The Patuas of West Bengal and Odisha: An Evaluative Analysis

Sharmila Chandra

Himalaya Publishing House
ISO 9001:2008 CERTIFIED
The *Patuas* of West Bengal and Odisha: An Evaluative Analysis

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Visiting Lecturer, Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata.
Dedicated to
The Loving Memory of My Parents
My first experience of watching the scroll painters was in a Calcutta handicrafts fair. A group of them had come from Naya in Medinipur. As the scrolls were slowly unfolded, the serialised narrative sung by the painter, shut off one sequence, opening another. The audience was carried forward as the form and theme blended with the song and the painted images. As a student of art history, I was exposed to a novel experience. The well-known tales of Behula, Chandi, Dharma Thakur (Hindu mythological characters) came alive as the images moved through the performative art, to end in the grand scene of the manifestation of divine power. I left in a trance, overwhelmed by the performance I had noticed. As the years rolled on and I learnt more about the history of the patuas’ (scroll painter’s) art, his lifestyle and his innovative powers to bring the past alive, I also realised that understanding the art form of the patuas would push me to new areas of studies which my limited experience in history and art history had so far granted. I learnt the meaning of the term, ‘interdisciplinity.’ Sharmila Chandra had gained an entry into her theme of research by moving beyond the confines of her original discipline. Here lies the strength of her work.

As a student of Geography, Sharmila has firmly based her work on specific locations. The contrasting areas of Medinipur in West Bengal and Raghurajpur in Odisha offer interesting details which acquire significance when the comparisons reveal both similarities and differences. The meticulous explorations of the researcher as she situates herself in the two separate areas brings before the readers the hard realities of the artist performers’ lives. The grinding poverty, the changing concepts of entertainment, the invasion of the cinema and with it, a marginalisation of the rural artists.

A sharp distinction between the rich and poor, urban-rural, trained and untrained artists had existed from the ancient period. Yet, unlike the present, the rural artist was never dismissed as an artisan. It was the Colonial Period and an English education that allowed Indians to create a schism between the ‘shilpi’ (artist) and the patua. The continuation of the rural artist is, therefore, seen as works of craftsmen who practise their work among a limited and shrinking group of audience. Traversing between the past and present, the patua also oscillates between a
vanished feudal world and the globalised market, where he, along with his art, are exhibited as anthropological specimens. Sharmila Chandra’s work in trying to comprehend the dilemmas of the rural artist and his audience gains special importance in this context.

The work is divided into nine sections. While equal attention is paid to the patuas in Raghurajpur and Medinipur, special emphasis is placed on their histories, the evolution of their styles and specially their techniques. It is interesting to notice that the patuas of Raghurajpur are still overwhelmed by the cult of Jagannath (a Hindu deity) while the Medinipur patuas draw on many sources for their work. Long lost secular ballads can be found among the Medinipur patuas. Those who had migrated to Kalighat, Calcutta in the nineteenth century still continue with their decorations of ‘square patas’ and clay plates – saras. Most of these artists have turned to other crafts to eke out a living. While pointing out these problems, Sharmila has also analysed how the crafts of the patuas can be kept alive.

While a number of organisations are working in these areas, whose sole aim is to keep the crafts and craftsmen alive, one notices a steady erosion in both techniques and innovative performances. Artists are often dictated as to what themes they should take up, how the performances should be staged and this leads to greater confusion as they have no clear-cut ideology to which they could turn. Deep seated prejudices still exist about class and gender. While more and more women are being inducted in the process of production, they should be made aware of their rights. Women artists still cling to given gender roles which they have inherited from their ancestors. Yet, with new training centres coming up and artists, both men and women, being allowed to move outside their villages, states and even countries, awareness of self and national identities are taking on creative aspects.

A very interesting part of this work are the maps and photographs provided by the author. It opens up new vistas before readers as to the contemporary realities of the patua’s life and work. This book, though providing us with such rich material, should be considered as part of a process of ongoing research. For even as the patuas, men and women throng the popular art fairs, they realise that to survive, they need to take up other skills.

Ratnabali Chatterjee
(Former Director,
Women’s Studies Research Centre,
University of Calcutta).
I had all through been a student of Earth Science when it struck me that I could come out of the discipline of hard core Geography, essentially with inclination towards physical indices, and attempt to work on something interdisciplinary. History had always interested me and so had ethnic art. At the same time, it dawned on me that although the various aspects of Geography had been looked into by researchers, sporadic and sketchy emphasis had been laid on the cultural aspect. I, therefore, decided to combine Cultural Studies and Art History for my research work, keeping the space factor in geographical study as a fulcrum.

Ethnic handicraft had always appealed to me. The patuas of the Bengal Region are a class by themselves. They not only excel in ethnic folk painting but strictly follow folk ideals. They suffer from an acute identity crisis with regard to their religion, as they are neither accepted by the Muslims nor by the Hindus, but dwell in a twilight zone. They carry the social stigma of a subaltern community, yet they cling to their ancestral occupation by all means even though it does not support them economically in a substantial manner. It was this passion for their traditional occupation and the simplicity of their lifestyle that inspired me to conduct some sort of an exploratory and in-depth research on the patuas. Four years of intensive field work and a thorough review of past works done on the patua community of the Bengal Region have produced interesting results and have enriched me with new ideas which I have attempted to share with the prospective readers of this book.

In my research work, I have included Odisha in the Bengal Region since in the ancient period, Anga (Bihar), Banga (Bengal) and Kalinga (Odisha) were considered as one unit. I would not hesitate to say that the other intention behind this move is the fact that I have closely observed the works of the patuas of the Puri District of Odisha and have found that although these have gained fame as folk art, the paintings are nothing less than classical, rather they should be classed as divine. The work itself is highly inspirational and demands research.

I am extremely grateful to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi for appreciating my work and considering it for a Publication Grant. I feel equally obliged to Professor Ratnabali Chatterjee for consenting to write the foreword for this book.

– Author
I would like to express my sincere gratitude towards all who have helped and encouraged me to carry out my research work and to prepare this dissertation. In the first place, mention must be made of my Supervisor, Professor Sumantro Mukherjee, Department of Geography, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, whose constant guidance throughout my research period has provided me an incentive to carry out the work with all my effort. His exceptional concern for me and my work throughout this long period has left a deep impression on my mind as a research scholar.

I also wish to thank my professors and the entire Department of Geography, Visva Bharati, for helping me with secondary material off and on during my research period.

I am deeply indebted to the Chitrakaras of Raghurajpur, with whom I spent a good deal of time throughout the course of my field-work from 2008 to 2010 and again later, from 2012 to 2015. I also wish to express my gratitude towards the patuas of Naya (West Medinipur) and Thekuachak and Habichak (East Medinipur) as well as Kalighat Patuapara (Kolkata) for answering my queries from time to time. Ebad Chitrakara of Naya deserves special mention in this respect.

In procuring secondary information, I have received assistance from the office staff of the Directorate of Census Operations, Bhubaneswar and the Directorate of Census Operations, Kolkata. The Tourist Officer, Puri, the staff of the Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha, the staff of the BDO Office, Puri and the BDO Office, Naya, the Joint Director Industry, Puri, the District Statistical Officer, Puri and the Industrial Development Officer (IDO), Medinipur have also been highly obliging in this respect.

