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Storytelling Art: A Reconsideration of Patuas Performance

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Abstract

The Scroll Performers, since time immemorial, utilize their inborn visual vocabulary aptitudes to connect, teach and entertain the majority in the rural Republic of India and in addition to rural Bengal region mass. Patuas traditionally performed by traveling from village to village with scroll paintings of epic stories depicted on scrolls. In every village, they might sing songs narrating the stories on the scroll, whereas unfurling their scroll at an equivalent time, creating a dynamic oral tradition developed by visual art. The immensity of their subjects was religious in nature and every Hindu and Muslim tales were pictured. Principally insight of the traditional heritage of the cluster of spectators, the entertainers connect with the hearts of thousands of people, influencing them to wander on the message of the portrayal. As bards of Bengal, they portray the scroll on myths, epics, folks, fables, social and contemporary problems. Before inquiring into the event of patachitras, the researcher will be able to justify what is ultimately about the lives and work of the patuas, their past and present, to produce the groundwork for the complex history of their art. Before British colonialism and before Islamic invasion, there was being active Patuas in the villages of Bengal. This research paper focused on a thousand years of traditional art practices have presently come to a dead end scenario in the light of the truth that social movement and other issues, expedite an extremely huge loss of contemporary support from the rural Bengal farmers' community associated an audience. Nearly two hundred years experiment by research scholars from India and foreign countries mentioned frequently, this challenging issue and a social awareness in callings those artistic expressions are placed in peril.

Keywords: scroll performers; narrating the stories; bards of Bengal; patuas; loss of contemporary support; challenging issues

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Introduction

West Bengal is a state in Eastern India stretching from the Himalayas in the North with hilly state Sikkim to the Bay of Bengal in the South. In its North East lies the state of Assam and Sikkim and Country Bhutan. Country Bangladesh lies on its eastern border, to its south Bay of Bengal and South West, the state of Odisha. To the West, it borders the states Jharkhand and Bihar and to the North West country Nepal. Five districts come under sub-Himalayan West Bengal and fourteen districts come under *Gangetic* West Bengal. Capital of the state is Kolkata, the third largest urban agglomeration and the third largest city of India. It is recognized as the cultural capital of India.

Bengal scroll narration is known as an ancient form of audio-visual presentation. The Bengal scroll narrative painters are well known as *Patuas.* From the times immemorial, *Patua* community is well engrossed in their story telling profession. *Patua's* performance is easy, simple, and straightforward an attempt to convey insights across the rural society. *Patuas'* scrolls are painted in a sequential order also called as scroll panels[i]. Scroll narrators diligently highlight the message behind the theme of the narration and articulate the thought process in the form of a song to capture the minds of the listeners. During the forenoon or fall afternoon, these itinerant bards perform on their painted scroll. On top of their pitch near every door step or public congregations these artists perform their narration and this has been very long-established picture in rural Bengal. This artistic expression begins with the foremost ancient community from Austro-Asiatic-culture. With the advent of Brahminical society, a number of the scroll painters or *Patuas* embraced Hinduism. Once more with the arrival of Buddhist they embraced Buddhism. Presumably, that was the golden period of *Patuas*. As a result, of they love art practices; they're galvanized by good patrons. To carry forward their culture and to undertake additional support and encouragement they were no reluctant to change their faith as well as religion. Religious preachers, monks and clergymen made intensive use of scroll paintings to narrate the reality of this ill fated world, and therefore the punishment for his sins that may be

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waited after death. By that point, the practices of showing scroll painting had spread to so many far Eastern Countries similarly as the Asian nation, Tibet, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka. Once more *Patuas* or scroll painters embraced Islam throughout the rule of Khilji Dynasty and Mughal[ii].

Literature review: The Source of *Patua* Art Tradition

On perspective of all this, it is often argued that scroll painting is one of the traditional art forms in the Bengal region. They (*Patuas)* paint narratives of the folk on varied surfaces like walls, floors, clothes, woods and papers have become vital sources of information regarding regional, mythological, religious, heroic, folk and social customs. Over time, the visual vocabulary and paintings of the tribal community have evolved into an innovative genre of ethnic art. According to scholar Suhrid K Bhowmik and David J MaCutchion the *patta* or *patto*[iii] has been regarded as more sacred by the *Patuas/Chitrakars* for the deity *Lakshmi* scroll. It has been customary among women of the village communities to wear the sacred *Patto Vastra* (the textile/ Saree made by *Paat* means Jute threads from Jute plant)[iv] for special holy ceremonies (during *Kojagari Lakshmi Puja)*[v]. It has been also a general belief that the holy communion between God *Viswakarma*[vi] and *Ghritachi*[vii] resulted in nine supreme artist races among which the *Patua* or *Chitrakar* occupy a pristine position[viii]. *Patuas* prefer to perform *Behula-Lakhinder* scroll and *Behula Bhasan* narratives concerning scroll narratives and folk play[ix] from the Hindu mythology *Manasa Mangal Kavya* with the aid of Mukundaram Chakarbarty's[x] (a sixteenth century's poet) lyrics. The investigation in this paper gives a broad outlook and critical analysis of contemporary problems of the *Patua* community. This study also offers new perspectives to the old and contemporary problems associated with this traditional art form. Further, a well

