

ILA PANDA CENTRE FOR ARTS



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Splendours of Odishan Painting

by

Dr. Dinanath Pathy

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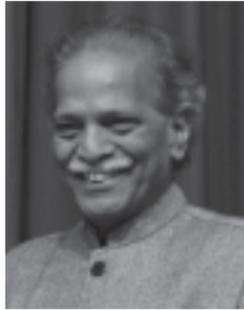
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ILA PANDA was educated in visual art at Shantiniketan under the tutelage of Acharya Nandalal Bose and at The Royal College of Art, London. She was married to Dr. Bansidhar Panda and was the partner in the formation of the IMFA Group of Companies in Odisha. She was a member of Indian Parliament.

IPCA has been instituted in Bhubaneswar to perpetuate her memory and ideals. IPCA aims at promoting Odia art and artists in the country and on the international level.

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Dr. Dinanath Pathy (1942) has a Government Diploma in Fine Art and Crafts from Khallikote School of Art. He has been awarded two Ph.Ds., including one from Visva Bharati and a D. Litt. *honoris causa* from Berhampur University. He is the recipient of Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship, International Rietberg Award and President of India Silver Plaque for Painting. Dr. Pathy is a practicing artist, art historian and writer. He has designed and curated a number of national and international exhibitions including the Festival of India in Sweden and USSR as well as the International Kalinga-Bali Jatra. He has been collaborating with Swiss Scholar Dr. Eberhard Fischer on a number of research projects on Odishan Art since 1978. He has authored, edited and published more than a hundred books in Odia, English and German.

Dr. Pathy is the Founder Principal of BK College of Art and Crafts, Bhubaneswar, former Secretary of the National Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi; President of State Lalit Kala Akademi; and Director of Alice Boner Institute, Varanasi. Presently he is the Chairman of Angarag Trust, Bhubaneswar.

Odisha possesses a unique pictorial history, which stretches from the primitive to the contemporary. Unlike sculpture, the nature of painting is extremely fragile. The structures and the carriers those once owned the paintings exist no more due to hostile climatic conditions and human neglect. So it is no wonder that one does not come across very many paintings of ancient times and the physical continuity has been lost. But the pictorial spirit remains unabated and deeply entrenched in a superb tradition that is alive and splendours.

Nearly more than three thousand years of Odishan art history have witnessed three distinct stylistic phases: the Universal, the Pan-Indian, and the Regional. To support such a divide, we have visual evidences: The rock-shelter paintings of Vikarmkhol, Manikmada, Lekhamoda and Ushakuthi to name a few with their stylistic and thematic resonances in art practices by Sauras, Kondhs, Juangs and other hill tribes; the 8th century Sitavinji mural, the lone survivor in the whole of eastern India; and the wall murals, *pata* paintings and

palm-leaf miniatures spanning over a period of roughly four hundred years beginning from the 17th century. However, the visual evidences are at times ample and other times scanty enough. Hardly any region in India could boast of such a grand stylistic evolution of their pictorial tradition. This precisely makes the Odishan art tradition unique. It may not be an exaggeration to mention here that the eastern Indian Buddhists Pala, western Indian Jain, Persian, Sultanate, Mughal, Deccan, Malwa and Vijaynagar styles did flourish at particular points of time but vanished soon after.

Rock-Shelter Painting

The rock-shelter paintings of Odisha numbering to a few hundred reflect the form, colour, and content of Altamira in Spain and Lascaux in France or rock-shelter paintings in Australia, America and Africa as well as Singhanpur, Mirzapur, Bhimbetka, Hoshangabad and Pachmari situated in central India belt.

The painted rock-shelters in India were generally inhabited over a very long period of time, in contrast to the caves where paintings are found in southern France and northern Spain. Within the shelters, the paintings are placed both on the rear walls and ceilings. The paintings are oriented in almost any direction, with no apparent scheme of composition. In the majority of locations, paintings have been successively superimposed several times on those underneath. The artistic consciousness that pervades the rock-shelter paintings all over the globe is so strikingly similar that there exists

hardly any or little difference in form, colour and renderings between the Bison of Altamira and the Bull of Manikmada as well as that of Bison-bull in Bhimbetka. I am not talking of an anthropologist's or archaeologist's minuteness which is bound to happen in a different sphere, what I am up to is to hit upon an unitary aesthetic language that exists with a variety of intonations and tongues.

