

An Artisan Heritage Crafts Village: Indigenous Sustainability of Raghurajpur

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Abstract—The paper is a case study of Raghurajpur which is a heritage crafts village in the district of Puri in the state of Odisha. This village is recognized for its folk art called Pattachitra, an art form which dates back to 5th Century B.C. and Gotipua dance which existed as a predecessor before the emergence of Odissi dance and is hence the home of a prominent visual art as well as a performing art. The artisans of this village are also engaged in crafting various other craft objects like wooden toys and masks, palm leaf engravings, wood carvings, etc. These activities have provided them income opportunities outside their state and even in foreign lands. The master dancer Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, belonging to this village, is the person responsible for the popularity of the Odissi dance form today. The village was given the status of heritage village, the first in the state, by INTACH in the year 2000. Though the state government has attempted to improve the physical conditions so as to make them tourist friendly but the impacts of these interventions have been. The purpose of the research is to show how the practices and traditions of the residents make it an open air museum for the outsiders but a home for the residents. These practices are also the very essence of sustainability, a trend catching up throughout the world, as seen from the raw materials used in the painting process, in the colours, canvases, etc. and the manner in which the painting is done. This is an example of the complex relationship which the village shares with the environment and is exclusive to the place, making it an important focus of rural tourism in the state.

Keywords: Artisan, Chitrakar, Gotipua, Heritage crafts, Pattachitra, Rural tourism;

1. CRAFTS IN INDIA

India is one of the only countries with a continuing vibrant tradition of handicraft culture. After agriculture, the crafts sector is the largest employer with over 20 million practitioners. The art and handicraft items produced by the artisans of the Odishan village are required for religious ceremonies, festivals and even decoration of households, lending those artistic opportunities and their livelihood, even on the international scale. The history of Odisha bears testimony to the fact through the evidence of maritime trade. These include a variety of products like appliqué work, textiles, terracotta, and filigree and, of course, Pattachitra.

Pattachitra, an ancient art form dating back to 5th century B.C., is a Sanskrit word in which ‘Patta’ means canvas and ‘Chitra’

means picture. The canvas can be of cloth like silk and even palm leaves. The colours used are mainly organic except black which is obtained from the soot of kerosene lamps. Pattachitra is characterised by vibrant colours and craftsmanship and they mainly depict Hindu mythologies, deities and like.



Fig. 1: Pattachitra: A Heritage Folk Art of Orissa

2. ABOUT THE VILLAGE

Table 1: Facts about Raghurajpur Location	2 km from Chandanpur on NH-203 connecting Puri and Bhubaneswar.
Distance from major cities	50 km from Bhubaneswar and 14 km from Puri.
Dwelling Units	103
Population	311
Average household size	3
Area of the village	2 Hectares
Net residential density	52 DU/Ha
Major caste of residents	Chitrakar (surnames like Moharana, Swain, etc.)

Source: Primary survey by author

The village is situated about 50 kilometres from the state capital on the southern banks of Bhargavi River. Every family in the village is engaged in visual or performing art making it an artisan village. Tropical trees like mango, jackfruit and coconut are common around here and the nearby crops are mainly betel leaves. Various small temples dedicated to Lord Lamxinarayan, Raghunath, etc. and Bhuasuni, the local deity, are found in this village. The artists are engaged in various activities like the talapatta paintings, patta paintings, poetry on

dried palm leaves, engravings on palm leaf, carving stone and wooden idols, sculptures, papier mache and making of toys.



Fig. 2: Serene Atmosphere of the village

The village has 103 houses with about 311 residents, in which many of the master painters are away for the majority of the year. The village comprises two streets oriented along East to West and three rows of buildings. The outer buildings are residential units and the inner buildings are the community buildings like temples and dance practice huts. The three Patas painted by the Chitrakaras in this village are placed on the deity throne of the main Jagannath Temple in Puri, during the fortnight following the full-moon day in the months of May-June. Raghurajpur village is known for its traditional performing dance, known as Gotipua. This village is the birth place of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, the great Odissi dancer, who popularised it on an international scale.



Fig. 3: Raghurajpur in Odisha



Fig. 4: Top view of the village



Fig. 5: Social Map of Raghurajpur

3. CASTE

The finish floor level of the dwelling units is at a height of 750mm (5 steps) from the Ground level. This is due to functional reasons so as to inhibit entry of snakes and rainwater but it also served a social function. Higher plinth height meant a higher social standing. Since the state Government intervention, most of the dwelling units have become pucca structure and since they are in row form, the plinth height is same.

Though the evils of the caste system are known throughout, the culture of crafts survived here because of the caste system and the local demands for these items. The social immobility of these artisans (called Chitrakars) ensured the continuity of the tradition through generations which highlights a deep inter-relationship between the Chitrakars and the societal structure. The surname of these inhabitants is their professional identity restricting them in their profession and issues like landlessness, small farmers as part time artisans depending on the season, social restrictions exist.



