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## PATTACHITRA

*From History to Modern*

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**ABSTRACT:** Pattachitra is one of the most popular traditional paintings of India and is mainly practiced in the states of Odisha and West Bengal. The name "Pattachitra" comes from the words "patta" (cloth) and "chitra" (picture), in Sanskrit, referring to the origin of the work as a kind of cloth-based scroll painting. The present research is aimed to understand the historical evolution, aesthetic richness and cultural significance of Pattachitra art and to explore its relevance and application in contemporary fashion design. This study is a post-colonial study of Pattachitra art in Bengal and how it evolved from a religious storytelling medium to a vibrant visual medium that recognizes the contemporary socio-political issues. The research was conducted using a theme-based visual content analysis approach. The study has discussed six Pattachitra paintings ranging from traditional mythological narrative to modern socio-political representations. The artworks were selected through purposive sampling. Pattachitra is famous for its detailed work, bold outlines and bright use of natural colors. It is based on mythological and religious stories. Traditionally, artists have illustrated stories from epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, and themes related to Lord Jagannath and the Vaishnavite tradition. Making Pattachitra is a very detailed process, The word Pattachitra is made up of two Sanskrit words patta meaning cloth and chitra meaning picture, meaning that originally it was a form of painting on cloth which was rolled up in scrolls. The study aims at understanding the historical development, aesthetic richness and cultural significance of Pattachitra art, exploring its relevance and application in the field of contemporary fashion designing. The research identified three main aspects that emerged from the themes on the colonial period, the post-colonial period, the debate on hybridity, changing techniques and the mixing of Pattachitra with Western art. These include gender representation, national identity and the response to global crises. Through a gender lens, artists had reimagined the female figures in bold contours, expressive colour. A theme-based visual content analysis method has been used in this study.

**Keywords:** Pattachitra, Style, Traditional, Indian, Fashion Design, Cultural

### I. Introduction

Pattachitra, the traditional cloth-based scroll painting practiced in some areas of Bangladesh and the eastern Indian states of Odisha and West Bengal. Patachitra art is not only known for its intricate embellishments but also for the folktales and mythological stories written on it. Pattachitra is one of the historic art forms of Odisha. Pattachitra was originally made for ceremonial purposes and as souvenirs for the pilgrims visiting Puri and other temples. Pattachitras are an old Bengali narrative art form, originally used as visual

aids for reciting songs. In Sanskrit, the word *paṭṭa* means "cloth" and *chitra* means "picture". Most of these paintings depict stories of Hindu deities



## II.Literature

Ancient paintings known as Charanachitras, Mankhas, and Yamapatas were created on cloth scrolls and dealt with narrative-didactic storytelling themes that are mentioned in Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu writings. Historian N.R. Ray claims that the Pattachitra art form originated from these textile-scroll paintings.

**Odisha & Bengal pattachitra:** Pattachitra style of painting is one of the oldest and most popular art forms of Odisha. Thus, Pattachitra is a canvas painting which is characterized by rich colorful application, imaginative motifs, designs and representation of straight forward topics mostly of mythological nature. The traditions of Pattachitra painting are over a thousand years old. The pattachitra, dating back to the fifth century BC, is akin to the ancient murals of Odisha, particularly those found in the sacred centres of Puri, Konark and Bhubaneswar. The best work is found in and around Puri, particularly in the village of Raghurajpur. **Theme & style:** The main subjects of Odia Painting are Vaishnava faith and Jagannath. Lord Jagannath (incarnation of Lord Krishna) has been the main source of inspiration since the origin of Pattachitra culture. Pattachitra style is a combination of classical and folk elements with more emphasis on the traditional forms. Fashion bears signs of old Odia influence. Each position has been reduced to a few discrete positions. These are not without tedious repetitions, but now and then the repetition is needed to give weight to the narrative quality of the style. The lines are sharp, angular, bold and crisp. The themes may be classified into following categories: Jagannath paintings, Vaishnav Paintings, Bhagabat paintings, Ramayana paintings, Saiva paintings, Shakta paintings, Paintings as legends, Ragachitras, Bandhachitra, Yamapati and yatripatas – (sketches of puri temple) Ganjapa playing card paintings and other social themes on paintings., Navagunjara.