Tribal Painting

At an unknown time and in an unknown manner the southern part of the Indian peninsula including Odisha was occupied by people whose successors are officially classified by the Indian government as 'tribals'. These people still largely depend on hunting and food gathering. They also paint their homes. Their architecture, textile and ornaments are superbly designed.

When one analyses the paintings of tribals such as the Sauras, Santals, Kondhs and Juangs and compare them with the rock-shelter paintings, one is amazed at the similarity of the styles, colours and the themes.

In primitive societies, the main occupation is survival and this is intricately linked with harnessing nature which is held in awe and admiration. The concept of nature extends into the unknown, unfathomed and dark world of spirits. The demystification of nature is the result of a long process of interaction and inference. This leads to the emergence of a cosmic phenomena which permeates the life of a primitive and which transforms,

objectifies and becomes imperative in both life and society. This collective unconscious psyche takes shape in the archetypal myths and symbols and finds expression in art and rituals.

Rituals synchronise all the corresponding elements, physical as well as mental gestures, sounds, images, superstitions, beliefs and mysticism. Myths provide a context and its perpetuation is done through rituals. The archetypal myths are the earliest attempts at articulating, rationalising and unravelling the mystery of the cosmic phenomena. Camouflaged in fantasy, they reflect the unconscious, fears, aspirations and dreams.

Magic is the basis of all rituals. The earliest attempts to create a mysterious environment is far beyond our comprehension. Symbolism carries in it the spirit of magic enlivened by mysticism, superstitions and beliefs.

Image making of the Sauras

Therefore like in most other primitive societies, image-making of the Sauras is intimately linked with their living pattern. It is primarily based on their faith in healing of disease and appeasing spirits through creative expressions. Belief in supernatural deities or entities, close interaction with them and suffering as a result of their wrath is a common phenomena in primitive communities. But in Saura societies, the interaction between the Sauras and their supernatural entities is quite intimate which results in paintings. The entities or spirits are of two kinds one, the nature spirits which

dwell in forests, fields, hills and streams and the other, the ancestral spirits which reside in the underworld. These spirits always make attempts to occupy ritualistic spaces, personify and live among Saura families. There are instances when Saura men and women have married tutelary spirits. These spirits convey their desires through dreams and in case of negligence cause untold sufferings. It is always believed that most of the diseases or afflictions are mainly caused due to the wrath of the supernatural entities. They are to be properly propitiated, respected and appeased and the best way to do this is to paint an icon for them inside the house. These ritualistic spaces in the paintings serve as temporary dwellings or rest houses in the living world. This belief brings about an intimate relationship between the Saura and the spirits on the one hand, and the spirits and the icons on the other.

Propitiating various spirits and deities for the welfare of the family, fields and the village is a very ancient tradition. These are solemnised at the family-level rituals and at the village-level rituals. In the Saura societies, the household head (*Idairmar*) propitiates the ancestral spirits and the village shaman or *kudan*, who are the high gods of the Saura culture, by painting icons for them. As far as the village-level ritual is concerned, the Sauras worship icons of *Sahibosums*, *Marnosums*, *Jammolsums*, *Sardasum*, *Earongsum* and other village Goddesses or *Thakuranis*. This has a parallel in the Hindu socio-religious system. The Sauras have a preoccupation with magic, incantation, charms and sorcery both as avenues of curing disease and obtaining the blessing of Gods and Goddesses.

Painted Homes in Villages

When we pan our vision on a wider range of similar renderings from the rock-shelters to the walls of tribal houses, we are eventually led to the beautiful and intricately decorated homes in rural areas. We often term them as 'folk' - the work of the common villagers, particularly, the women who are the harbingers of this fabulous tradition. The tradition is enriched by the spontaneity and profitless adventures. Consumers and producers are bound up to uphold the tradition punctuated with rites and rituals of *vara*, *vrata* and *osa*.

