by the male painters from within and external ethnicities with full glory. They, comparatively new to the practice are more radical in subject matters. They are secular and often radical.

The cultural scene of Jharkhand shares a lot of affinity with the ephemeral art of Madhubani. Nevertheless it stands unique in its *jadopatia* practice the struggles for survival. The life of the practice if depends on the customs and rituals of the society, will always be at risk of extinction in the age of cross-cultural and cross media influence. A tradition in those cases requires proper preservation in the form of proper archiving.

Naya village, Midnapur, West Bengal is in the process of turning to a cultural hub for the tourists and art lovers. The artists are conscious about the tradition and willing to add new elements to their expression to maintain the soulfulness of the tradition. Nayagram is turning to an attractive spot for cultural tourism. People visit *Naya* view the art forms with their context.

In Raghurajpur and Srikalahasti the practice emerged as a temple tradition and shares connection to the temple in terms of the themes and motifs. But the art has come a long way to achieve a worldwide recognition for the distinctive style, refined skill and vivid execution.

People in general hold great appreciation and respect for traditional art but not always willing to accept experimental ventures, which is bound to take place.

K. G. Subramanyan (Subramanyan, 1987) categorically identified the two guiding factors of contemporary folk art. The present-day interest stands on its historical and museological value. There are collectors who are instrumental in knowledge preservation to realize the cultural value

of folk art specimens. The conservationists focuses on the preservation of the art forms as living traditions within the changing society. Both are important for the cultural scene of the country. At the same time the existence of tradition in contemporary should not be a cultural imposition on a society. The conservationists appear with complex intentions causing the need of folk art to be duly justified as a natural occurrence to a society.

‘To nourish pockets of folk culture as specialized reservations in a changing society is hardly realistic even if well-intentioned; such attempts in other parts of the world have hardly succeeded; if at all, they have turned out to be ridiculous caricatures of what was intended.’

(Subramanyan, 1987).

To meaningfully support the survival of a culture, imposition of any kind may prove to be fatal. The impositions may take place in many different ways. If a traditional culture is expected to survive in isolation or as a conserved habitual entity within a changing society, it will only be preventive of a natural flow that leads towards brighter future. The survival of a culture should also not depend on the market demand that restricts experiments and creativity.

In contemporary context, the sustenance of folk idiom is directed towards an external initiation of a cultural discourse. The emphasis is on the ethnicity of an individual rather than a community. The modern art scene in such cases requires being accommodative enough to include diverted style and expression.

“To encourage folk artists to be individual practitioners in line (and competition) with modern art practitioners, too, is bypassing the question. Some among them have the wit and the sophistication to take such a position, on their own initiative or with the help of others, but a large number cannot; even those who have tried have not all fared well. Besides, this ignores the special nature and structure of folk art activity itself.”

(Subramanyan, 1987).

6.2 Contemporary habitat as an alternative context for folk art

It is an undeniable fact that the elements and principle of folk art practice are the offshoots of a particular lifestyle that involves certain believes that is often regional and purely habitual. The lifestyle of an ethnic society is the life force that causes the art forms to emerge and grow.

To find the place, and justify the role as well as the need of such cultural practices in today's society and culture, it requires a scrutiny to the guiding factors that determines its life.

- (1) If we count the lifestyle as a variable, the life of the practice is not guaranteed.
- (2) If we count the lifestyle as invariable, the life of the practice is artificial.
- (3) If we suggest an alternative lifestyle that duly supports the practice, the lifestyle can also cause the art forms to alter.

The third option ensures a survival of the practice in new circumstances, which can support the practice to cope up with the contemporary art scene and cater to the need of the modern art market. But to appreciate the new art forms as an outcome of an alternative condition the society also needs adequate preparation.

If the contemporary demand suffers from 'ethno maniac' syndromes the folk art will die in stagnancy.

If folk forms are hypothetically set in a symbiotic relationship with mainstream modern art, they cannot mutually benefit from each other unless there is the right awareness.

The folk imageries have had influenced the mainstream artists and provoked their thought and vision towards innovative solutions in India and European art scene (Chapter 1.2, Chapter 2.4.1)

6.3 Place of the ancient literary sources to re-canonize contemporary folk art

On the other hand folk art has drawn elements from classical art and ancient literary sources bringing regimentation to its principle norms (Chapter 2.7 and 2.8).