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defined roadmap for the revitalization of these communities and assisted conservation strategies are duly emphasized.

The words *Patua* and *Patidar* have been derived from the word *pat* (Potrait), the former ending with the Bengali suffix *'ua'*, and the latter with the Persian suffix *'dar'*, meaning holder. The origin of Tribal Patuas, their myth and details of their ancestors that discussed at length by various authors[xi] (McCutchion, David J. and Suhrid K Bhowmik, *Patuas and Patua Art in Bengal*, Firma KLM Private Ltd., 1999, p.3.) have been confirmed in our study by a personal audience with the artists. With the evidence obtained from elaborate, colorful paint depictions, the putative myth of Santhal, right from the birth of their first ancestors; *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi*, have been documented[xii], much detail can be avail about Santhal ancestors[xiii]. In addition, claims have also been made based on Sanskrit poetic dramas on *Patuas* namely *Mudrarakshasa*, by Vishakhadatta 8th Century A.D. and *Harshacharita* by Banabhatta 7th Century AD (both the authors confirm about *Yama pata* and *Yama Patuas*, Datta,Vishakha. *Mudrarakshasa*. Poona: Oriental Book Supplying Agency, 1928. And Kane, P.V. (ed.), *The Harsha-Charita of Banabhatta*, trans.E.B. Cowell and F.W.Thomas, Delhi:Motilal Banarshidass Publishers Ltd.1897, p. 55.). These dramas with the narrations with *Yama Patas* have been ascribed to the Buddhist period. *Patuas* methods of showing *patas*, as vividly described in the *Harshacharita*, remains unchanged even today.

Patuas **Narrative Performance and Metrical thrust to reach an audience**

Patuas or scroll narrative painters of Bengal maintain a rhythmic momentum during their performance. One can see a good deal of the effects of visual and verbal interaction between the scroll narrator and their audience on the progress of narrative scroll performance. To handle this kind of difficult situation *Patuas* are always busy as well as dedicated to find its applicability and

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confirmatory action for its ample culture change program aimed at meeting the challenges of audience attraction. That is what *Patuas* feel like the application of certain speed of dynamic methods of how it is useful in a present situation to reach an audience effectively. The suggestion was created on top of that the dynamics of the performance of *Patuas* are compared to those of a stage play. In keeping with the man of science, this is often an awfully fruitful approach –though one that has seldom been used to the degree that it might be followed (Sándor 1967), it appears suggestion has created based on his studies in "performance context" have cared-for target expansive social and socio-linguistic aspects rather than the sort of performance context utilized by those functioning within the context of drama and theater arts.

The Patachitras or scroll narrative paintings of rural Bengal are made by the *Patuas* caste, conversely a branch of the *Chitrakar* caste. As it is known to researchers that *Patuas* are professional folk artists who make images and paintings for their living. They are also accomplished singers. They prefer to depict and narrate scrolls on mythological, regional folklore, folk narratives and contemporary events. They (*Patuas*) carried painted scroll art from village to village. There are completely different rhetorical characteristics like the distinct tribal genre of the *Santhal* scrolls, those from Birbhum, show an indulgence of feeling and sentiment and therefore the Bengali scroll genre within the Kalighat *bazaar*[xiv] scrolls. These days the *Chitrakars* or *pata* painters of *Naya, Pingla* in Medinipur are the only ones involved with *pata* making. A fraction of the *Patuas,* or scroll painters, also serve as priests in the *Santhal* community, they paint *Parani scrolls* and make *patas* with *Santhal* folklore, '*Santhals Janma Britanta'*[xv]. This invaluable crafts has been affected by the onslaught of lithography, oleography and *bazaar* pictures.

