

# Krishna's Life-Story in Bengali Scrolls: Exploring The Invitation to Unroll

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Fig. 4.1.  
Krishnalila (Play  
of Krishna) Scroll,  
Medinipur District  
(nineteenth-  
century). Opaque  
watercolor on  
paper. Stella  
Kramrisch  
Collection,  
Philadelphia  
Museum of Art,  
Philadelphia,  
Accession no: 1994-  
148-548a,b. Photo:  
© Philadelphia  
Museum of Art.



Narrative hand-scrolls (*pata*) have been assembled and painted by the painter-minstrel (*patua*) communities of Bengal to tell stories for at least two hundred years.<sup>1</sup> Such itinerant bards have traditionally employed the picture sequences to sing well-known stories from the lives of deities (fig. 4.1) and saints, the epics, and more recently to address contemporary social issues and political events.<sup>2</sup>

These scrolls have a distinctive vertical format of framed registers assembled from sheets of paper that are aligned and stitched to the required length for a particular rendition of a narrative. The whole is then backed with thin cotton fabric, usually extricated from worn garments such as *saris* and *dhotis* which have the length required to accommodate the images' continuous vertical format. Nineteenth-century scrolls surviving in museum collections vary greatly in length, ranging from eight panels to over fifty and from five to forty feet, perhaps more given the longest ones are incomplete (fig. 4.2).<sup>3</sup> This length is integral, determining the field for designing the pictorial space, providing the physical parameters for a distinctive visual organisation to the narrative, and undergirding the conventions of handling the object in performance. It also corresponds to the rhyming couplets composed to accompany the pictorial sequence during a performance (figs 4.3–4.6).<sup>4</sup>

Older scrolls now in museum collections have, however, become estranged from the multi-sensorial dynamics between performer, audience, and object, all once vital to their original performances. When rolled up in museum storage vaults or displayed in galleries for viewers to traverse their entire length they are ostensibly stable objects (fig. 4.7).<sup>5</sup> I have previously attempted to juxtapose words of songs with visual registers of scrolls, to imagine a range of relationships between verse and visual evoked in performance.<sup>6</sup> This essay builds on that work to attend to the bodily rituals of handling and touch, which must have mediated viewers' and performers' encounters with such objects. Like the aural dimension, these ephemeral practices can only be reconstructed from the variations discernible today. Yet this creative hermeneutic frees us to contemplate the social and performative qualities of objects often in museums, taking into account the lyrics of songs and interaction with the body of the singer, to explore their fundamental performativity and improvisational quality.<sup>7</sup>

The performative skills of each *patua* are, after all, unique (fig. 4.8). Skill in handling their scrolls in concert with the tempo and rhythm of the song necessarily varies from one performer to the next, one

scroll to another, and one session to the next. The coordination of verbal and bodily components with the framed scenes of images can generate distinctive interpretations. A singer may recognise particular visual properties in a sequence of images or consonances between verse and picture, while unfurling the scenes for an audience; bolder or more skilled practitioners may choose to explore these through particular inflections of voice or gesture of hand. Such relationships can turn on the repetition or variation of colour and compositional choices, which may be underscored by the guiding finger, emphasised or subverted by the words sung. Some *patua* are charismatic entertainers with powerful singing voices who fill performance venues and mesmerise audiences, offering interpretive nuance through skillful manipulation of the lyrics, intonation, rhythm, and tempo. Not all, however, are so overtly dramatic. Some turn the bamboo handles of the scrolls with an elegant turn of the wrist, intensifying the inherent malleability of the objects in generating movement and pauses or even stasis, while displaying a sequence of panels. Others choose to display distinctive propensities in painting their imagery, rather than performance. Indeed, various combinations of performance style can be observed, for example, among the living *patua* community active in the village of Noya, in Medinipur district of south West Bengal (figs 4.9 and 4.10). Moreover, the occasion for their displays, including setting and time constraints, and the familiarity and affinity of the audience with the performer's themes, likewise factor in animating the performative features of their scrolls. To complicate matters further, contemporary practice indicates a range of formal and informal collaborations that are not unusual in familial productions in rural communities. Painters borrow (or 'steal', depending on the point of view) songs or lines from other composers, the rendition thus varying in nuance and quality among singers. Singers also borrow and use scrolls originally painted by others in their community, equally opening up creative spaces for interpretation and improvisation upon another painter's visualisation. Each storyteller negotiates the consonance of verbal to visual framework through various bodily strategies. Through such variability in display, a scroll takes on unique incarnations at each unrolling.

The performativity inhering in the act of scrolling is in fact integral to their etymology. The term commonly used to describe these scrolls, *gorano pata*, may be translated as 'rolled scroll'. Although popular and scholarly literature has used the term to distinguish vertical scrolls from square ones (*chauko pata*), the adjective *gorano* also points to the act of rolling and unrolling, which activates the object in the hands of the performer as the story is sung. This is precisely my interest in what follows: the dynamic movement animating the object in the hands of the performer in coordination with the utterance of the words of a song. And this dexterous manipulation generates both movement and chronology, the unfolding of

