

## Patuas of Purba Medinipur - A Study of Economic Perspective

Keya Mandal

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Pingla Thana Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author: Keya Mandal

---

**ABSTRACT:** The patua community of the district of Purba Medinipur in the state of West Bengal in India is recognised as an artisan class (occupational caste-guild named 'Nabasakh' according Brahmapaibarta Purana). It is very important that patuas of the district of Purba Medinipur produced craft products (mainly scroll painting or pata-painting) based on indigenous knowledge. After independence the Government of India has tried to uplift the position of rural artisan class all over India through different projects under the Ministry of Handicrafts. Department of Micro and Small Scale Enterprises and Textiles was also formed in West Bengal in late 1950's. Moreover, District Industrial Centre was also formed in every district of West Bengal including Purba Medinipur. Since independence the Government of India has tried to uplift the position of chitrakars or patuas of undivided district of Medinipur (now it is divided into the districts of Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram) and other rural artisan classes under the Ministry of Handicrafts. Then after 1999 SGSY was started and it also improved the economic condition of patuas. Activities of Self Help Groups (SHGs), State and Central Governments, the growing retail industries and new urban customers have increased the income opportunities of the artisan communities including the patuas of Purba Medinipur. In the era of commercialisation and globalisation improvement of the economic conditions of patuas of Purba Medinipur are important. But the effects of globalisation demoralise the traditional style of scroll painting or pata painting.

**Keywords:** Patuas or Chitrakars, economic development, commercialisation and globalisation, Purba Medinipur

---

Date of Submission: 07-10-2017

Date of acceptance: 18-10-2017

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

Patuas of the district of Purba Medinipur are mainly folk painters. They make patas or scrolls with the story or narrative in the form of songs which are called patua songs. They inherit their skills from their ancestors. Nowadays patua songs of Bengal including the district of Purba Medinipur play an important role in the world of oral, traditional folk music and painting. Patuas or Chitrakars are common words in the district of Purba Medinipur of West Bengal. There are many patua settlements in the district- Habichak, Nankarchak, Muradpur, Kkharda. These scroll painters or patuas or chitrakars are artisan class in the context of Indian society. It has been opined by some researchers that pata painting or scroll painting has originally come from an art form of the tribal community. During the reigns of Pala and Sena the folk painters (Chitrakars) did not follow the traditional method of painting (Shastriya riti). As a result of that they were enlisted in the group of *Nabasakh*<sup>1</sup>. During the period of Turk- Afghan social and political exploitation by the Brahminical society forced them to take Islam. They created *Gaazipata*<sup>2</sup> for the spread of Islam. So, they assimilated both Hindu and Islamic culture for their styles. So, most of them practise both Hindu and Muslim cultures and rituals in their daily life and, therefore, they become a marginal community in the context of Indian society. They are very poor also. After independence the Government of India has taken many steps for upliftment of economic condition of rural artisan class including patua or chitrakar community (artisan) of the district of Purba Medinipur. Activities of the State and Central Governments, the growing retail industry and new urban customers have increased the income opportunities of the artisan communities like the patuas of the district of Purba Medinipur.

---

<sup>1</sup>The nine caste-guilds are: a) The Sutradharas, b) The Karmakaras, c) The Tantubayas, d) The Kumbhakar, e) The Kangsakar, f) The Swarnakar, g) The Sankhakar, h) The Chitrakar, i) The Malakar.

<sup>2</sup>Pata on Gazipir-Gazipatas are very popular among Santhals, Bhumis & Bedias of the districts of undivided Medinipur, Purulia & Bankura. It is also in vogue among the Muslims of Kumilla, Faridpur & Barisaal in Bangladesh. Many supernatural incidents of two Muslim pirs *Satyapir* & *Kalugazi* have been depicted in Gazipata.