Fig. 6: Themes of Pattachitra paintings

4. RAGHURAJPUR AS A LIVING MUSEUM

Merriam-Webster defines museum as an institution devoted to the procurement, care, study and display of objects of lasting interest or value. A type of museum where the exhibits are displayed in an unconfined atmosphere, outside an enclosed area can be referred to as open air museum and they include

living museums where the goal is to demonstrate the lifestyle and the culture to an outside audience. Similar our study area can be referred to as a repository of living culture unconfined within four walls where everything catches the attention of the tourist in a living form. The activities can be the painting of a pattachitra, making of toys made out of terracotta, cow dung, paddy, betel nuts, lacquer, etc., the way of the inhabitants and so on. Through this, one can discover the social fabric of the village settlements, rural households, the goods being created, their daily lives and so on weaving the story of a rural heritage crafts village.

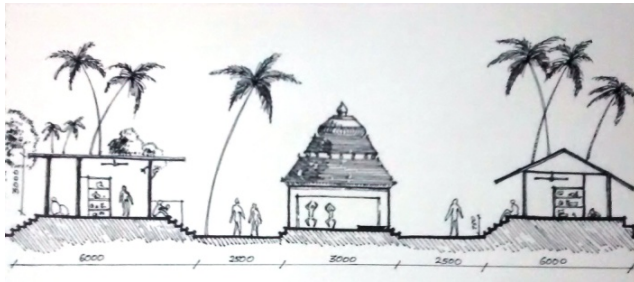


Fig. 7: Typical Section of the Village



Fig. 8: Plan of dwelling unit of Artisan Vikas Swain

The houses, on row form, are painted with murals as an artistic skill expression and also act as a display of talent to outsiders passing on the streets. The chitrakars can be seen working on the verandas. In the evenings, one can see Gotipua dance being practiced by many of the residents. The evening rituals at the temples are participated by all the households. All these highlight the continuing tradition of the village and hence make it a living museum.



Fig. 9: Exterior wall as canvas and verandah as work place

5. SUSTAINABILITY

The profession, tradition and the lifestyle of the residents is deeply linked to nature. From the very layout of the village to the individual level, one can observe the natural influences. Earlier the drinking water needs were fulfilled by the Bhargavi River though the residents have switched to ground water. The river still provides the water for religious purposes.

The village streets are oriented on the East- West direction which facilitates unshaded streets, which translates to reflected or diffused natural light to the dwelling units. The artisans prefer to work on the verandas or at the entry door of their houses in the presence of natural light. Since the houses are in row format, there is a continuous veranda along the houses which serves as the social interaction space for the residents, both for the male as well as the females, though at different times of the day. This fosters a spirit deeper than neighbourly, more like a family spirit. Originally the performance art used to take place in the village centre, which was an open air kutchra platform, which used to be the focus of the village social interaction in the evenings.



Fig. 10: East West Orientation of the Village



Fig. 11: Verandah as a work and social place

6. RAW MATERIALS

The process of painting patachitra begins with the preparation of canvas (pata). Traditionally, cotton canvas was used, now both cotton and silk canvas are used for paintings, sourced from nearby villages. **White** is obtained with conch shell is powered and boiled with *kaittha* gum, till a paste is formed. **Black** is formed from lamp black or lamp soot. A burning lamp is placed inside an empty tin, till a considerable amount of soots collects on the underside of the tin. The oil used in the lamp is from polang tree seeds which are locally available. **Green** is made by boiling green leaves like *neem* (Asian Tree) leaves with water and *kaittha* gum. **Brown** is obtained from Geru stone, whose powder is mixed with gum and water. **Red** comes from a stone Hingulal, which, is a locally available stone. **Blue** obtained from a blue stone called Khandneela found in Orissa. **Yellow** is derived from yellow stone called Hartal, which is found in Jaipur.

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



Fig. 12: Raw materials used in the painting process

7. CONCLUSION

The Government of Odisha has stated that in Raghurajpur, every house is a studio and every resident is an artist. Though their profession and tradition is a result of generations of social restrictions, there product is an important part of the state's household culture. This has also provided them many opportunities to improve their socio-economic status through the intervention of the Odisha government. Their culture of decorating their dwelling units through murals has made the village a living museum, and also their practice of working in an unconfined environment. Their religious ceremonies and celebrations of various social functions further emphasize their heritage. Concepts like sustainability existed through its history of traditions. Though the Government actions has led to the overall improvement in living conditions but certain issues have also been observed such as expansion of the existing one or two room house disregarding lighting and ventilation, lack of use of the guest house, etc. In spite of them, its positive aspects to highlight the importance of the village as a symbol of a living cultural heritage outweigh the issues.

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