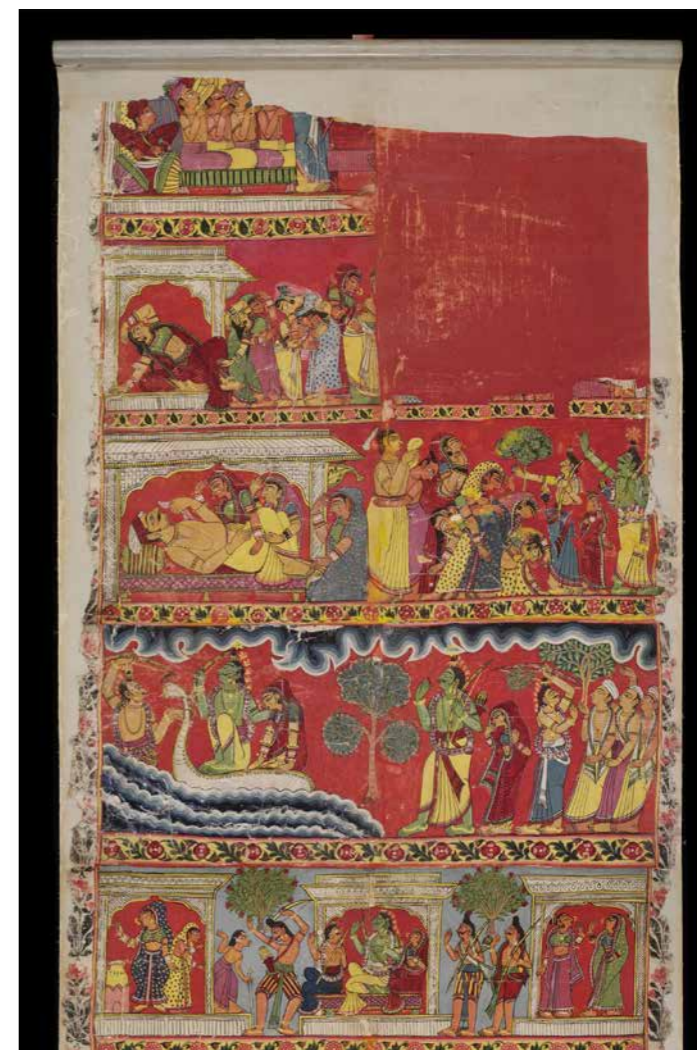


Fig. 4.2 [detail]  
Ramayana scroll,  
West Bengal  
(c.1800). Opaque  
watercolour on  
paper, mounted on  
cloth. Victoria and  
Albert Museum,  
London, Museum  
no. IS.231-1953.  
Photo: © Victoria  
and Albert  
Museum.

Fig. 4.3 [left]  
Rani Chitrakar  
unrolling a scroll on  
female infanticide  
on the terrace  
of her home in  
Noya, Medinipur  
(December 2000).  
Photo: © The  
Author.



Fig. 4.4 [right]  
Moyna Chitrakar  
unrolling a  
scroll during a  
performance in  
Noya, Medinipur  
(December 2000).  
Photo: © The  
Author.



the narrative implicating a play of multiple temporalities. The connections and separations of registers established in the act of unrolling segment after segment, creates corresponding visual associations between the episodes revealed and removed from view, yielding particular nuance to the narrative.<sup>8</sup> The interplay of closure and concealment in the unveiling of the scroll engages beholders, potentially amplifying desire to know what is beyond the visible fragment: both anticipating what comes next and recalling what has been rolled away from view, imagery that can only be revisited through song and memory. This, coupled with certain visual techniques, can stimulate particular attentiveness or curiosity among viewers, for example, the use of a limited set of formal or compositional motifs deployed through variation along the length of a single scroll, or across several scrolls. Familiar stories can thereby be given particular inflection when modulated through such strategies to intensify emotional engagement and generate anticipatory desire.<sup>9</sup>

In an era before cinema and television, such performances were surely experienced in ways that are difficult to imagine, particularly from our screen-filled and screen-dependent perspectives of the twenty-first century. Yet although *patua* scrolls have been collected since the early decades of the twentieth century, embraced by Calcutta's intellectuals and artists, their conditions of display do not seem to have been recorded with much specificity. At this time, the scrolls were incorporated into two interrelated discourses as the interests of the burgeoning field of British ethnology and documentation in the colonies converged with the nationalist quest for an essentially Indian art that was untainted by European influence. Major collections, housed in museums in Calcutta, London, and subsequently Philadelphia, were assembled from this confluence of investments.<sup>10</sup> And something of this colonial taxonomy has spilt over into modern scholarship, which tends to identify these scrolls as performance props rather than works of art in museum displays. Focus has mostly remained on classifying visual narratives, transcribing words of songs, identifying processes of making, and discerning changes in practice against shifting patronage patterns, audience interest, and competition from other media.<sup>11</sup> Or it has followed an anthropological preoccupation with the lifestyles of the living community of makers, their liminal position as craftsmen, and their complex religious and caste affiliations.<sup>12</sup> The increased visibility of women as performers in the past decades, their resourcefulness and success at local competitions and exhibitions, in a few cases leading to international prominence, has also received enthusiastic attention.<sup>13</sup> Yet the engagement of the *patua's* body in the physical act of manipulating the length of a scroll to the words of a song has not received the quality of attention lavished on the embodied practice of dancers, martial artists, practitioners of yoga and wrestlers in South Asia.<sup>14</sup> What follows seeks to place the *patua's*

Fig 4.5 [left]  
Moyna Chitrakar  
unrolling a  
scroll during a  
performance in  
Noya, Medinipur  
(December 2000).  
Photo: © The  
Author.



Fig 4.6 [right]  
Moyna Chitrakar  
unrolling a  
scroll during a  
performance in  
Noya, Medinipur  
(December 2000).  
Photo: © The  
Author.



movements, not merely their lives, back into the picture.

### Probing the Ephemeral

The problems inherent in analysing objects as malleable as *patua* scrolls are formidable, not least because words cannot possibly capture the multi-sensorial and richly affective qualities of the experiences today. If the efforts to translate pictures into words have always been susceptible to multiple impediments, to do so for a multi-media performance act is even more problematic, as anthropologists and folklorists of theatre and performance studies have alerted. To speculate on the past in the absence of much documentation is likewise precarious, inevitably constrained by contemporary observations.<sup>15</sup> Yet, convergence of scholarly interest in the intrinsic material properties of objects as constitutive of their presence or power, and in the sensorial dimensions of experience and embodied practices, offers a lucrative opportunity to heed the performativity and the contingent nature of *patua* scrolls in practice. I aim to explore such ideas through a single scroll from Medinipur in south-western Bengal, painted in the late nineteenth or at the turn of the twentieth century, now residing in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It survives in two fragments—3.65m and 2.90m respectively—and together its halves narrate the life-events of the Hindu god Krishna (fig. 4.1).<sup>16</sup>

This scroll is particularly useful in such a study for several reasons. Firstly, its narrative: by the time this scroll was painted, Krishna worship had gained prominence in the region,<sup>17</sup> and his biography was visualised in many pre-modern art forms including temple sculpture, song, dance, embroidery, and theatre.<sup>18</sup> Together these parallel traditions offer visual, oral, and performative vocabularies and conventions that are integral in assessing the particular choices made by scroll painters to construct their own versions of Krishna's story. Multiple extant nineteenth-century scrolls on the subject also give us insight into the frequent experimentation undertaken by a particular painter to bring their narratives to life.<sup>19</sup> They allow us to compare the effects with which episodes are visualised or elided—the nature of their juxtapositions either in successive framed registers, in continuous narration within a single frame, or in thematic sequences—as well as how each particular episode is rendered.<sup>20</sup> The Philadelphia scroll, for instance, employs a range of compositional devices for organising the visual narrative along the length of its surface, which could have been manipulated creatively in its display. Most striking is its clustering of episodes