I wish to thank the staff of the Zilla Parishad, West Medinipur, for the help provided to me during my visits to the district. I have been provided special assistance by the staff of the Police Lines, Medinipur Town, during my field-work in and around Naya Village. In this respect, I would like to thank Dr. Keka Dutta Roy of Prafulla Chandra College, Kolkata and Mr. Sandhi Mukherjee, Retired I.A.S.

In drafting the thesis, I have used books and periodicals from the Central Library and the library of Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati, the
National Library and the library of the Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata. Therefore, I would like to offer thanks to the staff of all these libraries.

I express my gratitude to Mr. Ashish Chakraborty, Executive Secretary, Gurusaday Museum, Kolkata, Mrs. Ruby Pal Choudhury, Secretary of the Crafts Council of West Bengal and Dr. Pradip Chakraborty, the renowned socio-economist, for helping me to explore into the present and past socio-economic conditions of the patuas of Kalighat.

Finally, I offer my gratitude to Dr. Maya Dutt, retired professor of Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata, for her untiring guidance provided to me in writing this book. I also thank Dr. Annapurna Chatterjee, Dr. Anjali Chatterjee, Devika Mukherjee, Shriya Mukherjee and all my fellow researchers, friends and well-wishers who have provided me incentive during the long period of my research work.

– Author
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Folk Art in India – An Introduction</td>
<td>1 – 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Preamble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>History and Background of the <em>Patuas</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td><em>Pata</em> as a Form of Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Objectives of Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Database and Methodology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.i</td>
<td>Secondary Information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.ii</td>
<td>Primary Data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.iii</td>
<td>Questionnaire-schedules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6.iv</td>
<td>Statistical, Cartographic and Mapping Techniques</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>Organisation of Chapters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>Overview of Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8.i</td>
<td>Folk Art and Folk Artists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8.ii</td>
<td><em>Pata-art</em> in Kalighat Patuapara, East and West Medinipur and Odisha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8.iii</td>
<td>General Views on <em>Pata-art</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Study Areas</td>
<td>23 – 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Raghurajpur : The Heritage Village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Kalighat Patuapara : The Seat of <em>Pata Painting</em> in Kolkata</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>West and East Medinipur : The Home of the <em>Rural Patuas</em> of Bengal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Historical Development of <em>Pata Painting</em> : Case Studies</td>
<td>32 – 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The Huge Impact of the <em>Jagannath Cult</em> on the <em>Chitrakaras</em> of Raghurajpur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Other Factors Leading to the Evolution of <em>Pata Painting</em> in Raghurajpur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Decline and Revival of the <em>Chitrakaras</em> in Raghurajpur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Kalighat Patuapara : The Colonial Period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 Scroll Painters Turned Craftsmen: East and West Medinipur
3.6 The Impact of Urban Culture on the Rural Patuas and the Influence of the Latter on Contemporary Artists of Bengal

4 The Stages of Pata Painting: Raw Materials, Equipments Used, Themes, Subjects and Other Related Issues 44 – 52
4.1 Patachitras of Raghurajpur: Themes and Techniques
4.2 Kalighat Patas – The Degenerating Process
4.3 The Scroll Paintings of East and West Medinipur: Diversity in Themes

5 Problems of the Patua Community and Contemporary Changes in their Products – Compulsive or Natural 53 – 66
5.1 Raghurajpur: From Art Worship to Commercialisation
5.2 Kalighat Patuapa: Chitrakaras Turned into Kumbhakaras
5.3 Medinipur Patuas: Decline and Revival
5.4 Modern Techniques and Themes in Pata Painting: The Heritage Village
5.5 Temporal Changes: Kalighat Patuapara and Medinipur

6 Lateral Shifts in Occupation – A Myth or a Reality? 67 – 84

7 Revival Efforts 85 – 98
7.1 Tourism Growth, Economic and Cultural Development in Raghurajpur
7.2 Incentives for the Rural Patuas of Bengal
7.3 Kalighat Patuapara Comes to a Standstill: A Few, Sporadic Efforts at Revival

8 Proposals and Suggestions for Sustainability 99 – 101

9 Conclusion 102 – 109
Glossary 110 – 116
References 117 – 133
Author Index 134 – 137
Subject Index 138 – 168
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 2.1</td>
<td>Location of the Study Area in Odisha</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 2.2</td>
<td>Kolkata-Ward No. 73: Location of Kalighat Patuapara</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 2.3</td>
<td>West Medinipur: Centres of Pata Painting</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 2.4</td>
<td>East Medinipur: Centres of Pata Painting</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 6.1</td>
<td>Location of Naya Village within Pingla CD Block, West Medinipur</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 6.2</td>
<td>Location of Thekuachak Village within Nandakumar Block, East Medinipur</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 6.3</td>
<td>Location of Habichak Village within Chandipur Block, East Medinipur</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 6.4</td>
<td>Naya: Proportion of Artisans to Total Population, 1971-2010</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 6.5</td>
<td>Habichak Village: Proportion of Artisans to Total Population, 2010</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig. 7.1</td>
<td>Raghurajpur: Average Monthly Household Income, 2001-2013</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plate No.</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>India’s Painting Heritage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shawl Weaving in Kullu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A dokra artisan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dulal Chitrakara, the sole painter of saras in Kalighat Patuapara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Saras for sale in Kalighat Market. Strangely, these have been brought all the way from Kumortuli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Mother Goddess being worshipped in the form of saras: Economic benefit through modernisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The art of creating Ganjappa playing cards, Raghurajpur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ganjappa playing cards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Jagannath Temple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Rathayatra – A festival in which Chitrakaras are deeply involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The art of painting patas originated from the idea of painting the Trinity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yatri Pati – the first category of patas drawn in the Puri District</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>A scroll Painter of West Medinipur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Chitrakara preparing the pati</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Chitrakaras make the colours themselves from vegetable matter and natural stones and store them in coconut shells</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>The workshop is non-functional during the lean season; the idol makers are marginal workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Asura under a wrap to protect the face from rain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Shortage of space inside the workshops forces the artisans to push their idols out into the open</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Onslaught of the media has caused a fall in demand for scroll paintings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plate No. 20  *Patuas* have to move to neighbouring towns and cities to show their scrolls

Plate No. 21 While previously, a *pata* used to represent a single scene, now pictures are drawn in small frames around the main figure to depict an entire story

Plate No. 22 Traditional technique embracing modernisation

Plate No. 23 Tribal paintings by the *Chitrakaras of Raghurajpur*: Introduction of innovative themes and ideas

Plate No. 24 Product variation through consumer demand; Originality questioned

Plate No. 25 Demand-based products with simplified designs

Plate No. 26 *A patua* preparing the *chalchitra*

Plate No. 27 *Patuas* turned idol makers

Plate No. 28 *A patua* working as a dressmaker for stage shows in Kalighat Patuapara

Plate No. 29 *Patuas* working as masons in West Medinipur

Plate No. 30 *A patua* driving a trolley-van in West Medinipur
LIST OF TABLES

Table No. 1  Naya: Total Population and Number of Patuas, 1971 - 2010 75
Table No. 3  Raghurajpur: Average Monthly Household Income and Number of Artisans, 2002-2005, 2010 and 2014 81
Table No. 4  Raghurajpur: Number of Artisan Families and Segregation of Artisans, 2002-2005 and 2012-2013 82
Table No. 5  Naya: Self-Help Groups formed by the Government of West Bengal 97
1.1 PREAMBLE

To express his changing moods, man requires a wide variety of instruments. Some take the help of words - oral or written, some resort to music, while others express their moods through creative works of art and craft. Hence, in this world, some human beings become artisans, others become writers and scholars, while the remaining excel in various forms of other creativity such as performing arts.