This is perhaps the most discrete point that separates primitive art from folk art. Folk art for its literary inclination does not remain as instinctive and spontaneous as primitive art does. Folk art follows a strict foundation that governs the order of space division, presence of symbolic and allegorical imageries to emphasize mandatories over arbitrary (Chapter 2.8)

The aesthetic continuum of contemporary practice is not free from traditional elements. In them we see reminiscent of the past, but they are embedded with individualistic expression. The contemporary range is multifaceted and varicolored and full of promises of originality and innovativeness that emerge through a traditional foundation by means of fresh observation.

The present study involves five of the traditional practices out of ten to twelve analogous traditions to represent the perspective of Indian folk painting. They belong to five neighboring states having stylistic differences that mark distinct identity in the due presence of much homogeneity in their context.

The practice that was restricted to the women of Madhubani for centuries and now for the last two decade showing signs of change with male members of the community taking it up as profession indicates the freedom that they have enjoyed being free from the ritualistic restraints yet having a free access to the traditional symbols and icons to maintain the stylistic identity. It also describes the difference in style based on the cast system and how these styles are facing reconciliation in contemporary expression.

Wall Paintings from the state of Jharkhand on the other hand is filled with primitive and tribal elements in spite of many similarities with Madhubani, in the ephemeral art forms. The images are spontaneous and rich in tribal aesthetics but vastly unexplored as a surviving tradition that is centered on age-old *Jadapatia* and their *Yamapata*.

Patachitra of Nayagram and Midnapur from Bengal stands as a phenomenon of change caused by the new wave of exposure to the community of narrative scroll painters, known as *Patuas* who experiment with new means to continue their practice with progressive social attitude.

In Raghurajpur, Odisha a family of master painters, having immigrated from northwestern regions of India long ago, carrying a refined sensibility and passing that on through generations and yet keeping their individuality alive. There is an amalgamation of folk and classical flamboyance as well as multiple regional influences that provides the tradition with immense refinement and sophistication but restricts many experiments from taking place.

Kalamkari paintings of Srikalahasti, Andhra Pradesh has individual artists who mastermind the community practice that often aims at mass production. The change in forms and motifs are often resulted from a changing religious dominance. The present form holds obligation to continue traditional forms that is not seamless in reality. It is evident in each case that various human and socio political factors constantly influence and alter the fabric of this age-old entity. The new aesthetics either struggles to find it's meaning in new circumstances by altering to match the time or decide to cling to its traditional root. For the later, the repetitive quality often loses its soul (Chapter 3.2).

Study of Folk art was limited to the field of anthropology since years. It is only very recently that a revision in the area of pedagogic study of history justified the complete nature of visual history by including visual studies in History of Art. The general notion about folk painting in common people is full of association with the ancient. The materialization of the contemporary range of serious art works is still a matter of larger awareness. The way folk art is being viewed also needs renewal. The contemporary aesthetics that conform to the essentials of its origin and thrive with individual expression today needs a proper tracking from the part of the viewers (Chapter 4.2 and 4.3).

6.4 New methodology of viewing and appreciating contemporary folk art

The artworks must be viewed following suitable method to analytically realize the artistic expression that is in the process of greater evolution.

A thorough field study in the regional India where the practice survives as a living tradition and to the museums, galleries, and archives rationalizes the worth of a methodical viewing of the existing artworks. Like other mainstream art, folk art require a complete critical viewing considering all three aspects of semiotic, iconic and thematic layers of visual analysis.

Iconic analysis ensures identification of an image that conforms to prior knowledge of history and mythology that refers to the thematic level. The iconic analysis helps to decode its symbols that are culture specific. Unlike primitive expression they are not universal and capable to confront a common worldview. The layer of semiotic comprehension though, applies to a critical analysis free from any foreknown information. Non-representational and abstract images are read applying this very level of critique. In the semiotic level the artwork can be viewed and analytically appreciated regardless of any prior knowledge of its history, background, method, medium or material. In this level each and every dot and pixel can be analyzed and communicated. In the semiotic level the critic directly approaches the elementary part of an artwork (Chapter 4.3)

The study strategically chooses *Ramayana* as a traditional theme that is common for all the above-mentioned traditions to initiate a comparative study. Episodes from the epic in single frame and narrative scroll format are based on the same story, with distinctively different regional styles. They have followed a common visual idiom typical for folk paintings, where the space is two-dimensional in general with no intension to create any illusion of depth. The use of

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perspective is aerial rather than linear. The compositions are dominant with linear qualities and all the characters and objects are confined in well-defined contour lines (Chapter 4.1.1).

