Exploring the Meaning of Genre in Two Indian Performance Traditions*

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Two performance traditions found in modern India raise questions about the ways genres are transformed by changing social, cultural, and economic circumstances. Using the examples of *Dhola*, an oral epic from the Braj region of northern India and *patas*, scroll/songs from West Bengal, this paper examines both the traditional and modern meanings of genre via these two traditions. The *Dhola* functions much like a novel, a heterogeneous compilation of secondary genres including song, chant, narration, reported speech, and more. Now *Dhola* is found on audio-cassettes and DVDs, shifting its performance style and content away from the oral performance on a village verandah while adding new secondary genres and new content. The *pata* (plural for ease for English readers, *patas*), traditionally a performed sung scroll, presented a unity of illustrated scroll and song, which has disappeared as the scroll alone has become a commodity sold to urban Indians and tourists to be hung on their walls as folk art. Exploring both the *patas* and *Dhola* over time—in print, oral performance, audio-cassette, or museum exhibitions—leads to an understanding of the ways genres are grounded in social practice. These two traditions, sharing a worldview from below (both are products of marginalized lower castes), allow us to explore the intersections of social value, linguistic and painted conventions, and the world thus portrayed. They are just two examples of the transformations of folk genres occurring around the world due to the influences of globalization.

Keywords: genre, performance, singing, painting, India

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Globalization in combination with new forms of media have transformed the ways folk traditions around the world are presented to their often new audiences. Part of this transformation is one of genre, of changes in the orienting framework, the set of expectations about the ways in which the actors relate to or use language (Hanks 1987). This paper focuses on two north Indian folk genres, and the ways they have changed over time. The changes in both reflect the demands of their different audiences, whether those audiences are drawn from the same rural locales as previously but whose expectations have changed, or new audiences created by transformations and new fads in the global supermarket (Mathews 2000) that have sometimes extolled the "folk" or the "primitive."

I look first at *Dhola* (Wadley 2004), a primarily oral epic sometimes found in written form from the late nineteenth century on, that is performed throughout the Braj region of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, India. *Dhola* singers agree that it "originally" was performed by a male singer playing a *cikara*, a two stringed instrument, in conjunction with a *dholak* (drum) and either *manjira* (cymbals) or *cimta* (steel tongs). In the latter half of the twentieth century, some singers added a harmonium, a keyboard instrument resembling an accordian, but set on the ground with bellows pumped by the left hand. Some performed it on village verandahs or in tents at district fairs as a form of folk opera. By the 1980s, *Dhola* was transferred to audio cassettes to be sold in the market, and by late in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it became available on DVDs with the addition of, amongst other changes, female singers. The singers of *Dhola* have readily changed its form of presentation, and to a lesser extent its content, in response to the demands of its village audiences, now exposed to new media, different styles of singing, and new aesthetics.

I then turn to the *pata*, a painted scroll with accompanying song from the rural regions of West Bengal. *Patas* (scroll/song) were presented by itinerant bards, *patua*, who travelled throughout Bengal singing their songs as they unrolled their scrolls. But starting in the 1990s, *pata*s began to be used by NGOs as a way of presenting new messages to their less educated audiences (e.g., HIV education) and the scrolls became a popular decorative art treasured by tourists and upper-class Indians. But in this process, the accompanying song was lost, leaving only the painted scroll to convey its message. Here the new urban, educated and sometimes Westernized audiences participated in the transformation of a genre from one that entailed performance to one that was merely an artifact.

Both of these genres are male performance traditions, although the scrolls from Bengal are now sometimes made by women, who, even if they do not publicly sing the accompanying song, at least compose it. Both have historically been lower caste traditions and remain so today. The singers of the epic *Dhola* may rarely come from the high-ranked Brahman caste, but they usually represent mid-to-low-ranking castes in their

originating village communities. The *patua* singers are on the fringes of Hindu society, sometimes even marking themselves as Muslim as an alternative to an otherwise almost untouchable identity. Despite changes in the styles of their performances, changes that borrow from the new aesthetics of Bollywood and the West, *Dhola* singers have retained their focus on the goddess and on caste and gender as they are enacted in the rural communities where *Dhola* is still sung or played on audio cassettes today; changes in storyline or content have been minimal. In contrast, the *patua* artist/singers, with their new non-rural audiences, have turned to a correspondingly wider set of issues – the atom bomb, 9/11, the 2005 tsunami, or HIV/AIDS. Finally, both groups employ sung performances, though again in markedly different ways, that allow us to explore varying forms of dialogic engagement with audience, texts, and extra- or para-textual elements (e.g., melody, painted scroll). These examples illustrate, then, different kinds of genre transformations: one—*Dhola*—responds to the new aesthetic demands of its original audiences, and the other—*patas*—responds to the demands of its new urban and transnational audiences.

Issues of Genre

In understanding genre, I draw primarily on the work of Mikhal Bakhtin and his anthropological interpreters (Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Briggs and Bauman 1992; Bauman 2005; Hanks 1987, amongst others). With regard to genre in India, especially genres that are either oral or cross between oral and written forms, the writings of A. K. Ramanujan (1989, 1991), Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger (1996), and Ann Grodzins Gold (1993) and Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold (1994) are fundamental. A few key ideas provide the frame through which these two genres from northern India are presented. Drawing on Bakhtin (1981, 1986) via Hanks (1987), genre can be seen as an orienting framework, a set of expectations about the ways in which actors relate to and use language. This framework provides a model for both the production and the reception of discourse, understood here (see below) as more than linguistic text. Thus when one invokes a genre, one invokes a model for understanding and production, for producing and interpreting cohesion and coherence. The audience, the receivers of the discourse, have a set of expectations in place through which they can interpret and judge the performed discourse (Bauman 1977), while the performer of the discourse has a set of expectations about what should be produced—if he is able.

As Flueckiger (1996) has shown for India, genre is centrally tied to ideas of community—genres are often community-specific, associated with specific castes, social

groups or genders. Indian genres do not correspond directly to those of the West, so that, for example, India has many oral epic genres as well as many folk song genres—in these sung genres, the melody is often as definitive as the actual text, for the text *and* melody together define the genre. This is true of *Dhola*, where the traditional song style plus the playing of the *cikara* define *Dhola* as clearly as the actual content, which is connected to other traditions and genres in complex ways. Thus while *Dhola* falls into the Western genre-type of oral epic, within India it is a genre onto itself. Likewise the *pata* scroll might be considered belonging to the Western genre of painted scrolls, but in actually is a genre defined by scroll/song, not scroll alone. In neither of these examples do the Western categories fit the reality of genres in India. They do however fit the broader discussion of genre given above, that is they provide "a model for both the production and reception of discourse."[1]

In all these instances, various levels of dialogue, of dialogic interactions, are at work, whether between speaker and hearer, historical time and present time, melody and text, or one genre played off of another. Further, both the *pata* and *Dhola* are interactive performances, interactive in two ways: (a) with their immediate audiences, initially rural audiences gathered around a singer in a temple compound, on a village verandah, or in a school yard, and (b) with a wider set of ideas and genres and influences. In the case of the *pata*, this includes Bengali urban elites and Western-oriented NGOs, and in the case of *Dhola*, rural-based recording and publishing companies, as well as Bollywood films and other new performance styles. Both traditions also draw upon and engage with a variety of discourses from a local or pan-Indian set of mythologies and concepts as well as discourses emanating now from globally attuned urbanites. In other words, they entail constant interaction with temporally or spatially distant persons and speech acts (Manheim and Van Vleet 1998). While many of these dialogues constitute what Kristeva termed intertextuality, I prefer to draw on Bauman's (2005) "interdiscoursivity," in part because it is essential not to link this dialogic relationship to linguistic texts alone, but to widen it to include images, melodies, and concepts that, while less textual in nature, are still culturally recognized discourses.