Fig. 4.7  
Ramayana scroll  
on display at  
the Philadelphia  
Museum of  
Art, December  
2009. Photo:  
© Philadelphia  
Museum of Art.



along the banks of the dramatic downward flow of the Yamuna River, the site of many of Krishna's youthful adventures.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, along with these multiple visual versions, the *Krishnalila* theme (literally the 'play of Krishna', i.e. his exploits) survives in several songs collected early in the twentieth century. Even though these particular ditties were likely not sung to this particular scroll, they still suggest the flavour of verses that could have accompanied such imagery.<sup>22</sup> And these too survive in multiple versions, allowing us to discern how the stock elements comprising these scenes were reworked in various verbal and visual sequences, to create different moods and evoke a range of responses. Their transcriptions offer general insight into the range of possible engagements between the visual and

Fig. 4.9  
Joba and Montu  
Chitrakar painting  
at home in Noya,  
Medinipur  
(December 2000).  
Photo: © The  
Author



Fig. 4.10  
Karuna assisting  
her husband by  
handling the scroll  
while he sings in  
Noya, Medinipur  
(December 2000).  
Photo: © The  
Author



verbal components, strategies that can only be savoured in performance.

Secondly, the Krishna scroll is also revealed as particularly rich when set in conversation with contemporary *patua* practices, strategies that open up the scroll's visual possibilities through performative handling. Today, when guided by the words and tempo of their song, a larger scene might allow storytellers a fuller verbal account of a dramatic episode, or for repetition of a refrain for emphasis, or to introduce a pause in the narrative flow. Dwelling on the larger iconic scenes can encourage viewers to quickly grasp them as being significant; to linger on details can imaginatively visualise or insert what is only verbalised. On the other hand, quickly skimming over scenes abbreviated or condensed in a series of recognisable motifs to stand in for well-known episodes, can facilitate establishing particular rhythms and resonances among them through verbal or gestural cues. A quick recounting of the stanzas to the individual episodes, narrated continuously along the width of a panel or across successive registers, may function like a list, to enumerate some of a larger known set, or to suggest episodic equivalence. Conversely, a pithy scene may be elaborated or supplemented by the words of a song, such as the feelings of a specific character or those of others not visualised. A detailed image may be accompanied by a refrain, allowing the viewer to revel in its richness and complexity, or to note divergence from earlier iterations that have since been rolled up but are evoked once again through song. Such performances indicate a range of strategies that energise a scroll and stimulate an array of responses during a multi-media entertainment act, often customising choices to the venue and quality of audience participation.

The patterns of wear along its length suggest that the Philadelphia *Krishnalila Pata* was well used in performances of just this type and that its imagery might hold within it a palimpsest of

the *patua's* storytelling movements. As part of a practitioner's repertoire, its display could have constituted part of a longer performance together with other stories from the regional versions of the epics: the local goddesses such as Chandi and Manasa; local saints such as Chaitanya, Satya Narayan/Satya Pir, and Ghazi Pir; visions of hell (*Yama Pata*); and many others. From what has been recovered of nineteenth-century practice, based upon oral memory, painter-minstrels traveled with sacks full of scrolls from village to village, where they enticed rural audiences in relatively impromptu performances.<sup>23</sup> Compensation from the audience typically turned on the quality of the entertainment act.<sup>24</sup> Experienced performers likely assessed their audiences and chose their tales and scrolls with an eye toward remuneration.<sup>25</sup> Correspondingly, the verses and refrains may be edited or elaborated as a singer gauges the level of audience engagement.<sup>26</sup> The unrolling of the Krishnalila scroll would thus have been contingent on such conditions as navigated by the individual practitioner, who could potentially have been one of several taking turns in sharing and animating the object over its lifetime.

### Unfurling Scenes, Unveiling Miracles

The scroll's wealth of visual cues for narration and performative potential is perhaps best apprehended if we unfurl it scene by scene alongside song, in the manner of contemporary *patua*. Its first scene presents the miraculous birth. At the left end of the first register, elevated upon a pedestal, is the now damaged blue figure of Krishna. He would likely have been seated displaying the four-armed form of Vishnu/Narayan. The mother, Devaki, is presented giving birth, lying on a bed, attended by several women. Their raised hands acknowledge the arrival of the baby. One narration suggests a verse counterpart:

And Lord Krishna went to the house of Devaki to be born.  
 Devaki was lying asleep on the bed  
 Sitting at the head of the bed  
 The Lord Krishna showed her a dream.  
 O mother Devaki Rai sings the *patua*,  
 How much longer are you going to sleep  
 While Lord Govinda wants a place in your womb!  
 Lying dreaming, the Queen recounts this story:  
 In my womb, *bapu*, there is no place for you!  
 I had six sons and Kamsa killed them all  
 In grief for my children, I shall weep my life away.  
 The Lord can't get a place by any means  
 So he stole into the mother's womb in the form of a white fly.  
 On the eighth lunar day of Bhadra, Govinda [Krishna] was born.  
 Here Devaki is giving birth to Dev Narayan [Krishna/Vishnu].<sup>27</sup>

This song offers a temporal sequence that is not so readily visible in the visualisation of the episode on extant nineteenth-century scrolls. It narrates at least three successive moments. First, the dream vision is communicated in the voice of the narrator. Devaki's response is presented as a retelling to her female attendants gathered around her for the birth. The recounting of a miraculous conception returns again to the voice of the narrator, who may well be relying on common knowledge of the wily ways of Krishna among their audience.<sup>28</sup> If an analogous arrangement of verses was sung in conjunction with this panel, the compacted narrative of the visual register would have been expanded verbally, perhaps with a finger guiding viewers from the figure of Krishna to Devaki and her maids, as agency shifts from the one to the next. Such brevity in visualisation could also likely have been abbreviated in the sung verses, customised for

a particular audience. The horizontal figure of Devaki could very well stand in for at least three moments, beginning with the announcement from the Divine that he sought to inhabit her body and her negotiation with him, which she is communicating to her attendants during labour. The woman closest to her head may be leaning closer to hear her better. The same supine figure, with her full belly, must surely also be understood as giving birth, with the women supporting her. One attendant is depicted reaching between her feet as if assisting her physically. Not visualised here is the intermediary act, the penetration of her body by the miraculous white fly, a familiar trope in the oral narratives of Krishna's biography.<sup>29</sup> Scroll performances suggest that a skillful entertainer could have used the single figure to tell successive episodes, using a pointing finger to focus the viewer's gaze upon the figure for clarification or emphasis.