To propitiate and to offer gratitude form the motivation to draw the diagrams on the floor and the wall of the houses where people live. The diagrams mostly monochromatic are a kind of incantations to appease Gods and Goddesses, particularly the Surya, Lakshmi and Durga. Surya, the sun is the source of light and energy, Lakshmi, the provider of food, nourishment and auspiciousness and Durga remains the protector. Day begins with a painting which is drawn in front of living house and is meant to invite the Sun and capture the rays to ignite the hearth and ends with another painting at the foot of the *tulsi chaura*, basil stand to bid farewell and invite the evening, the moon and stars.

Paintings and Songs

The paintings are substantiated with songs in which women pour their hearts, their joys and jubilations, woes and wails, sorrows and misfortunes, hopes and

aspirations. Stories are created, narrated to family member and neighbours. Poems are sung, ideas become myths and legends. *Vara, Vrata and Osa* are occasions interlaced with paintings and wordings. Paintings get verbal and survive as means of communication between the man and Gods. In Saura tradition it is the *Bejuni* who is the medium, and in folk tradition the woman, the possessor of creative mystery who connects paintings with poetry and binds them with the supernatural.

Osakothi Rituals: Paintings, Poetry and Possession

Manifestation of painting, poetry and possession is best illustrated in Osakothi rituals. A painted wall with thirty three millions (*tetisikoti*) of Gods and Goddesses, said to be the sons, daughters and companions of the primordial mother - *Thakurani* appear through the dexterous acumen of the village painter. The sacred arena in front of the painted wall is transformed into a theatrical space where the possessed human spirits, the *devatas* and the singer (*gayeni*) are locked up in long and witty verbose. The individual paintings get life, the spirit enters the *devatas* and make them eloquent. Songs built on spontaneity, (*apuranas*) intriguing questions and witty answers demand the involvement and attention of the villagers who have kept the tradition alive.

Harnessing the nature, demystifying the unknown and creating an interactive space in life and society have remained as the prime motivation of painting, poetry and dance in primitive and agrarian societies all over the

world. This we term this as “universal” which gradually is tinged with local forms, colours and patterns. It speaks of a journey from the dim horizons of pre-history to proto-history and to no recorded history of any short. The rock-shelter paintings stand as sentinels and induce a long tradition of continuity and change, speak creative efforts of artists who were enlightened humans.

Pan-Indian Style of Painting

From the so called tribal and folk, we now proceed to identify a Pan-Indian style of painting in Odisha. The royal procession painted on the ceiling of a huge boulder called Ravanachhaya at a place known as Sitavinji in the district of Keonjhar bears unmistakable influences of classical Ajanta murals. This is the only evidence of the pan-Indian style which is fortunately located in Odisha and has survived centuries in spite of inclement weather condition and human vandalism. The painting that once depicted a glorious royal procession with a decorated huge elephant, spirited cavalry and foot soldiers marching prancingly with flags, shafts, spears, weaponries and drummers at the front, followed by retainers, among them a maid wearing a breast band, a skirt and carrying a plate of offerings has last its sheen. This painted area is now shrunk and dilapidated beyond recognition. A painted inscription at foot of the massive elephant figure still ruling the ruins relates it to king Disabhanja mounted on the fabulous animal. The king is holding a flower and is attended by a retainer having a parasol in his hand held over the head of the king. The

old photographs and several hand painted copies of this procession are reproduced in *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XIV. 1/2 remain as evidences to proclaim the one time glory. This mural is the reminiscences of the classical Ajanta mural. But one might always keep in mind too, that the south Indian tradition especially of the early Pandya's and Pallava's is in many formal details nearer to that of the paintings of the Vakataka's in Ajanta.

