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A Visit to Village Raghurajpur: A living exhibition of traditional crafts and ancient *pattchitra* of Odisha

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Introduction

I visited Raghurajpur, a very small village settlement of Odisha state in eastern India, where I found a true picture of traditional life style. The habitants of the village, irrespective of their age, were involved in one or other type of activity related with art and different craft production. Orissa *Pattachitra* is world renowned art and has made Raghurajpur a 'Heritage Village'. INTACH has selected this village to revive the ancient wall painting of Orissa. The work has already been completed and now the village looks like a 'Museum of Painting'.

I had an earlier experience to be a part of rural setting, way of life, culture and visual appreciation of rural life, but I got unique experiences in *Raghurajpur* regarding occupation, tangible and intangible culture, physical setting of village and inspiration behind bond between habitants and art and crafts, which I am going to elaborate further in this paper.

Odisha State, located on the east coast of India with the Bay of Bengal forming its eastern and southern frontiers, is known for its fine arts, folk paintings on walls, *Pattachitra*, Chau dance, sculpture and architecture. Orissa has been rightly called Utkala or 'the land of exquisite arts'. Untouched from much foreign invasion and influence from colonial culture. Odisha has retained a pre-Islamic style of religious art that has changed little over the year.

Raghurajpur, is located in Puri district. One can reach there in three hours, by road (NH-203 connecting Puri and Bhubneshwar), from the state capital Bhubneshwar; and for someone based in Puri, it is just 10 km. away. It is located on the banks of the picturesque river Bhargavi.

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Physical Settings

Raghurajpur village is well planned according to the local climatic considerations. The village runs from east to west with house arranged in two neat rows facing each other. At the centre there is a line of temples and the lone 'Bhagabat Tungi', the community meeting place of the villagers (Fig.1).

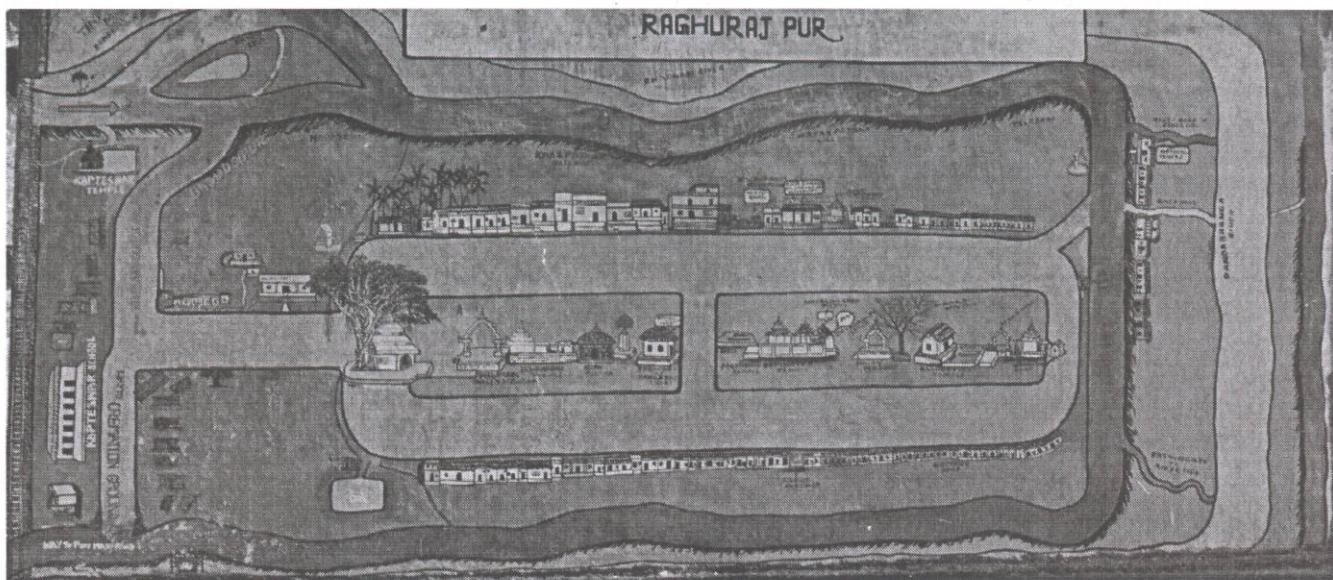
Geometrically simple plan of the village sets very effective impression on mind. Centrally placed temples, community place, water well for community, spaces for children along with the place for local deity, Bhusuni, adds life to the village in terms of various activities throughout the day.

The settlement is surrounded by coconut palm, mango, jack fruit and other lush green tropical trees which enhance the feel of visitors to be in natural area rather than a village (Fig. 2). Individual unit of house is uniquely placed in attached row and generally they have access from front with a back-side door also.

Pattachitra painting

The *Pattachitra* painting tradition can be traced back to the 8th century A.D. making it one of the earliest form of indigenous paintings, gods and goddess, Krishnalila, mythology etc. these are the main subjects of the art. This art is passed on from one generation to other within a family. Here, each member of family is at different stages of learning the art.

