

Naya-A Village of Scroll Painters: Some Lights on Their Economic Development

***Keya Mandal**

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Pingla Thana Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal
*Corresponding Author: *Keya Mandal*

ABSTRACT: Naya, P.S.- Pingla of the district of Paschim Medinipur is a village of scroll painters commonly known as Patuas or Chitrakaras or scroll painters (artisan class). It is very interesting that those scroll painters are professional artists by caste rather than craftsmen. This art has been practised since thousand years ago. In the process of historical development this rural artisan class inherit both Hindu and Islamic ritualistic cultural phenomenon on their style of living. They are very poor and marginal class. 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 and Paschim Medinipur. But the poverty of the scroll painters remains unchanged. Then after 1999 SGSY (Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna) was started and many Self Help Groups (SHGs) were formed. It improved the economic condition of patuas. Then commercialisation of pata painting started. In the era of globalisation many renowned patuas of Naya, Pingla of the district of Paschim Medinipur like Dukhushyam Chitrakar, Shyamsundar Chitrakar, Rani Chitrakar, Manu Chitrakar, Gurupada Chitrakar, Sambhu Chitrakar and other patuas of Naya have brought out their folk painting and musical tradition of rural Bengal to the whole of India and abroad also. The economic condition of patuas of Naya is better now than the past.

Key words: Patua or Chitrakar, artisan, Naya (Paschim Medinipur), economic development, SHG.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Pata painting is one kind of folk art because it is produced by patuas or chitrakars or scroll painters who do not have any so called academic training. They inherit their skills from their ancestors. Nowadays patua sangeets of Bengal play an important role in the world of oral, traditional folk music and painting. Patuas or Chitrakars are common words in the districts of Purba & Paschim Medinipur of West Bengal. There are many patua settlements in both the districts. The most important patua settlement is Naya, Pingla in the district of Paschim Medinipur. 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 Santhal or tribal community. After Muslim invasion in Bengal the patuas or chitrakars became the followers of Islam. 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 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 Paschim Medinipur. Then Self Help Groups (SHGs) were formed in the famous patua settlement, Naya, under Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojna (SGSY¹) and it improved the economic condition of patuas. Activities of Self Help Groups, State and Central Governments, the growing retail industry and new urban customers have increased the income opportunities of the artisan communities.

¹ 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

II. OBJECTIVE

The objectives of my study are to find out

- i) The economic development of patua community of Naya, P.S.-Pingla in the district of Paschim Medinipur
- ii) Impact of formation of Self Help Groups on them
- iii) Effect of commercialisation

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 Mandal Sujit Kumar, *Dukhshyam Chitrakar*, Gangchil, Kolkata, 2011 etc. In spite of those works more research in the field of economic development of patua community 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. DISCUSSION and FINDINGS

Naya is a village of scroll painters commonly known as *patuas* or *chitrakars* (artisan class). Historical evidences of *chitrakars* or *scroll painters* are found in many ancient texts such as *Kautyliya's Arthashastra*, *Patanjali's Mahabhasya*, *Banabhatta's Harshacharita* and Buddhist text *Aryamanjushreemulakalpa* etc. According to *Brahma Vaibarta Purana* 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*². During the period of Turk- Afgan social and political exploitation by the Brahminical society forced them to take Islam. They created *Gaazipata*³ for the spread of Islam. So, they assimilated both Hindu and Islamic culture for their styles. This kind of common style of living is reflected in their birth, marriage and death ceremonial functions. So this rural artisan class of the said village inherit both Hindu and Islamic ritualistic cultural phenomenon in their style of living. Still now they are not included in the Hindu society. They are very poor and marginal. After 1999 some steps have been taken by the Union Government of India for economic development of patuas of West Bengal including Naya. One of the major steps is formation of Self Help groups (SHGs)

In spite of those they have tried their best to develop their economic condition through Self Help Groups (SHGs). In this process both Central and State Governments and different NGOs namely Bangla Natak.Com have extended their helping hands towards them.

