

Historical Studies on Pata and Patuas Painting with Special Focus to Purba and Paschim Medinipur Districts, West Bengal

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Abstract:

The study explored the historical creation of Patua songs and the evolving trends, styles, techniques, and commercialization of Pata painting in Purba and Paschim Medinipur. Patua songs and Patachitra developed as interconnected folk traditions combining visual narratives with oral performances to preserve cultural memories, religious beliefs, and social messages. The study examined the traditional methods, thematic changes, and artistic features of Medinipur Pata painting, including the use of natural colours, symbolic forms, and narrative scroll techniques. It highlights the transformation of Patua art from a community-based practice to a broader cultural expression influenced by contemporary themes. The commercialization of Pata painting through exhibitions, tourism, and handicraft markets has created new opportunities for Patua artists. At the same time, challenges related to authenticity, sustainability, and changing market demands are also discussed. The study revealed the adaptability and resilience of Patua communities in preserving their heritage while embracing modern influences. It emphasized the cultural, historical, and economic significance of Patua songs and Pata painting in the folk tradition of Bengal. In this article; historical studies on pata and patuas painting with special focus to Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts, West Bengal were discussed.

Keywords: Pata, Patuas, Painting, Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Pata painting and Patua songs of Purba and Paschim Medinipur represent a remarkable tradition of Bengal's folk culture, where visual art and oral storytelling developed together as important mediums of cultural expression (Jana, T., 2022). Historically, the Patuas or Chitrakars created scroll paintings (Patachitra) accompanied by narrative songs (Pater Gaan) to communicate religious stories, mythological episodes, folklore, social values, and community histories among rural audiences (Mandal, K., 2017). The creation of Patua songs reflects the evolution of an indigenous storytelling system in which artists combined painting, music, and performance to preserve collective memories and transmit knowledge across generations (Mandal, R. et al., 2018). Over time, the themes of Patua songs expanded from traditional religious narratives to contemporary social issues, reflecting changing social realities (Prasad, S., 2018). The Pata painting tradition of Purba and Paschim Medinipur is also distinguished by its unique artistic styles, handmade techniques, natural colour preparation, symbolic imagery, and sequential storytelling methods. While preserving traditional craftsmanship, Patuas have adapted their artistic practices through new themes, modern designs, and market-oriented production. The process of commercialization through exhibitions, handicraft fairs, tourism, and cultural initiatives has provided new economic opportunities and wider recognition to the artists. However, it has also created challenges related to maintaining authenticity and balancing traditional values with changing market demands. Thus, the historical development of Patua songs and the evolving style, technique, and commercialization of Pata painting demonstrate the dynamic nature of folk art, highlighting the cultural resilience and creative adaptation of Patua communities in Purba and Paschim Medinipur (Mandal, K., 2017). The objective of the study is to historical studies on pata and patuas painting with special focus to Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts, West Bengal.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Research is a methodical way of asking questions. Research methodology refers to the systematic and theoretical examination of the methods employed in a certain field. Historical research is the collection and interpretation of facts regarding previous events or concepts to ascertain their influence on contemporary events and ideas.

Study Area:

Purba and Paschim Medinipur two districts from West Bengal, India were selected for this study.

Study Period:

The study period was 1947-2016.

Variables:

Independent Variables: Gender, Age.

Dependent Variables: Pata, Patua, Painting.

Research Design:

A method for addressing the research questions is the research design. The overarching strategy or framework that directs the course of research termed as research design. In quantitative research design, it is standard procedure to pose identical questions to every respondent. In this manner, we can fairly assess all the data samples. In this research, quantitative research design was used.

Primary Data:

Primary data refers to data that originates from first-hand accounts or empirical evidence, particularly in the context of study. One may also refer to it as first-hand knowledge or raw data. In this research, primary data were used.

Sampling Plan:

Sampling methodology referred to examining the population through data analysis and information gathering. Every item in the population has an equal and likely probability of being chosen for the sample when using the simple random sampling technique. In this research, simple random sampling plan was used.

Sample Size: 500 [Purba Medinipur: 250 (Male: 125, Female: 125), Paschim Medinipur: 250 (Male: 125, Female: 125)]

III. Methodology:

The respondents were taken from the Purba and Paschim Medinipur districts, West Bengal. Both male and female were taken according to same ratio. The age of the respondents were 45-75 years. The questionnaire sheet was provided in favour of the respondent after clearing the research objectives. Sufficient time was given to each respondent. After completion of the sheet, the data sheet was collected for further analysis and interpret the same based on the research objectives.