The early temples of Bhubaneswar and environment do not give any hint to what the paintings of the 9th to 12th century looked like. Except the painted plaster-surface of the ceiling of the Mukteshvara temple, nothing remained. But scholars of Odishan architecture are generally of the opinion that all the sculptures of the temples were painted when the temple construction was completed. Due to the fact that hardly anything of this painting remains, we cannot deduce any formulation of a local painting-style for that period.

Temple Murals

Many scholars have included two paintings still available today into their chronology as samples for the period of their occurrence, i.e. the 12th to 16th centuries; these are the so-called paintings of *Buddha Vijaya* and *Kanchi Vijaya*. The first mentioned painting exists at the western wall top, in the left corner of the *Mukhsala* of the Lakshmi Temple inside the Jagannatha Temple complex at Puri. It has been assumed that it owes its origin to the visit of the Saint Ramanuja to Puri. At his time, the Buddhists were chastised and forced to get

converted to Vaishnavism. This probably would date the painting back to the 12th century. But what we see today is not the original painting. This has been painted over and again and the present painting certainly has been done by the Chitrakaras of Puri, sometime in the last century. It certainly would be most important to try to dismantle the under layers of paintings and perhaps one would find the original from Ramanuja's time. But the present painting of *Buddha Vijaya* has no value for a chronology and no early date can be ascribed to it. In the second case, a painting of *Kanchi Vijaya* simply does not exist in the *Mukhasala* of the Jagannatha Temple at Puri. Since long, the ugly varnish-painted cement reliefs have taken the place of such a painted wall. Or, perhaps, the scholars claiming the existence of such painting, have just ignored the reality and have never investigated the spot but depended on hearsay. In any case, there is no painting of *Kanchi Vijaya* in the Jagannatha Temple even so it very well could be because the theme of Purushottamadeva's victory over the Raja of Kanchi appears often in the Odia literature of the 16th century and is very much recurrent in the Odia legends and rendered quite often on *pata* paintings and murals too (Srikurmam Temple in Andhra Pradesh, Gangamata Matha at Puri and Jagannatha Temple in Nayagarh could be cited as evidences.)

Apabhramsa Style

There is a wide gap between the Sitavinji mural in the Keonjhar district and later paintings in the interiors of

temples and mathas where one observes a pronounced linear regional style. The murals, *pata*, or cloth paintings and the paintings on palm-leaf display this characteristic which is typical Odia in nature. We would like to term them as vernacular paintings. Art historians prefer to brand them as of an *apabhramsa* style meant to be a derivative of the high classical. Sanskrit tradition. In Odisha, art practice was never exclusive but embraced different facets of culture such as painting, sculpture, literature and even dance.

Use of an iron stylus (*lekhani*) to scribe a palm-leaf resembles the work of a stone carver who uses a chisel. The stylus bestowed a specific style that evolved into a pattern of writing Odia scripts and Odia scriptures. One hardly finds such inter-relatedness between sculpting, carving, writing, and painting elsewhere. Therefore, the art of painting is not an isolated phenomenon and the linearity neither evolved out of the mural at Kailashanath Temple in western India as Motichandra suggests nor in the Sunderban copper plate in eastern India as D.P. Ghose opines ; it is an indigenous style that emerged in the Odia cultural milieu.

Vernacular Paintings

The distinguishing characteristic of Odia painting is its bright primary colour shades of vermilion red, chrome yellow, white and black reflected on the faces of Jagannatha, Balabhadra, and Subhadra, the most adorable trinity of Odisha now often related to Odia identity. The bold and undiluted lines that are used in

Odia painting are like the clear and easily discernible melody of an Odia *Champu* and *Chhanda*. The intricacies of relation that exist among the formal forms in these songs and the play of flowing language are comparable to the obvious rhythm that makes these paintings vernacular.

