

**PERFORMANCE TRADITIONS IN THE AGE OF MASS MEDIA:
AN ANALYSIS OF SCROLL PAINTINGS**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

URMI BHATTACHARYYA



**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110067**

INDIA

2011



जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI - 110 067

Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences

Tel.:26704408
Fax.: +91-11-26742539

Date: July 21, 2011

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "PERFORMANCE TRADITIONS IN THE AGE OF MASS MEDIA: An Analysis of Scroll Paintings", submitted by Urmi Bhattacharyya in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, has not been previously submitted for any award or degree of this or any other University and is her original work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof. Susan Visvanathan

(Chairperson)

Chairperson

CSSS/SSS

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi-110067

Prof. Anand Kumar

Professor

CSSS/SSS

(Supervisor)

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi-110067

Date: July 21, 2011

DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This dissertation titled "PERFORMANCE TRADITIONS IN THE AGE OF MASS MEDIA: An Analysis of Scroll Paintings", submitted by me, in partial fulfillment for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this University or any other University or Institution.

Urmi Bhattacharyya
Urmi Bhattacharyya

Centre for the Study of Social Systems
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi.

Dedicated to

My family

*Without whose support and blessing this would not have been
possible..*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work would have been impossible without the immense contributions from certain people in terms of their constant help, guidance and blessings. Although the obligations incurred in the course of the dissertation are far too many to be acknowledged through this brief note, I would like to share this space to express my earnest gratitude to all those who have helped me in the preparation of this dissertation.

At the very onset, I would like to give my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor Prof. Anand Kumar, without whose constant guidance and blessing, this work would never have been possible. Be it through his valuable ideas about improving my work, or his continuous encouragement even at those times when the work was going nowhere and even when I was faced with many other crises, when I thought I would never be able to complete it, it is only his constant support that has made this work materialize. It was his constant guidance, and his positive criticism at every point of the work, that helped me rethink the concepts and ideas used and facilitated in producing a better dissertation. Without his immense faith in me and my work and his blessings, the writing of this dissertation would never have been possible.

I take this opportunity to also thank the chairperson of my Centre, Prof. Susan Visvanathan. I am ever obliged to her from the days of my M. A., as it was in one of the courses offered by her then, that I had written a paper on a similar area of interest. It was her wonderful words of encouragement and her suggestions that helped me develop and pursue my interest in this area of study.

I am also grateful to Prof. Avijit Pathak, for his much needed advice and support in the course of this dissertation and his wonderful ability to understand my ideas and work much more than I do. Without his valuable suggestions this work would not have been possible.

This work would not have been achievable without the constant support and the guidance from all the Professors of my Centre, from the very first day in J.N.U. Without their lectures, suggestions and encouragement, I would not have been able to reach this level

altogether and so I take this opportunity to personally thank all of them for having faith in me.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Fr. Jimmy Keepuram of St. Xavier's College, Kolkata for his support since my days of graduation, without whose blessings and guidance, any of this would have been possible

My sincere thanks to the staff of the Centre's library and the Central Library of J.N.U, for their help in providing me with the available books and documents. I am also extremely thankful to the library staff of the National Library and Gurusaday Museum in Kolkata, Sahitya Akademi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, and The Archaeological Society of India, in New Delhi, for their immense help in providing me with some rare and valuable books, journals and documents which have helped made a difference to this piece of work.

I am especially thankful to all the scroll painters of West Bengal with whom I engaged in informal conversations, to gain a sense of the actual field situation, for giving me the time to know them and their tradition in a better way. This would not have been possible but for the event 'Akhyan: A Celebration of Masks, Puppets and Picture Showmen Traditions of India' organized by the I.G.N.C.A., New Delhi from 20th October to 20th November, 2010, and I thank the organizers for arranging such a valuable and educational event.

Most importantly, I would like to my family for their continuous support, encouragement and faith in my work. Without their blessings and prayers, this work would not have ever materialized. I thank my father, my biggest source of strength, for helping me search all the old and rare books in the libraries of Kolkata, my brother for always being there for me as a friend, a patient listener, a source of emotional support, and for helping me search articles for my dissertation; and my mother, who has been the biggest source of inspiration in my life and my best friend, who has apart from her support and encouragement, also helped me look into the Bengali sources relevant to this dissertation.