These marginal artisan class people belong to 12 (twelve) different SHGs in their own village. The most important SHG is *Patua Mahila Unnayan Samity* which have been formed in 1998. The group led by Ayesha Chitrakar comprises of all 15 (fifteen) female members. The names of members are as follows Swarna Chitrakar, Rani Chitrakar, Ayesha Chitrakar, Yumuna Chitrakar, Moyna Chitrakar, Radha Chitrakar, Manimala Chitrakar, Rubela Chitrakar, Guljan Chitrakar, Snehalata Chitrakar, Meena Chitrakar, Joba Chitrakar, Rukmini Chitrakar and Putul Chitrakar etc. Among them Swarna Chitrakar and Rani Chitrakar are renowned National and International famed scroll painters. The Account of this group is with the Maligram branch of Bangya Gramin Bikash Bank. Financially it is very sound.

The other important SHG is *Patua Chitralya*. This SHG of ten male and female members is led by Shyamsundar Chitrakar. The names of other members are as follows- Yakud Chitrakar, Mamata Chitrakar, Prabir Chitrakar, Laila Chitrakar, Rahim Chitrakar, Madhu Chitrakar, Purna Chitrakar, Gulsan Chitrakar, Joibul Chitrakar etc. Moreover, other SHGs namely Jagarani, Ma Monosha, Pirbaba, Zorano Pat, Gazibaba and Olabibi play important roles for their financial development.

Before the formation of such SHGs the conditions of the scroll painters were not good. Then they lived on showing the scroll paintings from door to door mainly in the rural area. In return they collected paddy or rice from the households. But that was not enough for maintenance of livelihood. Therefore, they had to take different occupations e.g. snake-charming, rickshaw-pulling, masonry, mat-making, agriculture labourers and so

²The 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.

³Pata on Gazipir-Gazipatas are very popular among Santhals, Bhumis & Bedias of the districts of undivided Midnapore, 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 Gazipat.

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 SHGs of 'Naya (South)' are also part of the same scheme.

As a result of formation of SHGs the people of the artisan class of Naya (South) who have left their traditional occupation of scroll painting earlier have taken those of their own. These SHGs make scroll painted silk sarees, t-shirts, salwar-suits, calendars, greeting cards, bags and many articles and sell those products to art loving customers of India and abroad. They have also made Formayeshi Pata (the pat made in accordance with the specific instruction). The skilled scroll painters train the new comers as well as unskilled chitrakars through workshops and training programmes. Now all children of this village go to school.

It is very interesting to mention that the patuas of Naya are not willing to participate in rural fairs. They are now interested to different Govt. Sponsored fairs and exhibitions in India and abroad. It reveals from the field survey in the village that the patuas of Naya earn Rs.1500/- (Rupees One thousand five hundred) only (approx.) through the Self Help Groups. At present their monthly income is Rs.6000/- Rs. 7000/-. Those who have no idea about the style and technique of scroll painting and lived hand to mouth by other professions e.g. daily labours, rickshaw-pulling, idol-making and snake-charming etc. come back their own hereditary profession. The list of the patuas of the District Industries Centers of the districts of Purba Medinipur and Paschim Medinipur is very large.

In regards 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 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 (sutradhars) 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 ratio of value addition, high potential for export and foreign exchange earnings for the country.

VI. CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that the development of the aforesaid village is going on with proper participation of rural people and help of the Government. But it is alarming that such rapid commercialisation of folk painting of Naya with use of chemical colours at the hand of unskilled artisans may destroy their thousand years inherited style of painting and structural music also. That does not mean that the artisans of the village will stop the development. It should be remembered by the SHGs and the Government who are engaged in the process of development that they have not only developed a particular village but also a thousand years inherited (Indus, Sanchi, Bharhut, Ajanta etc.) traditional folk art of Bengal. It should not be distinguished.

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