Interdiscoursivity refers to the interconnections between discourses, understood broadly, especially when a theme in one discourse connects via topic or melody or implication to that in another. For example, Indian mythology often presents themes of fathers learning of the existence of a son through the singing/telling of the son's story, usually by

1 See Gossen 1974 for an early explication of this issue for Central America; for India, see Wadley 1978.

the son himself. The most famous example comes from the Indian epic the Ramayana but *Dhola*, too, uses this device, which resonates with those hearing the epic as meaningful and culturally significant. Ramanujan (1989, 1991) often wrote about intertextuality in Indian oral and written traditions, demonstrating the close connections, or inter-penetrations, between those traditions within the Indian cultural sphere. But here I choose to use the more inclusive term interdiscoursivity to move beyond the limitations implied by "texts" as written or transcribed (oral) products—this is especially important given the folk genres being examined here.

Finally, it is important to recognize that speech styles are inherently indexical, "since their use co-occurs with some other entity, the context or subject matter" (Urban 1984). As such, issues of power and identity (Bauman 2005: 148) are constantly being invoked, for genres ultimately function as a social poetic (Hanks 1987), and their interdiscoursivity "provides a powerful means of ordering discourse in historical and social terms" (Briggs and Bauman 1992: 147). Moreover, and key to this paper, is that notion that since all language changes over time, so do genres; genres are actively being (re)constructed and reconfigured (Briggs and Bauman 1992: 148).

Dhola in Performance

In northern India not far from New Delhi, rural male singing groups perform *Dhola*, [2] along narrative telling the story of Raja Nal and his wives Motini and Damayanti and his son Dhola and Dhola's wives Maru and Rewa. By the late twentieth century, *Dhola* had become a heterogeneous compilation of secondary genres including song, change, narration, reported speech, and more.[3] Exploring *Dhola* over time, through print, oral performance and audio-cassette, allows us to consider how genre is "grounded in social practices of production and reception" (Hanks 1987: 676).

Throughout the Braj region of western Uttar Pradesh and eastern Rajasthan, *Dhola* might take more than twenty nights to perform in its totality. *Dhola* tells of a king, Raja Nal, who seeks to be accepted by the other kings of the region, especially the kings of the Rajput kingdoms to the west. *Dhola* also exalts in the powers of the goddess, particularly the goddess Durga, and women more generally. The hero, Raja Nal, is often unsuccessful,

2 In order to distinguish the name of this performance piece *Dhola* from the hero's son, Dhola, the former is always italicized while the latter is not.

3 See Gold 1993 for a detailed discussion of a similar epic performance from Rajasthan.

whether in battle or in winning the hand of a future wife, without the help of one of his wives, Motini or Damayanti, or Durga. *Dhola* is also a genre that portrays the lifestyles in the Braj region of rural India for the past several centuries, especially with regard to caste. At various points in the epic, Raja Nal takes on the disguises of different caste groups such as Nats (Acrobats), [4] Telis (Oil Pressers), and Banyas (Merchants). Other castes, such as Brahmans (Priests), Potters, and Sweepers, also play key roles. As such, *Dhola* captures much of the rural lower-caste male worldview concerning the traditional social order of this region of rural India. Ultimately, though, *Dhola* is an epic about human's search for recognition of achievement, rather than ascribed status, an idea that speaks against caste hierarchies and associated beliefs about status ascribed by birth.[5]

Indian society, especially that of rural India, is largely ordered through caste status, which defines rules for marriage, the rituals one performs, the importance of education, dress styles, and, more well-known, one's occupation and status, especially with regard to one's relative bodily purity. Until recently, caste clearly defined one's place in the village hierarchy where one resided. This was a status, with all of the concomitant issues, defined at birth and unchangeable during one's lifetime. One should not marry out of one's caste, nor could one change one's level of purity and pollution, especially with regard to the sharing of food and other substances. Caste status then was ascribed: you were born with it. *Dhola*, however, is about a king who seeks status through merit—through his life accomplishments. Possibly based on the Jats (a caste known as farmers and brigands) who ruled in the Braj kingdom of Bharatpur, *Dhola*'s hero and his son constantly seek acceptance by the royal Rajputs who rule other Rajasthani kingdoms. In modern India, where caste rules are illegal and occupation is often determined by modern education, but where caste rules are still actively maintained, especially by women but also through marriage, the message of success by achievement remains vitally important. At the same time, the use of traditional caste markers (Potters with their tethered donkeys wandering from village to village to sell their pots, Oil Pressers with their rebellious wives and blindfolded bullock endlessly turning the wooden oil press, or Brahman priests who lie for monetary gain) sometimes offend those in modern rural audiences who seek to escape traditional caste identities and markers. Based on the older stereotypes and understandings of rural India, *Dhola* must make itself anew to find modern audiences.

4 Translations of caste names are given with an initial capital letter to distinguish them from those who might follow that occupation, but not be of the caste designated by its title.

5 See Wadley 2004 for a fuller explication of this epic tradition.

Dhola is often described as an oral epic, a term that immediately raises the problem of applying Western genre terms to genres elsewhere in the world. (For more on Indian oral epics, see Blackburn, et al. 1989) The on-line encyclopedia Wikipedia captures the popular understanding of epic: "The epic is a lengthy, revered narrative poem, ordinarily concerning a serious subject containing details of heroic deeds and events significant to a culture or nation".[6] Hence oral epics are both poetic in their formal structure and sung in performance; they take hours if not days to perform. *Dhola* does fit within this broader Western view of "oral epic," although in India it can also be considered a genre unto itself. What is not captured here is the actual structure and performance of *Dhola*, for *Dhola* in performance resembles the hetereoglossia of a Bakhtinian novel (Bakhtin 1981) more than it does the long narrative poems of Homer. Further, as Hanks (1987) notes, a genre also implies a related ideology, a set of connections with particular social groups and spheres of activity. Genres, in other words, are particular points of view toward the world (Dorst 1983: 413). And *Dhola*, at noted above, is about caste as an ascribed versus achieved status and also about a goddess, whose help can be sought to alleviate human suffering.

In the past decades, *Dhola* has changed more in performance style than in actual story in part due to new fashions in music in modern India. At the same time, new connections are made, via music and text, to discourses—whether performance styles or concepts and ideas—that have led to changes in content over the several hundred years *Dhola* has been performed.

According to older *Dhola* singers interviewed in the 1990s, *Dhola* was originally sung as a set of verses with a key melody and singing style that mimicked the *cikara*, the two-stringed, bowed instrument (similar to the Middle Eastern *rabat*) that provides the core musical accompaniment. The resulting sound has a harsh nasal quality and is both difficult to sing, especially for any length of time, and is essentially unchanging in its melody. Around the 1950s, the popularity of new theatrical styles and the cinema led singers to begin adding secondary melodies based on both traditional folk tunes and new melodies associated with popular films. This opened up new sources of intertextuality since the music was now used indexically, moving beyond the single *Dhola* melody (which is still used, albeit not with the same voice quality today). The melodic and structural forms added to *Dhola* all had their own associated meanings, meanings borrowed along with the textual traditions of specific song genres into *Dhola*.