Research Tools:

Structured Questionnaires & 5 Point Likert Scale Sheet:

A questionnaire comprises a series of inquiries or additional 'prompts' designed to gather information from a group of participants. The options were Strongly Agree (SA): 5 points, Agree (A): 4 points, Neutral (N): 3 points, Disagree (D): 2 points, Strongly Disagree (SD): 1 point. In this research, structured questionnaires (5 Point Likert Scale sheet) were used.

Tools Used:

- Assessment For Historical Creation of Patua Songs & Trends.
- Assessment For Style, Technique & Commercialization of Pata Painting.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Data analysis involves scrutinizing raw data to identify patterns, derive conclusions, and guide decision-making. Data interpretation involves comprehending, structuring, and deriving significant conclusions from data. A pie chart is a circular graph that graphically shows a whole divided into sections, where each portion is proportional to the quantity it represents. In this research, pie charts were used.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

a) Personal Profile:

Table 1. Gender:

Options	Respondents	%
Male	250	50
Female	250	50
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

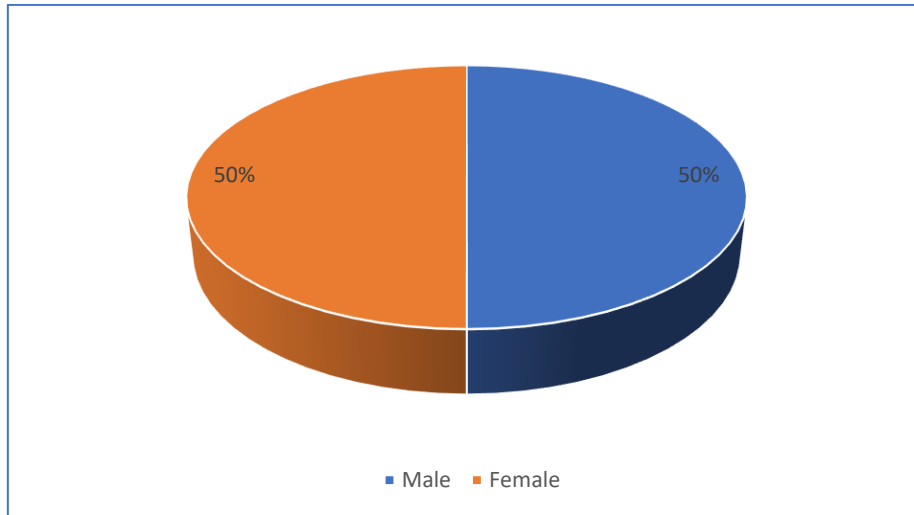


Figure 1. Gender (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were Male: 50% & Female: 50%.

Table 2. Age (in years):

Options	Respondents	%
45-55	189	37.8
56-65	206	41.2
66-75	105	21
Total	500	100

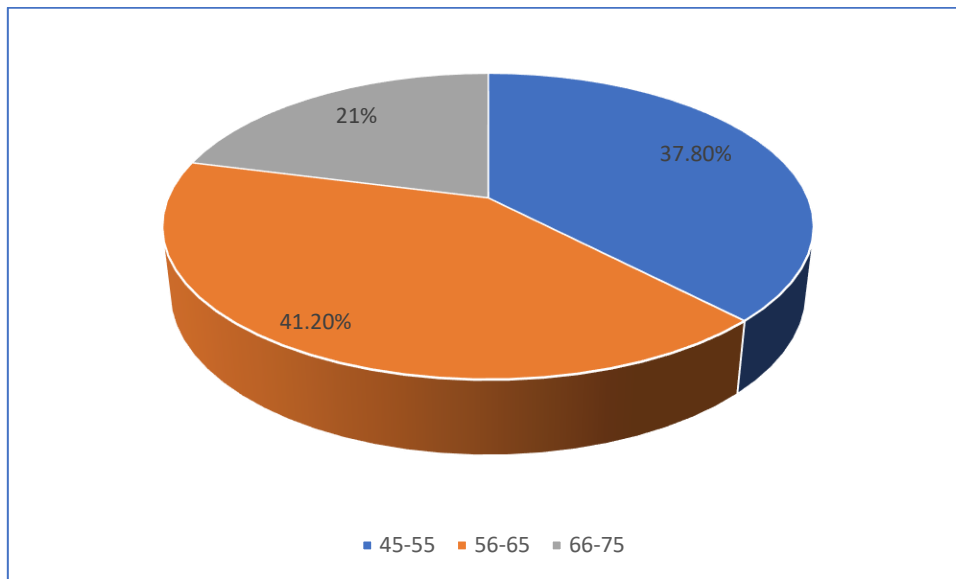


Figure 2. Age (in years) (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were 45-55 years: 37.8%, 56-65 years: 41.2% & 66-75 years: 21%.