## II. OBJECTIVE

The objectives of my study are to find out

- i) The economic development of patua community of the district of Purba Medinipur in the post independence era
- ii) Effect of commercialisation and globalisation

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies on this subject are found e.g. McCutcheon, David J and Bhowmik Suhrid K., *Patuas and Patua Art in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1999, Sengupta Sankar (ed), *The Patas and Patuas of Bengal*, Indian Publication, Calcutta, 1973 and etc. In spite of those works more research in the field of economic activities of patuas and effect of commercialization and globalisation on pata painting in the district of Purba Medinipur is needed.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

For the study data are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are collected by field survey using a semi structural questionnaire and personal interviews etc. Secondary data and information are collected from library books, journals, e-books and websites etc.

## V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Economic position of patuas in the pre-colonial period:** Patuas of Bengal including the undivided district of Medinipur (districts of Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram) were very poor and wretched having no or little cultivable land. They lived a hand to mouth existence with their low income. They had a vagrant nomadic nature and migrated from one place to another in quick succession. Females made dolls and toys, reeds and brooms and sold those in rural area. In that way they subsidised their family income to sustain themselves. Male patuas were working as ordinary agricultural labourers, menial day-labourers, masons and mat makers with palm and date palm leaves in addition to pata painting.

**Economic condition of patua community of the district of Purba Medinipur in the post-colonial period and its different phases:** After independence the Government of India has tried to uplift the position of rural artisan class all over India through different projects under the Ministry of Handicrafts. In this context, we may remember the contribution of Smt. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the Founder Patron of the Crafts Council of India (1976). She was responsible for changing the cultural perspective of post-independence India and restructuring the art and craft forms. In this way the Government of India has taken many schemes under the Ministry of Handicrafts for upliftment of economic condition of rural artisan class including patua or chitrakar community (artisan class). In late 1950's Department of Micro and Small Scale Enterprises and Textiles was also formed in West Bengal and District Industrial Centre was also opened in every district of West Bengal including Purba Medinipur. Then Self Help Groups (SHGs) were formed in the patua settlements of the district of Purba Medinipur under Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY<sup>3</sup>) and it improved the economic condition of patuas.

**Formation of Self Help Groups in patua community of the district of Purba Medinipur:** In 1999 the Ministry of Rural Development of the Government of India restructured the numerous poverty alleviation programmes and introduced the new self employment programme called Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), which is implemented through the Self Help Groups (SHGs). The SHGs have been the focal point of rural credit, self employment programmes and poverty alleviation in India since the early 1990's.

The important Self Help Group of the district of Purba Medinipur is *Samajsilpi Self Help Group* of Tehukachak led by Mairon Chitrakar. The SHGs of Muradpur are *Mecca Self Help Group* led by Alaya Chitrakar, *Najrul Self Help Group* led by Ila Chitrakar and *Modina Self Help Group* led by Ayesha Chitrakar. The Self Help Group of Habichak is *Habichak Najrul SHG* led by Jharna Chitrakar. Names of Self Help Groups are *Nibedita SHG* led by Menoka Rana and *Patua Unnayan SHG* led by Alekjan Patidar.

Through these Self Help Groups they produce different types of commercial products like T-shirt, sari, salwar-kurta, shoe, paper-weight, curtain, table-cover, pen-stand, tea-table, umbrella, ashtray, bag, shoe, leather bag and wall mat etc. with artistic touch of traditional pata painting.

**Changing scenario in economic conditions of the patua community of the district of Purba Medinipur in the era of commercialisation and globalisation:** In regards to sustain development of patuas or artisan classes not only the start of Self Help Groups but other activities of the Government are also important. Nowadays, the growing retail industry, fashion and luxury market, demand for green production and potential for e-commerce

---

<sup>3</sup>An initiative launched by the Government of India to provide sustainable income to poorest of the poor people living in rural & urban areas of the country. The scheme was launched on April 1, 1999

have created new opportunities for developing a vibrant craft economy. As a result, the income opportunities of the artisan communities like scroll painters (patuas), potters (kumbhakars), metal workers (kansakars), wood carvers (sutrathars) etc. have increased many folds. So, the globalization of the craft generates more employments in this sector. The craft sector is economically important from the point of low capital investment, high ration of value addition, high potential for export and foreign exchange earnings for the country.