6 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_poetry, accessed March 13, 2008

Such melodic forms are used by the renowned *Dhola* singer Ram Swarup Dhimar, a Watercarrier, a low but not untouchable caste with very high rates of illiteracy even today. Ram Swarup led a troupe that performed throughout western Uttar Pradesh for at least five decades, and he still performs, though rarely because he is over seventy. For at least a decade, Ram Swarup's troupe of ten members performed folk opera with several instrumentalists; the singers adorned in costumes acted out scenes in villages or at district fairs across the region. Ram Swarup himself played Raja Nal, the hero. More frequently, however, Ram Swarup performed with just two others, a drummer who played the two-headed *dholak* and a steel tong player. Ram Swarup himself played the *cikara* and sang. His performances are and were a combination of narrative spoken in an everyday speech style, chants (called *doha*) that are used to mark scenes, and songs based on various folk genres of the region. The folk song genres of north India are melody-specific, that is, each genre has one or several associated melodies and related verse structures to which any number of texts can be associated. The key marker for the rural audience is then melody/verse structure. Singers frequently deploy these melody-specific genres in unique ways to comment on the world through the process known as parody.

Here is a small example. In the initial section, Raja Nal, the hero, is avoiding going to war and is chastised by his compatriot for not engaging with the enemy as a real king should do. Here the singer used a martial tune, *alha*, to both mark the beat and also emphasize the need for war.

Varta: "So what did (he) say (to Raja Nal)?"
Alha: "Oh, don't go brother, to Phul Bag; I have told you the state of affairs."
"Go quickly instead to Bengal; why are you being so tardy?"
"Go quickly instead to Bengal; why are you being so tardy?"
"Now why are you dallying on the road; I have told you the complete truth."
Raja Nal, upon hearing this much, then said to those passing by—
"You sit there so boldly, but why are you keeping secrets?"
"Brutality is ended in the army, brother, only fantastic ceremony remains."
"Now, why are you taking so long on the road, give the order."
Said the king of Narbar to his companion, "Father, listen carefully,
"I am now going to Phul Bag, I have heard your opinion."
(Wadley 1989: 94-95)

A second example confirms the singer's use of melody as an indexical marker:

Raja Nal has been strolling in a woman's garden where he has met a gardener's wife who has warned him that he must leave immediately or be imprisoned. Nal does not wish to leave the garden and return to his army and its impending battle though his compatriot, Gujar, urges him to. The performer asks, "And how does Raja Nal leave?" The description of his departure is presented in the *malhar* genre.

Varta: "And in what fashion did Nal leave there?"
Malhar: Oh, slowly, slowly Nal went from the garden.
Oh, slowly, slowly Nal went from the garden.
O, brother, Nal was very sad at heart.
The King of Narbar, brother, went from the garden.
Oh, seeing him come, O brother, the Gujar said.
Oh, seeing him come, O brother, the Gujar said.
"Oh listen to my request, brother, listen to my request, listen carefully."
King of Narbar, O brother, fix your mind on the forest.

Nal is regretfully leaving a woman's garden. In fact, his reluctance to return to his army marks him as feminine. This femininity is highlighted for the audience by presenting it through a woman's song genre. Raja Nal must end his pleasant walk in the garden (a symbolic representation of a carefree girlhood) to return to his army and his responsibilities as a man and king. The redundant, long-drawn-out lines clearly mark his reluctance, especially when contrasted with the short, unelaborated lines of the dominant *dhola* song style. But the *malhar* genre marks his reluctance in more than just referential terms. As culturally defined, *malhar* songs are laments—and they are female. The message is clear. (Wadley 1989: 96-97)

In this piece, Ram Swarup uses two indexical song genres, *malhar* and *alha*, *Malhar* evokes the rainy season and a woman's longing to return to her natal home. As he uses the melody of *malhar* here, Ram Swarup indexically marks the hero Raja Nal's reluctance to pursue the battle ahead by as female because of the female-associated melody and metrical structure. Hence he engages in a complex dialogue with the rural audience that knows the melody and linguistic genre markers. But when battle is discussed, the singer draws on an appropriate song genre, in this case *alha*. *Alha*, like *Dhola,* is both a melody and a long sung narrative and is often termed an epic by Western scholars; as a genre, it is concerned primarily with war. Like *Dhola*, it has an associated key melody and verse structure, one based on a regular even four-beat line, a style suited to march-

ing armies. In this instance, Ram Swarup uses the *alha* melody and verse structure to describe Raja Nal's army marching to battle. Gone is the feminine reluctance; the masculine battle song is invoked. Again, the rural audience recognizes the melody and verse structure as *alha*, as masculine, as war. The rural audience knows the genre, its orienting framework, and the associated content and ideology (see also Wadley 1989). Over time, additional folk song genres have been incorporated into *Dhola* performances, as well as melodies made popular in films or folk theater. New instruments have been added as they are incorporated into Indian music (the harmonium, the violin). Female singers are now present in public performances and in performances available in VCD format.

The *Dhola* genre has undergone still other changes. As early as the late 1800s, *Dhola* also emerged in print. The most prevalent version (still in print) by one Todarmal (Todarmal 1879, 1975) uses classical poetic styles, placing *Dhola* in a new artistic realm and bringing it to literate urban audiences. It was now a book to be read, not seen on village verandahs. Its expense and the demands of literacy in an area where even today barely 50 percent of the population can read mark it as a different kind of text. Later, in the mid-twentieth century, a plethora of cheap 20 to 28-page printed versions were circulated, the most famous by Gajadhar Singh. This short-form *Dhola* presented one episode in each pamphlet. The pamphlets were never meant to be performed, certainly one could not get a three to five-hour performance into twenty-four pages. Rather, they provided only the most basic story line and selected songs and functioned more like a reference for singers, or a recall guide for readers, rather than a full script. These pamphlets are, however, still called *Dhola*.

In the 1980s, a prolific audio-cassette industry offered *Dhola* on tape. Here the genre was refashioned once again. Each cassette lasts 60 minutes, so it is common to find one episode on two or three cassettes, often packaged together. One particularly popular singer, a young man named Kailash, whose performance was dominated by the music of Hindi films, adding a new dimension of interdiscoursivity to *Dhola*. He transformed the text to emphasize a new Indian nationalism and militant Hinduism. Yet Kailash was also very aware of his core audience, and of the connection of *Dhola* to rural communities: in one cassette, after an introduction in which he speaks standard Hindi and performs film tunes, he goes on to say, "Now I will talk in "country language" (*desi bhasa*), immediately connecting *Dhola* through language to its rural roots. Although audiences and performers still refer to this form as *Dhola*, its audience and performers are now connected at a distance, rather than interacting directly. The genre, understood more broadly, is significantly altered.

The most recent transformation of *Dhola* responds both to audience demand for films and television, and the popularity of new technologies, in this case the DVD player.

Produced in Delhi, thirteen sets of VCDs[7] feature the troupe of Hariram Gujar of Alwar in Rajasthan; they are a modern version of the folk opera style of the mid-twentieth century—with the addition of female performers while retaining the indexical *cikara* as a prop rather than a key musical instrument.