b) Historical Creation of Patua Songs & Trends:

Table 3. Traditional Patua songs embody the historical legacy of rural Bengal:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	112	22.4
A	251	50.2
N	32	6.4
D	66	13.2
SD	39	7.8
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

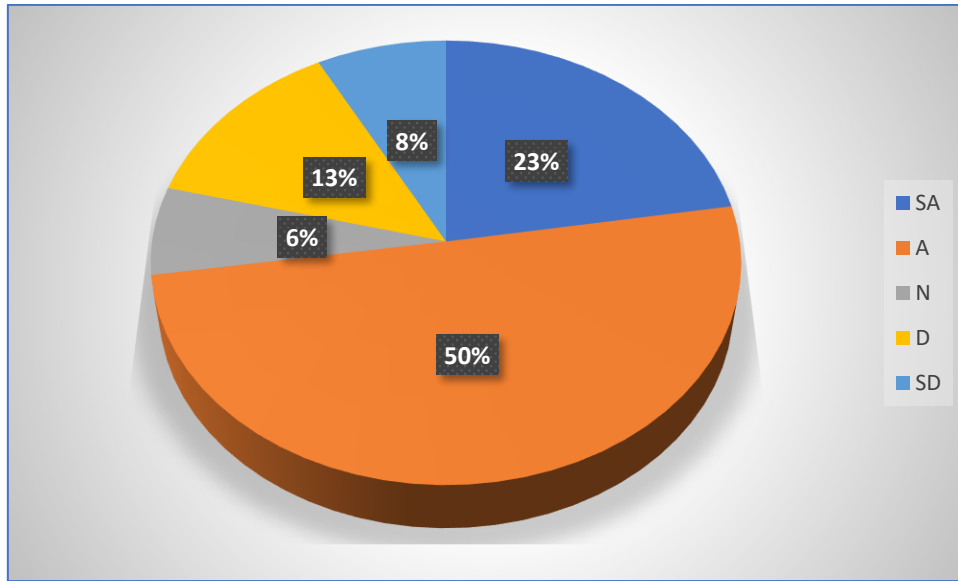


Figure 3. Traditional Patua songs embody the historical legacy of rural Bengal (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 22.4%, A: 50.2%, N: 6.4%, D: 13.2%, SD: 7.8%.

Table 4. Patua songs were initially composed to disseminate religious and mythological narratives among the general populace:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	102	20.4
A	197	39.4
N	26	5.2
D	101	20.2
SD	74	14.8
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