“The Ramayana is more than a text however. It is a meta-narrative made up of a corpus of different tellings available to successive generations by the diverse performative traditions through which it is embodied. Each new telling assumes knowledge of prior tellings. The relationship to previous Ramayana texts allows a certain freedom to later composers. Since the story is already known composers are free to dismember the text and to detach particular episodes for fresh enactment or commentary.”
(Chatterji, 2012).

Folk art is observed to have drawn literary support from classical texts and images to form canons. In *Ramayana* where everyone knows the story in its minute detail, the artist takes the freedom to skip frames and stick to the most relevant key events.

An observations made from the modern depiction of the age-old saga includes elements like speech bubbles after the comic strip pattern, in a *Kalamkari*, Srikalahasti style, where in *Marich*, a demon in disguise of a golden deer calls *Rama* for rescue in *Lakshmana*'s voice. The narrative in this picture is single framed but in continuous fragments famed as '*Sampurna Ramayana*', which means complete *Ramayana*. The key frames are arranged in orderly formations to aptly satisfy the viewer's aesthetic need with experimental insertion of decorative borders with typographic elements. The parallel horizontal borders embody *Ramavandana*, which means 'prayer of *Rama*' in regional Telegu scriptures to beautifully match the visual patterns of the *kalamkari* figurations on the painting.

In Bengal it is fascinating how the style of execution in terms of the quality of line, colour, composition and image delineation differs between different districts. *Ramayana* narrative scroll paintings from Midnapur, Murshidabad and Birbhum district are distinctively different in their stylistic identity.

In Madhubani *Ramayana* is traditionally single framed and best on the most popular episodes like the 'wedding scene of *Rama* and *Sita*', '*Rama*'s Assembly' and 'abduction of *Sita*' to explore scopes of painting different characters in their iconographic detail like *Rama* in blue skin, *Hanumana* in animated personification, *Ravana* with his ten heads and *Jatayu* the mighty bird, in each paintings to give it distinct identity.

‘Complete *Ramayana*’ from Raghurajpur has similarity in the compositional arrangement with Srikalahasti’s ‘Complete *Ramayana*’, where the space division is well calculated and preconceived flowing a different style of figuration. The apparent asymmetry of a narration is carefully balanced in both traditions by a symmetrical formation in their organization of space.

The characters despite being common is present in highly regionalized identity, for example *Sita* in the *Patachitra* of *Bengal* will always be in the costume of a Bengali house wife with coral and conch shell bangles and handloom sari where as in Madhubani *Sita* is the daughter of the land who wears a long skirt and blouse called *ghagra choli*, a traditional costume of that region. From this point the study redirects its mode towards the practicalities that can justify the place of folk painting in the contemporary social culture based upon, It’s context and modality (Chapter 3.6)

6.5 Existing plans and policies to revive the folkloric culture

Folk art forms that survive within a particular lifestyle that becomes its context, if taken out and placed against a different situation may act differently, resulting in delusion of its essential language having been lost in translation.

Sourced from a news article in Hindustan Times e-Paper- Hindustan Times (Kolkata), 17th August 2013-Page # 4, ‘*Government to create art village for patachitra artists*’, it is said in the report that art galleries in as many as 65 houses, a museum of patachitras and a retail outlet, a guesthouse for tourists, beatification or renovation of all houses in the village, electrification of the village roads, renovation of water bodies and an entry gate to welcome the tourists- this is how the state tourism department wants to develop Naya village in West Midnapur district, as a destination for lifestyle tourism, converting the informal segments to formal sectors as a policy.

Bringing artists of different art styles under the same umbrella in workshops within the country and abroad, may lead to fusion in style. The findings from the interview show that artists hold a great admiration for styles from other traditions. But tend to stick to their own expertise because of the existing difference in image making. The canons and rigorous training as part of their development as an artist encourages them to conform to one style and experiment within that margin. The identity consciousness resists them to experiment with analogous styles. The protection of community proprietorship of a traditional skill has been taken care of by several policies that include the protection of intellectual property by copyright and patenting, by

trademark and certification to authentication. There are legal acts associated to a particular cultural artifact within its geographical location.

Cultural Policies of the Government in the post independence era primarily looked in to the economic viability related to traditional art and crafts keeping their worldwide popularity in view, kept traditional art and craft under the governance of ministry of industry, trade and commerce. The ministry of culture supports folk art at present. The research findings show that there is certain amount of discrepancy in to the execution of the policies, perhaps due to the complexity of this artistic drive. For example Gurusaday Museum, Kolkata that have a significant collection of folk paintings comes under the purview of Ministry of Textile. The reason is that they hold a large section with the collection of age-old katha stitched embroidered pieces. Sometimes the grant that the museums receive is also of an inconvenient nature, as they do not have adequate consumable budgets to take out a good maintenance and support conservation and restoration.