It is these transformations, retaining the narrative but transforming its performance style, that allow *Dhola* to persist in the twenty-first century and to remain popular with its lower-caste patrons. *Dhola* is, after all, a story of a king who is not accepted as a king because of his supposed lower-caste birth. Despite its transformation from a *cikara*-style of singing to the heavy use of film tunes or its presentation in limited one-hour packages, 28-page scripts, or a VCD, *Dhola* retains its appeal for lower-caste audiences and patrons because it is ultimately about power and identity in rural caste-based communities, and these issues still reverberate in India's villages. *Dhola* also celebrates the power of the goddess, emphasizing again and again the rewards of being devoted to her. In a rapidly transforming India, reassurance about the goddess's power is valued. *Dhola* is thus refitted for modern times. It has become a genre for the recording studio and VCD player, but still brings sharp focus to ongoing issues of achievement and identity; it continues to convey a powerful ideology that combines the potential of religious worship and life success.

Patas and Their Makers

An itinerant bard opens his painted scroll in a village in West Bengal and sings out the song that he wrote to accompany his painting, unrolling the scroll to show new scenes as his song moves from verse to verse. The singer is known as a *patua*, and the scroll/sung performance a *pata*. While one possible derivation of "*pata*" connects it to terms for cloth (and to the word to which the English carpet is related), some modern *patuas* claim that *pata* is derived from the term *patana*, to persuade (Korom 2006: 32), and refers to the use of rhetoric to persuade rural audiences to pay to look at and listen to the scroll/song. But what persuades here? The song? The painted scroll? I argue, it is the combination of the two in performance.

This linking of scroll and song in performance presents challenges to accepted understandings of genre, while at the same time opening a space for new interpretations. Furthermore, the "modernization" of the *pata* provides insight into interdiscoursivity and

7 DVDs are sometimes termed VCDs (video cds) in India.

innovation in a tradition that dates back to the thirteenth century. For centuries, *patuas* traversed the rural lanes of West Bengal, carrying their scrolls in a shoulder bag, stopping to sing out their scroll whenever an audience could be gathered, usually in some public space such as a school yard, temple compound, or village gathering spot. Shifting back and forth between Hindu and Muslim identities (although this was probably not an issue prior to British rule), the low-caste *patua*s tell stories about their low-caste identities, all of which, like those elsewhere in India (Wadley 1994; Caughran 1997), were given them by some deity because of a ritual mistake. In several versions of the *patua*s' story, their low-caste status originated in a painter using saliva to moisten his paintbrush when painting an image of a deity (Korom 2006: 34, 36). But whatever their origins, modern *patuas* (also called *chitrakar*, painter) are poor and make their living primarily by the singing the relevant songs as they unfurl their scrolls in Bengal's rural areas. Originally, these scrolls were not for sale, but were painted solely for their own use as they wandered from village to village seeking an audience (McCutchion and Bhowmik 1999: 7). But in the last thirty to forty years, scrolls have increasingly become folk art objects that are collected and displayed in their own right, both by urban upper-middle-class Bengalis seeking to display Bengali "culture," and by Westerners.

Key here is that with few exceptions, the *patua* historically painted the scrolls and composed and sang the accompanying songs. A wandering bard, he was also a beggar, seeking alms (*bhika*) from his rural audiences. It is this scroll/song in performance, the unrolling of the *pata*, that is in fact the operative genre here. Recognition that the scroll and song are not separate entities (see below) requires a rethinking of what we mean by genre, especially in universal terms, as the scroll/song fits no modern Western genre categories. Contrary to much of the literature on the *patua*s and their performances, I find that use of the term *pata* to refer only to the scroll is largely incorrect. The *pata* as it has existed until recently is neither an art genre nor a textual genre, but some co-mixture of the two. As I argue below, to some extent this compound genre is fading away, or changing its terms so that now the *pata* scroll is a commodity that can be bought—but one can also pay to buy the scroll and have the seller perform the scroll/song for audio-cassette or video. For clarity, however, in the following pages, I use *pata* solely to refer to the complete scroll/song performance, using scroll for the scroll alone and song for the song alone.

Nowadays, many *patuas* live in the village of Naya, Medinipur District, West Bengal as well as in Birbhum District. The third largest district in all of India, Medinipur has more than 11,000 villages and as recently as 1991 was 90 percent rural (Korom 2006: 50). In 2005, there were thirty-nine *patua* households in one Naya neighborhood (Korom 2006: 52). Every *patua* family had at least one member engaged in the singing or paint-

ing of scrolls, and many had more than one. Other family members worked as laborers, carried grain in the markets, tended small field plots, or sought other kinds of menial employment. Regardless of occupation, most *patua* families lived in extreme poverty.

In the last twenty years, younger women have been trained to paint, compose songs and sing, and have begun to earn money in their own right. Many of these women entered into the *pata* system because of training sessions sponsored by the Handicrafts Board of West Bengal and held in Naya, Medinipur in 1986 and 1991. Because men could not free themselves from other duties for the months of this training (especially given the meager stipends paid to those attending), they sent their wives, thus opening scroll painting to women (Hauser 2002: 118).[8] While women compose and sing the songs composed for the scrolls, they are less likely to do so publicly, so in some cases a brother or father may sing or speak the associated song. Local and Kolkata-based NGOs have encouraged women to become *patuas* and have aided them in selling their works (Fruzzetti, Ostor and Sarkar 2005).[9]

The scroll itself is (usually) divided into framed pictures, and is now made from sheets of paper bought in the local market that are sewn together to make a long handscroll (which can be painted horizontally or vertically). The size of the scroll is thus determined both by the width of the purchased paper and the number of sheets sewn together. In some cases, the painter uses the rectangles created by the sewn papers to lay out his scroll, covering the sewn sections with a painted frame. Other scrolls lack the structure of a scene-by-scene style and instead the whole thing becomes one large frame. Still other painters create frames that are larger or smaller than those made by the paper size with its sewn breaks.

The painter first composes his/her song, which determines the number of frames needed, since a single verse usually accompanies each frame and provides the basic outline of its content. After the scroll is painted, an old piece of cloth (often a worn sari) is glued to the back to make it more stable and less likely to tear, especially as it is rolled and unrolled during performances.

Disagreement exists as to the kinds of paints used. Korom (2006: 60) claims that the paints are usually made by the painter him/herself, using turmeric powder for yellow;

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8 Female *patua* were not unknown prior to the 1980s. A French group seeking *patua* for their scrolls celebrating the French revolution in the mid-1980s came across at least one renowned female *patua* (Alliance Francaise 1989: 43).

9 When I bought *patas* at the National Crafts Museum in New Delhi in the fall of 2006, one of those that I purchased was painted by the sister of the male seller. He could tell me the meaning of her scroll, but not sing the accompanying song as it was "hers".

burnt rice for black; pomegranate juice for red; lime for white, etc. The addition of the sap of wood apple provides a fixative. But Hauser (2002), doing research in the 1990s, prior to Korom's work in Naya, found that the *patuas* bought their paints in the local market, although they might claim to use home-made, "natural" paints because of the demand for these from the urban elite who seek a "true" Bengali folk art.

The performed scroll is what is rewarded with alms in rural Bengal.[10] The songs generally use a metrical style known as *payar*, which is performed at a slow tempo. It is also reported that the *patua* starts by singing very loudly, slowly decreasing both his volume and moving to lower parts of the scale as the song proceeds. After 8-10 lines, he will begin accenting the lines very strongly to engage his audience (McCuchion and Bhowmik 1999: 125-126).