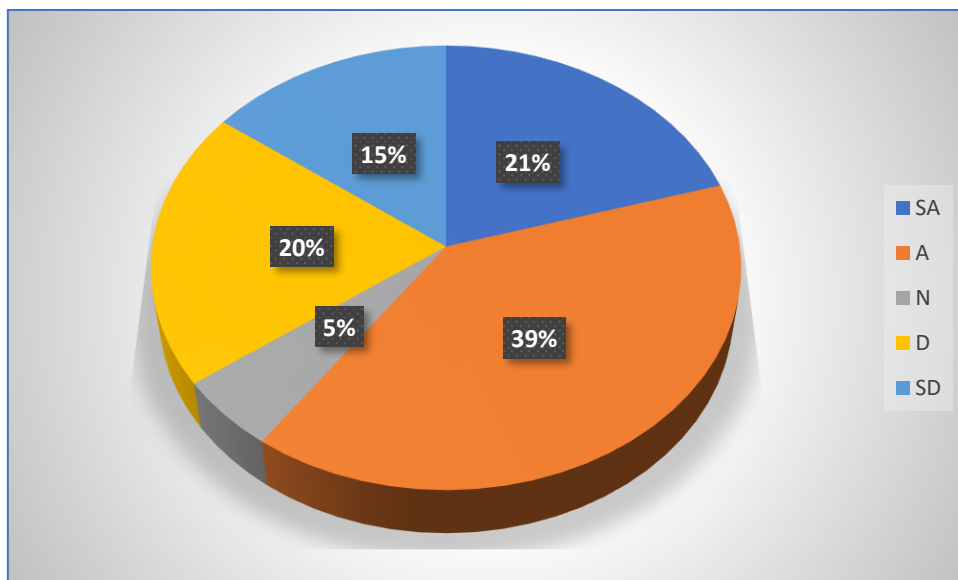


Figure 4. Patua songs were initially composed to disseminate religious and mythological narratives among the general populace (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 20.4%, A: 39.4%, N: 5.2%, D: 20.2%, SD: 14.8%.

Table 5. Historical events have profoundly impacted the themes of Patua songs:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	89	17.8
A	117	23.4
N	20	4
D	139	27.8
SD	135	27
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

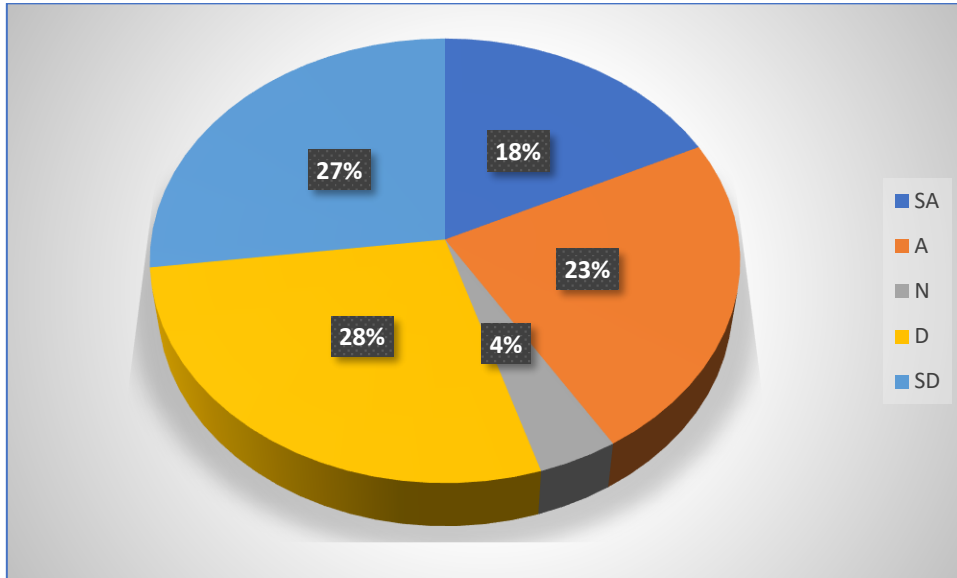


Figure 5. Historical events have profoundly impacted the themes of Patua songs (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 17.8%, A: 23.4%, N: 4%, D: 27.8%, SD: 27%.

Table 6. The social transformations following independence influenced the style and substance of Patua songs:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	120	24
A	131	26.2
N	29	5.8
D	118	23.6
SD	102	20.4
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