Early evidence of paintings were found on the caves of Khandagiri and Udayagiri of the 6th century A.D. The earliest indigenous paintings from Orissa are the *pattachitra* done by the *chitrakar* (the painters). They do



Source: Photograph by Author

FIG 1 : LAYOUT OF RAGHURAJPUR DRAWN ON WALL OF A HOUSE AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE VILLAGE SHOWING HOUSES AND STREETS



Source: Author

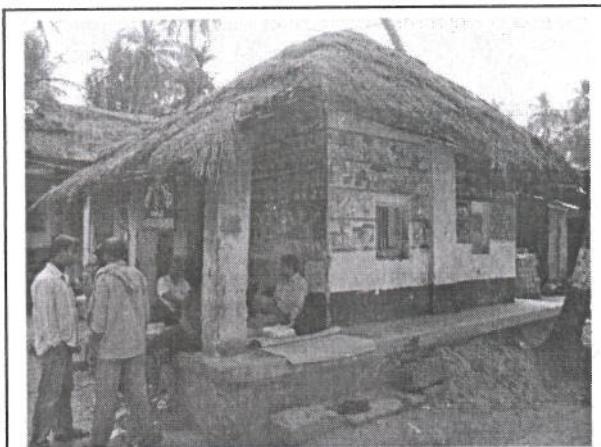
FIG. 2 : RAGHURAJPUR VILLAGE SETTLEMENT WITH LUSH GREEN BACKDROP

not belong to any particular place but the district of *Puri* has the highest concentration of *chitrakars*.

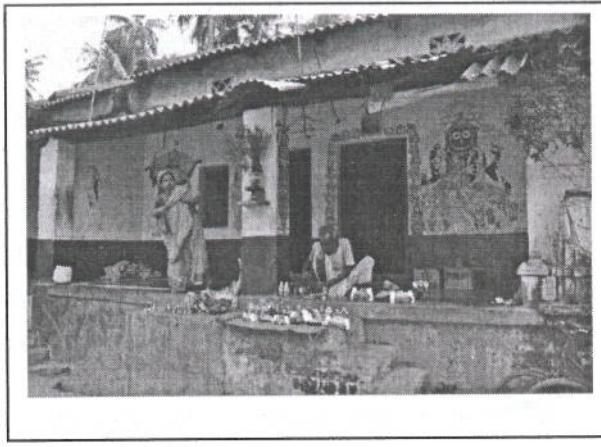
The word *patta* is a *Sanskrit* word meaning 'canvas' and *chitra* meaning 'picture'. Border are an integral part of the painting and this is drawn first on sides of the *patta* consisting of two or three lines according to the size of the painting. The outlines of the figures are drawn first with very thin lines in white. The figures are then adorned with colours. Outlines of other motifs are then thickened with a thick brush with black colour.

Habitat

The dwelling units, arranged in a row, have small frontage in comparison with depth of the house. The longer sides form the common walls. We can observe a series of rooms one after another with a variation in sizes in terms of depth only. Every unit has a high plinth and a covered veranda which serves as outdoor studio where artists are seen busy in producing artefacts and master pieces of intricate detailing on *pattachitra*. The front wall of the each house is 'open exhibition panel' with very fine



Source: Author

**FIG. 3 & 4 : ACTIVITIES IN FRONT OF HOUSING UNIT AND WALL PAINTINGS**

paintings drawn by the artist living there (Fig. 3 & 4). Here each family is engaged in nurturing the art legacy of their ancestors.

Less width of houses accommodate more numbers of units in a row to get advantages of frontage of street and centrally placed community spaces and common facilities like water well, temple and play area for children etc. The small frontage also helps in reducing heat gain from harsh sun.

Livelihood

In Raghurajpur economy is governed by the various indigenous art forms flourishing over here for centuries. This is the only village in India, where each family is engaged in making one craft or another. There are around 120 households having community of 350 artisans who produce various handicraft items such as patta paintings, palm leaf engravings, stone carving, wood carving, wooden toys, paper mache toys and masks, cow dung toys etc. It is rare to find such place having verity of art at one place.

Tourists visit the village to purchase the artefacts directly from the artists. Artist also sale their art products to other parts of Orissa and India with the help of N.G.O's and various agencies of government. The front sit-out platforms serve as 'outdoor studios and exhibition area' and tourists observe how the artist give shape to the art through paints or leaf engraving etc.

'Gotipua' Dance Form

Besides the unique handicrafts, the village has witnessed

the indigenous performing art known as 'Gotipua', the earlier form of 'Odissi'. Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra a reknowned odissi dancer was born in this village and had his early training in Gotipua tradition here. He was the first person from Odisha who received 'Padma Vibhushan' in the year 2000. Now, a Gotipua Odissi dance school has been established here. The trainees of this school present their performances in different cultural events in India and abroad.

Way Ahead

The Government of India have identified this village for the development of rural tourism. To facilitate the visitors and artists, government has developed an interpretation centre, an interactive space just at the front of the village to interact artists while working on crafts. State protections have kept the art intact in this village. Talent is born and nurtured in every single house. This village has bright future where life of people moves around the traditional art forms that, culturally, connect to people's livelihood and appreciated by tourists and others.

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Smart Cities

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Green Habitat

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Waterfront Development

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**National Declaration on
URBAN GOVERNANCE &
HOUSING FOR ALL**