Let us now look at a scroll that represents the *pata* tradition in the scroll/song form common throughout the twentieth century (see Figure 1). Here is one of India's most famous stories segments from the Ramayana, the capture of the goddess Sita, wife of Rama, by Ravana, the evil demon-king of Lanka.[11] As is typical of a *pata* scroll, the first frame shows the main character of the story, in this case the god Rama. Borrowing from the Ramayana, one of India's most famous and widespread epic traditions, the *patua* has condensed the hundreds of verses in the written versions of the Ramayana into a set of eight key images/verses. Here the elaborate story of Rama and Sita in exile is focused on the key incidents of that story—the marriage of hero-god Rama and with the lovely Sita; the travails facing Sita when exiled, along with Rama and his brother Lakshman, to the forest; the arrival of the demoness Surpanakha, and the resulting cutting of her ears and nose by Rama's brother Lakshman after she insults Rama; Surpanakha's complaint to her brother, the ten-headed demon king of Lanka; Ravana's revenge which takes the form of using a golden deer to entice both Rama and Lakshman to leave Sita alone in the forest; Lakshman's drawing of the magic circle to protect Sita; Ravana arriving in the guise of a holy man who demands that Sita step outside the protective circle before he can accept her offering; and the heroic vulture Jatayu's swallowing of Ravana's chariot with Sita inside and Jatayu's resulting death. These episodes from the Ramayana shown here are amongst those most commonly sung about or painted (in various Indian artistic traditions), with two exceptions. One that is not amongst the most common is the second

10 I have found only one author who actually dealt in any way with the song as sung performance, although numerous authors include song texts, usually without the accompanying scroll. Korom (2006) is an exception to this: his beautiful catalog has scroll and song side-by-side, although he does not discuss the songs in performance.

11 This *pata* is owned by Professor Geraldine Forbes, Syracuse NY, translation hers.

frame where Sita's feet burn from the sand in the forest. The second is the vulture Jatayu swallowing the chariot and then vomiting it back up; this is a Bengali variant not found in other regions and variants of the Ramayana, where instead he kidnaps Sita and loses his life in a resulting battle with Ravana (Ghosh 2003: 847). Any Hindu familiar with the Ramayana would be able to narrate the basic story represented in each frame.

Examining the *pata* scroll/song as a genre raises questions of definition and complexity. It challenges those who think of the scroll as a piece of art when it is unaccompanied by the *patua*'s song. This is an issue when museums set about presenting *patas* to their public. Museum directors are used to thinking of art as atextual, unless the text is built into the artifact.[12] Yet *patuas* did not intend their songs and scrolls to be separated. Their creation was intricately intwined with their intended presentation tradition. *Pata* cannot truly exist without being performed together, the scroll unrolled and the song sung. I would argue it is neither a song nor a scroll, but a unified, and yet dialogic, combination of the two. Unfortunately, in exhibitions it is usually treated as scroll, while in print as song (since the imagery is seldom published alongside). The song and the scroll complement and speak to one another, each informing the "other half", if you like, of the genre.

Let us return to the example scroll and focus on how painting and text intersect. Nowhere in the song is Ravana described as having ten heads, yet the scroll affirms this characteristic. Likewise, the listener is not told that Ravana has taken the disguise of a holy man when he comes to kidnap Sita, yet he is portrayed in this disguise in the painting. Thus we can see that the painting and song are an intertwined discursive event. Neither exists fully without the other. If there were only a song, the singer might well need to add more visually orienting terms to his song. Nor is the painting entirely sufficient onto itself, although most Indians would be able to relate the story being represented given its familiarity through other discursive events in Indian society.

Starting in the 1970s, Kolkata-based elites and NGOs began to use the *pata* form to convey messages about issues ranging from deforestation to HIV/AIDs: these present an opportunity to begin to understand in an even more complex manner how *pata* complicates the notion of "genre," and the multiple dialogic relationships between its parts, with its various audiences, and with the social times in which new *pata* are produced. From the 1980s on, various groups, both Indian and Western, used the *patua* and their *patas* to present messages that suited their upper-middle-class urban needs for cultural

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12 When I curated an exhibition of *patas* at Syracuse University in 2002, this problem really hit home; the museum director *allowed* the accompanying text only after endless argument and persuasion.

affirmation. An early and oft-mentioned example is the patronage of the Alliance Francaise de Calcutta, which had *patas*[13] created to celebrate the bicentennial year of the French Revolution, a year that coincided with the Festival of France in India (Alliance Francaise 1989). The resulting publication includes several scenes from the scroll with no accompanying song, although a Bicentennial text is included in a version published later (McCuchion and Bhowmik 1999: 105-111). As with most outside-sponsored *patas*, the French laid out the basic content, saying "and when we went back to narrate the story of the French Revolution, the [*patua*] was extremely empathetic" (Alliance Francaise 1989: 43).

The transformation of the scroll portion of *pata* into a commodity to be sold rather than part of a performance to be viewed and participated in is tied to the early twentieth-century "discovery" of Bengali folklore. The Bengali Gurusaday Dutt played a key role in this development, by collecting *pata* scrolls, and his compatriot Rabindranath Tagore did the same for music. As *pata* came to accepted as a commodity, it became "*Patua* art" rather than a scroll/song performance. As Frank Korom notes,

> The most notable change is that instead of using the scrolls as a prop for the performance of the tune, Patuas are now selling the scrolls. In other words, no longer are the song performances central to the economic dimension of the tradition and some painters do not even bother composing new songs just new scrolls. (2006: 80)

In a clear case of self-reflexivity, *patuas* now talk of *kalca kara*, "making culture," whether it is tied to the kinds of paints used or to the creation of scrolls without songs (Hauser 2002: 116). The *patua* is now recognized as a *pat silpi*, a "*pata* artist," but not a scroll singer. More and more, the *patua* often refrains from singing his scroll in performance; in fact, he may not know any songs. In addition to the urban elites and foreign tourists seeking art to hang on their walls, other pressures have encouraged *patua* to shift away from singing. The rural itinerant scroll singer was considered a beggar seeking *bhiksa* (alms) from his patrons, and thus engaging in transactions thought by many to be degrading (Hauser 1994). Having his art considered a commodity appealing to tourists and elites gives the modern painter a prestige he previously lacked. Not surprisingly, the modern *pat silpi* has rejected the performance aspect in favor of art (Hauser 2002: 119).

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13 A note on the *pata* genre: As I write, my instinct is always to say "have a *pata* painted," rather than to capture the duality of the *pata* as scroll and song. I believe that most authors on the *pata* would concur in this inclination.