Finally, I would like thank all my friends Panchi, Sudha, Resmi, Yogen, Poukin, for their love and support in the course of this work and for always being there for me, and all my classmates from the M. A. and the M.Phil. batches for all the wonderful times we have shared.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	
Contents	i
List of Figures and Illustrations	ii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Folk Art and Performance Traditions of India: A Picture of the Past and the Present Situation	39
Chapter Three: The Social Identity of the Scroll Painters	91
Chapter Four: Scroll Painting and Cultural Identity in the Age of Mass Media	139
Chapter Five: Conclusion	189
Bibliography	200

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 (Map)	The Tradition of Scroll Painting as found in different parts of India	55
Figure 2 (Flowchart)	A Classification of Pats in terms of their Character As found in certain regions of West Bengal and Jharkand	69
Figure 3 (Map)	The Main Districts of West Bengal where the tradition of Scroll Painting still exists	73
Figure 4 (Map)	The Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand	85
Figure 5 (Flowchart)	A Diagrammatic Flowchart of the two kinds of Identity that have been discussed in the work	112
Figure 6 (Illustration)	A Scroll Painting Depicting the Origin of the <i>Patuas</i>	114
Figure 7 (Illustration)	A Santhal Scroll or <i>Jadu-Pat</i> of Jharkhand	118
Figure 8 (Illustration)	Kalighat Painting illustrating a traditional theme	170
Figure 9 (Illustration)	Kalighat Painting illustrating a modern theme	170
Figure 10 (Illustration)	A Scroll on the Indian National Movement	180
Figure 11 (Illustration)	On the World Trade Center Attack in America	180
Figure 12 (Illustration)	On the Tsunami	181
Figure 13 (Illustration)	On the Gyaneshwari train accident	181
Figure 14 (Illustration)	A Scroll on the Nandigram incident in West Bengal	183
Figure 15 (Illustration)	A Scroll on the evil practice of dowry	183
Figure 16 (Illustration)	A Scroll being used as a popular audio-visual medium to communicate the agendas of the political parties	184

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Art is an elaborate expression of individual and social identity. It is a vital part of society, associated with the healthy and pure development of society. Yet, in the discipline of sociology, there has always been neglect in terms of scholarly contributions in the field of studies related to artistic activity in human society, which is relegated to by art in being capable of only making sense in relation to aesthetic sensibility. The social function played by art in human civilization, through the endless varieties of art forms available in all kinds of societies throughout the world, has somehow been buried in its growing popularity as an aesthetic or artistic tradition. Taking this into consideration, this present work “Performance Traditions in the Age of Mass Media” is a humble attempt to look into the subject of performance traditions in the age of electronic mediation. This work particularly deals with the tradition of scroll painting as found in certain regions of West Bengal and Jharkhand, with an endeavour to explore the present situation of this age-old tradition in the contemporary world of modern mass media. Thus in this study, the tradition of scroll painting, which in practice is accompanied by narration, is viewed not merely as a form of folk art but instead as a performance tradition, in order to highlight the role of performance of this form of media in the present context of the wide availability and outreach of the technologically advanced forms of media.

Traditional performances have always been a basic part of the cultural order in every society. Including certain forms of art, folklore, dance, or music, which form a part of the larger whole of folk culture, which have been passed down through many generations, these forms of culture have adapted to changing times and situations whenever necessary, thus retaining their vitality even in their contemporary form. Folk culture, in general refers to the way of life in a ‘folk’ or a relatively simpler society. In some contexts, the concept of ‘folk’ is also used to refer to the rural society, as compared to the urban, industrial society. It was Robert Redfield who first used this term “folk culture” as an ideal type, as opposed to city life, basically referring to the relatively simple culture types which are experiencing modifications as a result of their increasing contact with the modern industrial world (Foster, 1953).

This domain of folk culture thus includes both material and non-material aspects, all of which perform certain functions of ensuring stability and order in the human society. Most of the elements of culture in a folk society like art, music, dance and myth, therefore, rather than existing for matters of entertainment, survived for certain vital functional purposes and roles which they performed in the society. For most forms of folk art and performance traditions, they have had vital contributions in the field of communication in pre-industrial society, when the modern forms of mass media had not come into existence. But with the coming of the modern forms mass media like the newspapers, television, radio, the film, and the Internet, the popularity of these traditional forms of media have got affected. What their present situation is, and how they cope with the problems, is basically what this study deals with. Exploring the aspects of religious and cultural identity of this tradition of scroll painting and narration in certain parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, this work thus looks into their struggle to retain their distinct identity, both in terms of the personal identity of the painters-cum-narrators of this practice as well as of the cultural identity of the tradition as reflecting a distinct local and indigenous form of culture.