**Technique:** The Patta paintings are done on small strips of cotton fabric. To prepare the canvas the clothes is coated with a mixture of chalk and gum taken from tamarind or guar seeds. Then, after being massaged with the help of two different stones, the cloth is dried. The painters used the gum and chalk mixture to paint vegetable, earth and stone colours on the leathery surface of the cloth. For the first sketches the painters do not use charcoal or pencil. They just draw straight with the brush, either light red or yellow, because they are so good at drawing lines. Next the colors are filled in. The patta gets varnished and the last lines are drawn. The clothes are covered with a mixture of chalk. The clothes are coated with a mixture of chalk and gum extracted from tamarind or guar seeds for the canvas. Then the cloth is massaged with two different stones and dried. The painters use the vegetable, earth and stone colors on the leathery surface of the cloth created by the mixture of gum and chalk. The painters don't begin with charcoal or pencil sketches. So good at drawing lines that they just draw straight with the brush, either in light red or yellow. And then the colours are filled.

**Colour:** Pattachitras are painted in five natural colours - Hingula, Haritala, Kala, Sankha and Geru, which are: Vermilion, Green, Black, Pearl White and Brick Orange respectively. The painters use mineral and vegetable colours. They prepare their own colors. The process of pulverizing, boiling and sifting conch shells to whiten them is very dangerous. It requires a lot of patience. But this technique makes the colour more visible and brighter. Red is called "hingula", a mineral color. For blue, a kind of indigo called "Ramaraja" is used, and for yellow, "Haritala," king of stone ingredients. Black obtained from the burning of coconut shells or pure lamp-black are used. None of the former color schemes had any blue, cobalt or ultramarine. Patta paintings have only brilliant colors. Red, Yellow, Indigo, Black and White. These

“Chitrakarars” use native brushes too. They prepare their own colors. The powdering process, they make their own colors. The powdering, boiling and sifting of conch shells to make them white is a dangerous process. You need to have a lot of patience.

**Palm leaf pattachitra:** On a palm leaf, you can see a palm leaf pattachitra, which is also called Tala Pattachitra in Odia. First, palm leaves are taken off the tree and let harden. Then, the pieces are sewn together to look like a canvas. To trace the pictures, rows of palm leaf panels of the same size are sewn together, and the grooves are filled in with black or white ink. These panels can be easily folded like a fan and stacked up in a small pile to help with conservation. Palm-leaf images are often more detailed because they are made by stacking layers that are glued together on most of the surface. But in some places, these layers might open like little windows to show a second image underneath the first one.

**Colonial influence on pattachitra:** The British colonial period had a deep impact on Pattachitra, particularly in Bengal, where the art form evolved from simple religious storytelling into a medium of social critique, adaptation and resistance.

- a. A reduction in normal patronage: Before the British rule, the Pattachitra artists, also known as the Patuas or Chitrakarars depended mainly on the following: Temples, Local patronage systems, Kings, Zamindars. Many indigenous royal courts and temple economies declined under colonial rule. British economic policies destroyed local handicrafts and crafts and cut funding for traditional artisans. Many Pattachitra artists struggled with poverty; some gave up their work, while others modified their themes to make ends meet.
- b. Western Artistic Influence and Hybridization: European creative ideas brought by British colonial education included: Realism, Perspective, Shading, Anatomical detail, Portraiture. Pattachitra was originally a flat, decorative and symbolic art form. The artists started blending European visual techniques with Indian folk traditions during the colonial period, particularly in Bengal. A hybrid artistic language was created, in which Compositions are influenced by the West, facial emotions are softened and figures are more lifelike. This impact is particularly clear in the development of Kalighat Pata first appeared in colonial Kolkata and soon adjusted to colonial society and urban audiences.
- c. Emergence of Political and Social Themes: Colonialism brought about a radical change in the content of Pattachitra. In the past, the paintings focused on: Hindu mythology, stories of Jagannath, Mahabharata and Ramayana epics. But under the British rule more and more artists were painting: social satire, nationalism, reform movements, colonial authorities (“Sahib Pata”) and revolutionary themes. A few scrolls were damned British exploitation, moral decline of colonial life, urban corruption, social hypocrisy.
- d. Suppression and censorship by colonizers: British officials sometimes thought Pattachitra was a political threat because many people liked it to tell stories. Reports say that a few narrative scrolls and songs that praised revolutionaries or encouraged anti-colonial feelings were banned or made illegal. This shows that Pattachitra was more than just a work of art. A way to fight back, a folk newspaper, and a way to talk to each other.
- e. Cities, Markets, and Business: Also, new urban markets were set up during the colonial era, especially in Kolkata. Artists began to make small paintings, souvenir art, and commercial goods for European collectors and middle-class city dwellers. This commercialization changed the art form from a ceremonial object to a commodity, which helped keep it alive.
- f. Influence on contemporary Indian nationalism: In the late colonial period, Indian painters who aspired to a “national” art form turned to local traditions such as Pattachitra. Jamini Roy and other artists took inspiration from Kalighat and traditional Pattachitra traditions to reject Western academic art and recover Indian identity. Thus, indirectly colonization contributed to Pattachitra’s status as a symbol of Native ingenuity, cultural nationalism, and opposition to Western dominance.

