



Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

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DON'T BOYCOTT THE GOPIS

His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

The policy should be that the people may not understand *gopīs* like ordinary girls, or like that. You should be careful to present the *gopīs*. It does not mean that, “We shall not utter even the name of the *gopīs*. We have taken vow to boycott the *gopīs*.” No. They are our worshipable devotees. How we can avoid them? 🙏

— Conversation in Boston with BTG staff. 24 December 1969.

THE TRADITION OF DEVOTIONAL PAINTING FOR LORD JAGANNATH PT 4

Art as Worship

Paṭa-citra art is not only an element of service offered to Jagannath on his festivals, in its traditional form it is itself a form of worship. If one carefully considers, all the essential elements of *pūjā*, formal worship, are also found in orthodox *paṭa-citra* art.

The *pāñcarātrika* literatures¹ divide *pūjā* into five processes, known as *pañcāṅga-pūjā*:²

- 1) *abhigamana* — cleansing of oneself as well as the place, paraphernalia, and object of worship.
- 2) *upādāna* — collecting ingredients for worship such as sandalwood paste and flowers.
- 3) *yoga* — conceptualizing oneself in one’s spiritual identity, and conceptualizing one’s relationship (fraternal, paternal, conjugal, etc.) with the worshipable deity.
- 4) *svādhyāya* — reciting mantras or Vedic literature while meditating on their meaning.
- 5) *ijyā* — worshipping the Lord.

These classical elements of worship can be seen in *paṭa-citra* art as follows:

Abhigamana, cleanliness: The *Viṣṇu-dharmottara Purāṇa* has given various instructions for *citrakāras*, some of which include the elements classically found in *abhigamana*. Artists are enjoined therein to first take bath and wear clean cloth before painting.³ The general *citrakāras* of Odisha today do not observe this injunction as a formal part of their work. However, the artists who make the *aṅasara-paṭi* and other ceremonial paintings used in the worship of Lord Jagannath still follow a number of strict rules of *abhigamana* while they are painting. The edicts to be observed while making the *aṅasara-paṭi* include:⁴

- Before starting to paint, the painter’s house must be thoroughly cleaned.
- He has to sleep on the bare floor

- He must observe celibacy.
- He may accept only vegetarian food, with no onions or garlic.
- He must take bath and wear clean cloth each time before working on the painting.

Upādāna, collecting ingredients: The *pañcāṅga-pūjā* system places great stress on the importance of offering items that are both natural and pure. For centuries, orthodox *paṭa-citra* artists have followed certain codes regarding the materials they use for their paintings. The standard canvas for *paṭa-citra* paintings is made from layers of aged white cotton cloth that are stuck together using paste made from tamarind seeds. A mixture of tamarind paste, lime and water is then smeared on the top. After it is dry, it is polished with stones and then cut to size.⁵ This is still the system used by some *paṭa-citra* artists. However, today most of them use *tassar* silk⁶ for their canvases.

Similarly, although nearly all contemporary *citrakāras* use modern conventional paints, natural pigments are still in use.⁷ Such non-artificial hues are the only type of colors allowed when painting the deities or making ceremonial pictures for Lord Jagannath's worship.⁸

Paṭa-citra artists use five primary colors called *pañca-tattva*, literally "five truths", which they consider to be associated with five divinities as follows:

Black: Associated with the black-colored Lord Jagannath. This is obtained from lampblack. The paint is made by first making a stand out of coconuts upon which a brass plate is balanced. A lamp that is burning oil extracted from the *polāṅga* plant⁹ is then placed underneath. After half an hour or so the soot on the plate is collected and then mixed with the gum of the *kaitha* plant.¹⁰

White: Associated with Lord Baladeva, due to his whitish color. The *citrakāras* make white paint from conch shells which are first soaked in water for two days, ground finely, mixed with *kaitha* fruit, boiled to a paste, and then dried in the sun.

Yellow: Associated with Devi Subhadra, due to her yellowish color. This paint is made from finely ground *haritāla* stone (yellow ochre that contains sulphate of arsenic). The ochre is finely ground, allowed to settle in water, and boiled down to a thick paste. It is then formed into tablets and dried.