6.6 The culture society and religious complexity as an operational factor

Theme of folk art not always drawn from religious myths. There are some derived from social scandals and crime stories from real life incidents, with comments on social value system and its decline in modern life. Moralizing as a purpose of creation of these paintings gave its makers a different status in the society as painter cum balladeers. The syncretic culture and religious plurality, to put them midway between Hindu and Muslim, possibly because wealth and power in the area were in the hands of one or other religious group by turns (Subramanyan, 1985). They often have both Hindu and Muslim names, and observe both customary rites perhaps to secure their acceptance to households of both religion. The community often goes under fundamentalist pressure from all sides to conform to one or the other religious group. Experience shared by Dipak kumar Baropanda. The flow of life is operated by religious complexity the artworks is never reflective of that. The charm of the folk narrative painting lies in its exclusiveness where not two works are similar in spite of same subject matter and episodic break ups.

6.7 Need of a paradigm shift

There was a time when cinema as a mode of popular entertainment largely took over the culture of folk narrative oration and painting and the folk painters out of desperation began to move to different professions, but of late there is a realization that has brought back the culture, this time

in a more responsible and conscious way. Discussed earlier in this chapter the main causes that justify the place of folk art into the culture. But the surviving part of this culture is confined to a restricted society with limited spread. A practical effort to this field therefore is to explore shift to its traditional paradigm to reach the need of the society. (Fig.6.1, 6.2, 6.3)

'What is at the bottom of this interest? The fact is that between the visual images they present, and their narrative singing, the pats are a special kind of communication art; they could be called the comic-strips of Bengal village, presented with a live commentary.'

(Subramanyan, 1985).

The traditional process of making art works involves preparing the colour, preparing the brushes and preparing the ground (cloth, paper). The practice confined to the villages have always drawn source from nature over commercial materials. But with the growing demand the method and materials are not restricted to the natural sources any further. Also, the commercial products ensure durability. A culture is bound to acclimate to new circumstances but needs cautions not to fall victims of empowered technology that may cause impairment to the aesthetics. The new mediums if explored carefully and restrictively may prove to be beneficial.

Kalam Patua for example stated that he painted on papers that are used for printing newspapers (known in the market as newsprints) and found the experience very satisfying. The papers are low in price, has the right capacity of absorption and very supportive of his style of painting. But later he shifted to acid free archival papers as the former hardly had any longevity. His paintings are sold to customers all over the world now in good prices and thus he should not compromise on materials.

Late Channo Devi, the pioneer of Godna painting in Madhubani coated cow dung on the paper as a base and used extracts of flower, leaf and seeds to paint. Her style of painting is being carried over by many of her students and followers but her works need thorough restoration as they are losing their luminance over time.

Moyna Chitrakar is instrumental in demonstrating her ways of making paints to the visitors and at the same time she cherishes her experience of working for printed books as illustrators.

Bibhu Maharana in Raghurajpur realizes the need to use branded materials for his creations and tries his best to choose the most suitable type of paints that supports his aesthetic sensibility.

A recent example of converting the narrative oration based art form into animated films is by Nina Sabnani. She has contributed to the revival of *Kaavad* storytelling of Rajasthan, which was popular as an oral tradition in the region of Mewar and Marwar. Those who have visited the marketplaces of Udaipur must have come across the sight of a folk performance where the narrator unfolds a portable wooden shrine with multiple folded panels, as they recite stories based on genealogies of their commissioners.

The formation of such art works is based on multiple aspects. It is not only the painting but making of the wooden shrine as a prop and forming a narrative oration that is engaging enough to hold the audience during the performance to give it completion. An animation film in this case is an apt alternative as a medium to expose the art forms to a larger audience.

While initiating a change in the existing medium one must work with great responsibility to examine and understand the context of the art form, the salient features that is indicative of its identity, the form and content that determines its style and the way it communicates to its recipients.

In folk art forms we often encounter over glorification and propagative tendencies that are connected to its essential humor. The paradoxical living conditions of the practitioners are reflected in the artworks to make it more soulful at times. The art forms being intrinsically connected to the ethnic root are rich in indigenous flamboyance. Indian modern art has drawn influence from folk art to successfully rebuild its ethnic identity.