A second Krishnalila song presents the same basic information, but with variations that could have been significant in performance:

Anybody who uttered the name of Hari in Kamsa Raja's kingdom  
 Received beatings on the hands, on the feet and the chest  
 Where were Basu-Daivakini [Vasudev and Devaki], who had taken the name of Hari?  
 Taking the form of a white fly Narayan [Krishna/Vishnu] gave a vision:  
 'Give shelter to this seed in your womb'.  
 'Six sons I bore, Kamsa Raja snatched and killed them  
 How will another son change my fate?'  
 First month, second month, the mother cried,  
 Third month, fifth month, the news spread.  
 On the tenth day of the tenth month as her pregnancy reached full term  
 Basumati [Earth goddess] herself served as the midwife, taking Krishna in her lap.<sup>30</sup>

The direct communication between the human and the divine in this iteration, presents the four-armed deity humbly requesting shelter from the devotee. Although Devaki does not resist, she speaks her mind in no uncertain terms, likely knowing that she is ultimately powerless to the presence and will of the omnipotent deity. The intimacy of such negotiations between human and divine, highlighting their mutual dependence, retains the sensibility shared across multiple genres to undergird Krishna worship in the region.<sup>31</sup> Other components of such a performance—again, now lost in museum settings—could have intensified these sung notions even further through intonation, melodic rendition, gestures and facial expressions. The words may have been uttered as the poignant entreaty or angry retort of a woman who has already lost six of her children and refuses the divine for fear of more grief. The range of nuances a storyteller could have brought to the scroll are rich with possibility.

In the next panel, the baby is separated from his mother, now seated on his father's lap, with the attendants hovering around them. Although the recorded songs do not elaborate on the episode, the painter has presented a wide-eyed Vasudeva prominently at the centre of the panel. His face is rendered in profile, as if turning to look at something beyond.<sup>32</sup> The possibility that yet another divine revelation is being invoked cannot be dismissed. Some viewers may have been familiar with the *Bhagavata* elaboration of the episode: the father's amazement at the radiant sight of his son as the absolute godhead; overwhelmed, he recognises the Supreme Lord (Bhagavan) flooding the birthing chamber with divine light. As he bows to acknowledge the divine presence with folded hands and praises him, Krishna assumes his infant form. However, in this pictorial iteration, the rest, their faces depicted in three-quarter view, do not seem to be aware of the vision presented to the father. Successive moments may thereby have been indicated through the presentation of the seated Vasudeva, visualised with profile face, while his body is frontal, with the baby on his lap. Viewers may also have filled in what is neither visualised nor verbalised: that at this moment the shackles fall, the doors of the prison open, and Vasudeva is invited to remove the baby from

Fig. 4.11 [left]  
Detail of Krishnalila  
Scroll, Medinipur  
(dated nineteenth  
century).  
Gurusaday  
Museum, Kolkata,  
India, Acc. No:  
1779.



Fig. 4.12 [right]  
[detail]  
Detail of Krishnalila  
Scroll, Medinipur  
(dated nineteenth  
century). Victoria  
and Albert  
Museum, London,  
Museum no. IS  
1955-109. Photo: ©  
Victoria and Albert  
Museum.

Kamsa's stronghold.

The narrative proceeds to the left. The baby is smuggled away by the father, the snake's hood protecting the vulnerable, naked divine. The two scenes are differentiated by the figures turning in opposite directions rather than any dividing frame. The repeated figure of the blue-skinned baby signals the continuity of the narrative, which proceeds from right to left. Next, Vasudeva carries the baby to the river's edge. The baby slips out of his hands momentarily and floats upon a lotus leaf on the turbulent river. To the right, he brings the boy to his friend Nanda's home in the village of Gokul and exchanges the blue-skinned boy for the girl-child born to his friend's second wife Yashoda. Implicit here is the shared knowledge between the performer and audience that the boy who slipped out of his father's hands returns to the agitated father.

The painter has thereby chosen to vary modes of visual narration from the first to the second panel, and reversed direction thereafter. Indeed, the appreciation of such juxtapositions may well have constituted part of the pleasures of the performance for a discerning audience. If viewers were already familiar with the general storyline, they would have been able to savour and possibly even seek out the distinctive nuance offered in the particular choices made by the singer to interact with the visual imagery.

In juxtaposing the verses that correspond to the visualisation of particular scenes on the scroll, the possibility of various interactions between them emerges. Some episodes condensed in the visual narrative may have been privileged for elaboration in song, elucidating the extraordinary nature of the events described. Others are mentioned only briefly or elided entirely in the song, relying for the most part on audience fore-knowledge. The song elaborates upon the miraculous qualities of the journey that is visualised: the play of the divine and the compassion of a benevolent god who forgives errors and reveals himself to the devoted father:

Immediately after its birth, Vasudeva took the child in his arms:  
Vasuki the snake from Patal made a canopy!!

Slowly they walked down to the Jamuna.  
The waves of Kalindi, the river of illusion,  
grew bigger and bigger –  
Lord Narayan [Krishna] slipped out of Vasudeva's arms into the river:  
Weaving a web of illusion he began to float on a lotus leaf.  
Not getting milk from its mother, the child chews its thumb,  
While Vasudeva feels about for him with his hands.  
'Alas what has happened, because of my cursed fate –  
All these troubles at my ages only to splash about!'  
Dayal [Kindly] Krishna seeing the weeping of Vasudeva,  
Presses two hands on the water and climbs into his arms.

The composition and colour choices in this scroll also emphasise the miraculous nature of the events. The blue-skinned baby floats upon a golden mandorla, itself afloat on a river which meanders downstream, dynamically rupturing the horizontal arrangement of several registers to underscore the verticality of the scroll.<sup>33</sup> Just below, the yellow-skinned female, who is to be exchanged, floats upon the blue waters in a reversal of colours, as if to draw attention to the roles and fates of these two infants. However, current practice suggests that scrolls are hardly ever viewed opened up in their entirety. As a song unfolds, a *patua* unwinds to the appropriate scenes, with the help of the bamboo handles at either end; viewers were likely huddled in groups to see the images turning on the bamboo handles. Thus, while the two images could have been appreciated in comparison at the same time, they may have been revealed sequentially with the progression of the song and the tempo of the unfurling registers. Such choices would suggest different viewing experiences, the latter relying on memory for any such comparison.

Another song indicates a different verbal strategy to enhance the supernatural dimension of the story, emphasising the celestial entourage provided for the divine child:

Vasudev proceeded to Nandalaya [home of Nanda Ghosh] to hide the baby.  
Seeing Krishna the Yamuna River spilled over her banks.  
Bhagavati [the goddess, Durga] took the shape of a fox to escort them in crossing the river.  
'Ten months, ten days having spent in his mother's womb  
The Lord bathes in my womb, so fortunate am I'.