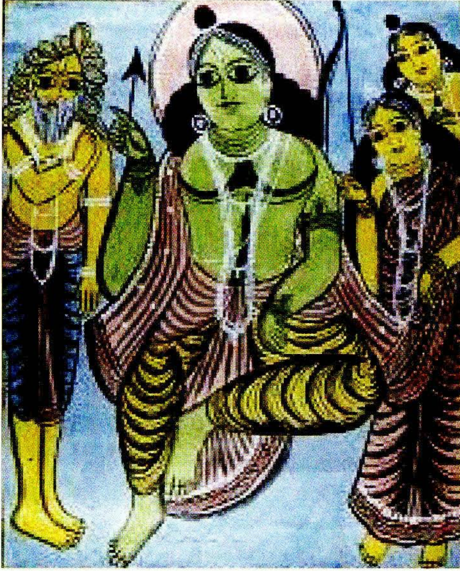
In the case of the French and others who employ the *patua* to convey their own messages, it is clear that a certain power of tradition is referenced because of the genre's historicity—by using a *pata* for a modern message, the indexical connections to the past, to the validity of the *pata's* song and scroll, are invoked. Through use of the *pata*, new and foreign content can to a degree be naturalized. Hence the modern (e.g., messages against deforestation) is connected indexically with the past (the many myths and old stories generally found in the repetoire). The *patua* now making *pata*s for new audiences, whether the Duke of Edinburgh (Alliance Francaise 1989: 43) or for a literacy campaign, is in a dialogue both with the modern and with the historical.

The growing HIV/AIDS epidemic has provided new opportunities for NGOs to employ *patua*s to transmit their messages. The scroll in Figure 2 was commissioned by The American Center in Calcutta for AIDS Awareness Day in 2001. The *patua*, a woman named Rani, said that she knew about the disease but did not personally know anyone infected with it. The resulting scroll, then, was based on the intentions of the Westerners at the American Center and the message they wanted to convey. Interestingly, although Rani was able to narrate the meaning of each frame, she had not composed an accompanying song. For the purposes of the American Center, the scroll without song conveyed the necessary information.[14] Moreover, since it was to be displayed on a wall, a performed song was irrelevant. Visually the scroll reflects its Western orientation, the culture with whom the *patua* was in dialogue as she created it. The medical office, the syringes, the sterile look of the setting all reflect an orientation to the modern West, not to present-day India. By invoking the genre of *pata* assumedly the American patrons aimed for coherence, through local viewers' interdiscoursive recall of "true" *pata*. However as an index to the tradition, I would argue that this piece largely fails. The non-song explication of the scroll the painter/singer provided to its American buyer is given here (Figure 2).

Two scrolls from 2004-06 counter the Western orientation of the 2001 works. Here the *patuas*, one a female and one a male, are more fully in dialogue with their cultural roots. Moreover, songs were composed for both scrolls (see Figures 3 and 4). While references to Western medicine and syringes remain, both are dominated by the AIDS demon. Let us look more closely at Monimala's scroll and text (Figure 4).

Although the topic of this *pata* originated in the West and was brought to Kolkata largely through the efforts of Westerners, this HIV *pata* is clearly in dialogue with Ben-

14 A further indication of the planned use of the scroll was that it was made on narrow flimsy paper without the cloth backing that would prevent tearing, which occurs with the most minimal use in performance.



1-1 Sita Haran, painted by Yakub Chitrakar

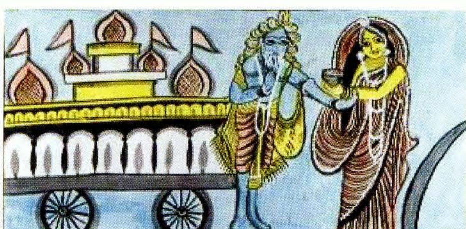
1-2 First Rama went, then Sita, andthen Lakshman. Lakshman broke off a branch and made an umbrella to hold over Sita. Sita walked slowly on burning sand under the hot sun. Sita melts like butter, she cannot walk anymore.

1-3 They made a house in the forest. Rama and Sita talk, Lakshman has fun. One day, Surpanakha came in search of flowers. Lakshman cut off her nose and ears

1-4 Surpanakha went to her brother, the demon Ravana, with her nose in her hand. She laid down in front of him crying. Seeing the condition of his sister, Ravana became very angry. He called the demon Marica and told him to take the form of a deer.

1-5 Sita saw a golden deer and said, "Bring me that deer and make me happy." Rama told Lakshman, " I am going to catch the deer because Sita has asked me to." When Rama chased the deer, it flew away.

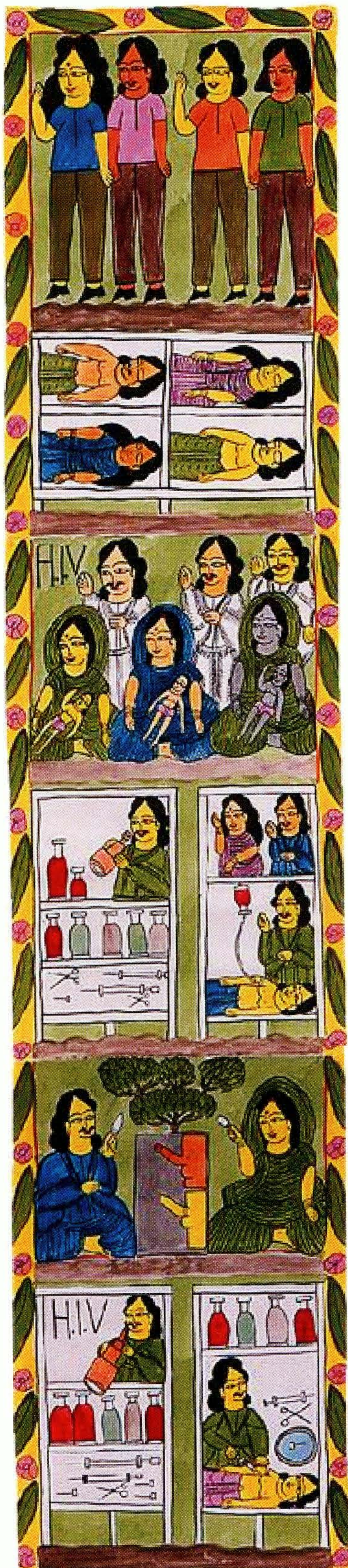
1-6 When Rama killed the deer, it cried out in Rama's voice. Sita heard this and told Lakshman to go search for his brother. Lakshman agreed to go, but first he drew a circle and told her not to step outside of it.



1-7 Then Ravana [in the disguise of a holy man] came out from behind a banyan tree and said to Sita, "Janaki-ma, give me alms. I am afraid of this line." Sita stepped outside the circle and Ravana grabbed her and took her away in a chariot.

1-8 As the chariot flew through the sky, the bird Jatayu came and swallowed Ravana's chariot and began to fight with Ravana. Ravana shot a special arrow and Jatayu fell to the earth. Sita cried, "Where are Sri Rama and Lakshman?"

Figure 1 Sita Haran, painted by Yakub Chitrakar



2-1 Listen.

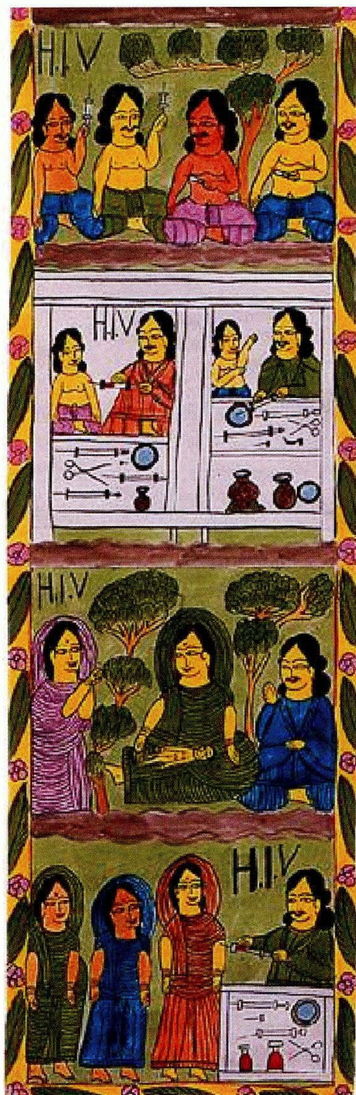
2-2 In the last twenty years, one million Indians were affected by AIDS.