Red: Associated with the altar in Puri upon which the above four deities sit. The altar is not visibly red.



Painting possibly by Shimbhadrī Maharana.
From *In the Absence of Jagannatha* by Eberhard Fischer and Dinanath Pathy.

Anavasara-paṭi painting of Jagannath alone, c. 1960.

In this form he is known as Dadhivamana or Nilamadhava

Its association with this color may be due to the fact that it is popularly known as the *ratna-simhāsana*, "jeweled throne". The *paṭa-citra* artists make this color from two types of stone known in Oriā as *hīṅgula*, and *gairika*, containing natural cinnabar and red ochre respectively. The red ochre is processed into paint using the same procedure as the yellow ochre above.

Blue: Associated with the Sudarshan Chakra, the disk weapon of Krishna/Jagannath that is worshiped as a fourth, smaller deity next to the above three. Sudarshan is also known as *nīla-cakra*, "the blue wheel". This paint is made from the *nīla gacha*, the indigo plant, or from a soft stone known as *rājabarta*.

These paints are kept in coconut shell bowls.

Before painting, the artists often first sketch their drawings with a kind of crayon that is made by mixing lampblack and boiled rice and rolling it into a pencil shape. The brushes customarily used to apply the paints are made by tying hairs to a twig.¹¹ The commonly used twig for this purpose was obtained from the *kherwa*, or *khurni* (bitter oleander).¹² This plant is said to have been born from drops of heavenly nectar that fell on the ground from the bodies of Ramachandra's monkey soldiers who had been restored to life by Indra,

the king of the devas.¹³ Thus even the brushes used by the *paṭa-citra* artists have some connection with their worshipable Jagannath, who is considered to be non-different from Krishna and Ramachandra.

Yoga, conceptualizing oneself in one's spiritual identity and conceptualizing one's relationship with the Lord: The *paṭa-citra* artists of Odisha consider themselves to be connected with Visvakarma, who in Odishan lore is widely considered to be the first artist and source of the arts, as well as the carver who fashioned the original deity of Jagannath. Visvakarma is the master craftsman of the *devas* and the patron deity of craftsmen and artists.

The *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* (1.10.19-91) describes the origin of the various kinds of craftsmen. Visvakarma and the heavenly damsel known as Ghrītachi were cursed to become lower caste *sūdras* on the earth planet. In that birth, Visvakarma begot nine sons in the womb of Ghrītachi. Since their parents were *sūdras*, the descendants of these nine children were also considered to be so. *Brahma-vaivarta* (1.10.90) lists the nine types of craftsmen born of their union:

*mālākāra karma-kaṁsa-
śaṅkhakāra kuvindakān
kumbhakāra-sūtradhāra-
svaraṇa-citrakarāṁs-tathā*

- 1) *mālākāra* — garland makers, gardeners or florists
- 2) *karmakāra* — blacksmiths or mechanics
- 3) *kaṁsakāra* — brass- or metal-workers
- 4) *śaṅkhakāra* — carvers of conch shells
- 5) *kuvindaka* — weavers
- 6) *kumbhakāra* — potters
- 7) *sūtradhāra* — architects or carpenters
- 8) *svarṇakāra* — goldsmiths
- 9) *citrakāra* — painters

Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa says that these nine all became experts in *kalā*, the arts. Hence the Odishan *citrakāras* identify themselves with Visvakarma in three ways — as the *devata*, patron god, of art, as the original carver of their worshipable Lord Jagannath, and as the founder of the crafts as well as of their ancestral line.

Svādhyāya, reciting Vedic literature and meditating on its meaning: The practice of *svādhyāya* is seen in Vedic and *paṭa-citra* art in the use of the scriptures known as *dhyāna-mantra śāstras*. In his excellent work, *Puri Paintings*, the art professor and scholar Jagannath Prasad Das writes:

According to *Viṣṇu-dharmottara*, one quality that spoils pictures is *anya-chittatā* or being unmindful, and the text



Priest worshipping the anasara-ṭaṭi of Jagannath in the artists house in Jagannath Puri in 2002

enjoins the *citrakāra* to concentrate through *dhyāna-mantra* before starting a painting. The practice of visualization is identical in worship and art. The worshiper recites the *dhyāna-mantra* describing the deity, and thus forms a corresponding mental picture. His prayers are then addressed and his offerings are then made to this imagined form. The artist follows an identical prescription but proceeds to represent the mental picture in a visible and objective form by drawing or modeling. According to the *Agni Purāṇa*, the image-maker must pray the night before undertaking a great work in these words, “O thou Lord of all the Gods, teach me in dreams how to carry out all the work I have in my mind.”