Art is the outcome of the exuberance of life. The very word ‘artisan class’ invokes the term, ‘artistry.’ The artisan, combined with his artistry, produces an image of aestheticity and creativity. The growth of artistic expression is a sign of cultivation of sensitivity, the mellowing of humanism. In fact, handicrafts are directed to add beauty and brightness in the otherwise drab existence of man.

“In India, the artist had not yet been separated from the artisan……as in our Middle Ages, so in the India that died at Plassey, every mature workman was a craftsman, giving form and personality to the product of his skill and taste. Even today, when factories replace handicrafts and craftsmen degenerate into ‘hands,’ the stalls and shops of every Hindu town show squatting artisans beating metal, moulding jewellery, drawing designs, weaving delicate shawls and embroideries or carving ivory or wood. Probably no other nation known to us has ever had so exuberant a variety of arts” (Durant, 1954). In fact, the Indian folk arts represent the highest form of creativity. Each is a fresh creation, there is no repetitiveness, no standardisation. Folk art in India combines incredible patience, untiring labour and a wonderful sense of resourcefulness of the folk artists.

Folk art describes a wide range of objects that reflect the craft traditions and the traditional values of various social groups. The folk artists of India represent art and craft forms at the grassroots level. Folk art is generally produced by people who have little or no academic
training. It is not at all influenced by movements in academic or fine art circles. It is a form of art—essentially an inherited skill, handed down in pupillary succession. The creations of the folk artist emerge out as a reflection of the environmental inputs around him. Thus, folk art is essentially related to rural areas. The folk art forms, be it on a global or local scale, consist of thematic and technical items which are simple, expressive, indicative and contain some kind of a message which is termed as reflection.

The artisans of India have always maintained an identity of their own. They have represented certain down-to-earth forms of activity such as handloom weaving, pata painting, dokra-art and other metal craft, wood-carving, basket-weaving, leather work, block-printing, jewellery-designing and so on and so forth. These artisans come from remote villages, where it is difficult for them to provide themselves with even the bare necessities of life. Still then, they have worked for years on the art-forms so dear to them and have been appreciated the world over. “The Indian craftsman conceives of his art not as the accumulated skill of ages, but as originating in the divine skill of Visvakarma and revealed by Him. Beauty, rhythm, proportion, idea have an absolute existence on an ideal plane, where all who seek may find. The reality of things exists in the mind, not in the detail of their appearance to the eye. Their inward inspiration upon which the Indian artist is taught to rely, appearing like the still, small voice of a God, that God was conceived of as Visvakarma. He may be thought of as that part of divinity which is considered by a special relation to artistic expression; or, in another way, as the sum-total of consciousness, the group soul of the Indian craftsmen of all times and places” (Coomaraswamy, 1989).

The Kamasutra (Choudhury, 2004) mentions painting as one of the several arts cultivated by a nāgaraka—a gentleman of taste. In the olden days, a favourite pastime of a refined gentleman was fine arts. Vinodasthana and painting, since they were easier than sculpture and modelling, were probably more readily executed. The ‘Chitrakara’ was a professional artist of taste and eminence. The inferior craftsmen were known as ‘dindins’.

However, before the 20th century, only Mughal painting was appreciated by art connoisseurs in India. It was only in 1916 that Anand K. Coomaraswamy could establish Rajasthani and Pahari paintings on a respectable footing. His writings added a fresh nuance to the aesthetic evaluation of all forms of Indian art and the essence of the significance of Indian art was firmly established in the West. From that time onwards,
art lovers continued their search for the pictorial expressions of the village painters.

As a consequence, while initially the search for folk painting was restricted to Bengal alone, later on, more centres of ‘folk’ and ‘popular painting’ were located.

In the Jatakas (Sengupta, 1973) - one of the most ancient forms of Indo-Aryan literature, mention has been made of the artisans being organised into guilds. There were eighteen such guilds in the past. They were constituted of the weavers, the woodworkers, the smith, the leather-dressers, the painters, the sculptors and the rest engaged in various other crafts. This makes it apparent that since time immemorial, art and craft were produced by professional craftsmen and an artisan community, following the traditions handed down in pupillary succession. In the olden days, artistry was a culture, inherited by different groups of artisans from their ancestors. In ancient and medieval India, the artists received royal patronage and adorned the courts of the kings and the badshahs. Hence, they could take pleasure in their creativity and did not have to bother about monetary gains. As a consequence, they did not have to look upon their creative work as an economic pursuit. Their physical existence was never at stake. However, in course of time, royal patronage waned. Today, with commercialisation of the art-forms on the one hand and increasing cost of living on the other, the artisan not only excels in his art as a pastime, but also sells his product to the consumers, who come to appreciate their artistry from far and wide.

1.2 HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF THE PATUAS

Pata is essentially a form of folk art, as it is produced by a group of artisans-village people who have no academic training. These people inherit their skill from their ancestors and remain within their own caste, which is called the Chitrakara caste.

Kautilya, in his Arthashastra, has mentioned all the artisans as Sudras. In the Rigveda, Sudras have not been mentioned. This caste appears to have originated in the Post-Vedic Period and their tasks were defined as providing service to the other three castes, namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas. Thus, the Chitrakaras occupied a low position in the caste based society and were looked down upon by the other castes. The Chitrakaras are artisan castes in the socio-cultural hierarchy of the Bengal region. In the past, the participation of other caste fellows in the art of pata drawing was strictly prohibited in order to maintain the
trade secrecy of the art. Pata painting was restricted to the Chitrakara caste only.

Pata making is an important section of creative folk items in parts of Bengal and the adjoining regions. As it is mentioned earlier, the very word ‘folk’ is presently inseparably related to the rural areas, where these artistic expressions are still away from the moulding mechanism of the present day urban socio-culture. The pata artisans essentially live in villages, the themes of patas are still mostly rural in nature, the painting instruments are basic in character and the product contains a high degree of thematic transparency and simplicity.

According to some scholars, the word pata owes its origin to Dravid language (Kanada and Malayalam) and has been derived from the word, ‘padam’. According to others, the Sanskrit word, ‘patta’ has been transformed into the Bengali word, ‘pata’ (Choudhury, 2004). ‘Patta’ means a piece of cloth. Hence, patachitras are meant to be paintings on cloth.

The word, ‘pata’ has been mentioned in Uttar Ramcharita, Harshacharita, Abhigyana Sakuntalam, Harivansha, Malavikagnimitra and such other classical literary works as well as in Kautilya’s Arthashastra. Apart from Sanskrit literature, the word, ‘pata’ has been found to exist in Jain and Buddhist literature. Mention has been made of Gazir patas of East Bengal (now Bangladesh) in the remote past.