This fear of losing an essential part of one's communal identity to incoming cultures is not a new concept. India, which has been under nearly constant siege from outside invaders for one thousand years, and which has been nearly constant siege from outside invaders for one thousand years, and which is made up of 1.2 billion people from a number of cultural groups, is perhaps one of the best examples of a country whose place a high value on aspects of culture that either separate or unite them.

In the circumstances we may discuss about the social, economic scenario of rural patuas of the district of Purba Medinipur. In the era of post-colonialisation the roles of both central & state Governments and Non Government Organisations for economic upliftment of patuas are important. In the remote past the patuas served the rolled up paintings (scroll) for performances not for objects of commercial sale. According to oral history we know that singing and painting were the hereditary caste occupations of patuas. 'Functioning as both entertainers and educators, they wandered from village to village during festive times of the year seeking out patrons to support their crafts. As they entered into the cash economy during the British colonial period, however, they began gradually to incorporate new themes and motifs of a social nature into their largely mythological repertoires, adding journalism to their multi-talented skill set. But it was not until the 1970s that the Patuas began to collaborate prominently with various outside agencies to propagate particular messages associated with modernity and development.'<sup>4</sup>

The Government of West Bengal has taken some promotional programmes for development and survival of craft heritage of Bengal. The Directorate of Micro and Small Scale Enterprises,<sup>5</sup> Govt. of West Bengal, is the main promotional body and works as a facility provider for development of this sector. The District Industry Centres (DICs) located at all districts render the promotional services for development of Handicrafts at district, block and village levels. For the benefits of the handicraft artisans Government has taken initiatives for issuance of *Artisan Photo Identity Card*, *Artisan credit Card*<sup>6</sup> and *Health Card Rajib Gandhi Shilpi Swastha Bima Yojana*<sup>7</sup>. Those facilities are availed by the maximum number of Patuas of the district of Purba Medinipur.

**Effects after commercialisation and globalisation:** Pata painting in the undivided Medinipur has a long and rich history, yet the advent of commercialization of scroll based products only emerged within the last 15 to 20 years. The participation of patuas of different patua settlements in the district of Purba Medinipur in many national and international fairs and enhancement of the list of commodities they make have given an importance to the pata painting of Bengal. In this context, the Design Development Programmes for the artisans organized by both the Handicrafts Commissioner of the Government of India and Micro & Small Scale Industries of West Bengal are very significant. As a result a number of household commodities e.g. bag, pen-stand, ash-tray, umbrella, shoe, sari and curtain take positions in the list of the their creative style of pata painting. So, a sustainable development has been found in the patua settlements of Purba Medinipur.

With the effect of globalisation the simple rustic lives of rural people are changed on account of influx of the advanced technology, commercial entertainment, fusion cultures and mobile capital etc. It affects traditional art and crafts which are produced by rural artisans like patuas, kumbhakaras (idol makers) and sutratharas (wood carvers) etc. 'The *patuas* faced enormous problems and failed and failed to compete. Illiteracy made them even more vulnerable exhausting their artistic spirit. From then onwards the *patuas* have lived a life of poverty, negligence and deprivation for decades after independence. The sophisticated city-dwellers devalued these rural folk painters who found it quite difficult to gain a safe, respectable space for themselves within urban boundaries. The art of making patachitra also lacked any specific thrust or policy support from the State Government. Gradually with the passage of time during the 1970's this folk art emerged as a unique unparalleled art form of Bengal to boast of among a new rank of educated audience of urbanity.'<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Korom Frank J. 'Civil Ritual, NGOs, and Rural Mobilization in Medinipur District, West Bengal' Asian Ethnology, Volume 70, Number 2- 2011, P-181

<sup>5</sup>Its Office is at 9<sup>th</sup> floor of New Secretariat Building, 1 K.S. Roy Road, Kolkata-700001. Its handicraft wing under Joint Director (CDP) is functioning from 4<sup>th</sup> floor office at 2, Church Lane, Kolkata-700001.