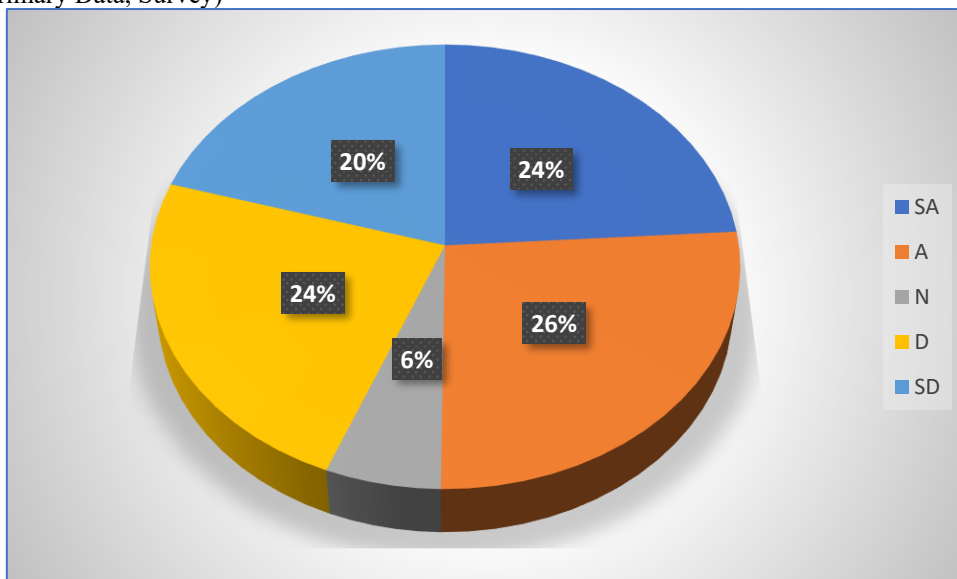


Figure 6. The social transformations following independence influenced the style and substance of Patua songs (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 24%, A: 26.2%, N: 5.8%, D: 23.6%, SD: 20.4%.

Table 7. The process of modernization has diminished the traditional significance of Patuas musical performances:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	121	24.2
A	187	37.4
N	29	5.8
D	101	20.2
SD	62	12.4
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

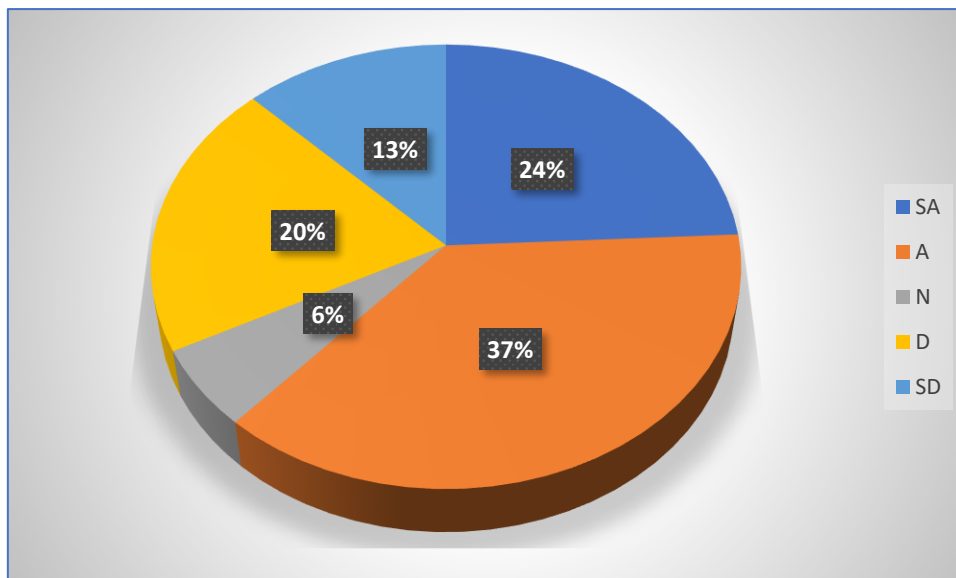


Figure 7. The process of modernization has diminished the traditional significance of Patuas musical performances (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 24.2%, A: 37.4%, N: 5.8%, D: 20.2%, SD: 12.4%.

c) Style, Technique & Commercialization of Pata Painting:

Table 8. Religious narratives constitute a significant aspect of the Pata painting style:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	97	19.4
A	154	30.8
N	28	5.6
D	117	23.4
SD	104	20.8
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