Perhaps the word, ‘pata’ was derived from ‘patkar,’ meaning painter. Hence, in all probability, the term, ‘patua’ has come to mean a painter by caste. An eminent scholar has mentioned that the term ‘pota’ meaning painter has originated from ‘patua’. The epithentic stage in the origin of the term was ‘pouta’ or ‘pootua’ (Choudhury, 2004). The patuas are also known by various names such as Patidars, Patikari, Chitrakara, Gazi, Gayen, Maal and so on. Their history is known from Vedic and oral literature and from materials that were excavated and explored. Patachitras have been found to exist in West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar (Jharkhand), Andhra Pradesh and various other parts of India. Archeological findings prove that pata was a form of art which existed in Bengal before the arrival of the Aryans in India and hence, is of great antiquity and tradition. To our knowledge, the earliest patas to have existed belonged to the Pala era of Bengal. However, it is quite clear that folk art had existed in Bengal from earlier periods, but it found it difficult to assert itself against the hieratic art of the earlier periods and the upper classes. Perhaps that is why Hauser (2002) has expressed the
idea that the concept of folklore and folklore studies emerged in the colonial context of British India.

When politically Bengal became very loosely connected with a king and a court, i.e., in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, a vernacular literature came into existence, expressing the emotions of the common people. This vernacular literature left a lasting impression on the rich ballad literature that developed in Bengal, including the Mangalkavyas, the epics and the verses of the seasons. Parallel to this vernacular literature, a revival of the ‘people’s art’ took place. Characteristics of the ‘people’s art’ can be traced as late as the 19th century, in the scroll paintings and book covers recovered from various parts of Bengal (Majumdar, 1943, Reprinted – 2003). This ‘people’s art’ remained almost untouched by the hieratic art of the court and the cult and retained its genuineness.

The search for this people’s art in Bengal began in the 19th century by the British educated elite, as a response to European Orientalists’ visions of India (Korom, 1989). This was backed strongly by the rising nationalist movement. Prior to the 1860s, most of the urban intellectual elite in Bengal used to imitate British fashions and mode of lifestyle and communicate in English, so much so that they ultimately forgot their cultural roots. However, after the Sepoy Mutiny, an identity crisis began to take root among the Bengali elite. “Redefinitions of religion, culture, educational and economic reforms reached their climax in the so-called ‘Bengal Renaissance.’” Inspired by the British scholars who had published their first studies on Indian folk culture, the educated Bengalis visualised an unknown but hauntingly familiar ‘other’, the Bengali peasant.” (Korom, 1989). Many scholars felt it necessary to save traditional folklore. The propagation of folk culture emerged as an attempt to unite the Bengalis and to raise a feeling of nationalism among them. This ultimately led to the emergence of folklore in Bengal. Folk art included folk songs sung by ballad singers, scroll paintings and songs sung to them somewhat like ballads, square patas akin to scroll paintings, folk art objects and so on.

According to some, the origin of patachitras can be related to the advent of Buddhism in India. For instance, Kshitimohan Sen has said that the Buddhist monks utilised the pata as a medium of propaganda (Dutt, 1990). In both Bengal and Odisha, the patachitras were highly influenced by Buddhism and patachitras drawn by the Buddhists.

In the Brahmavaivarta Purana, written in the middle of the 13th century A.D., the origin of the patuas has been clearly defined and detailed discussion has been made regarding the origin of the
Chitrakaras, their work and their social identity. It has been said that the Chitrakaras is a member of the Nabashakha (nine offshoots) group of people. In the Brahmavaivarta Purana, it has been stressed that the Chitrakaras (painters), Malakaras (those engaged in shola craft), Karmakaras (blacksmiths), Sutradhara (carpenters), Kumbhakaras (potters), Sankhakaras (those who work on shells, including conch-shells), Swarnakaras (goldsmiths), Tantubayas (weavers) and Kangsakaras (those working on metals) are all children of Viswakarma and Ghritachi (an Apsara woman, the spouse of Viswakarma). Thus, the Chitrakaras have their origin in the union of Viswakarma and Ghritachi.

All the children of Viswakarma were cursed by Brahma that they would eternally be involved in manual labour. However, by purifying themselves, all the eight children, except the Chitrakaras, could attain refinement. But the Chitrakaras, the youngest of the lot, remained impure. The Brahmavaivarta Purana explains that as the pictures and images made by the Chitrakaras were erroneous, i.e., instead of following the Pauranic ideals of Devkali, they had followed folk ideals, the Brahmins became angry and cursed them. That is why the Hindus did not accept them in their society and they resorted to Islam. Some scholars are of the opinion that the patuas suffer from a crisis regarding their religious identity. This is because while practising Islam as their religion, they drew the portraits of Hindu gods and goddesses and in the process, were made outcastes by the Muslim community as well.

To save themselves from religious persecution, the patuas have converted themselves from one religion to another, time and again. They have changed faith and taken to the most influential religion prevalent over various periods of time. As a result, they have always had a peculiar lifestyle. They follow Hindu rituals, the married women of the patua community use vermillion and even adopt Hindu names such as Chitrakara and Pal. However, they marry within their own Muslim community and the marriage ceremony is conducted according to Muslim rites by a Kazi. However, even within the Muslim community, they do not occupy a high position.

Sri Lakshmi K. Pal, (a Kumbhakar by caste), has said (Bhattacharya, Devashish, 1972) that there were certain things in the dye, i.e., the colour used by the patuas, which were not touchable by the Hindus. Due to this reason, they were made outcastes by the Hindus.

The patuas were not Chitrakaras in the initial stage, but later they merged with the Chitrakaras (Mc’Coutchion and Bhowmik, 1999). This was prior to the writing of the Brahmavaivarta Purana. Kaushik
Bhattacharya (2008), expresses the opinion that the patuas were of the Sutradhara caste and were also stone carvers. Hence, their transformation from the Karigara to the Chitrakara. It is said that they belonged to the Austro-Asiatic or Asura group. Their chief occupation was to show scrolls to the accompaniment of narrative songs. In fact, in the caste based society of India, all the nine sons of Viswakarma have been classed as Sudras (Dey, 2008). This concept is supported in the Mahabharata which says that all the descendants of Viswakarma were enemies of the Vedic God, Indra. This idea has further been strengthened by the fact that artisans or their way of life has nowhere been mentioned in the Vedic society. In the latter, there was no place for the artisans, who had existed much before the new society was born. In the absence of creative artisans, the Vedic society had to accept Viswakarma as the Lord of Creative Art.

From all sources of Hindu mythology, as well as from history, it appears to be a proven fact that the Dravidian society was far more advanced in artistry and handicrafts than the Aryan (Vedic) society. Thus, the idea that all sculptors, painters, craftsmen, architects and other artisans originally belonged to the demon or Asura family, appears to be true.

When the positive impact of the Brahmanical society began to be felt in Bengal first, the patuas got themselves named ‘Chitrakaras’ in an epiphytical way, as their occupation was almost the same and they could identify their taxonomic position to be almost identical to that of the Chitrakaras. But the Hindu society did not accept this move and since there was no distinction between the Chitrakaras and the patuas, the entire Chitrakara community was declared corrupt. Exhibiting scrolls was given the fourth place only, yet it continued to be the single most important profession of the patuas.