Overall Effect: British colonialism caused both destruction and change in Pattachitra: Negative Effects: Less business, Craftspeople are having trouble with money, Culture being suppressed, Competition among

industrial goods. Positive/Transformative Effects: New urban audiences, Art experiments: The emergence of political themes, Nationalism for Revival. Pattachitra was able to survive by changing. Instead of dying out, it grew into a lively art form that mixed modernism, resistance, and tradition.

**Modern society impact on pattachitra:** Modern culture has transformed Pattachitra from a regional folk tradition into a globally appreciated art form. The advances in technology, communication, education and artistic thought have had a profound impact on the production, distribution and perception of Pattachitra today.

a. **The impact of the internet and digital platforms:** The internet has created the exposure of pattachitra art. Historically artists sold most of their work: at local fairs, in villages, temples or through intermediaries. Today artists' use: Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, online marketplaces and digital exhibitions to reach local and international audiences directly. Pros: Artists can show their work in any part of the world, Online shopping can make more money for businesses, Younger people are more interested in digital exposure, Documentaries and how-to videos help keep methods and history alive, A lot of Pattachitra artists now upload narrative performances, painting techniques, and explanations of culture online. As a result, more people are interested in traditional folk arts: Things that get in the way, Copying and stealing ideas are common, Cheap printed copies take away from the value of handmade art, Viral trends may make artists feel like they must change their customs to get famous quickly online, The internet has made things both more commercial and more possible.

b. **The effect of social media:** social media has changed how people and artists interact with each other. In the past, traditional Pattachitra was mostly about mythology, religion, and folklore. Artists are making more things about these things these days: Climate change, women's rights, migration, public health, political awareness, and environmental issues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some Pattachitra painters made the following paintings: pandemic stories, hygiene tips, and mask awareness in traditional scroll layouts. Social media encourages modern storytelling, teamwork, and trying new things. Also, artists often change the subjects, colors, and formats of their work to fit the tastes of their audience and the current visual culture.

c. **Modern Methods and Tools for Making:** Things Technology has influenced both making and keeping art. Changes to Materials In the past, Pattachitra used: natural dyes, cloth canvases, organic materials, and brushes made by hand. Sometimes, modern painters use commercial canvases, computer design tools, acrylic paints, synthetic colors, and printed outlines. These methods: lower costs, make things last longer, and speed up production. Some critics, on the other hand, say that too much modernization could make rituals less important and less real. Digital Archiving Museums, universities, and other cultural institutions now digitally archive old scrolls, songs, artist interviews, and rare regional styles. This keeps knowledge alive for future generations.

d. **Pattachitra and AI (Artificial Intelligence):** Artificial intelligence is starting to have an effect on traditional art in many ways. Good Chances AI tools can: help make teaching materials, record patterns and motifs, support digital restoration, and use online discovery tools to spread the word about folk art. Designers also use AI-assisted technologies to: Play with patterns, make modern adaptations, or mix folk art with digital media and animation.

**Problems and Criticism:** A lot of artists are worried that AI could make copycat art that: take advantage of local art traditions, make handmade crafts less valuable, and copy old styles without understanding their cultural importance. Pattachitra is closely linked to: A lot of people believe that AI can't fully replace the lived experience and cultural memory of traditional artists when it comes to music, storytelling, ritual, and human emotion.

e. **What Modern Artists Think and Feel:** Modern Pattachitra artists are starting to see themselves as more than just artisans. people who come up with new ideas, start businesses, fight for social change, and teach others about culture. A lot of people who want to be artists want to: connect folk culture with people all over the world, keep traditions alive while bringing up new topics, and make the art financially viable. Some artists mix on purpose: contemporary design, street art, digital illustration, fashion, and classic styles.