2-3 Both women and men can be infected.

2-4 Transmission is through blood, through the mixing of blood.

2-5 If you use condoms [she named the brand "Nirodh"], you will not be infected.

2-6 Microscopes can examine blood, so if you get a blood transfusion you won't get it.



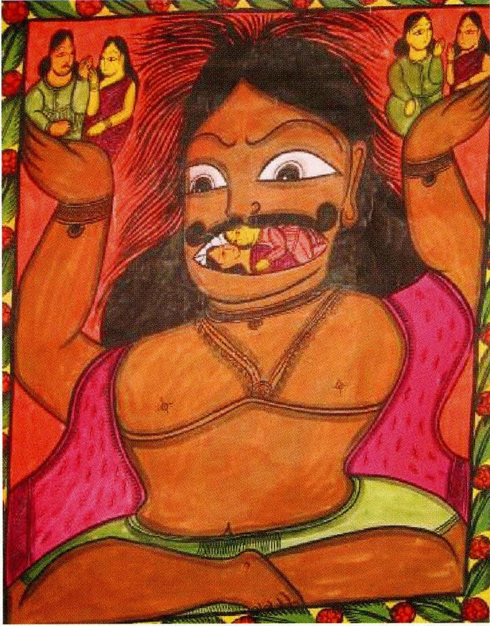
2-7 Addicts who share needles transmit H.I.V.

2-8 Needles to give injections must be sterilized before injection.

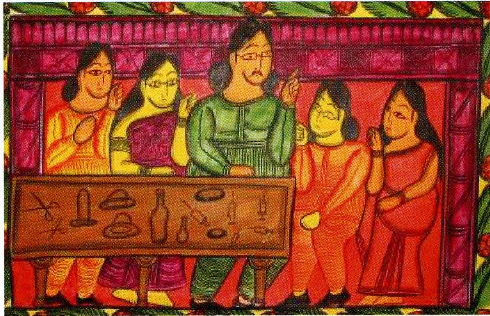
2-9 In the mother has it and breast feeds, then the baby will get it.

2-10 If pregnant, women should be tested for HIV.

Figure 2 Anti-HIV Campaign, painted by Rani Chikrakar (Tempera on Paper 107 x 14, 2001, State of West Bengal) The American Center in Calcutta commissioned Rani to create HIV/ AIDS scrolls for AIDS Awareness Day in 2001. Rani says she knows about the disease but does not personally know anyone infected with it. This is not a song; the *patua* narrated what was in each frame.



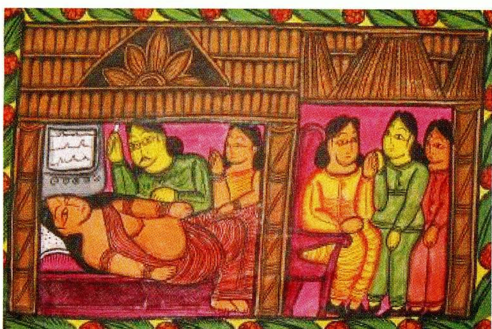
3-1 AIDS is a lethal disease
"Wonder who brought it our way? "
It accounts for many fatalities,
Increasing everyday...
AIDS arrived here from some foreign shore
Infecting our people who are dying by the score
Oh brother, dying by the score



3-2 A little caution, however, will keep it at bay...
AIDS is a lethal disease
"Wonder who brought it our way? "
O mothers, sisters, brothers, be aware all of you
Once afflicted by AIDS there's nothing you can do
Oh brother, nothing you can do...

3-3 Be alert always and you will be safe from its sway
AIDS is a lethal disease
"Wonder who brought it our way?"
Don't fall prey, oh brother, make a note in your head
Rest assured then you'll be spared all the dread
Oh brother, be spared all the dread

3-4 Use Nirodh condoms and a fresh syringe each time
AIDS is a lethal disease
"Wonder how it came into our climes?"

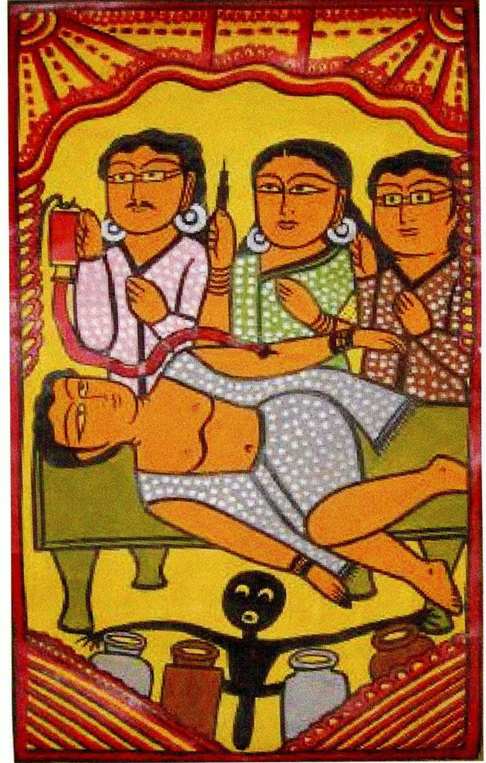


3-5 If AIDS happens to afflict a pregnant woman
The newborn, too, will suffer from the same condition
Oh brother, from the same condition

3-6 Heed these words, the doctors they all say
AIDS is a lethal disease
"Wonder who brought it our way?"
It accounts for many fatalities,
Increasing everyday...

3-7 Every district hospital has a VCDC post
Get yourself examined there at 10 Rupees cost
Oh brother, at 10 Rupees cost
Reports will be confidential, they will never change hands
AIDS is a lethal disease
"Wonder how it came into our land?"

Figure 3 Manoranjan Scroll Song



4-1 *The Lady Doctor is the god I worship in my heart, O brothers! They revive the dead.*

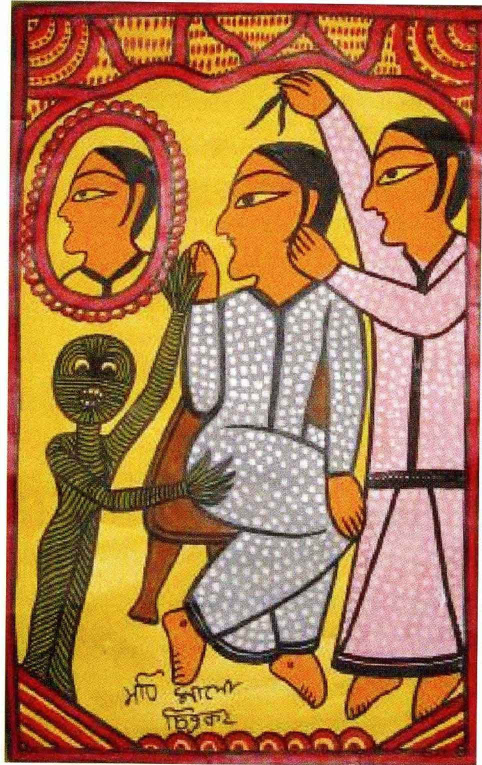
The AIDS disease reached Kolkata from abroad,
It spread from country to country, and how many did they seize?
We still don't know O brother!