Most probably, the Chitrakaras were originally Hindus by religion. When they were degraded by the Hindu community, they converted themselves into another religion. Some say that they took up Buddhism when this religion was dominant in India and identified themselves as Buddhists, but still could not flourish. Hence, in the Islamic Period, they became Muslims and have remained so ever since. Owing to this type of conversion time and again, from one religion to another, they now belong to a society that is neither Muslim nor Hindu nor tribal.

There are various theories that explain the original home of the patuas. According to some scholars, the patuas of Bengal migrated from the Mal Paharia region. Others hold the view that the patuas, who have an Austric stock, became Aryanised Hindus after Aryanisation. Again,
as said earlier, when Buddhism flourished, they became Buddhists and this practice spread out to Bali, Java and Malaya as well as to Tibet. Again, during the Islamic Period, they embraced Islam. It was observed that the patuas who belonged to the Santhal, Bhumij and Kheria classes enjoyed a higher and more respectable position than the non-tribal patuas. That is why they claim to be of tribal origin, especially in Bengal.

It is not only in Bengal, but also in other states such as Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Odisha, that a long tradition of the narration of local legends simultaneously illustrated by paintings, existed. Several holy places of the Hindus - Kailash, Vrindavan, Ayodhya commonly appear in pata-art. A popular theme of the patachitra was the Gazir pata, depicting the heroic deeds and conquests of Ismail Gazi - a Muslim general who served the Sultan in the 15th century.

As from one region to another, the paintings of the patuas also varied from time to time. During the rule of the Senas in Bengal, when the Mangalkavyas came into existence and were highlighted, the patuas composed songs and drew pictures based on the stories of the Mangalkavyas side by side with the scroll type pata and the charanchitra. From this time onwards, the Manasa pata became one of their most popular subjects. These patas are based on the Manasamangal. It is a unique folk art in Bengal. Later, during the Islamic Period, the patuas became more eager to draw patas based on the Pir and the Gazi. The patuas today form a community of their own - a community based neither on caste nor on religion nor on social hierarchy, but tied together by a common profession.

1.3 PATA AS A FORM OF ART

Pata-art is of two kinds - art on a broad sheet of folded cloth and miniscule art on a short piece of fabric. In fact, pata-art can be interpreted as a visual art as well as a performing art. Patachitra is a folk art form drawn on a piece of silk, cotton or any other fabric, portraying traditional motifs and imageries of religion and society. The earliest patuas usually took the theme of their paintings from the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, various legends, myths and stories and later expanded the range by including themes of popular and secular stories of the land. At the same time, the patuas acted as singing bards, narrating the story depicted in their pictures through songs sung in a monotonous tone. The patuas of rural Bengal usually excel in scroll painting. The scroll is divided into frames and each episode of the story
corresponds to a single frame. Some *patua* songs, generally called *patuasangeet*, are composed by the *patuas* themselves while some are learnt from their forefathers. *Pata-art* has always been dynamic, constantly changing and adapting itself to the requirements of the customers.

A distinct classification of *patas* can be attempted as below:

![Diagram of Pata Classification]

**Source:** Barapanda, 1999.

An allied form of painting is found on playing-cards designed by the *Chitrakaras*. These playing-cards are called ‘*ganjifa*’ all over India, except in Odisha, where they are named ‘*ganjappa*’ cards. Although their history is shrouded in a haze, it has been claimed that the game of *ganjifa* cards began between the 8th and the 12th centuries A.D. in Mallabhum (Bankura), West Bengal. Till today, *ganjifa* cards have been famous handiworks of the artisans of Bishnupur, where they are called ‘Dashavatar Tash’. Mostly, the incarnations of *Lord Vishnu*, embodied in the shape of human beings, animals or human-animal combined form are represented in these traditional playing cards. Inevitably, local myths abound: in Sonepur, it is said that *ganjappa* is named after its inventor, Ganjapada. Some say that
The Patuas of West Bengal and Odisha: An Evaluative Analysis

The game is called *ganjappa* because it was invented in the Ganjam District of Odisha. This art rapidly declined in the 19th century, as the markets were flooded by cheaper printed cards from Europe and later from Japan. Today, Odisha alone retains this art. There are artisans making cards in other areas, like Bankura (Bishnupur) in West Bengal and Sawantwadi in Maharashtra, but these are mainly for tourists, exporters and collectors, rather than for play by the local population.

Allied to the *patas*, is the painted *sara* – an art-form once very popular in Kalighat, Kolkata. *Sara* is an earthen plate representing a lid. On the *sara* are drawn portraits of Hindu gods and goddesses like *Durga, Lakshmi, Manasa, Shiva* and so on. Often, instead of the image itself, the *sara* is worshipped in the local homes. However, the attitude of the *Kalighat patuas* has now changed and they claim that the demand for *saras* has almost ceased today. Therefore, they do not practise this form of art at all. But the *saras* are still in demand for *Lakshmi Puja* and *Goddess Lakshmi* is worshipped in this form in many homes in Kolkata. The *sara* has always been looked upon as an auspicious symbol and an item of folk art by the people of West Bengal. The *sara* is still popular as an item related with religious ceremonies. In fact, the photograph in this book showing a huge *sara* with an entire idol of *Goddess Durga* and her children, being worshipped by the priest shows that the *puja organisers* here have found a direct connection between the traditional *sara* and the worship of *Goddess Durga*.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The study has been conducted with manifold objectives. It focuses on the future of a particular artisan class of India, namely, the *patuas* or *pata painters*. The *patuas* are regarded as a subaltern community and this is one reason why a detailed socio-economic evaluation of these artisans has become necessary. These painters suffer from dire economic distress and deep identity crisis with regard to their religion. They are neither accepted by the Hindus nor by the Muslims due to various idiosyncrasies of the peculiar society that have, for generations, existed in India. However, they are extremely talented, so that their artistic pursuit has to be preserved. There is a necessity to relieve them of their economic distress, for, if their economic condition becomes a constraint to their artistic development, their traditional art-form will be destroyed and they will be forced to abandon *pata painting*. It is not possible to improve the economic situation of any community until and unless a proper scrutiny of their present socio-economic condition is done by researchers. Therefore, the primary objective of this dissertation
is to evaluate the socio-economic condition of the patua community in selected areas from a social geographical perspective, in order to preserve their cultural identity and the quality of their products in the modern set-up. Practical and viable suggestions have been provided at the end of the study so that this artisan class and their products can be accepted by the society both economically and socially through necessary corrective measures that may be drawn up as part of a package of policy for revival and acceptance of patas and the patuas.