It is possible that these extraordinary events were so familiar to audiences that such fresh verbal and visual interpretive twists renewed awe and wonder (*vismaya*).<sup>34</sup>

On the right third of the panel, Krishna is delivered to the family of Nanda for safekeeping, and the next register presents Vasudev returning to his wife with Nanda's baby girl to the left. To the right, Kamsa kills her by hurling her upon a stone on the river's edge. But she escapes, here flying upstream, revealing her true form as the golden-hued goddess. Her message is suggested in the words of the following song:

'What have you gained by killing me, O hero?  
He who will kill you will be born in Gokul'.

Following this prophecy, Kamsa, in a moment of remorse, seeks forgiveness from his sister and brother-in-law, which they grant. However, he has a change of heart and decides to seek out the baby who was to destroy him. The ensuing panels are devoted to the well-known exploits of the youthful Krishna, vanquishing the series of demons Kamsa dispatched to the village of Gokul in response to the prediction. They include on the right Putana, the ogress who tries to poison the boy while breastfeeding, followed by the crane (Bakasura), the horse (Keshi), the cart demon (Sakata), and elephant (Pramila) in the next series of registers. These scenes are stock types,

Fig. 4.13.  
Monimala  
Chitrakar unrolling  
a scroll while she  
uses her fingers to  
point to a detail in  
Noya, Medinipur  
(December 2000).  
Photo: © The  
Author.



presenting the episodes in a terse synoptic fashion that features only a single moment in each: that of Krishna accomplishing the annihilation of demonic forms to restore order.<sup>35</sup> A comparison with other extant scrolls indicates that these compositions are used by artists in various sequences along the length of the river to different effect (compare, for instance, with figs 4.11 and 4.12).

The riverbank is also where Krishna spent much of his youth enjoying the camaraderie of the cowherd boys (*sakhas, gopas*), and the attention of the local women (*sakhis, gopis*). The handsome adolescent's dalliances with the cowherd women, and his beloved Radha in particular, are visualised in three scenes.<sup>36</sup> They are part of a larger corpus of episodes introduced earlier in Bengali poetry and temple imagery to imagine his relationship with Radha, the young woman who stole his heart.<sup>37</sup> They may have offered beholders the opportunity to remember and re-experience the emotional intensity that the divine lovers had themselves felt.

In the first episode, posing as tax collector, Krishna waylays the women, demanding payment to cross the river (*danalila*):

Pay the toll and get on the boat Radhe Vinodini (Radha, Bestower of Pleasure)  
To take all of your companions I will charge an anna each  
To take Radha I will have a golden earring.  
'Take the gold, take my sari, I can give you everything  
I cannot cross the river on my feet'.  
Hearing this Krishna escorted her across.  
One by one the gopis went to Mathura.<sup>38</sup>

On the opposite bank of the river, an earlier episode in the life of the baby Krishna is presented. He is shown high up in a tree that is splitting apart at the bottom, releasing the twins Jamal and Arjuna from the pair of trees in which they had been imprisoned. Again, not depicted, and possibly not even elaborated in song, are the events leading up to the climactic moment that is privileged for visualisation. Viewers likely knew that the child had been tied to a heavy mortar by his mother by way of punishment for his mischievous misdemeanours, and that Krishna was

determined to release himself by crawling between the two trees, so that the mortar would be left behind as the rope gave way. In the process, the trees collapsed, releasing the sons of Kubera.<sup>39</sup>

The visual arrangement of episodes again departs from a strictly chronological unfolding of his biography, as two scenes of the child milking cows in his father's shed and stealing butter from his mother's churn, follow from the trysts of the lovers. Such flexibility in arrangement of the visual sequence is facilitated by a number of factors. First, the narratives are very popular and the individual episodes have acquired discrete lives in image and text within their synoptic visual iterations. Second, in performance the sung verses can create a continuity through rhyme, rhythm, and repetition, which may appear abrupt or even confusing if the visual were to be experienced in the absence of the verbal component. The songs recorded by Dutt reveal that words of the songs employ various strategies to effect transitions from one episode to the next. Indeed, multiple disjunctive temporalities emerging between visual and verbal sequences, and those anticipated from prior knowledge, could potentially have enhanced audience participation.

The next panel offers another unusual pairing of episodes that may be distinctive to the genre. The words of a song would suggest it could have been navigated from right to left. On the right half of the next panel, Krishna carries Radha's dairy goods to market (*bharakhanda*). When he shows up in the garb of a porter in the woods, she has him carry her dairy goods to the market, now promising her favours in exchange. A *patua* song outlines the negotiation between them:

I've never carried loads, I'm Hari, Lord of the Universe,  
The unruly handle burns my shoulder.  
Radha, says to the Lord, You've taken my money, now you're obligated to do so.  
Now why do you say you can't bear the load, Dinanath [Lord of the Poor and Helpless]?  
Removing the load, Vanamali [Krishna] sat.  
Hiding her face, Chandravali [Radha] smiled.<sup>40</sup>

However, she manages to give him the slip after the market, choosing to return home on a different path. The two episodes of toll collection and porter services visualise the power dynamic in the lovers' affair and the complexity of emotions they experience.<sup>41</sup> Exploring intimate exchanges, the verses also remind the audience that the absolute divine had chosen to experience Radha's love alongside performing the more conventional salvific functions of an avatar.<sup>42</sup> She, however, can only see a troublesome young cowherd youth who shamelessly and relentlessly chases her. She seems to have the upper hand, for the moment.<sup>43</sup>

This episode, in which she is in control of the lovesick youth, is placed across from the display of one of Krishna's best-known cosmic feats. If the youthful lover protests at the menial task of carrying dairy goods for his beloved, he certainly takes full responsibility for his community in lifting Mount Govardhana with supreme ease, barely raising one finger to create an umbrella and shelter his village from the onslaught. Challenged by Indra, who showers rain relentlessly, Krishna reveals his true form as the divine savior. Both episodes are immensely popular and the artist may well be relying on that foreknowledge to create a distinctive juxtaposition and interpretation. Encouraged by these visual resonances and dissonances of form and composition, and perhaps alerted by similar balancing of power in the songs of older poets such as Chandidas and Jayadeva, the viewer may have appreciated the *patua's* inventiveness. If the visual invites comparison of these two episodes of load-bearing, a song offers further nuance:

'I can't carry this, Radha, the load is too heavy'.  
'Why Krishna did you eat the yogurt, your payment?  
You have to take the load to Mathura'.  
Krishna recalled Indra:  
Indra brought rain, Pavan brought wind,  
Crossing the river of illusion, he reached the shore.<sup>44</sup>

The raising of the mountain, a feat of extraordinary force and one that came to take on a ritual life of its own, is referenced only as a recollection in this song.<sup>45</sup> It not only reminds viewers of Krishna's true strength in his cosmic form, but is presented as motivation for a young man whose ego had clearly been hurt at being treated as a lowly porter.<sup>46</sup> The dual dimensions of Krishna as absolute divine and simultaneously utterly mortal are simultaneously drawn out: a besotted youth chafing inwardly as he chases his love, overcoming a humiliating experience through exertion of mental images and exercises.<sup>47</sup> The intimacy of the emotional dimension is valued deeply in this religious tradition as avenues to engage in exploring an intensely personal relationship with the deity. The reward for such dedication is the remembrance of the illusory nature of human existence, one that Krishna here offers as role model and promise to the audience.

*Naukavilas* (pleasures of the boat), Krishna's boat ride with Radha and her companions across the Yamuna River, follows the toll and porter roles on the right half of the next register. Here Krishna raises his oar at the far end of the peacock-prowed boat (*mayurpankhi*). He balances easily at a rakish slant, leaning over a woman, likely Radha, whom he had sought out. The composition shares many elements with terracotta, embroidery, and print versions, which could have invoked appreciation of the painter's rendition, although the compositional flourish in filling the curve of the river with the shape of the boat is not to be found in embroidered or printed vignettes, which do not offer a series of episodes in vertical succession. A *patua's* song could have recounted the well-known tale of Krishna, disguised as a boatman at the river's edge, ferrying the women across on condition of Radha's affections as payment, as in this version recorded by Gurusaday Dutt:

'Pay the toll and get on the boat Radhe Vinodini (Radha, Bestower of Pleasure)  
To take all of your companions I will charge an anna each  
To take Radha I will have a golden earring'  
'Take the gold, take my sari, I can give you everything,  
I cannot cross the river on my feet'.  
Hearing this Krishna escorted her across.  
One by one the gopis went to Mathura.<sup>48</sup>

Many versions of the episode exploring shades of emotional entanglement continue to be sung in temple courtyards and home shrines today. If this *patua* presents a helpless Radha giving in to the rake's mercenary demands, the audience likely knew some of the other interpretations read into the episode through the centuries in various media.<sup>49</sup>

Following the episodes clustered along the banks of the river, a set of three panels is devoted to Krishna's bovine encounters. Cows were not only the mainstay of the rural community of Krishna's childhood, but also relevant to the predominantly agrarian economies of the painter communities and their audiences. At left, Krishna is milking a cow, possibly stealing milk as he does with the butter from his mother's churn on the right, as a verse suggests:

Dark Krishna happily milks the white cow.  
The milk overflows, so Krishna opens his mouth [to drink directly from the udder]<sup>50</sup>

The butter thief episode (*nonichora*), as narrated by *patuas*, likely assumes their viewers' knowledge of one of the best-known miracles performed by the divine boy: the wondrous vision he offers his mother when she scolds him for dipping into her churn, after which she peers into his open mouth and glimpses the entire cosmos, including herself and her home in Braj. Viewers surely knew that such a revelation of ultimate truth, offering an omniscient viewpoint unavailable to human eyes, must have bewildered and overwhelmed her. If the stock image is shared with many other genres, the extant verses also do not seem to elaborate:

And Shandashur [bull demon] was killed by Damodar in the cowshed.  
Tying the calves in the forest, he milked the cows.

Mother Josoda [Yashoda] of good fortune was churning the milk  
The two brothers Krishna and Balaram stole the butter;  
The Lord drank the skimmed milk and lay down to sleep...<sup>51</sup>

This song moves from one episode about the cowherd life of Krishna to another, but in reverse order to the scroll. Instead, the following register visualises the defeat of the bull. Krishna is in the act of impaling him by the horns as the bull charges at him. It is presented with another feat, depicting Krishna atop a gigantic demon figure. This may be the defeat of the demon in the form of the ass Dhenukasura, who guarded the palm forest and denied the local population of the delicious fruit or another presentation of the demoness Putana.

The third scene relating to the bovine life of the village and Krishna's interventions chosen by this artist, is the tale of Brahma stealing the cows from the cowherd boys to test Krishna. Again, only the climactic moment of Brahma's realisation that the boy was indeed the absolute divine is depicted, assuming general familiarity with the events leading up to it. Here Brahma returns the cows he had kidnapped on recognising Krishna's omniscience.<sup>52</sup>

A large panel, double the size of the previous ones, displays the popular tale of Krishna stealing the clothes of the women while they bathe in the river. Here he is presented walking along a tree branch, gazing below at women who plead with raised hands. Pink articles of clothing dangle from the spreading branches of the *kadamba* tree, along with its globular blossoms. A song offers some sense of the verbal accompaniment possible:

Stealing all the sakhis' clothes Govinda  
Is sitting in the kadam tree, playing on his bamboo flute:  
'O moon-faced sakhis, now listen to me  
Lift up both your hands and ask for your clothes back!  
Understanding their state of mind, Krishna  
Threw back their clothes into one pair of hands after another.<sup>53</sup>

If the image suggests the adolescent's desire, the songs divert attention to the women's state of mind, transforming the tale into one of divine compassion.<sup>54</sup>

After the telling of the scroll's tale is accomplished, the *patua* typically rolls up the scroll to return it to the pile of dormant ones. At this point, if the audience is hooked, they can make specific requests and offer money as they would to street singers. However, if the performance is deemed indifferent, the crowd thins and peters out.

## Handling Objects

The relatively small size of all but the final surviving register of the Philadelphia scroll suggests that more than one register was probably revealed at a time. The span of the scroll that an individual can display at a time is also dependent on the length of an arm. Among living practitioners today from the Noya community, it is typical to hold the scroll up with one hand to reveal the scenes from the top of the object, while the other keeps the rolled-up portion at the bottom. In observing Rani Chitrakar, one of the most successful contemporary women singers of Noya, I came to appreciate her dexterity in manipulating the object (fig. 4.3). She is keenly aware of how far she can stretch her arms, and how she can use her entire body to facilitate the display of the scroll. For example, she uses a bent knee to create additional support, from behind, for the display of the expanse of the scroll between her hands. It allows her to control the length of paper, the angle at which she presents the image, and frees up a hand to use as a pointer. She frequently casts a sidelong glance to ensure that the segment exposed is as intended, and that the angle allows for ease of viewing. Her skills in presentation are not unlike of those of a television weather reporter, coordinating between the screen and the viewer, using sideways movements of the hands, head, and eyes, while maintaining a frontality that consistently engages the viewer. It also became apparent during my



fieldwork in Noya that performers demonstrate varying degrees of skill and ease in turning their wrist and using the thumb, for example, to roll up a scene (figs. 4.4–4.6). Such contingencies have several consequences: some slow down the tempo of the song to coordinate the visual to verbal components, while others deploy the refrain strategically to create a pause to roll up a section.