Some people are against commercialization and strongly defend traditional practices. In modern Pattachitra, this leads to two main ways of doing things: artists who care about conservation and focus on history and purity. The main goals of experimental artists are to be creative and flexible. Most modern practitioners try to find a middle ground between the two.

f. Changes to culture and education: Government programs, workshops, and modern educational programs have also helped with reform: Art schools now teach folk arts, craft fairs make artisans more visible, and cultural tourism helps local economies. People now know that pattachitra is more than just a "folk craft." great art, a cultural heritage, and a way to show who you are.

To sum up Pattachitra has changed a lot in modern society. Contemporary Impact: Internet and e-commerce, social networks, Recent tech, A.I., The modern artist's mind. Pattachitra's Impact, International exposure and sales, Modern themes and audience participation, faster digital production and preservation, Innovation, but questions of sincerity, Balance between exploration and tradition.

Pattachitra is no longer village stories or temples. It is now a living art form that is always in flux, maintaining its own identity while incorporating old tradition and the culture of the modern world.

### III. Methodology

The methodology of this study is qualitative and descriptive. It uses primary and secondary data sources. Data for Pattachitra art and traditional costume design of India were collected from books, research papers, journals, websites and case studies. The study also examines the cultural importance of Pattachitra, the art techniques, the historical development and its current uses in social and fashion contexts.

### IV. Result and Discussion

Studies have shown that Pattachitra has been able to successfully transform itself from a traditional folk-art form to a popular element of culture and fashion. Its rich motifs, natural colors, and mythological themes have had a great impact on the design of modern textiles and garments. Social media and digital platforms have enhanced the visibility and market value of Pattachitra art. new designers and artists are mixing old techniques with modern themes to keep the art form relevant and sustainable.

The study points out that Pattachitra is a synthesis of tradition and modernity by way of continuous adaptation. While modernization and digital technology have opened new avenues for artists, concerns have been raised about commercialization and the loss of authenticity. Adapting Pattachitra to fashion design helps in preserving cultural heritage and also caters to the needs of modern consumers. In this sense, the survival and identity of this art form will necessarily require the coexistence of traditional values and innovation.

### V. Conclusion

Pattachitra is a living cultural expression not a traditional folk painting which has evolved continuously from ancient days till today. Pattachitra is a narrative art form on cloth, based on mythology, religion and temple traditions. It has carried forward the artistic legacy of Odisha and Bengal for thousands of years, with its intricate details, bold lines, natural colors and storytelling techniques. "This art form carries the values, traditions and common memory of Indian civilization and is endowed with deep historical, spiritual and social significance," the study says.

The study further reveals that the British colonization influenced the development of Pattachitra in two ways. Colonial economic policies were making it more difficult for artisans to make a living and were undermining traditional systems of patronage, but they were also encouraging artistic change. The exposure to Western art techniques, metropolitan audiences and sociopolitical realities, led artists to experiment with realism, satire, nationalism and social criticism. As a result, Pattachitra transcended religious narrative and developed as a form of resistance, consciousness and cultural identity.

In today's culture, Pattachitra has become a globally known art form due to modernization, digital technology, social media and globalization. Today's contemporary artists can speak to traditional aesthetics

but also address contemporary themes such as public health, migration, women's rights, climate change, and political consciousness. With digital platforms and online markets, their opportunities have increased, giving them exposure on a global scale and financial backing. The importance of cultural preservation and artistic originality is also seriously questioned by concerns about commercialization, imitation, loss of authenticity and the influence of artificial intelligence.

The study also shows how modern Pattachitra artists are finding a balance between tradition and modernity. Some people are interested in preserving historical accuracy and purity, while others are interested in fashion, digital art, and modern design. Pattachitra has been able to survive changes in society, politics, and technology without losing its cultural core because it is so adaptable.

All in all, Pattachitra is a lively mix of history, tradition, resistance, and modern creativity. Folk art has lasted into the modern age, as shown by how it has moved from temple walls and hamlet scrolls to digital platforms and art museums around the world. To make sure that this priceless artistic legacy keeps inspiring future generations, Pattachitra needs to be protected and promoted through education, cultural programs, digital archiving, and new uses like fashion design.

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