Culture, in general, is one of the most complicated terms in the English language. As a concept, 'culture' is very common in everyday life. But it is it very highly misunderstood and misused, and hence the need for explanation. Culture provides the structure through which people interpret experience. It informs and guides both intention and action. It can be defined as the human creation and use of symbols and artefacts. It can also be described as a 'way of life' of an entire society, including codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, norms of behaviour and systems of belief. 'Culture' comes from the Latin word *colere*, meaning inhabit, cultivate, protect, etc. The term at first was used to describe a material process and later changed to describe "affairs of the spirit" (Eagleton, 2000: 1). In all its early uses, the term referred to the tending of something, basically, crops and animals. Later on, this tending of natural growth was extended to the process of human development. In French, until 18C, culture was always accompanied by a grammatical form indicating the matter being cultivated. In German, the word was still used as a synonym for 'civilization', precisely in the abstract sense of a general process of becoming civilized or cultivated, and also as had already been established for 'civilization' by the historians of

Enlightenment, as a description of the secular process of human development. It was Herder's work 'Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind' (1784-91) that the concept was defined in terms of a unilinear process and was not something restricted to the Europeans. He argued for the need to speak of cultures in a plural sense, to include the specific and variable cultures of different nations and periods, and also the specific and variable cultures of social and economic groups within a nation. During the early 19th century, many writers of the Romantic Movement, used the concept as an alternative to the then prevailing ideas of human development based on civilization and progress. Thus culture was used in a comparative sense of the term, to emphasize on the traditional and national cultures, and the new concept of 'folk culture', in the light of the growing industrial nature of society and the increasingly mechanical character of human civilization (Williams, 1976).

'Folk culture' as a concept can thus be said to have appeared with the urban revolution, as a contrast to the concept of 'urban culture', characterised by the growth of the city, signified by a modern industrial economy, and new forms of social and political organisation. Folk culture as such can be thought of as a common or similar way of life which characterises some or most of the people in a given area (Redfield, 1947). Be it folk art, music or dance or any other performance tradition, different forms of folk culture act as powerful tools of communication. Since ancient times, these folk performers have played an important role in transmitting news, ideas, traditional values and customs, or any kind of information to the society. Although these traditional performances have undergone great transformation, both in form and format after the invasion and the growing popularity of the mass media, many of them still play an important part in the folk society, as interpreters of tradition as well as of contemporary global events.

It can thus be said that, the prevalence of human communication over time, and at a distance has been a much older phenomenon than the modern mass media. This process of communication was very much integral, even to the organisation of early societies, where mass dissemination of ideas were carried out in matters of religious awareness and political duties. In the Middle Ages, it was the European churches which functioned as a form of 'media' enabling 'mass communication of religious values and ideals (McQuail, 2010). As mentioned before, folk or traditional art and

performances also played a significant role in the sphere of communication. It was only with the introduction of the print media that the history of the modern media began. Printing enhanced the process of communication by making it more secular, practical and popular in nature and by its ability to reach out to the public.

Alongside the notion of the modern forms of mass media, 'New Mass Media' or 'New Media' as expressions have been in use since the 1960s. In the book 'Handbook of New Media', the editors, Lievrouw and Livingstone have defined the concept by associating information communication technologies with their related social contexts, in other words, by showing a relation between technological artefacts and devices, practices and activities, and the social organisations which form around these practices. It is along with the coming of these advanced forms of electronic mediation, that the traditional art forms and performances have received a major blow in terms of their demand and popularity. Unlike earlier times, when they remained as the major form of communication and entertainment, the modern forms of mass media emerged as tough competitors leading to the decline in the attractiveness, importance, popularity, and their recognition as important mode of mass communication (McQuail, 2010).

But, irrespective of these factors, folk art and folk performance traditions still exist, although in a much lesser proportion and a much lesser prominent manner than the new mass media. In India, folk art, be it the *Kaavad* tradition or the *Phad* from Rajasthan, the *Garodas* of Gujarat, or the *Pats* of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa, all function as forms of entertainment media, especially in the rural parts of the country, carrying down through generations the traditional myths, pertaining to religious and moral values. At certain places, they also play a prominent role in communication. The idea of representation is hence very crucial at this point, for understanding the meanings that are produced through these folk forms of media. The pictures or images help in representing ideas or objects. Folk art, as a form of visual media, through the help of images, symbols, signs, and icons then along with representing myths, also reproduce or reconstruct reality, or a part of reality.