India being a country of diversity, with a large number of ethnic groups spread over all corners of the country, it is quite but natural that art and craft items are numerous, which are part of the entire lifestyle of such ethnic groups. Artifacts of distinct individuality are part and parcel of each of these ethnic groups and communities. However, the qualitative excellence, thematic specialities, method of preparation etc. of some of these creative products associated with some social groups have become important to the modern society. Departing from mere utility and ritualistic characters associated with these products, they are accepted, rather rediscovered as products of beauty, expertise, intricacy and of great artistic and aesthetic value to the clients, essentially urbanised, of modern India. Even with the prospects of the new vistas of economic value created through the neo-clientele, these age-old traditional products are expected to identify a broad market base with better economic viability. Needless to say, as a part of socio-cultural evolution that takes place in any human society, particularly when global exposure is cutting across physical geographical, social, cultural and economic barriers, the traditional usages and necessities of the artisans and their products cannot remain unchanged. Therefore, this is the crossroad when a specific set of policies and their correct implementation can save the artisans and their products in such a way that unwanted changeovers like occupational shifts, economic oppression, social segregation and cultural irrelevance do not creep in to destroy the excellence of traditional creativity for the sake of economic survival. Patuas and patachitras are important examples of aesthetic and traditional creativity.

It has been seen from a thorough survey - both primary and secondary, that the patuas of the Bengal Region have been gradually diverting their pata painting activity to other economic pursuits. In some cases, they have altogether ceased to paint ‘patas’ in the literary sense of the term and have taken up activities more profitable, but which still require the artistic skill inherent in them. Such activities may encompass idol making, painting wooden toys and figures, designing jewellery and creative art-work on sarees and garments. There are other cases in
which, after receiving education, they have totally abandoned artistry and have taken up jobs in offices and schools. In other, more distressing cases, it has been found that these creative artisans have given up their innovative ideas entirely and are working in the fields as landless labourers or are setting up grocery shops in the village to earn a decent income. In the two latter cases, the changeover is compulsive and definitely undesirable and steps must be taken to stop such complete lateral shifts in the age-old occupation of the patuas.

This kind of situation suggests that in the present day globalisation, pata painting may not be profitable at all for the patuas of the Bengal Region. Therefore, it may be expected that the patuas here are a dying group of folk artists. This apprehension has been supported by Ghose (1979), who has emphasised that the patuas have miserably failed to recover as folk painters. Decade after decade, this form of folk art may have degenerated and may now have become quite unacceptable by the present day society. It is necessary to inquire why and how this degeneration came about. It can be seen that a drastic change has come about in the economic condition of the patuas and therefore, in their means of livelihood. A thorough study of the economic and social position of these artisans through decades, would help this researcher to understand and identify the reasons behind this change. Hence, the direct aim of this research work is to analyse the cause-and-effect relationship in the light of the factors that are making the patuas lose interest in their tradition-bound pata painting activity and take up other professions.

In order to preserve and promote the once glorified pata-art of the Bengal Region, it is important to justify its continuance. Hence, it is imminent to reorganise and promote the social and economic geographical parameters that would help in the survival of the patua community of this region. For this, the researcher felt it necessary to prepare a dissertation that would inquire into the chances of their economic survival, the present day relevance of their art-form and the changes in their lifestyle, be it compulsive or natural.

Another objective of this research work is to study three particular areas of the Bengal Region, well inhabited by the patuas and to draw a comparison between the income-level and consequently, the economic conditions of the artisans living in these three specific regions namely, Kalighat Patuapara in Kolkata, East and West Medinipur districts of West Bengal and the village of Raghurajpur in the Puri District of Odisha. It is imminent to conclude whether pata painting is a dying profession in all these three regions.
Finally, the study has been used to analyse how much the consumer himself is responsible for the degeneration of *pata painting* in the Bengal Region and how the changes in the attitude and tastes of the consumer have brought about consequent changes in the life of the *patuas* of Kalighat and Medinipur in West Bengal and in Raghurajpur – the ‘Heritage Village’ in Odisha.

### 1.5 HYPOTHESES

The *patuas* of Raghurajpur in Odisha and those of Kalighat Patuapara and East and West Medinipur in West Bengal are *pata painters* by profession. Since *pata* is a folk painting, the work of these *patuas* is highly ethnic. Therefore, it may be hypothesised that:

- Where there is a demand for ethnic Indian articles, their products are in demand.
- One of the patrons of ethnic Indian products constitute the foreign tourists. Hence, these *patuas* may find a wide clientele among the foreign tourists visiting India from time to time.
- Since foreigners come to India mostly in winter, it may again be hypothesised that the winter months, i.e., October to February, is the peak time for the sale of *patas*. For domestic tourists also, winter is the time for paying visits to new areas of exploration. They can also be part of the clientele and provide information to others about the *patuas*. Therefore, these *pata painters* are expected to earn maximum during these months. From this, it may be assumed that the monthly income of the *pata painters* is erratic and this makes it difficult for them to sustain themselves and their families.
- It is naturally assumed that the maximum number of *patas* are bought by art connoisseurs. The ordinary customer primarily buys articles which have utility-value. This brings one to the conclusion that the middle class, which is constituted of ordinary customers, are not purchasers of *patas*. Both within the country and outside it, the *patuas* can find a clientele only among the upper class and the rich, who are the so-called ‘art connoisseurs.’ Thus, the market of the *patuas* is indeed restricted in extent and the sale of their products is absolutely conditional. Since the utility-value of *patachitras* is almost nil, the *patuas* cannot obtain a permanent clientele. Given the nature of the product (*patas*), it is highly possible that the
demand would show a declining trend, affecting the price of the products and the profits adversely. Therefore, it is improbable that the patua community today is able to sustain themselves by painting patas only.

- Given the above, it is expected that the patuas have probably taken up other occupations to supplement their income. At the extremity the patuas might have abandoned pata painting altogether and have switched over to other activities that may not have anything to do with artistry at all. The patuas as a class, therefore, are probably on the way to gradual extinction. There always exists an apprehension of their activity getting gradually eroded owing to increasing globalisation and consumerism in the present age and the resultant waning of the demand for their products. Therefore, it is expected that from this research work it will become evident how far the patuas have already lost their identity as a segregated class of artisans. Deterioration and loss of their occupation, economic status and creativity are also expected.

1.6 DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

In the case of this study, the three, different fields of research have been selected on the basis of certain criteria, such as the villages of patuas well known all over the world, the historical importance of pata painting in the area and villages traditionally recognised as patua villages.

The survey was undertaken in two forms:

(a) Direct survey which involved primary data collection in the field and

(b) Indirect survey through secondary sources of information.

1.6.i Secondary Information

In the initial stage, secondary information was gathered on the respective areas of research. This information included not only direct information on the patua community, but also peripheral work on the regions concerned. For construction of the entire dissertation, various books and periodicals, including news dailies were consulted. Pilot survey reports from government and quasi-government sources as well as NGOs, were studied. Reliable data for the past 50 years or so were collected from District Census Handbooks, District Statistical Handbooks, Statistical
Bulletins and District Gazetteers. These included qualitative as well as figurative data from the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, Government of West Bengal; Department of Tourism, Government of Odisha; the Collectorate Office, Puri; the District Statistical Office, Puri; the Directorate of Census Operations, Bhubaneswar; the Directorate of Census Operations, Kolkata and other offices. Along with these, relevant information was gathered from research monographs as well as dissertations and past works done on the area surveyed, the evolution of *pata-art*, the artisans and their socio-economy. The data thus collected were compiled and quantitative analysis of the data was resorted to, to arrive at certain conclusions.

1.6.ii **Primary Data**

Primary survey involved extensive field-work in the areas of survey. In the first stage, different sets of questionnaire-schedules were prepared to gather relevant information regarding the areas of survey. Case-studies were conducted in the respective areas under survey. Both random sampling and purposive sampling were resorted to. For this purpose, the areas were visited in person by the researcher several times as and when required.