Such bodily engagements with scrolls suggest ways to imagine the Philadelphia scroll fragment opened up in sets of scenes that cohere around particular subthemes, which may be conceptual or visual. For example, the birth and transfer scenes may have been opened up together, while the river scenes—rupturing the strict division of registers, physically directing our gaze downward, much like an arrow—could have been opened up as a set if the hands of the performer were long enough and the skill of using the knee to support the object from the back were employed successfully. It is tempting to imagine a deft *patua* exploiting the painted cues of the scroll's visual organisation, to present a large scene of the theft of the clothes alone in dramatic contrast with the dense clustering along the length of the river, or pairing it with another large scene.

Variations surely emerged in the handling of the scroll from one entertainment act to another. The first three scenes could probably easily have been displayed comfortably between the hands and feet of a singer. Contemporary performances indicate that the bard does not necessarily adhere strictly to the painted frames of scenes. Instead, by leaving part of a previous scene visible as she moves onto the next, or exposing a fraction of the next scene, a particular iteration can momentarily affect a visual continuity that can either become consonant with the verbal transitions of the song, or one that is distinct from both verbal and visual cues. Such partial unveilings could potentially operate like a movie trailer or a preview of the next episode at the end of a television show, encouraging the audience not to switch channels. In this case, it could serve to engage the viewers, deter walking away, thereby operating as a strategy for securing remuneration. Regardless of whether the particular expanse exposed in rolling and unfolding is intended or appreciated, it could potentially have introduced greater complexity.

A host of other contingencies emerged in my observation of contemporary *patuas*. In an impromptu performance Monimala Chitrakar, for example, employed the elevated threshold of a balcony to prop her scroll from behind (fig. 4.13). Likewise, the only time I observed two *patuas* working in tandem, even greater options emerged than is typically assumed for a single singer. Karuna Chitrakar assisted her husband in unrolling to the timing of his song as he is now blind. Such pragmatic and creative combinations in making use of specific skills and tools today encourages us to be aware that many others cannot possibly be recovered.

Attention to medium and its physical properties thus urges us to take into account the quality of presence that a narrative acquires in particular material incarnations, in the triangulation with entertainer and audience occupying distinctive sites, and in shaping cultural domains at specific historical junctures. The ephemerality of *patua* scrolls in performance, despite the methodological precariousness, allows for greater awareness of how material properties shape perception, as well as bodily engagements. In turn, opening up such possibilities alerts us to the ambiguities inhering in the ever-changing entanglements between the various media through which distinctive regional images assume visible form.

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Her second monograph, *Making Kantha, Making Home* (University of Washington Press, 2020), investigates embroidered textiles to recover women's voices from colonial Bengal. This project builds on research on *kantha* for the 2009 exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which situated the fabrics within domestic networks, entangled with memories, perceptions, sensorial resonance and emotional experience. The publication received the College Art Association's Alfred H. Barr Jr. Award for museum scholarship.

1. The earliest surviving scrolls can be dated early to middle of the nineteenth century. However, the documentation provided by European travelling artists and ethnographers such as the Belgian engraver Balthazar Solvyns indicate that versions of the performances were to be observed at the end of the eighteenth century, and the presence of a professional group of painter-minstrels (*patua*). See for example, Balt Solvyns, *A collection of two hundred and fifty colored etchings: descriptive of the manners, customs, character, dress and religious ceremonies of the Hindoos* (Calcutta: Mirror Press, 1799), Pl II.67.

2. The distinction between social and religious subject matter is one that performers emphasise today and it is likely related to the nature of commissions received. Although the extant collections of nineteenth and early twentieth-century scrolls privilege the narratives of gods and goddesses, this may be contingent upon the collecting interests of the early twentieth century and the colonial and early nationalist investment in devotion and spirituality.

3. There is also a wide range in the quality of materials and labour invested in their assembly. Some were created from better quality paper and painted with great care; lavished with exquisite details that indicate awareness of the stylistic, compositional and narrative conventions of painting evinced in the older manuscripts shared across north India. See, for example, the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Ramayana Scroll* (I.S. 105-1-39 1955). I have examined this scroll in 'Scenes from the Rama Epic', in Forrest McGill (ed.), *The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Fo* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2016), pp. 13–17. Other scrolls are put together more quickly. Swiftly painted broad brushstrokes and far less attention to detail create a markedly difference in style as seen in a second scroll devoted to the epic in the same collection (I.S. 107-1-7 1955). On this scroll, see my study 'A Bengali *Ramayana* Scroll in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection: A Reappraisal of Content', *South Asian Studies* 19:1 (2003), pp. 157–167. Some scrolls are assembled from repurposed newsprint and other cheap paper extracted from railway timetables, the text sometimes visible through the layers of paint. The Philadelphia Museum of Art collection offers several examples of such recycled paper.

4. Whether the visual skeletal structure is worked out first or the song composed before the images are conceptualised varies among the living practitioners today and is contingent on several factors, among the most significant being their personal skills.

5. I have conducted fieldwork since 1995 both in the *patua* village of Noya in Medinipur district and among performers at various venues in fairs at Shantiniketan and Kolkata, as well as at museums in Delhi, Chennai, London, and Philadelphia.

6. They can range from more contextualising commentary on the depicted image, to an elaboration of details, including physical ones, that have not been delineated visually, and can evoke the affective dimensions of the narrative by raising questions about the moral, ethical or social justice issues in a particular event or state of affairs. I have discussed this elsewhere in: 'Story of a Storyteller's Scroll', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 37 (2000): pp. 166–185; 'Unrolling a Narrative Scroll: Artistic Practice and Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Bengal', *Journal of Asian Studies* 62:3 (August 2003): pp. 835–871; 'A Bengali *Ramayana* Scroll in the Victoria and Albert Museum Collection: A Reappraisal of Content', *South Asian Studies* 19:1 (2003): pp. 157–167; 'Rasalila Remixed: What Gets to Stay?', in Pallabi Chakravorty and Nilanjana Dasgupta (eds), *Dance Matters Too* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2018), pp. 137–167.