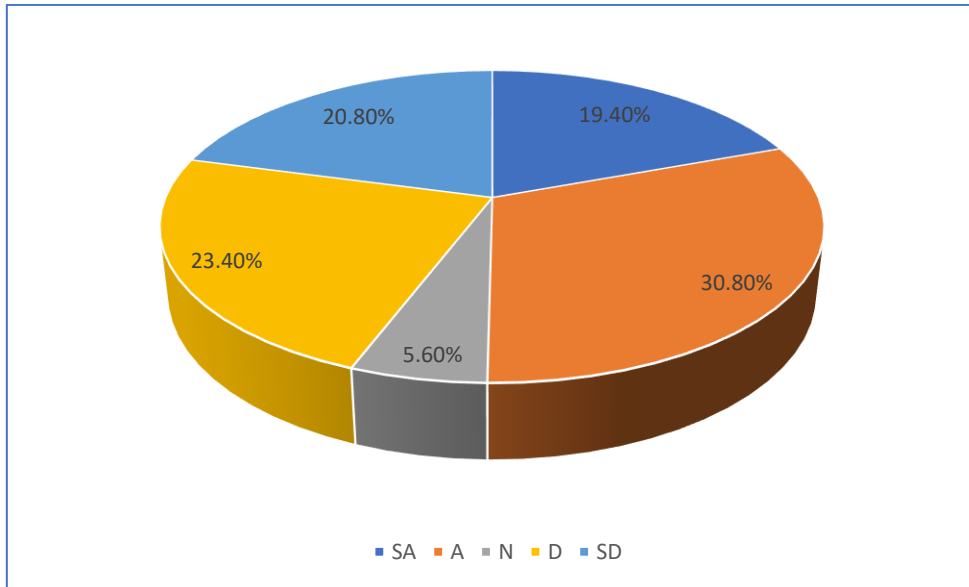


Figure 8. Religious narratives constitute a significant aspect of the Pata painting style (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 19.4%, A: 30.8%, N: 5.6%, D: 23.4%, SD: 20.8%.

Table 9. Contemporary artistic movements have impacted traditional Pata art:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	108	21.6
A	165	33
N	22	4.4
D	118	23.6
SD	87	17.4
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

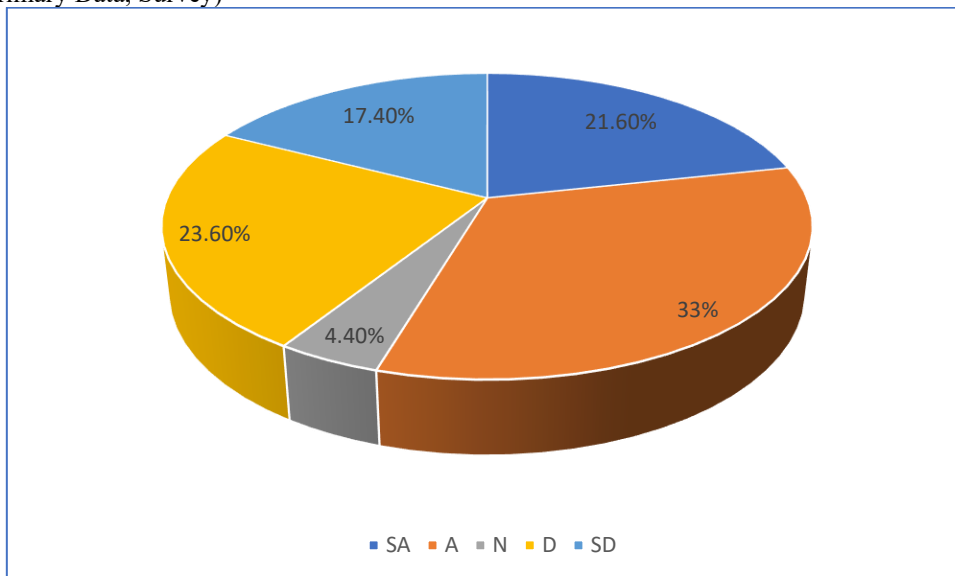


Figure 9. Contemporary artistic movements have impacted traditional Pata art (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 21.6%, A: 33%, N: 4.4%, D: 23.6%, SD: 17.4%.

Table 10. The aesthetic of Pata painting embodies Bengali cultural identity:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	135	27
A	214	42.8
N	25	5
D	77	15.4
SD	49	9.8

Total	500	100
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(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

