

Report on Patachitra of West Bengal

Statement of case

1. Origin & History

History of the Districts (Paschim Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum)

Medinipur:

Medinipur district (undivided) is rich with ancient history of royal dynasty and their royal activities. The kingdom of Swasthanka, Harshabardhan was the part of undivided Medinipur. One of the archaeological sites was the port at *Tmaralipto* which is present day Tamluk in the divided Purba Medinipur district. After the fall of last independent Hindu dynasty of Kalinga the region came under one of the five Sarkars of Mughalbandi Odisha which was ruled by the Subehdar of Odisha. Bahadur Khan was the ruler of Jaleswar Sarkar or Hijli (including Medinipur) during the time of Shah Jehan. He was defeated by Shah Suja, the second son of Shah Jehan, then the *subhadar* of Bengal. Latter on the region comes under the control of Nawab Alivardi Khan.¹

Purulia: Jaina Bhagavati-Sutra of circa 5th century A.D. mentions that Purulia District was one of the 16 Mahajanapadas and was a part of the country known as *Vajra-bhumi* in ancient times. However, little is known about Purulia before the East-India Company obtained the 'Diwani' of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa in 1765. By Regulation XVIII of 1805, a Jungle Mahal district composed of 23 Parganas and mahals including the present Purulia was formed.

Bankura: The history of the district of Bankura from the 7th century AD right until the advent of British rule is dominated by the Hindu Rajas of Bishnupur. The area around Bishnupur was called Mallabhum.

Birbhum: Birbhum district was dominated by different dynasties for centuries. It was once a part of Mauryas and the majestic Guptas. The name Birbhum came to be recognized as an administrative unit only after the Santhal rebellion of 1855-56, which was overwhelmed with the martyrdom of Sidhu and Kanu.

¹L.S.S. O'Malley (1995). Bengal District Gazetteer-Midnapore. Page number 22-37 (Annexure C.II)

History of the Patachitra of West Bengal:

Patachitra known for its brilliant play of colour is a traditional folk art form of rural Bengal that has been in existence for many centuries. It is world's first attempts to create motion pictures. There are varying opinions about the dates of ancient *Patas* but it has been suggested on the basis of historical themes connected with the accompanied songs. It dates back to the Pre- Pala period from the days of Mohenjodaro to the 9th century A.D. It is still tucked away with small villages of Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, Howrah, Hooghly and 24 Parganas.² Although in Buddhist literature there is reference of pata in 1st century A.D.; in Haribansha in 2nd century, in Abhijnynasakuntalam and Malabikagnimitra in 4th century; in Kaya Khondasanjukta in 6th century, Harashacharit and Uttaramcharit 6th and 7th- 8th centuries. These literatures speak about certain types of *Pata* which were exhibited to educate and to entertain the people.³

Author Ajitcoomar Mookerjee in his book Folk Art of Bengal has mentioned that there are some Jadu-Patuas painting of mural style in the temples of Bankura District. As the Bankura districts were not disturbed by the foreign influence its cultural integrity remained uninfluenced and the places like Mallbhum which is also called 'Land Of Wrestler' still hoards in its bosom. In the paintings of Bankura line drawing of greater efficiency has been shown. The salient features of the paintings are- The lines are distinctly bold swift and attractive. The techniques which are used is bold and simple. The dignified attitude and novelty of form of the figures reveals the traditional hands of artists.⁴

In the book of D.P. Ghosh titled "Folk Art of Bengal", variation of the style of *Patachitra* painting in respect of the district of West Bengal has been mentioned.⁵

The *Patachitra* of different districts of West Bengal are characterized by many peculiarities in colour and design. The products of Manbhum (now known as Purulia) can easily be distinguished by their preference for one particular shade of burnt sienna relieved by white and yellow patches and densely packed composition. The seated figures of Dasratha and Chand Sadagar of Midnapore crowning the Ramayana and Kamale-Kamini scrolls are impressive and monumental. In the scrolls of Birbhum, Bankura and Burdwan preference for Indian red background usually found while Hooghly preferred a dark brown. The abstract linear treatment of the Hooghly and Manbhum 'pats' are peculiar and definitely modernistic. The technique of meandering river of Mahakapi Jatka at Sanchi also survives in the undulating Yamuna in

² Craft council of west Bengal (1985-86), *The Jarana Patachitra of Bengal- Mahamaya*, Page number 112

(Annexure C.IV)

³ Roy Nirajan (1973), *The Patas and Patuas of Bengal*. Indian Publications Calcutta, Page number 54-55

(Annexure C.V)

⁴ Mookerjee Ajitcoomar (1939), *Folk Art of Bengal*. University of Calcutta, Page number 18-19 **(Annexure C.VI)**

⁵ GHOSH D.P. (1977), *FOLK ART OF BENGAL*, Visvabharati, Page number 4-5 **(Annexure C.I)**