Hearing of the AIDS disease, the Scientist **Babu's* brain starts spinning around;
"God! Give me your counsel. How am I to get a cure for the AIDS disease."

*The Lady Doctor is the god I worship in my heart,
O brothers! They revive the dead.*

4-2 At Blood donation-drive Camps
There may be some with the AIDS disease;
So I say to the Doctor Babus, at the time you take blood You must 'check'.

*The Lady Doctor is the god I worship in my heart,
O brothers! They revive the dead.*



4-3 That's why the hospital Doctors advise,
"Don't visit brothers!
If you visit brothers, the AIDS disease wont let you go."

The Lady Doctor is the god I worship in my heart,
O brothers! They revive the dead.

4-4 Listen O brother Barber! I am a Scroll-painter addressing you, Listen! Please keep your razors and blades carefully washed.
In Dettol[**] water, O brother!

The Lady Doctor is the god I worship in my heart,
O brothers! They revive the dead.

I conclude (my narrative) here;
I request you to become aware quickly.

The Lady Doctor is the god I worship in my heart,
O brothers! They revive the dead.

So I end the recitation of my poem,
My name is Monimala Chitrakar, Naya, Pingla,
West Medinipur[***] is my address.

Figure 4 Monimala Chitrakar HIV/AIDS (2004)

* Babu: honorific = 'Sir.' A class distinction is certainly implied.

** Dettol = a popular brand of liquid antiseptic.

*** Village Naya, Post Office: Pingla in District: West Medinipur is where this was recorded.

gali culture more than the American-sponsored scroll above. Further, it is fully a *pata*—it includes an associated song to be performed, although I do not have a recording of that song, and it is still most likely that the urban upper-class Indian or tourist buying the scroll will exhibit it without any reference to the song text. As others have noted, contradictions are often the source of stimulation and transformative power—I would argue that the conflict between the NGO version of disease and the Bengali view lead in fact to the highly original scroll and song by Monimala.

Conclusion

The examples of the *Dhola* and *pata* affirm the continual evolution of narrative genres in India, and by extension elsewhere, as they respond to, interact with, are in dialogue with changing social and historical contexts. Whether epic or scroll/song, each works from the strands of various written and oral stories and other cultural scraps of meaning, as well as different performance styles, which connect to and reinforce themes and issues of most concern to the current author/singer/painter. I wish to invoke Salman Rushdie here, for he epitomizes the playing with genres and the dialogues set up through interdiscoursivity in modern novel writing. Rushdie's description of the Ocean of Stories (in his book *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*) speaks directly to these points:

> Different parts of the Ocean [of stories] contained different sorts of stories, and . . . because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and to become yet other stories; so that unlike a library of books, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead but alive. (1990: 72)

So too are *Dhola* and *patas*: constantly fluid, able to join and rejoin into new versions of themselves, all while drawing upon the cohesion and coherence of their traditions.

Epic traditions as a genre are focused on community—on the making of community, on defining it, on claiming identity with those invoked in the story. *Dhola* is no different, as it captures the sorrows and tribulations of the rural communities where it is sung, affirms and yet challenges the caste systems present there, invokes the power of the goddess whose worship will bring success in life's ventures. *Dhola* faces challenges to its very survival, despite the attempts of singers like Kailash to draw upon modern issues of Hindu nationalism; the rural communities and female lifestyles that it directly addresses are rapidly disappearing, despite the continued presence of caste, albeit in a different

mode. Modern upper-caste youth no longer know *Dhola* or its story. With their gaze firmly fixed on urban India and the opportunities there, *Dhola* is meaningless to them. To lower-caste farmers, however, *Dhola* still resonates and they keep it alive, although demanding new performances styles based in the globalized media.

The painted scrolls of West Bengal have been used for centuries to educate rural audiences, often retelling episodes of India's major epics (stories of Krishna and Rama dominate) or telling the myths of regional gods and goddesses, such as Chandi or Behula, both goddesses worshipped primarily by Bengali audiences. In the past fifty years at least, the *patua* painter/singers have also captured recent events in their songs and paintings, such as the collapse of a local ferry in the 1930s (Sarkar 2002: 27) or the dropping of the atom bomb (Sarkar 2002: 28). In 2003, scrolls of 9/11 began to appear, while in 2006, one painter captured the tsunami that devastated the Bengal coast as well as much of Southeast Asia. Immediately it becomes obvious that the painter/singers are engaged in a dialogue with the world community at large, not merely with their local rural audiences.

Over time, *Dhola* has become more hyper-Hindu, and the covers of cassettes sold in the market, showing men in khaki uniforms with modern instruments of warfare—tanks and airplanes—bring to bear a modernity not found in the oral text. The *Dhola* performance style has also changed from the *cikara*-sounding nasal voice of singers in the early twentieth century to the color and melodies of film tunes, with new instrumentation, new instruments, and female singers. The *cikara* is retained as a prop, if not a played instrument, in almost all renditions. The *pata* scroll/songs likewise have been transformed, with new topics being dominant as the painter/singers attempt to sell their scrolls as artifacts to urban/foreign audiences who cannot relate to the traditional Hindi and Muslim mythological stories. The 2005 tsunami, 9/11, Hindu-Muslim relations, and of course new diseases find new buyers. Scrolls are sold rather than sung, rolled up, and sung again to a new audience. Still, now such scrolls reach audiences across the globe, having been shown in exhibitions in Iceland, the United States, and England. Yet with both *Dhola* and the *pata*, the invocation of these traditional genres provides validity to new styles of performance. No matter whether one speaks of a rural farmer or foreign tourist, the claim to tradition is recognized and given a validity not present if a piece was just "new." These examples demonstrate the continued importance of invoking genre, with all its historical and social associations.

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從印度兩種傳統表演探討文類的意義

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本文透過當代印度的兩種傳統表演，探討文類（genre）如何在變動的社會、文化與經濟狀態中被轉化。以北印度Braj地區的一種口述史詩*Dhola*，以及西孟加拉區的卷歌（scroll/song）「缽陀」（*patas*）為例，本文探究這兩種傳統中，文類的傳承與其當代意義。口述史詩*Dhola*的作用類似小說，含括多種異質的次文類（secondary genre）如歌曲、吟唱、敘事、演說等。*Dhola*現在已有錄音帶和DVD的形式出售，其表演形式與內容已脫離了村落廊間的口語表演，同時也加入了新的次文類和新的內容。唱卷（*patas*）在傳統上是卷軸畫與歌唱合一之表演形態，但也已逐漸消失。畫卷成為商品，賣給都市印度人及觀光客當成民俗藝術掛在牆上。本文透過印刷、口傳表演、錄音帶或博物館來探討*patas*和*Dhola*隨著時間的改變，理解文類如何根植於社會的實踐。這兩種傳統共享了由下而上的世界觀（他們都是邊緣、低層階種姓的作品），讓我們能探討社會價值、語言（和印刷）慣則、及由之所描繪的世界如何交會。世界各地的民俗文類正受全球化的影響而轉變，這兩個印度的案例可視為例證。

關鍵詞：文類，展演，歌唱，繪畫，印度