



Newsletter Archives

Technique of Pata Chitra

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Technique of Pata Chitra

Article of the Month – January 2000

Pata is a Sanskrit derivation which literally means canvas so pata-painting means a scroll painting on canvas. The art of Pata Painting (or pata chitra) is practiced by the artists of Orissa, a state on the Eastern Coast of India.

The painter first chooses two pieces (generally tussar silk) of cloth and he sticks the pieces together by means of a paste prepared from tamarind seeds. They are then dried in the sun.

The tamarind paste is traditionally prepared as follows: The tamarind seeds are first kept in water for two to three days. When the seeds swell and become soft, these are ground with a pestle stone till the formation of a jelly like substance. In an earthen pot some water is poured along with this substance which is finally heated into a paste. The pieces of cloth thus pasted into one become a Patti. The Patti may be of an area of a few square meters. After the Patti is dried it is rolled up and from this roll, pieces of pata are cut and utilised for individual paintings.

The colors are hand prepared by the artists from natural ingredients like china-clay, soft clay(chalk), conch shell, red stone etc. The black color is prepared from charcoal powder. For white, the artists use sea shells which are available in plenty on the sea shores of Orissa, the home of pata paintings. The sea-shells are powdered and the powder is kept mixed with some water for two days. The mixture is stirred properly until it becomes soft and milky. This milky liquid is then heated with the gum of Kaitha fruit (Feromia Elephantum). The paste thus prepared is then dried in the sun to form a solid substance.

Black color is prepared by holding an earthen plate over the smoke of a burning wick. The soot thus collected at the bottom of the plate is thickened to a black substance. This is mixed with the gum of Kaitha fruit when used as black color in painting.

Green color typically is prepared from the juice of green leaves which is boiled and gum is mixed in the same proportion.

The materials used by these artists are totally of an indigenous character. To unite the colors they utilise wooden bowls made of dried coconut shells. The coarse brush is prepared from the root of a local plant called keya. Hairs of brushes are collected from a buffalo's neck, more fine brushes require the hair of mouse. These brushes are fixed to wooden handles. They are usually kept in the quivers made out of a hollow joint of a thick bamboo tree. The brushes may also be sometimes stored in leather cases or in dried pumpkin bowls.

It is truly said of these Pata paintings that " Strange is this world of Pata paintings, a world in itself, where every article and ornament keeps its unchanging shape, its place and importance, where every animal has its own stylized features, every personality its unerring marks of identification defined by the ancient texts, religious myths and local tradition. It is a world of myths and gods, but still more it is a world of folk imagination, the reflection of thinking and of the mental scope of millions of

Indian peasants, fishermen and craftsmen, their joys, their hardships, binding faith and exacting beauty. So the paintings speak the language of their creators, they give realistic expression, a clear symbol, humorous details. They are familiar to the eye, close to the heart, bringing joy and expressing life".

Indeed the immensity of life and the diversity of the divine come together and stand in one in these Pata paintings.

This article by Nitin Kumar.

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