A structural and semiotic approach of experiencing the narrative, physical, ethical and visual construct of those folk paintings have always benefitted its viewer to realize its situate in the contemporary cultural milieu.



Fig. 6.1 Srikalahasti Complete Ramayan by M Nagaraja



Fig. 6.2 Sita's Ramayan by Moyna Chitrakar and Samhita Arni, Tara Books

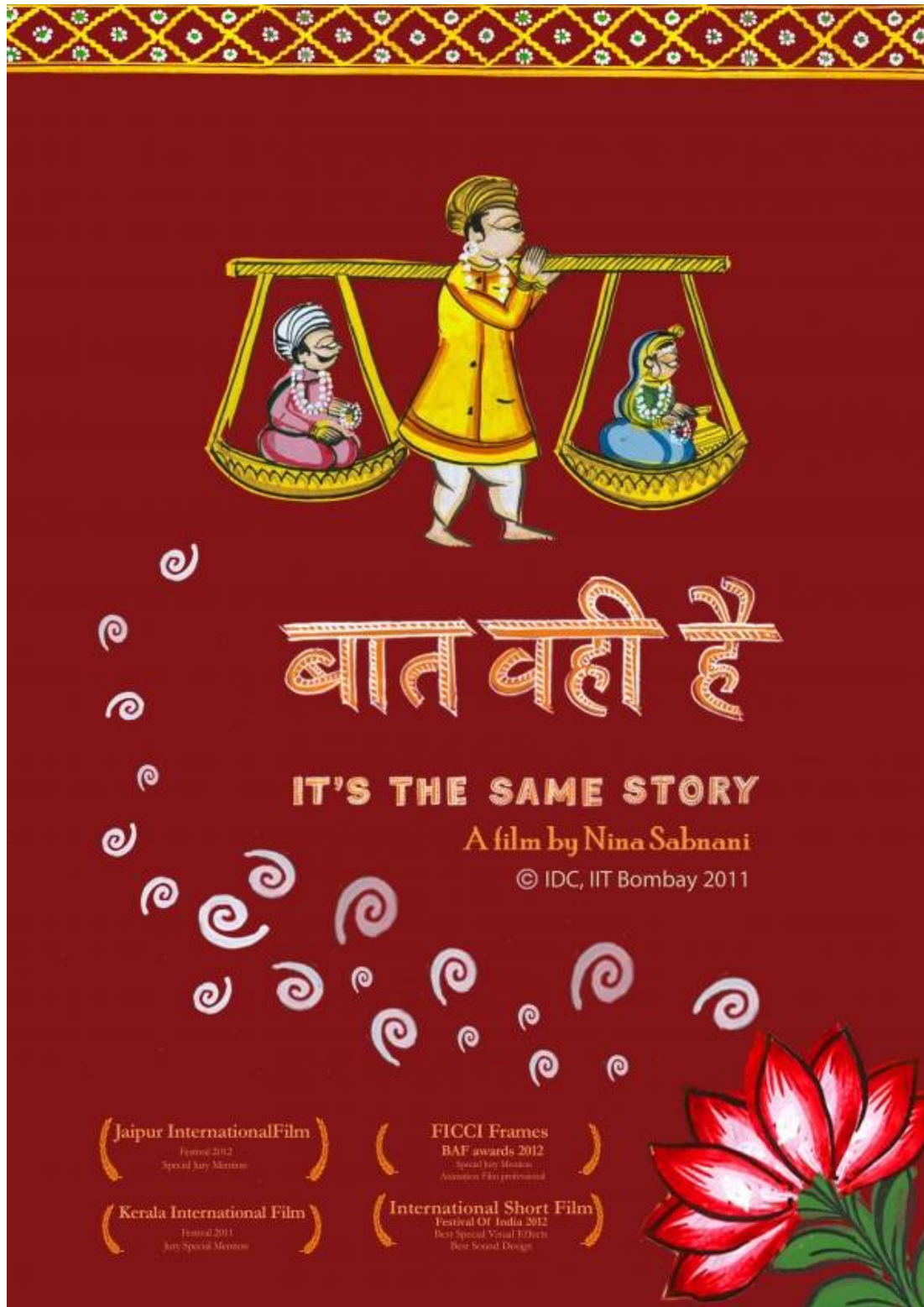


Fig. 6.3 Poster of an animation movie, by Nina Sabnani.

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Department of Cultural Vocational Development, National Taipei University of Technology