



Raghurajpur

The Crafts Village

Raghurajpur, a small village in Puri district, occupies a unique place in the cultural map of India. The village is inhabited by artisans producing sheer poetry on pieces of treated cloth, dried palm leaf or paper.

Situated on the southern bank of river Bhargavi and surrounded by coconut, palm, mango, jackfruit groves and other tropical trees, Raghurajpur has an idyllic setting. A number of betel vines dot the nearby paddy fields. The village runs from east to west with houses arranged in two neat rows, facing each other. At the centre, runs a line of small temples and the lone Bhagabat Tungi, the community meeting place of the villagers. The temples are dedicated to the lords, Radha Mohan, Gopinath, Raghunath, Laxminarayan, Gouranga, and to the village goddess, Bhuasuni.

To reach Raghurajpur one has to get down at Chandanpur bus stop, which is about 10 km from Puri and 50 km from Bhubaneswar on N.H.No.203 connecting Puri and Bhubaneswar, two important tourist destinations of the country. From Chandanpur one has to take a cycle-rickshaw or walk on a 1.3 km scenic road to reach this village. One may also hire a taxi either from Puri or from Bhubaneswar to reach the village.

This coconut-palm shaded village is quite different from other villages of the State.

It has its own identity. What is unusual is the number of outsiders including foreigners visiting the village round the year. These people don't come here to see a typical Orissan village from close quarters but to see and enjoy the rich traditions of Orissan arts and crafts at one place. The village has a community of artisans, who produce different varieties of handicrafts items such as *patta* paintings, palm leaf engravings, stone carvings, papier mache toys and masks, wood carvings, wooden toys, cowdung toys and tusser paintings. Perhaps nowhere else in India one finds such a congregation of so many arts at one place. This is also the only village in India, where each family is engaged in one craft or another. There are 103 households having 311 artisans in the village. Some of them are winners of National Awards. One comes across the best tradition of Orissan paintings and some of the finest pieces of work in this village.

The tradition of *pata* painting in Orissa is very old. There are several centres of this art : Puri, Parlakhemundi, Champamal (Sonepur), Athgarh and Dinabandhupur (Dhenkanal). Usually, the lane in which these painters or *chitrakaras* live is called Chitrakar Sahi. Although there are several centres of *pata* paintings in Orissa, it is Raghurajpur, which is famous for this unique art.

Chitrakaras are involved with the ritual performed in the temple of Lord Jagannatha

on the occasion of Snana Purnima in the lunar month of Jyestha (May-June). During the period of *anasara*, the fortnight following the fullmoon day, three *patis* painted by *chitrakaras* are placed on the *sighasana* inside the main temple. The *chitrakaras* are also called to execute colourful paintings on the three chariots for the Car Festival. Apart from taking part in the rituals, they also produce paintings which they sell at Bedha Mahal inside the temple premises and Chakada Mahal outside the main gate. However, with the entry of middle man to this business the *chitrakaras* suffered. At the beginning of the 20th century their fortunes dwindled. The art received a new lease of life in the mid-century. Ileana Citaristi, an Italian lady who has done extensive research on Orissan art and culture, observes, "By the late fifties only a few old men among the 90- odd *chitrakara* families of Raghurajpur were still painting, whereas all the youths had deserted the profession; it was only around the year 1953 that, with the intervention of an American lady, Mrs Halina Zealey, a new future opened up and the artists once again took out their brushes and colours."

Besides producing these unique works of art, this village has a living tradition of performing art known as Gotipua, the earlier form of Odissi. A worthy son of Orissa, Guru Kelu Charan Mohapatra, an exponent of Odissi dance, was born in this village and had his early trainings in Gotipua tradition here. Now a Gotipua Gurukul, namely Maa Dasabhuja Gotipua Odissi Dance School has been established here under the guidance of Guru Maguni Charan Das. The trainees of this school present their performances in different cultural events, in India and abroad.

INTACH selected this village to revive the ancient wall paintings of Orissa. The work has already been completed and now the village looks like a living museum of paintings.

To give this village its rightful place both in the cultural and tourist maps of the country, Orissa Tourism and Ministry of Tourism, Government of India have identified this village for development of Rural Tourism. After visiting Raghurajpur on June 27, 2002, Shri Jagmohan, Hon'ble Union Minister of Tourism and Culture, declared that this village would be developed as a model for rural tourism in India. INTACH is preparing the Project Report for this village, which would be implemented shortly. Basic tourist amenities such as road, drinking water, sanitation, interpretation centre, rest house, etc. would come up soon.

Government of Orissa is taking initiatives to develop the roads from Chandanpur and Kathapola to Raghurajpur and is urging the UNICEF to provide clean water to the village. To achieve this task, various Departments of Government of Orissa are converging their resources.

Once the Rural Tourism Project is completed, Raghurajpur will come in the National Travel Circuit of the Government of India.

References :

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Acknowledgement :

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