The earliest murals in the linear style are laid out on the outer walls of the Viranchinarayana Temple in the town of Buguda in Ganjam district along the enclosed open verandah. Here faces of human figures are most often in strict profile, the body rendered in three quarters. The colour shades applied on these murals are subdued and comprised red-ocher, vermilion, chrome yellow, indigo, terra-verde, white and black. The anatomy and the body contours as well as the foliage and architecture are all tuned to such an extent that modeling never becomes necessary. They are often witty, detailed and lively adding contours and accentuations to the pictorial compositions. The themes of the murals mostly are the *Ramayana* episodes and stories from the Krishnalila. The most striking paintings are where Rama applies a *geru*, red ocher mark on Sita's forehead seated on the Chitrakuta mountain; Bharata meeting Rama in exile with his retinue; the details of Chitrakuta mountain with dome shaped hills those house playful monkeys, quarrelsome wild cocks, jumping rabbits and leaping deer. The scene where the monkeys play on an improvised bamboo musical instrument called *Dhumpa* is indeed memorable. The other Ramayana paintings are Lakshmana and the bear advisor Jambavana, Battle

between Rama and Ravana and Rama shattering the umbrellas from Ravana's chariot. In this group of paintings is the graphical rendering of the pilgrim town of Puri (may be termed as *Thiabadhia*), now in a bad state of preservation. However, it still serves as a destination point to a large number of pilgrims from south Odisha who fail to make their journey to Puri.

The next set of paintings which are stylistically nearer to Viranchinarayana murals are the ones which adorn the interiors of the Srikurmam Temple in Srikakulam, Jagannatha Matha in Kanchili and the Radhakrishna Temple in Saria Palli. All these three temples once formed part of Odisha, are now in Andhra Pradesh. They contain a few notable paintings such as the *Kanchi Vijaya*, the *Lanka Fort* and the painting of *Lakshmana Shaktibheda*. Here the application of colour is soothing with the predominance of vermilion, indigo and chrome yellow. While the painting of *Kanchi Vijaya* connects Srikurmam to Puri and reinforces the supply of Telugu dancing girls to the Puri temple, the Lanka fort symbolizes an archaic rendering of military painting that is unique in Odishan repertoire. The fort painting is marked by its brevity and geometry as well as by the way the spirited monkeys who climb the fort. What is remarkable in this painting is the manner in which the city of Lanka is capsized and the fort of Ravana is conceptualised in a square space with inner compartments. The painter's attention is focused only on Ravana who stands in a stately posture in his palace and the activities of Rama and his retinue of army engaged in scaling the walls of the fort.

Shakta Murals of Linear Style

The murals of the Goddesses such as *Dasamahavidya* and *Navadurga* painted at Srikalika Temple in the vicinity of Jayapur town reflect a story of renewal of wall murals by a family of traditional painters and eventually how it passed into the hands of modern painters who introduced a cheap commercial style in preference to the traditional one the temple already had. The renewed mural have also accommodated new popular themes such as Shivaji receiving a sword from Goddess Durga and the image of Santoshi Ma blessing her disciples. Such types of mis-adventure on the part of modern painters and the patrons vitiate the traditional concepts of *Ashtakatyayani* and *Navadurga*. We have to bear in mind that Srikalika Temple is the only one in Odisha that reflects in its 20th century murals the traditional concept of Shakti in her various manifestations.

Portraits

At Puri, from the historical point of view two murals stand out evidently, one the life size portrait of *Sarvabhouma Bhattacharya* heralding the visit of Vaishnav saint Chaitanya to Puri painted in the Gangamata Matha and the second, the series of Vaishnav preachers those adorned the walls along the verandah in the courtyard of Emara Matha at Puri. These life size portraits in frontal sitting postures have survived untouched by subsequent painters. They depict stunning appearances definitely with southern style. The *Sarvabhouma* painting in the Gangamata Matha

belonging to the 19th century records one of the fantastic portrait paintings. The portrait does not have realistic features one derives from a sitter in a life-study situation, but proclaims Odia painter's ability to grasp the essential character of the person who was authoritative and erudite.

Murals in Jagannatha Temple: Puri and Dharakote

It is regrettable that the murals in the interiors of the Jagannatha Temple and subsidiary shrines in the Puri complex are rough, sketchy and bereft of artistic merit. While we boast of our Jagannatha culture, the pitiable condition of the paintings betrays our conviction. This matter needs serious consideration by the Jagannatha Temple Administration.