Making of Scrolls: Surface Preparation

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Before beginning any scroll painting, *Patuas* concentrate on base or surface preparation. The scroll fabric in fact forms the base of scroll art. Multiple ways of scroll preparation have been undertaken by these scroll painters. Originally scrolls have been painted on silk, jute, and cotton clothes. Of late modern mill made papers have been used in the standard full-scape imperial size. Many a times the paper scrolls have been backed with cloth and stitched together to form a long continuous roll. Sometimes they fix two bamboo rods at both the ends of their scroll. Several painted sheets of paper have been affixed end to end, creating one continuous roll of the scroll. These scrolls have been mounted on clothes (sometimes used saris) for better strength and flexibility. The scrolls typically measure about 1-2 feet in width and around 40feet in length. The scroll panels have been painted in vegetable colours on silk material (less frequently on papers). In the olden days, *Pata* painters used to paint on Tasar silk[xvi] cloth. As the time passed, affordability took the stance over surface selection for scroll preparation. *Patuas* select a pigment preparation technique, keeping in mind the skill, feasibility and benefit parameters. A variety of materials have been used for sticking the layers of the cotton cloths for preparing the surface for painting. Sometimes the *Patuas* use cost effective natural glues like that of tamarind seeds[xvii] or *bel* fruits[xviii] blended with *Ghusum mati*[xix].

These natural glues also act as pesticides and deter insect-pests, and make the scrolls last for a long time. The *Chitrakars* (Patuas) meticulously select colours to create a lasting impact on the audience as pictures speak volumes than words. *Lotkon*[xx] fruits have been used by these artists for saffron shading, *aparajita*[xxi] extract for blue, teak leaf extract for brown, *Ghusum mati* or *Ghusom mati* for white, turmeric for yellow, smoldering rice for dark black, and *sem*[xxii] leaf extract for green. To put it in a nutshell, they prefer to use splendid colours on the *Pata* by applying daring brush strokes for accentuating the aesthetic appeal. With the lapse of time most of the scroll material from the folklore has been lost as the art-form never received aristocratic reverence. As a result today we are left with hardly any scroll dating back to the 18th century.

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Evolution of *Patuas* scroll surface

Prehistoric people used to make their narrative artwork on rock surfaces or on the sand of the sea coast. Prehistoric people were nomadic. During their stay at some places they used to mark their creativity on rock surfaces and tree barks. To carry their legacy where ever they go, these men used to start creating their art on tree barks. And then the rest of the *pata* painting surfaces are stated below mentioned table. A detailed chronological change in scroll material selection and surface preparation is given in Table-1.

Table- Chronological development of scroll surface selection and preparation

S.No.	***Patuas* Pata/Scroll Surface**	**Time**	**Reign/ Approximate Time**
1	Birch tree bark surface	Prehistoric era to ancient era	Before Mauryan Era
2	Palm leaf surface	It has been continued during Pala and Jain era till the 14th Century	During the rule of Pala Dynasty such as Gopala, Dharmapala, as well as Chalukya dynasty
3	Silk cloth surface	Till 19th century	Mediaeval Bengal to British India Era
4	Jute cloth surface	Till 20th century	NA
5	Mica foil surface	Till 20th century	During Company school/East India Company(1750-1850)
6	Date leaf knitted mat surface	Till 20th century	Post Independence Era

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7	Thin bamboo stick knitted surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
8	Cotton cloth surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
9	Thin bamboo stick or blade surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
10	Natural Madhur stick (natural mats) knitted surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
11	Handmade or *papier mache* surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
12	Handmade paper surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
13	Bengali *Sitalpaatti* (cool spread) mats surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
14	Mill made paper or cartridge paper surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
15	Synthetic Madhur/ fiber mat surface	Till date	Post Independence Era
16	Canson / Fabriano Cartridge paper surface	It began in the 21st century	Last 3-4 Years

The Technique of Scroll Narration

Long vertical multi-panelled scrolls known as *Jarano patas*[xxiii] *or latai* scroll painting have been used by *Patuas*. *Patuas* scroll paintings have been rolled up for preservation and transportation. Every panel painted on the lengthy scrolls represent a particular sequence within the story. As the *Patuas* unroll the scrolls for viewing and narrating, the accompanying couplet

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or the story has been recited. While *Patua* displaying *scroll*, at first the *Patua* seats on the knee and then s/he holds the stick on the top side of the *scroll* with left hand. The end stick of the *scroll* he holds with right hand. Now s/he starts singing. The scroll Narrator makes her/his hands dance and starts to open the right hand-part and furls the left hand-part. He shows some paintings with his or songs and then he furls again the left hand-part and starts with the right hand-part. The gap between the panels *Patua* manage by bridging the gap by high pitch sons and dramatic body gestures .