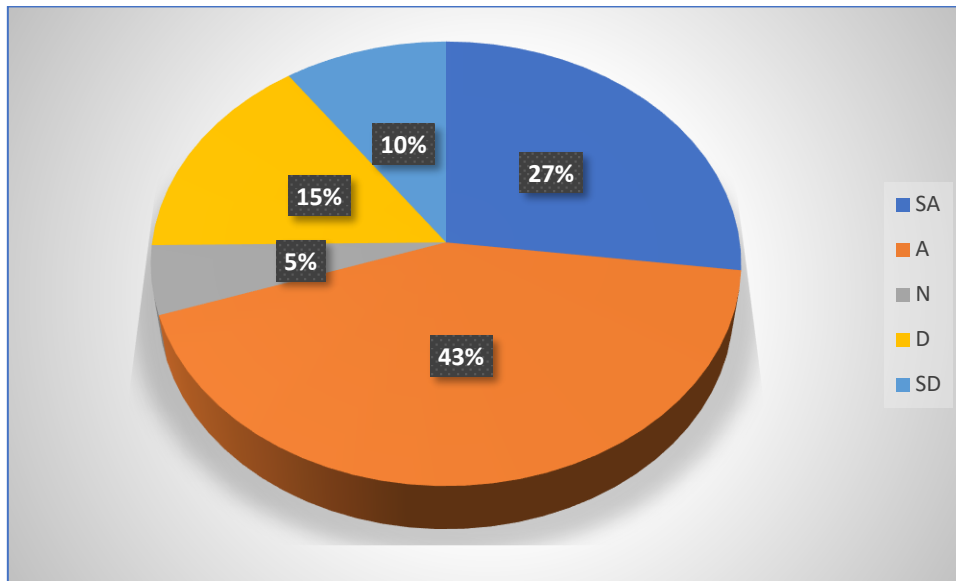


Figure 10. The aesthetic of Pata painting embodies Bengali cultural identity (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 27%, A: 42.8%, N: 5%, D: 15.4%, SD: 9.8%.

Table 11. Emerging Patua artists favour avant-garde artistic techniques:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	117	23.4
A	134	26.8
N	22	4.4
D	122	24.4
SD	105	21
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

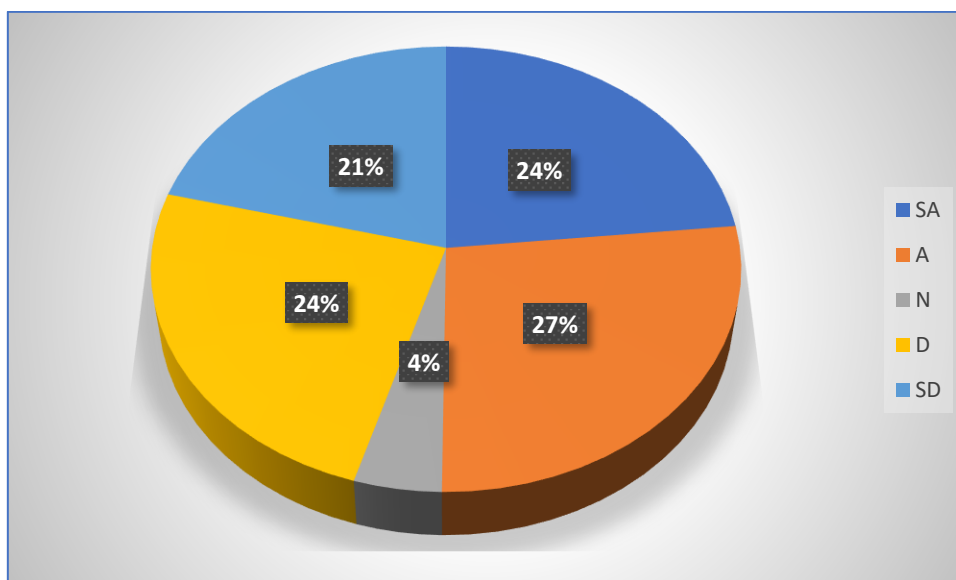


Figure 11. Emerging Patua artists favour avant-garde artistic techniques (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 23.4%, A: 26.8%, N: 4.4%, D: 24.4%, SD: 21%.

Table 12. Technological exposure has impacted the painting approaches of artists:

Options	Respondents	%
SA	138	27.6
A	167	33.4
N	18	3.6
D	108	21.6
SD	69	13.8
Total	500	100

(Source: Primary Data, Survey)