The murals in the Jagannatha Temple at Dharakote, a princely town in Ganjam district offer an integrated approach to Odishan visual art and establish a link with the stone reliefs on the outer temple walls. This is the only temple with such a meaningful interface and though painted in the early 20th century betray an early style. The striking paintings here are the large *Ashtasakhis* (eight female companions of Krishna) those adorn the painted temple pavilions and the long dancing panels with various animals and birds and most importantly the dancing figures of Krishna and gopis in *chauka* postures. One could relate such dancing stances to present-day Odissi and wonder if sakhinata ever used *chauka*. In general, the temple murals painted in the interiors meant for public viewing and religious education are restricted

in depiction of erotic themes. However, the painter of Dharakote murals has resorted to a witty depiction of eroticism using monkeys and not human beings as visual puns. There are two more shrines one, the Parva Ghara and the other the Vrindavana Chandra Temple in the palace compound where one comes across large figures of Goddesses such as Varahi, Indrani, Vimala and other divine mothers as well as episodes related to Krishnalila

Chitrakaras

The Chitrakaras as muralists enjoy greater freedom in terms of thematic depiction as well as large wall spaces to express their ideas. But as painters of primed cloth or *pata* their creative exuberance is severely hampered. This is because as servants of Jagannatha Temple they are bound by canonical instructions. We often refer to the painted wooden images of Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra as the source of *pata* painting simply because of similarity of colour applications while ignoring the fact that the Chitrakaras do not paint the divine wooden images in the Puri temple. There is another class of temple servants known as Dattamahapatras who are responsible for annual repairing and painting while a sub-group of this order known as Srimukhasringari perform daily retouching of the faces. However, the Chitrakaras as the servitors of the temple have been granted privileges to paint the *pata* replacements of the throned images when the deities ritually fall sick after their bathing ritual and remain absent in the temple throne for

public viewing. This is the period of Anavasara and the paintings are known as Anasara pati.

The replacement paintings or the Anasara paintings and the pilgrim paintings (*jatripatas*) meant to publicise the Jagannatha Temple, the sacred town of Puri as well as the Jagannatha culture are historic paintings, the Chitrakaras execute. Both these paintings are dated to an early period. The pilgrim paintings comprise a large variety of forms and motifs comprising tiny finger-ring paintings (*angutha*) to large *Sankhanabhi* and *Thiabadhia*. The pilgrims who visited Puri carried these paintings back home along, as prized souvenirs. Few years back, these were sold near the temple, a lucrative practice now given up adding owes to the painters. The Temple Records mention about the Anasara paintings dating back to the 15th century. But in the absence of a visual evidence, we are at loss to define its forms and formations. Fortunately we have the visual evidence of such a ritualistic painting, the *Sankhanabhi* in Copenhagen Museum which is dated in the 18th century. The largest collection of *Jatripatas* are with the India Office Library, London. Besides the temple paintings, Chitrakaras also execute a large number of square icon paintings of Gods and Goddesses, and thematic depiction of the *Bhagavata* and the *Ramayana*. Paintings of Mangala (*Mangalapata*), Kali (*Kalipata* or *Kalikaprabha*) are connected with observance of Khudurukuni Osa and Dandanata performances. These *pata* paintings are annually renewed.

Ganjapa

Ganjapa or the round shaped playing cards once formed an important aspect of *pata* painting tradition. It is said that Mughal eight colour ganjapa (*Atharangi*) was introduced by Babur. But, prior to that India had her indigenous *Dasavatara* (ten incarnation) cards. Card playing was a favorite pastime with aristocratic people and elite group in the Brahmin settlements and in the traditional towns. Depending on the type of symbols (*harapa*) and number of colours, playing cards could belong to different sets. The significant sets are *Atharangi*, *Dasavatara*, *Chadhei sara*, *Ashtamalla sara*, *Bandha sara* and the *Ramayana sara*. Sonepur, Puri, Raghurajpur, Dandasahi, Paralakhemandi, Chikitigada and Digapahandi are the famous centres of ganjapa production.