In Orissa, many *dhyāna-mantra* texts are available in palm leaf manuscripts. Some of these texts are also accompanied by drawings of the Gods and Goddesses corresponding to the *dhyāna-mantra*. The texts are, however, in Sanskrit and are not intelligible to the *citrakāras*. The *citrakāra* of today does not in any case recite the *dhyāna-mantra*, nor does he go through disciplines like wearing immaculate apparel, sitting facing east, etc., as enjoined by *śāstras* such as *Viṣṇu-dharmottara*. He does, however, make use of his memory of some Oriya *kāvya* [devotional poetry] describing the bodily color or garments of a God or Goddess or the limbs of *nava-guñjara*.¹⁴

Ijyā, worshipping the deity: For *paṭa-citra* artists, painting itself is their *ijyā*, worship. This is especially seen in the paintings that are made for ritualistic use, such as the *anasara-ṭaṭi*.



The anasara-patis are taken into the Puri Jagannath Mandir

Upon the completion of the *aṅasara-pati* paintings, there generally is a formal ceremony known as *prāṇa-pratiṣṭha* wherein the pictures are installed as worshipable deities.¹⁵ This is the same kind of process as the one used in worshiping the deities in Vedic temples. Although some *citrakāras* revere Ganesh, Shiva, Durga and other gods in the Vedic pantheon, generally, in terms of their religious affiliation, the *citrakāra* artists consider themselves to be Vaishnavas, devotees of Krishna. All of them worship Lord Jagannath. — MD. 🍌



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Notes

1 Literatures delineating the procedures of ceremonial worship.

2 See *Narada-pāñcarātra* 4.20-24. A more elaborate description of the items mentioned herein is found on p. 21-22 of *Pāñcarātra Pradīpa*.

3 Das, 141.

4 Das, (p. 38) notes: “Violation of these taboos is supposed to bring calamity to the *citrakāra*. It is widely believed that *citrakāra* Raghu Das became insane because he did not observe the *aṅasara* taboos.”

5 Fischer and Pathy, 112.

6 *Tassar* is a brownish colored silk obtained from wild silkworm cocoons.

7 In his *Pata-paintings of Orissa*, Bijoy Chandra Mohanty describes the ingredients used for painting the deity of Lord Jagannath: “The materials used in painting the Trinity are as follows: *śankha* (conch shell), *kastūri* (musk), *kesara* (saffron), *haritāla* (yellow arsenic), *hingula* (red ochre) and the gum of *kaitha* (*Feronia elephantum*).

8 According to Sri Bhubaneswar Mahapatra, the current *citrakāra* responsible for making the *aṅasara-pati*.

9 *Mallotus philippinensis*.

10 *Feronia elephantum*.

1 There are three types of brushes used: *sthūla*, (large or broad brushes), which are made of hairs from the ears of a calf or a buffalo’s neck; *madhya* (medium size), made of hairs from the belly of a goat; and *sūkṣma* (fine brushes) of hairs from the back of a mouse.

2 Sometimes called the screw pine tree. *Holarrhena antidysenterica*.

3 In Sanskrit the seeds of this plant are called *indrayava*, *bhadrayava*, *vatsakabīja*, or *śakrabīja*, all meaning, “Indra’s seed”.

4 Page 141. *Nava-guñjara* is a form of Krishna/Vishnu that is only found in Odishan lore. The Lord in this aspect has the head of a rooster, the neck of a peacock, the hump of a bull, a lion’s waist, a snake for a tail, three legs (of an elephant, horse, and tiger), and a human hand holding a lotus.

5 The *aṅasara-pati*, are the only paintings that we are aware of that are formally installed as deities.