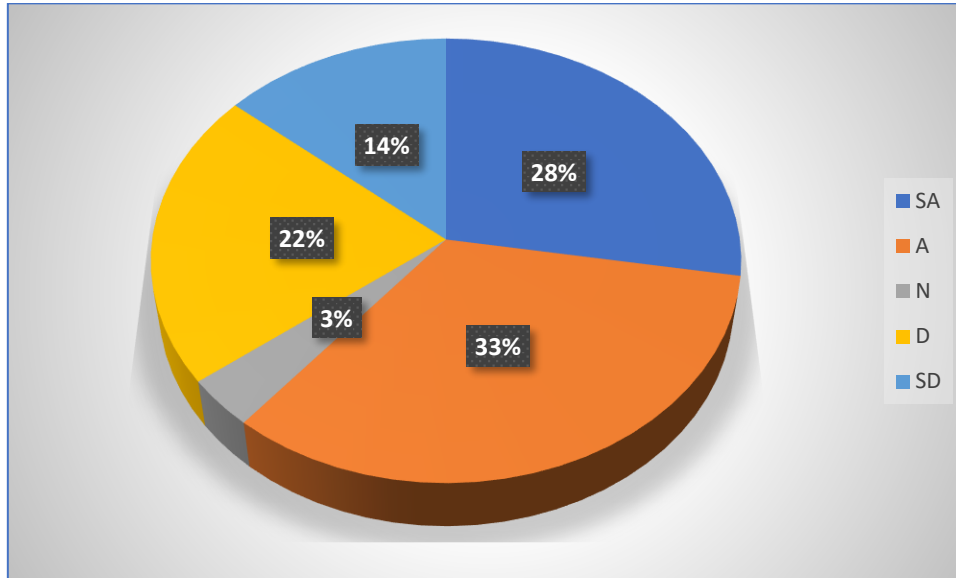


Figure 12. Technological exposure has impacted the painting approaches of artists (%)

As per data analysis & interpretation, it was observed that the % of respondents were SA: 27.6%, A: 33.4%, N: 3.6%, D: 21.6%, SD: 13.8%.

V. CONCLUSION:

The historical creation of Patua songs (*Pater Gaan*) in Purba and Paschim Medinipur represents a unique fusion of visual art, oral tradition, and folk performance. Developed alongside the scroll painting tradition of the Patuas or Chitrakars, these songs transformed painted narratives into living cultural experiences where stories of mythology, folklore, social values, and historical events were communicated through melody and storytelling. The traditional structure of Patua songs, consisting of narrative presentation, devotional elements, and artist self-introduction, reflects the community's role as both painters and cultural transmitters. In Purba Medinipur, Patua songs developed within rural community networks where artists preserved indigenous knowledge through hereditary practices and village-based performances. The themes gradually expanded from religious and mythological subjects to social awareness, contemporary issues, and human experiences, showing the adaptability of the tradition in changing social conditions. In Paschim Medinipur, particularly in areas such as Pingla and Naya, Patua songs continue to maintain their historical identity while embracing new artistic trends, including environmental themes, social messages, and modern narratives. The trends of Patua songs reveal a transition from traditional village-based performances to wider cultural recognition through fairs, exhibitions, tourism, and institutional support. Although modernization, changing patronage systems, and economic challenges have affected the traditional livelihood of Patuas, the integration of new themes and markets has helped sustain the art form. Thus, Patua songs of Purba and Paschim Medinipur are not merely folk performances; they are historical documents of rural Bengal's cultural memory, social transformation, and creative resilience. The continuity of this tradition demonstrates how folk heritage can preserve its roots while adapting to contemporary realities.

The style and technique of Pata painting in Purba and Paschim Medinipur represent a significant continuity of Bengal's indigenous artistic heritage, combining visual storytelling, symbolic representation, and traditional craftsmanship. The distinctive features of Medinipur Patachitra include elongated scroll formats, bold outlines, natural colours, decorative patterns, and narrative sequencing that visually communicate religious, mythological, historical, and social themes. The artists' use of handmade paper, organic pigments, and traditional brush techniques reflects their deep connection with local resources and inherited knowledge systems. In Purba Medinipur, Pata painting has maintained its traditional identity through themes related to folklore, religious narratives, village life, and cultural memories. The painters have gradually modified their styles by introducing contemporary subjects and experimenting with colours, compositions, and designs according to changing

audience preferences. In Paschim Medinipur, especially in the Patua village traditions, the art form demonstrates a strong combination of traditional techniques and innovative approaches, where artists have expanded their themes to include environmental issues, social awareness, public health, and modern events. The commercialization of Pata painting has created new opportunities for Patua communities by connecting them with markets, exhibitions, tourism, handicraft fairs, and cultural organizations. The transformation of Patachitra from a primarily ritual and performance-based art form into a market-oriented craft has increased economic possibilities and global visibility for artists. However, commercialization has also introduced challenges, including changes in traditional methods, dependency on market demand, and the risk of losing cultural authenticity. Overall, the style, technique, and commercialization of Pata painting in Purba and Paschim Medinipur demonstrate the dynamic nature of folk art. The tradition has survived not only through preservation of ancestral skills but also through adaptation to contemporary social and economic realities. The continued creativity of Patuas ensures that Pata painting remains an important symbol of Bengal's cultural identity, artistic innovation, and historical continuity.

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