<sup>6</sup>Undertaken by the Government for providing the requirements of working capital to carry out their activities incessantly

<sup>7</sup>Undertaken by the Government to provide the social security not only to the artisans but also to their families

<sup>8</sup>Chatterjee Suvapriya, The University of Burdwan, *Crossing the Threshold: Women Patuas of Bengal in Transition*, Chitraklekha International Magazine on Art and Design, (ISSN 2231-4822) Vol.3, No. 1, 2013. Available at [www.chitraklekha.com/v3/n1/03\\_Women\\_Patuas\\_of\\_Bengal.pdf](http://www.chitraklekha.com/v3/n1/03_Women_Patuas_of_Bengal.pdf)

## VI. CONCLUSION

There is also dark behind the light. It is very alarming that the concept of globalisation (economic integration of the nation) and commercialization de-constructed the uniform folk elements of the world. Patuas of Purba Medinipur are not exception. The traditional scroll painting is demoralized [the length of scroll diminishes, proper panel works of particular story of a scroll also vanishes, proper character is not depicted in the scroll, musical narratives are not sung in proper way, ganger scene of Purba Medinipur pata also vanishes, traditional and proper colour combination are not found in many cases, vegetable dyes are not used, 'workshop product' of newly educated (painting of scroll) patuas have no proper idea of their glorious hereditary works of pata]. Urban customers who emerge the post-colonial period are bored in this type of commercialization of scroll painting and subsequent decrease in the quality of the products.

## REFERENCE

### Books:

- [1]. D.J. noihctuCcM,K dna .S.kimwohB , *Patuas and Patua Art in Bengal* (Calcutta: Farma KLM, 1999).
- [2]. S. Sengupta (ed), *The Patas and Patuas of Bengal* (Calcutta: Indian Publication, 1973).
- [3]. G. Dutt, *Patua Sangeet* (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1939).
- [4]. B. Ghosh, *Paschimbanger Sanskriti, Vol-I, II, III* (Kolkata: Prakash Bhawan,1980).
- [5]. A. Mitra, I.C.S.(ed.), *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal* (Alipore: Land and Land Revenue Department, Government of West Bengal, 1953).
- [6]. G. Dutt, *Folk Arts and Crafts of Bengal: The Collected papers* (Calcutta: Seagull, 1990).
- [7]. S.K. Ray, *The Folk –Art of India* (Calcutta : Yogalayam, 1967)

### Journals:

- [8]. J. F. Korom, Civil Ritual, NGOs, and Rural Mobilization in Medinipur District, West Bengal, *Asian Ethnology*, Volume 70, Number 2- 2011
- [9]. S. Chatterjee, Crossing the Threshold: Women Patuas of Bengal in Transition, *Chitrallekha International Magazine on Art and Design*, (ISSN 2231-4822) Vol.3, No.1, 2013. Available at [www.chitrallekha.com/v3/n1/03\\_Women\\_Patuas\\_of\\_Bengal.pdf](http://www.chitrallekha.com/v3/n1/03_Women_Patuas_of_Bengal.pdf)

### Interviews:

- [10]. An interview dated 23.01.2013 of Late Niranjana Chitrakar, a resident of Village- Habichak, District- Purba Medinipur
- [11]. An interview dated 08.07.2014 of Jharna Chitrakar, a resident of Village- Habichak, District- Purba Medinipur
- [12]. Field Survey on 12.01.2017 at Village- Habichak, District- Purba Medinipur
- [13]. Field Survey on 26.12.2016 at Village- Nankarchak, District- Purba Medinipur
- [14]. Field Survey on 27.01.2017 at Village- Muradpur, District- Purba Medinipur
- [15]. Field Survey on 28.01.2017 at Village- Kkharda, District- Purba Medinipur
- [16]. Field Survey 29.12.2016 at Thekuachak, District- Purba Medinipur

International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 4593, Journal no. 47449.

Keya Mandal. "Patuas of Purba Medinipur - A Study of Economic Perspective." International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention(IJHSSI), vol. 6, no. 10, 2017, pp. 44–47.