Pata style of painting is also done on wooden boards after pasting layer of cloth and applying a coat of chalk over it. These paintings are treated as icons and venerated in home shrines and are renewed annually. Paintings of Radha and Krishna, Nitei Gouranga and Balarama on wooden boards from Digapahandi are significant. The images of Durgamadhava painted on wooden tablets are both historically and ritualistically important and are used in consecration ceremonies.

Painted wooden boards were also used as outer covers for palm-leaf and paper manuscripts. The paintings adorned the underside of the boards to avoid constant human touch required to handle the manuscripts. A large

number of such painted covers are in the collections of Odisha State Museum, Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta and National Museum, New Delhi.

With the spread of Vaishnav Bhakti, a need arose to copy the *Bhagavata* on paper. This work was carried out in *mathas* with religious zeal and dedication. A large number of traditional painters were commissioned to visually render from the tenth chapter of the *Bhagavata* comprising *Gopalila* and episodes from the *Gitagovinda*. In the range of paper paintings, one comes across a unique theme titled *Embassy* in which an Absaynian Ambassador in the Khurda King's court is presenting his credentials.

Sketch Books

A number of sketch books which are treated as heirlooms in the traditional Chitrakara families have been collected. The master painter of the family workshop drew these line sketches towards the end part of his artistic career which were treated as the family workshop style and often used by the younger members to obtain commission work. There are also sketch rolls of master painters which are used by the young painters to convince the patrons the thematic credibility. We have collected several sketch books and sketch rolls from Jaypur workshop. The one, earlier collected by D.P. Ghosh from Ranpur workshop depicting Gopis on the bank of river Yamuna is a work of flowing and graceful lines. The other published by us in *Indian Painting*, 2013 was by Markanda Mahapatra of Jayapur.

Palm-leaf Paintings

Palm-leaf paintings which are integral to illustrated manuscripts are the miniatures executed not by the traditional painters, but by novices and the elite group. They often comprised the poets and the copiers who copied the old manuscripts to rescue them from deterioration and decay. These copies often are treated mistakenly as original manuscripts. While the text was copied with several interpolations, the paintings always emerged as new visuals different from the paintings of the old manuscripts. The ticklish problem that arises in copying is the authenticity of the colophon. The colophon which was an integral part of the old manuscript now becomes a qualifying factor of the new. The entries of the colophon most of the time do not mention the name of the scribe-painter, date of copying the *pothi*, which eventually create confusion. The *Gitagovinda* illustrated palm-leaf manuscript with the commentary of Dharanidhara in the collection of the Odisha State Museum mentions in the colophon that the *pothi* was written during the time of Mukundadeva. There are four Mukundadevas who reigned over Odisha and therefore the *pothi* could be logically ascribed either to the 17th century or even to the 20th century. Some of our Odia researchers with nationalistic spirit tend to believe that the copied manuscripts are really the original ones. The date should be read along with the style of paintings.

Palm-leaf paintings accompany Sanskrit and Odia literature and are the prized work of Odishan art. These paintings are spread over in the collections of important

museum the worldover such as The New York Public Library, Elvehjem Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin; British Museum and India Office Library, London; Museum Rietberg Zurich, National Museum, Copenhagen and Bibliothque Nationale Paris. In India, National Museum, New Delhi, Ashutosh Museum, Kolkata, and Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar have sizable collections of palm-leaf painting. Of course, the Odisha State Museum is the largest repository of palm-leaf paintings in India and world over. It is lamentable that the important collections of Aurobinda Museum in Nuagan is completely depleted.