7. I draw upon the proposition offered by a range of influential scholars across several disciplines. Arjun Appadurai, drew attention to the ways in which objects were successfully moved and recontextualised. While Appadurai attended to the dimension of commodification and decommodification, Igor Kopytoff's essay opened up the question of the mutability of artworks, artifacts, and objects. Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction', in Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditisation as Process', in Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, pp. 64–91. The heightened attentiveness to the malleability of objects also reopened the question of agency,

particularly by Alfred Gell, who called for attention to the latent intentionalities of creators inhering in the very materiality of the works, their concomitant capacity to evoke emotional responses, and hence constitute social spheres. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: A New Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Alfred Gell, 'The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology', in Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (eds), *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 40–67. Bruno Latour's exhortation to seek out, through empirical observation, the dynamics in the jostling of objects, plants, theories, texts and people, to uncover the specifics of the relationships rather than a priori assumptions, has been highly influential. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005). Hans Belting redirected focus to the charge, or animation, in his terms, of the object in the triangulation between image, its material incarnation and the viewer. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), and Hans Belting and Thomas Dunlap, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).

8. Although the scholarly literature has insisted that scenes are unveiled one after another, I have not observed such precision; in addition, video recordings equally offer evidence to the contrary. The lack of consistency in size of registers relative to one other and the variability in the length of a performer's extended arm and fingers holding and rolling and unrolling the object, inevitably belies such fastidiousness.

9. Roma Chatterji recognises this variability and usefully explores meta-textual relationships concretised in specific narratives, such as the newer Laden Pata (Osama Bin Laden Scrolls or 9/11 Scrolls), which she locates with the established stories of pirs, as part of shared worlds of storytelling familiar to some traditional audiences. Roma Chatterji, *Speaking With Pictures: Folk Art and the Narrative Traditions in India* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 90.

10. Scrolls were collected by colonial administrative figures such as Gurusaday Datta and J. C. French, connoisseurs like Ajit Ghose, and artists including the Tagores, Nandalal Bose, and Jamini Roy in the early decades of the twentieth century, as well as the art historian Stella Kramrisch. Important historic collections include the Asutosh Museum's material, collected under the supervision of its first director, Deva Prasad Ghosh, and the Gurusaday Museum's collection, acquired by Datta, in Kolkata. Outside India, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum have some of the most exquisitely rendered scrolls. Stella Kramrisch brought her *patas* to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Aside from these better-known collections, *patua* families have continued to collect casually, occasionally selling their material to museums and connoisseurs. Dutt argued that because the 'folk' arts were authentically Bengali, they provided the answer to the quest for a nationalistic art, 'The Indigenous Paintings of Bengal', *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 1(1933): pp. 18–25.

11. Studies on style and establishment of regional stylistic groupings include Kavita Singh, 'The Pictures of Showmen', (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chandigarh, 1995) and T. Richard Blurton, 'The "Murshidabad" Pats of Bengal', in Jyotindra Jain (ed.), *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art* (Mumbai: Marg, 1998), pp. 42–55. In my own fieldwork among living practitioners, many attributed the decline in the practice to the competition from newer media, especially cinema and television in the second half of the twentieth century. Resourceful *patuas* have long compensated for the dwindling livelihoods with an astonishing array of innovations. Intervention from local governmental agencies, and urban and cosmopolitan investment in 'folk' art, equally contributed to transformations in the practice. These features have attracted much attention in recent decades, from both urban elites and academics in various countries. In turn, these forces have participated in stimulating a revival and renewal, inevitably bringing with it significant transformations, including the cultural value and status of both objects and practitioners. On recent transformations in painting style, subject matter, materials, venues, and patronage patterns in the living tradition, see T. Richard Blurton, 'Continuity and Change in the tradition of Bengali Pata-painting', in



Transformative Emotion in Ritual Dance', in Owen M. Lynch (ed.), *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotion in India* (Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 225–230.

44. Gurusaday Datta does not give us a name, but only that the song was collected from a *Santhal patua*, *Patua Sangit*, p. 40.

45. On this episode, see Charlotte Vaudeville, 'The Govardhan Myth in Northern India', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22:1 (1980): pp. 1–45; John Stratton Hawley, 'Krishna's Cosmic Victories', *Journal of the American Academy of Religions* 47:2 (1979): pp. 201–221. In consonance with the animation of the mountain in ritual, another *patua* song that explicates the episode at greater length also makes no mention of Indra, who was defeated and banished, and his worship stopped:

There was Giri [Mountain] Govardhan  
Saying kill, kill, the mountain began to crumble and fall  
Twelve cowherd boys held up the mountain by the touch  
of a finger  
From then the Lord was named Giridhari [lifter of the  
mountain].

(Song of Gopal Chitrakar of Ayash, Datta, p. 15).

46. The same song later devotes a verse to describing the raising of Mt. Govardhan, which may further complicate the reading of this pair of images.

47. David L. Haberman discusses such practices in 'Vraja: A Place in the Heart', in *Re-discovering Braj: International Association of the Vrindaban Research Institute Bulletin* 14 (1988), pp. 19–25 and *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Raganuga Bhakti Sadhana*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

48. Song of Panchanan Chitrakar of Panuari, Datta, *Patua Sangit*, 22 (my translation).

49. The Maithili poet Vidyapati, for example, hints at Radha's complicit participation in the signature line (*bhanita*). See Vidyapati, *Love Songs of Vidyapati*, 133.

50. Song of Kirti Chitrakar of Dumka, Datta, *Patua Sangit*, 37 (my translation).

51. McCutcheon and Bhowmik, *Patuas and Patua Art in Bengal*, 63.

52. Brahma realises that Krishna had not only figured out what he had done, but used his divine power to replicate the cows and cowherd boys, so that when he returned he was bemused to find the cows and cowherd exactly where he had initially encountered them.

53. McCutcheon and Bhowmik, *Patuas and Patua Art in Bengal*, 64.

54. The scroll ends abruptly here, but clearly there were additional scenes that followed as the frayed edges indicate. Correspondingly, the complete scrolls, such as those of the Victoria and Albert Museum and Gurusaday Museum, offer possibilities to imaginatively extend the panels to completion. Other typical choices include: the image of Yama, god of death; the tortures in hell; an array of deities present to acknowledge the superiority of the god to whom the scroll is devoted; or another iconic image of the deity.

# Scrolling the Emperor's Life and Triumph

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