The Fall of *Patua* Tradition and its implications on Indian Traditional Art

In the present study, *Patuas* of the age group 50 years and above have been performing scroll narration according to the original tradition. The young *Patuas* have been found to sway away from the traditional principles of the art-form that included *thakur deya*[xxiv], *bhanita*[xxv], *mool vishay*[xxvi] and *pala deya*[xxvii] during their scroll performance. The young narrators have been found to discontinue the singing part of the narrative adopting easy going methods. One of the proponents of Bengal scroll narrative art, and an eminent folk poet Dukhushyam Chitrakar, while discussing with the author of this paper, had brought to the attention the sorry state of affairs and decline in the traditional values in the performers of the art-form. With the change in the political framework in India, the veritable benefactors like the rulers of kingdoms and elite families had withdrawn their support to *Patuas*. Moreover, new generations have been gradually losing enthusiasm for scroll narrative art. The people of India have been very much reluctant to contribute any money or time to support this endangered art-form. Over the past 35 years, none of the Governments took the initiative for socio- economic development of *Patuas* of Bengal.

Supplementary Information about Patuas: Interviews

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A *Patua* very senior in age his name Pulin Chitrakar described about the actual root or base of *Patuas*, from where they have migrated to Bengal, actually many years ago *Patuas* used to live at the base of Chitrakoot Mountains in MP. Dukhushyam Chitrakar said *Patuas* are not only engaged with the job of *Pata* making and entertaining the people of rural Bengal, but they have served for other purposes to the people of Bengal. Since ages *Patuas* are divided into many groups and serving to the people in their various needs. Such as snake catchers and snake charmers. Naturally scholar can find a link between snake charming narratives and scroll narratives from the similar tales of *Manasa Mangal*. Dukhushyam elaborated the inheritance of his skill and how his talent surpasses from his father through his maternal uncle ultimately reached to him. When he was eight years old used to paint scroll and sing on a scroll, moves in villages with his maternal uncle Gunadhar Chitrakar.

Scholar met Swarna Chitrakar, she is one of the greatest and most talented *Patuas* in Bengal, and also she is the most reputed female *Pata* painters of Naya village, district Medinipur. While narrating scrolls her elegant voice combine with magnificent work skill and craftsmanship is remarkable to the researchers of Bengali scroll narrative art. She follows a specific characteristic while portraying the characters in her scroll panels. Her scroll border designing, colour balances, tonal variations, freshness in pigment is really amazing. She is the genuine inheritor of her father late Ajit Chitrakar, he was an eminent *Patua*. Who broke far from the old concept of performing scroll and brought a very new method, approach, manner, voice modulation, form and style, taking the *Patua* performance with the aid of specific types of pictorial composition on scroll panels. In a single sentence, classiness turns out to be in every bit of her character. In that event if she could continue to practice for forty more years the art fanatics and researchers of folklore will be rushed to Naya village, Pingla Mandal (block) of Medinipur district. Scroll narrative fans of the country will be satisfied to take a look at a new dimension in her overall performance.

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Scholar met Gurupada Chitrakar, his masterful creation *Manasa Mangal* scroll enables him to have a National Award from the hand of then president of India APJ Abdul Kalam in 2004. The implementation of his utmost skills and patience with which the *Patua* Gurupada strove *his supreme* to render exactly on HIV/AIDS scroll and 9/11 scroll, that was taken him to the global art scene. Philadelphia International folk art symposium is a remarkable spell in Gurupada's life where he performed his scrolls in Santa Fe, USA, in 2006.

Today *Patuas*[xxviii] are facing financial stringency,the researcher inquired from Mantu Chitrakar that what measure to be taken to overcome these challenges. Mantu Chitrakar stated that as per his belief he assumed that to attract the rural audience they need crew performance and tune with *poyers.* Mantu, expressed that as predictable with his belief, he accepted that to draw the attention of agrarian society they require overall a team overall performance three kinds of theme oriented scrolls they have to carry along with. Scrolls from myths, regional folktales/fables and contemporary issues and that will be presented amalgamating the action and rhythmic *poyers*.

Dambaru: Hand held instrument, twisting the wrist vigorously explanations the knot at the end of the string to beat the both ends of the drum. Fine sound, plenty of fun. Head is approximately three and a half inches in diameter and this little drum stands about four and a half inches tall. Mantu Chitrakar play to pull the crowd.