Workshops and Styles

We evaluate the paintings basing on their stylistic features. The important feature is the line. It is really amazing how the painters have composed densely on narrow formats of palm-leaf with the help of iron stylus. The human body is shown in three-quarter bent while the face is rendered in strict profile. The human figures are robust but sensuous and earthy. Hardly the painters use fore-shortening device and the distance and depth are treated on horizontal axis. The method of depiction is narrative though symbolic meanings could be derived. The architecture is handled deftly. *Pidha* structured single and multiple pavilions are often used both for the temples and secular buildings. There is ample use of *keli kunjās* where romance between the lover and beloved takes place. There is also use of highly erotic sequences in palm-leaf paintings.

The important illustrated palm-leaf manuscripts are the *Amarushataka*, *Gitagovinda*, *Ushavilasa*, *Bidagdhamadhava Nataka*, *Lavanyavati*, *Rasika Haravali*, *Mathura Mangala*, *Artatrana Chautisa* and several *Chausathi Ratibandhas*. We also have *Shilpa* texts with illustrations on Odishan temples and *Vastu Sutra Upanishad* explaining the use of ritual diagrams.

Few years back we had no clue to the individual painters who had illustrated these manuscripts. Recent researches have focused on several workshops and individual masters. These findings deny that Odishan art is anonymous. We have been able to identify about fifty to sixty Odia painters of yore and their workshops. We also do not approve of or appreciate Odishan painting being labelled as 'folk' or 'bazar'. Paintings are another strong facet of Odishan culture and should be viewed with serious concern as a classical language having communicative value.

Even today, Odisha boasts of a reasonable network of Chitrakara workshops, not to count the more than seventy workshops exclusively connected with the tradition of Osakothi painting and about sixty Saura painters' workshops in south Odisha. The Chitrakara workshop network does not yet include several other rural painters and women artists. A workshop is virtually a modern art studio and an art gallery combine. There was a glorious time when every Odia home was an art gallery and each Odia woman was a painter.

We find it difficult to subscribe to the theory of ‘centripetality’ making Puri the nucleus of the Chitrakar world. Odisha had a long tradition of temple building and Maharana masons, stone carvers and Rupakaras were locally available who followed the style of painting adopted for fashioning Jagannatha images. Neither the artistic skills involved in making these images demanded a defined style nor the painterly paraphernalia were intricate enough to call for special recruits from Puri. A number of Chitrakaras preferred to emphasise their association with Puri and eventually a theory of migration developed. At the same time there are also records to prove that painters were sent from Puri on special requests. Matrimonial alliance is the main cause that multiplied families and connected Chitrakaras to Jagannatha temples located in different towns of Odisha. Therefore instead of recruiting Chitrakaras from Puri, local arrangements were made. In the present time, we witness a large migration of sculptors and painters from Puri, Raghurajpur, Mathura, Lalitgiri and Sonapur to Bhubaneswar. Their decision to migrate is guided by government patronage and commercial incentive or a larger market.

Pata painting in Puri and Raghurajpur was revived in the fifties of the last century along with Odissi dance. During this sixty years period, it has transformed into a touristic painting marked by over-ornamentation, garish colouring and dense figuration. *Pata* is being replaced with tassar and indigenous earth colours with chemical shades. *Guru-Shishya* teaching and learning

parampara has given way to syllabi oriented dissemination.

The art of making palm-leaf illustrated *pothi* is dead with books printed on paper in printing presses. Since thirty to forty years, the professional Chirakara painters have taken to scribing palm-leaf, but the product does not constitute a manuscript. For the purpose of scribing, today's painter prefers to join the oblong palm-leaves horizontally to create a rectangular space in which he is traditionally adept at delineating a theme. But this is not palm-leaf *pothi* art.

The Odisha State Museum is yet to have a gallery which would display facsimile copies of Odishan murals. In Odisha State Museum, we do not have all the local varieties of playing cards, *jatripatris*, and icon paintings. I have no idea who will take up this project to make Odishan painting heritage visible to the world. It is now left to IPCA to take up this formidable challenge to save the ancient and medieval Odia art.

Odishan paintings are more ancient than literature and sculpture and fabulously rich in their painterly style, earthy texture, and individualistic excellence. They sing the glory of more than three thousand years of pictorial history and urgently need to be preserved for posterity.

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