Primary data were obtained in the following way:

1.6.iii **Questionnaire-schedules**

Two sets of questionnaire-schedules were prepared for each area. One set of questions was intended to cover all general information about the area and the other set was to be used for the purpose of household survey.

The questions were opinion-based as well as figurative information-based. Open-ended questions and questions with multiple-choice answer options were put to the persons concerned. Also structured questions and ranking-item questions were used for
household survey. Attempts were made to hold interviews with the Head of the artisan family. In exceptional cases, the other family members were interviewed.

For purposive sampling, interactions with the Gram Panchayat, the Block Development Officer (B.D.O.), the Industrial Development Officer (I.D.O.), the Head of the village community and such other persons took place.

Questions were asked regarding the total number of artisans in the village, their caste segregation and the number of members in each artisan family. The artisans were classed into age-groups and their literacy level was enquired into. There were questions on the raw materials used and the means of procurement of these raw materials as well as the extent of dependence on others for raw materials. Their income and expenditure were also enquired into, so that it could be possible to judge their present economic condition. There were other questions on the exchange and flow of designs, the use of colours and the evolution of their occupation as well as their skills in pata making. Questions on the patrons and customers of this artisan class were highlighted and enquiries were made regarding the governmental and non-governmental institutions supporting them. There were also questions on the ways they sustain themselves, the type of clientele they cater to and the social and economic contacts with the world inside and outside the village. Enquiries were made as to the operation of middlemen and of co-operative societies, the range of their wares and the extent to which they can operate in the open market. Finally, the several stages of production of the articles themselves were found out including the final and finishing stage.

1.6.iv Statistical, Cartographic and Mapping Techniques

After data collection was complete, appropriate statistical and cartographic techniques were applied to the data to create tables and figures. Maps were also drawn as illustrations, since map is an indispensable element in denoting the extent of the area of survey and its physical characteristics.

Mathematical calculations were adopted to create bar diagrams (simple and compound), line graphs and pie charts.

Statistical analysis of the data was done as and when necessary. Rank correlation co-efficients were computed and T-tests were conducted to state the significance of hypothesis. Regression analysis was also performed wherever necessary.
Location maps of the study areas have been prepared directly with the help of the DPMS (District Planning Map Series) published by the NATMO (National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation) and the Administrative Atlas, published by the Directorate of Census Operations, Bhubaneswar and Kolkata in recent years. The maps have been reduced to the required size. Some maps have been prepared by the researcher herself, following the text. The map of Ward No. 73 for Kalighat Patuapara has been procured from K.M.C. (Kolkata Municipal Corporation). The C.D Block maps have been obtained from the respective Block Development Offices and the Census Offices and the maps have been drawn to scale. The particular villages studied have been marked on them by the researcher.

1.7 ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS

The entire dissertation has been divided into nine primary chapters along with a number of corollary chapters. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction about folk art and the artisan class in India. It also explains the origin of pata painting and the history and background of the patua community. An outline of the methodology adopted for constructing the dissertation, the objectives, the hypotheses and a rational survey of literature on the topic of research along with the gaps therein are also given in Chapter 1.

In Chapter 2, the study areas, i.e., Raghurajpur Village, Kalighat Patuapara and West and East Medinipur have been introduced to the reader and their origins have been traced. The story of the development of Raghurajpur into a ‘Heritage Village’ has been narrated in detail. The geographical location of Kalighat Patuapara and Medinipur (East and West) have been discussed in this chapter in detail.

Chapter 3 deals with the historical development of pata painting in the individual areas of study. It discusses the influence of the Jagannath cult on the Chitrakaras of Raghurajpur and how pata painting came about as a direct outcome of the techniques employed in painting the Trinity. The decline and revival of pata painting among the Chitrakaras are also traced here. With regard to Kalighat Patuapara, the entire history of pata painting in the Colonial Period is discussed stage by stage in this chapter. The growth and development of this folk art form and its decline in the villages of East and West Medinipur, the identity crisis and miserable plight suffered by the rural patuas leading to
conversions and the impact of urban culture on their paintings have also been highlighted in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 describes the themes and processes of pata painting in the three study areas in detail. The highly spiritual themes used in the Raghurajpur paintings have been dealt with. The evolution of themes in Kalighat Patuapara through different periods has been elaborated in this chapter. The diverse themes used in pata painting by the patuas of East and West Medinipur and the reasons for applying them in this art have also been highlighted here.

The various problems faced by the patua community in the study areas at present have been dealt with in Chapter 5 of the dissertation. The compulsive changes in production brought about as a direct or indirect effect of these problems have been pointed out in this chapter.

In Chapter 6, instances of lateral shifts from pata painting to other occupations have been cited among the patuas of the Bengal Region.

Chapter 7 deals with revival efforts undertaken by the Government as well as different non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to revitalise the tradition of pata painting within the study areas.

In Chapter 8, proposals and suggestions have been provided by the researcher to overcome the problems encountered by the pata painters in the study areas at present. Suggestions are also directed towards empowering the patua community in such a way that they become self-reliant and do not feel the urge to shift to other, more lucrative occupations. This would help this community of artisans with a feeling of financial security so that they would be able to concentrate on artistry; this would also enable the society to preserve the indigenous tradition of pata painting in Raghurajpur, Kalighat Patuapara and the villages of East and West Medinipur.

Chapter 9 is the concluding chapter of this book. A synthesis of the entire study has been presented in this chapter.

**1.8 OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Within the subject of Geography, socio-economic studies, especially, the socio-economic evaluation of subaltern communities has progressively been in vogue. In context of the above statement, it may be emphasised that the life and works of the particular folk painter class – 'patuas' have evoked increasing interest among social scientists.
1.8.i Folk Art and Folk Artists

Folk art in general and folk artists in particular have been a subject of concern essentially from the point of innovation of art-forms. Comments on folk art have been made by Roy in his book, ‘The Folk Art of India’ (1967), which introduces one to the term ‘folk art’ and discusses its significance. He also, in his book, differentiates the terms ‘tribal art’ and ‘folk art.’ Similar studies have been conducted by Sanat Kumar Mitra in the folklore research journals and by Mallick (1985). Folk art and artists of India have been discussed by Nandagopal (1998) and by various authors in the book, ‘Five Contemporary Folk and Tribal Artists of India,’ edited by Jain (1998). Studies in the evolution of folk art and crafts in India have also been conducted by Saraswati (1973), Mitra (1955), Bhattacharya (1966), Elwin (1961), Anand (2005), Curt (1969), Sivaramamurti (1936), Havell (1926), Kramrisch, (1968), Coomaraswamy (1989), Brown (1960), Dutt (1933), Goetz (1969) and other Indian and foreign scholars.

In particular, folk art of Bengal has been dealt with by Mookherjee (1946), who has discussed all rural paintings in Bengal except the Kalighat School. He deals with Kalighat Paintings in an article, ‘Kalighat Folk Painters,’ published in ‘The Horizon’ in 1941. Folk art and craft in Bengal have also been covered in books and articles written by Das (1976), Basu (1962), Dutt (1932 and 1990), Mitra (1975), Sen (1994), Majumdar (2004), Chakraborty and Bari (1991) and others.