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Findings and Discussion

Indian folk artists have long been using *Patachitra*; an innovation par excellence without any technological sophistication. *Patachitra* has been considered as a film strip explained by rhythmic narration and stands as a testimony for the genesis of cinema way back in 5th century BC. Although the Egyptians have their own style of narrating a story like a story board on paper, *Patachitra* by *Patuas* of Bengal is a style of motions with melodious narration. A maximum of eight characters in Mythological scrolls nine characters in Legend scrolls and ten in Contemporary scrolls have been used by *Patuas*. In Mythological scrolls, proper plot wise skin colors are fixed unlike legend scroll as well as a contemporary issue oriented scrolls where skin colors have not been fixed. Contrasting skin colors have been often used by *Patuas* in mythological or epic scrolls than in Legend and Contemporary scrolls. The Egyptians have their own style of narrating a story hieroglyphic art[xxix] (Egypt) like a story board on paper, but *Patachitra* of Bengal is a style of motions with narration. During the advent of Brahnism they embraced Hinduism, again during the advancement of Buddhism they embraced Buddhism, once more during the invading of Bakhtiyar Khilji and Mughals they embraced Islam.

Conclusion

With the onset of cultural shift due to globalization and rise in technology, the ancient medium of communication of awareness and entertainment through *Patachitra* (scroll narration) is on the verge of extinction. Once supported by the elite class of rural Bengal, and then by the agrarian community, the *Patachitra* tradition is declining in the recent times due to cultural and economic changes. The *Operation Barga movement* of late 1970s has also forced the artists to take up farming and cultivation, leaving lasting implications on the scroll culture of Bengal. The findings in this paper give a clarion call to various stakeholders and policy makers to devise new strategies for the conservation of the traditional art-form of scroll narration. Several strategies

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that are suggested in this article, if considered, would build confidence in young scroll narrators and show them livelihood options by creating an efficient business network using this traditional art-form a value worthy performance.

Notes

[i] In general, one scroll contains eight to twenty consecutive panels or registers

[ii] Bhowmik, Suhrid K., and David J McCutchion. *Patua Art and Patuas in Bengal*, Kolkata: Phrama KLM Ltd., 1999.p-15

[iii] The fabric made of golden jute fiberss

[iv] Jute fiber is natural fiber with goldencolorr and silky shine, hence called the "Goldenfiber". Scientific name *Corchorus clitorious*

[v] Full Moon Night during autumn after Goddess *Durga Puja.*

[vi] *Vishwakarma* is the divine engineer cum architect son of sage *Prabhasa.*

[vii] Celestial damsel

[viii] Asis K. Chakrabarti, Asis K. "The Tradition of Scroll Paintings with a Special Emphasis on Lord Jagannatha", *Orissareview*, 2008, pp.13-18.

[ix] Called *Jatra* or staged play

[x] Edward M. Yazijian, *The Chandimangal of Kavikankan Mukundaram Chakravarti*, Gurgaon, The Penguin Books India, 2015,p.2.

[xi] Suhrid K Bhowmik and David J McCutchion discussed about origin of tribal *Patuas*, their myth and creation of their ancestors.

[xii] The scrolls are full of colours and romantic beauty discussed the authors of *Patuas and Patua Art in Bengal*, (1999.P.17).

[xiii] Debnath, Debasis. *Santhals Ancestors:Ecology and Rituals of Tribal Areas,* New Delhi: Swarup and Sons, 2003.

[xiv] Fastest production of pata art as per urgent requirement of pilgrims

[xv] Means birth history and Myths of *Santhal* community a Tribal Community of Eastern and North Eastern India.

[xvi] *Tasar* means *Kosa* silk, is produced from larvae of several species of silk worms belonging to the moth genus

[xvii] Scientific name *Tamarindus indica*

[xviii] Scientific name of the tree *Aegle marmelos*

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[xix] Natural earthen soil, it's associate underground soil accessible around twenty feet deep.
[xx] Scientific name *Bixa orellana*
[xxi] Scientific name Clitoria ternatea
[xxii] Scientific name *Dolichos lablab, a* creeper plant.
[xxiii] A painted nicely rolled scroll it could be on paper or cloth
[xxiv] They narrate elaboratelty about the glory of god goddess or any supreme character
[xxv] In this part they exaggerate the supremacy of any character again and again
[xxvi] Now they reach to the actual subject matter to give through definition in a rhythmic manner
[xxvii] This is the last phase of performance where end performance and humbly urge for more gifts,both they mixed up
[xxviii] Many scroll painters, it's a plural form of *Patua*
[xxix] Hieroglyphics , as symbols for pictures, or as symbols for sounds is first encountered in the writings of Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC).

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