On Pats and the Patuas:

Pat, a form of scroll painting, found primarily in West Bengal, and certain regions of Jharkhand, has a tradition that goes back to centuries. These scroll paintings are done by the *Patuas* whom Risley described as “an endogamous class of low Mahomedans who paint pictures illustrating Hindu mythology and hawk them from door to door with songs” (Hauser, 2002: 107). These *Patuas* are basically a community of wandering bards, whose hereditary occupation was less to paint scrolls than to display them in villages as illustrations to accompany their storytelling. They used to travel long distances to perform in villages, singing songs and unrolling the scrolls to accompany the narrative in exchange for food, clothing or payment. Their songs and scrolls were mostly about Hindu gods and goddesses as well as Muslim saints (Hauser, 2002).

In contemporary times, the term *Patua* generally refers to a community whose hereditary and name-giving occupation is handling a *pat*, which is literally a scroll, canvas or painting. In addition to the traditional Hindu myths and morals, in the recent times, they also paint scrolls pertaining to the social circumstances of the time and popular world events. Their focus has also shifted from the oral narratives or the songs, which have become secondary to the paintings, which have now gained more prominence and importance. The scrolls are generally between six to twelve feet wide and two and a half to three feet wide. The storytellers usually carry five or six of these scrolls with them when visiting the villages, to give their audience a choice of scrolls. By and large, they begin with auspicious themes or religious stories and then move on to display *Pats* on local and world events (Hauser, 2002). These *Patuas*, more commonly known as *Chitrakaras*, which refers to a caste of itinerant picture storytellers, display scrolls along with the narratives that they gather from newspapers, television reports, and also from '*Jatra*'. These narratives reveal a structural similarity with the mythical narratives illustrated and narrated by them, in such a way that it is locally intelligible and acceptable. The community of *Patuas* is a close-knit one, and so when a new theme is introduced, everybody in the profession follows suit. A survey of the archival documents suggests that the *Pats* may have had a sacred character in the past. In spite of the absence of an established network of patrons among them, in the past, the *Pats* had inscriptions at the back, declaring the

names of donors who had given offerings to have the scrolls displayed again and again. The repetition of the sacred story accompanied by the oral narrative acted as a blessing to all the members of the audience present. Although the audience still considers the *Pats* relating to religious themes as sacred, they are not sacred in the sense that there are no rituals associated with the act of painting, and the *Chitrakars* display the same attitude towards them as they do towards secular or worldly events (Chatterji, 2009).

On Their Identity:

In general, although the *Patuas* practice Islam and designate themselves as Muslims, they also follow Hindu customs, abide by the caste restrictions and display *Pats* which largely include Hindu themes, thus occupying a unique position in the caste hierarchy. They depict Hindu gods and goddesses on their scrolls, narrate mostly Hindu myths, but practice their rites of passage according to the Islamic rules. Everyone has two names, one Islamic and another Hindu. *Patua* comes from the Sanskrit word '*pata*' meaning cloth. Although from the beginning, the terms *Patua* and *Chitrakar* literally meant the same group of people, it was in the 1891 census that *Patuas* and *Chitrakars* were classified as separate castes. In the early twentieth century that there were efforts made to bring the lower caste groups into the Hindu mainstream. But this conversion did not help them much, as far as their social status was concerned, and thus many *Patuas* returned to their former religion. As Beatrix Hauser states, during the colonial period, the British government had made it compulsory for the *Patuas* to identify themselves with one of the religious communities. Taking this into account, at about the beginning of the twentieth century, several Hindu social reform organisations aimed at converting these Muslim painters, to strengthen the Hindu majority in the nationalist movement. To raise their status in the caste society, these *Patuas* drew lineage to the *Chitrakar* painter caste. In the census report of 1951, the *Patuas* were finally recognised as *Chitrakars*. However, as mentioned before, this integration of the *Patuas* remained purely on a formal level and thus gradually most of them returned back to their former position (Hauser, 2002). The adoption of the title '*Chitrakar*' by many members of this caste group is probably a result of this earlier

mobilization. *Chitrakar* is the preferred term in Midnapore district of West Bengal, while *Patua* is still used as a title by the members of the scroll painting caste in Birbhum district. In Purulia and Bankura districts of West Bengal, *Patidar* is the title which is preferred. A sub-caste of *Chitrakars* living among the tribal populations of the border regions of Bengal and Jharkhand, known as *Jadu-Patuas* are also very important as far as the study of scroll-painting is concerned. Other than some mythical stories which they paint, they are also known for a particular type of painting called the 'Origin of the Adivasi' (Chatterji, 2009).