The topic of folk art of Bengal has been dealt with in some books studying the historicity of the region from various angles of enquiry such as writings by Sen (1933), Majumdar (1943), Saraswati (1978) and Roy (1994).

On the other hand, studies in Odishan folk art have been conducted by Joshi (1980) and Rath (1983). Investigations and enquiries into the folk art of Odisha have also been made by Das (1985), Pathy (1990 and 2001), Bose (1939), Sharma (1993), Rao (1980), Senapati (2004) and Panda (1987).

1.8.ii Pata-art in Kalighat Patuapara, East and West Medinipur and Odisha

A thorough review of pata-art in Odisha in particular has been taken up by Mohanty in his book, ‘Pata Paintings of Orissa’ (1984). In this book, details of the pata painting process have been dealt with and the story of the revival of Odishan pata paintings has been discussed. The latter has also been told by Zealay (1954) and by Das (2005). Other
scholars and artists who have thrown some light on patachitra painting in Raghurajpur and the adjoining areas of Odisha are Mallick (2006), Majumdar (1957), Subrahmiam (1972), Barapanda (1999), Rautra (1957), Patnaik (2007) and Ghoshal (1998). Towering work regarding the Chitrakaras of Raghurajpur has been done by Mohapatra (2008) and Mohanty (2007).

In preparing this dissertation, thematic issues relating to Kalighat Patuapara and the patua villages of Medinipur (East and West) have been thoroughly studied. For this purpose, a large number of books, periodicals and monographs have been consulted. A thorough scanning of the books and periodicals on Kalighat patas reveals that the most intriguing texts are ‘Kalighat Painting’ (1951) and ‘Kalighat Drawings’ (1962), prepared way back by W.G. Archer. Another pioneering work by Archer is ‘Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta’ (1953) in which he says that the Kalighat pictures showed a definite departure from the prevailing conceptions. Ajit Ghose, in his article, ‘Old Bengal Paintings,’ (1926) stresses on the freshness and spontaneity of conception and execution in the Kalighat paintings and compares them to Chinese calligraphy. T.N. Mukherjee’s account (1886) relating to Kalighat paintings is significant, as it is the only early account of the Kalighat School found so far. Dutt (1933) notes in his book that a certain amount of interest had already been aroused by the fine line drawings of the Kalighat School. A systematic analysis of the Kalighat patas has also been done by Barapanda (1999) and Sarkar (1994). The book, ‘Kalighat Painting; Images from a changing world’ by Dr. Jyotindra Jain (1999) is meticulously researched and provokingly agile. Other important works on Kalighat patas worth mentioning are those by Dey (1932), Kalidas (1998), Das (1998), Ghosh (1964), Basu Roy (1993) and Bhattacharya (1973).

Issues relating to the theme of this dissertation have also been dealt with by Mukherjee (1984), Archer (1972 and 1977), Chakraborty (1972-73), Basu (1967), Chatterjee (1990), Bose (1957), Tagore (1948), Bhattacharya (1971, 1972 and 1980), Mukhopadhyay (1969), Mohapatra (1979), Stooke (1946) et al.

The portion of the thesis dealing with Kalighat paintings has been supplemented by subsidiary literary work done by Sarkar (1983), Sarkar and Datta (1998), Dev (1960), Gupta (2006), Sinha (1972) and Datta (1981).

All the books and articles previously mentioned in this literature survey in the context of folk art of Bengal, have mentioned the Medinipur district of West Bengal as an area famous for pata painting. Pioneering work in this respect has been done by Sankar Sengupta in his book, ‘The Patas and the Patuas of Bengal’ (1973). Other articles and
books on this form of folk art of Medinipur have been written by Santra (1970) and Das (2004). David Mc’Coutchion and Suhrid K. Bhowmik have conducted studies in the villages of Medinipur and have written a comprehensive book on the patuas of Bengal (1999). Malini Bhattacharya has especially studied the works of the women patuas of Medinipur and how they are being empowered by pata drawing (2004). The role of the patuas of Medinipur in entertaining the village inhabitants has been elaborated by Maity in two articles (1972 and 1973). Other supportive articles have been written by Bhattacharya (1990), Bandopadhyay (1954), Khan (2004) and also by Das, (1977 and 2004), Mallick (1985), Sarkar (1988), Kamila (1994), Mitra (1975), Bandopadhyay (1919), Sharma (1984) and Dutta (1993). Besides, the decline of pata painting in Medinipur has been studied closely by Ghose (1979), Das (1972), Chakraborty (1964) and Bose (1957).

1.8.iii General Views on Pata-art

Books and periodicals on pata-art in general have also been thoroughly scanned while preparing this dissertation. Among the past works done on this topic, mention may be made of the article by Devashish Bhattacharya (1972), in which Jamini Roy, Sunil Pal and Sri Lakshmi K. Pal have expressed their opinion about pata-art, its decline and the social position and economic condition of the patuas. This rare form of folk art and its decline have also been dealt with by Jasimuddin (1931), Barapanda (1999), Bhattacharya (1980) and Dutta (1993).


It is indeed interesting to note that quite a wide array of analytical and enquiry-oriented literature has been produced by academicians and scholars, particularly belonging to the disciplines of history, sociology, socio-cultural history and history of folk art and artists. Wide-ranging topics covering folk art, their forms, expressions, evolution and territorial specialities over a global, regional and local scale have been dealt with in a painstaking way, which have revealed different aspects of this folk art form and its creators. But the very question of the present day relevance of this art and the artists, in the context of the fast changing global character of lifestyle, the elements of compulsion exerted by the globalisation factor on the creator and the created, the
issues related to justification, modes of preservation and economic survival, which are essentially related to reorganisation of social and economic geographical parameters, have not been given due importance. Therefore, the present dissertation has attempted to highlight and focus upon the justification of continuance of a very specific form of folk art (patachitra) and the question of socio-cultural econo-survival strategies of the patuas in these specific regions of West Bengal and Odisha from social geographic perspective.

The subject of social and cultural geography possesses a mosaic of wide-ranging issues covering various shades of human behavioural aspects over time and space. India, having diverse socio-cultural identities, is an ideal region for social geographical enquiries. Folk art forms are inseparably associated with folk culture in general, which in turn, originates and gets nurtured by different ethnic groups historically spread over different regions with respective geographical parameters. Since India possesses a very strong and long history of social, cultural and in particular, ethnic history, followed by inter mixture of ideas, expressions and forms of creativity, the folk culture in India has attracted the attention of academicians. However, whatever intensive enquiry has been conducted in this field, a probable sectoral approach by art historians, artists and art connoisseurs has been undertaken. Their valuable enquiry however, rebound round the evolution, changes, improvements, departures etc. of the creations. Therefore, it is indeed the responsibility of the social geographer to look into the issue from the perspective of the creators, i.e., the folk artists. The influence of spatio-temporal changes in the social, economic and cultural variables on the lifestyle of the folk artists, in this case, the folk painters, has been taken up by this researcher to look into the background, present status and future prospects of a group of folk painters known as patuas in three traditionally famous locations in Eastern India. After knowing the principal landmark characteristics of the pata paintings, attention is to be given to the painters.