With the establishment of the Kalighat temple in Calcutta in the year 1798, the tradition of scroll paintings noted a marked change. It was in Kalighat, that some of the *Patuas* started selling the scrolls, to earn a living. Originally they never sold paintings, but used them as props for their narrative performance. As the demand for their performances decreased with the introduction of modern techniques, they had no other option but to take to selling their scrolls in the market, in the city. It was in 1818 that the first news about lithographs and chromolithographs came out in a Bengali newspaper. Till about 1850, they were not so popular among the Bengalis, though with their growing popularity in the 1870s, the visual dimension of the *Patuas* did suffer a setback. For the souvenir market, and the demand for the paintings to be used for interior decoration, the scrolls got replaced by single paintings. But unlike many folk traditions in other parts of rural India, which had almost become stagnant, in Bengal, although the tradition of scroll painting did get affected with the urban influence, there was, on the whole, more openness about the adoption and inculcation of the new media-based imagery.

During colonial rule in India, these scrolls also played a very important role in arousing the spirit of nationalism among the people in Bengal (Hauser, 2002). With the coming of the British, and the invasion of newer forms of mass media, the *Patuas* began to include new themes in their paintings. Under British rule, these *Patuas* played an important part in helping to preserve the identity and arousing feelings of nationalism through the illustration of popular cultural and religious festivals, besides portraying the lives of the freedom fighters and spreading their messages. As Ratnabali Chatterjee states, in a period of transition, when a social order breaks down, rupturing the hierarchical relations which forms its core, any one of its elements can

serve in art as its major metaphor. Thus also with these scroll painters, who expressed their satire to the newly formed urban middle class and the growing Americanization of the Indian society through the medium of scrolls. Now, along with their conventional practice, they also illustrate contemporary social and political conflicts in their works. In the scrolls created by the Santhals too, along with their traditional 'Myth of Creation' they have also elaborated on the issues of land rights, exploitation by moneylenders, control of natural resources by outsiders, and other instances of their encounters with different modes of control and governance. Although nowadays, the primary aim for the creation of scrolls is commercial, and they are created to suit the demands of the market, this traditional practice still holds an important place in the life of the people in rural parts of Bengal and Jharkhand. Although with the invasion of newspapers, television and cinema in the villages, the scroll paintings are no longer an alluring option for entertainment, they are still shown in and around villages (Chatterjee, 2000). As Roma Chatterji says, that unlike other forms of mass media, this traditional method of storytelling has the receptors actively participating in re-interpreting the event by re-locating it in mythical time (Chatterji, 2009). Even in the presence of the electronic media, the scrolls are more close to the heart of the people. Their structure, their narration, their style of painting, is more locally understandable and acceptable.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY:

The sociological approach to art has been a fruitful one, but the domain as such has always remained relatively neglected. Artistic activity is dominated by norms, customs and values which are a product of the social order. But art as a form of individual articulation and communication expresses and also to some extent determines these social values and beliefs. At the very outset, it is essential to draw the lines between religion and art in society. In the folk society, the institutions of religion and art play a major role in enhancing the adaption of humans to their environment. In such societies, it is magic which sanctions the works of art. Different forms of art thus become symbols of the communitarian ideal of the tribes or the

groups and also help in controlling the individual feelings of power or fear within them. The importance of rituals in the 'primitive' society has also resulted in the formation of several forms of religion and magic, myths and art, along with their diverse body of symbols and gestures. Art thus can be said to have a very special relation with religion. They give meaning to the mysterious experiences and events of life through the means of symbols and motifs. Both of these institutions are born in a society as products expressing reconciliation and self-expression of periods of crisis or tensions. As the society gradually progresses to one based on 'organic solidarity' or '*Gesellschaft*', there comes an increasing secularization of life, marked by a growing autonomy in the traditions of art and a distancing of religion from its overemphasis on rituals and other symbolic aspects. Nevertheless, both religion and art are interdependent for their existence in the society and as art uses the myths and symbols created by religion, these features also get transformed and reinterpreted in the process, with the end product augmenting the development of aesthetic as well as religious thought (Mukherjee, 1948).

Within the domain of the social sciences, writings on the sociology of aesthetics are found in the works of Herbert Spencer, Ernst Grosse and Wundt, while in the subject of cultural anthropology, the works of A. C. Haddon, Franz Boas, Raymond Firth, Robert Redfield, and others show a considerable body of literature dealing with the theme of art. In most works related to anthropology in the past, there has been neglect, in the systematic study of art. Although there has been a huge body of scholarly treatise on magic, religion, art, kinship, economy and gender, the discussion of art in such contexts have always been avoided. Ideas in the European world in the realm of culture have always been in a process of change and modification. Studies on art and the material culture of different societies were an integral part of the anthropological works of the nineteenth century. The methods then adopted in this discipline thus included the identification of traits with particular cultures and specific cults of civilization, on the basis of which the practice and the existing artefacts of the societies were made sense of. In the works of the anthropologists like Frazer, Tylor, or Pitt-Rivers, art was thus regarded as an integral part of the material culture of the society in the scheme of evolution. Art in this context was therefore viewed as a form which was necessary in a society where due to the population occupying the lower

strata of evolution, the element of innovation was very rare or almost impossible, and in which most styles are copied by all the people of the society, and exists for longer duration. These views of primitive art were again criticized and challenged by ideas of modernism, which viewed the works as forms which exemplified the liberating nature of the society, the psychic energy of the people which was unrestrained by the norms of academic tradition (Morphy and Perkins, 2006).

Anthropology has however come a long way from evolutionist modes of thought. British anthropologists like A. C. Haddon, who was extremely interested in the concept of decorative art, endeavoured to understand the development of decorative art over time as being reflective of relationships between groups. In the American school of Anthropology, Franz Boas' works also underline his immense contribution to the study of art form in society and emphasized on the potential of this cultural form to reflect the existing patterns among individuals and groups and thus to reveal historical patterns. From the twentieth century, the two schools witnessed great changes. In the case of Britain, evolutionary theory was thoroughly criticized as producing impoverishing theories through inadequate methods. Emphasis was instead made on a methodological shift away from dependence on the museums to studies based on long-term field research. However, this shift to researches based on fieldwork began to be associated with a shift to the structuralist-functionalism of Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski, which resulted in an emphasis on studies of social organization and social structure and, thus studies on material culture and art again became neglected. In America, the condition was quite different. European art theories continued to have great impact on the anthropological writings of Franz Boas, Alfred Kroeber, etc. But irrespective of this fact, there were very few contributions in the field of art till around the first half of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, there were some anthropologists who dealt with the subject of art. These included Robert Redfield, Raymond Firth and Melville Herskovits. Firth as such concentrated on the liberating ideas of modernism as found in Western and non-Western art. Such forms of exotic art which existed in the medieval or even primitive times should not be looked down upon as crude reflections of tradition, but instead as expressions of the artists as influenced by their cultural position and endowment (Morphy and Perkins, 2006).

It was after the Second World War that a new form of support and interest was seen to grow in the field of anthropology, in relation to art. Influenced by the theories of semiotic, linguistic, and structuralist views of culture, anthropology of art began to grow. The theme of art in the society was related to certain objects and was held as being integral to ritual performances, which led to the entry of this subject into the sphere of ritual and symbolism as can be seen in the works of Victor Turner (Morphy and Perkins, 2006).

In the realm of sociology, art as such can be described as subtle yet powerful tool of the society to shape and regulate social values and human relations in society. It symbolises a complete fusion of conscious and unconscious desires of human beings. It expresses individual creativity as well as the vitality of the entire society. Every art form is a reflection of the artist's creativity of the myths and traditions as well as the social and historical environment in which the tradition is as such born. But as mentioned above, the artists use their creativity to reinterpret and redefine these social values and socio-historical and cultural condition of the times. However, their works may not always be restricted to the immediate social reality, as is found in most traditions where the art forms reflect attitudes and values which have a universal appeal and hardly have in connection with their immediate social and economic environment. Art, as such, and specifically folk art for that matter, do not have strict rules or norms guiding their skills and their tradition. Thus time and again, there have experiments and alterations in this field. As for the motifs, the symbols and the patterns associated with the tradition, they have been social products which were invented in the early stages of the formation of the particular artistic tradition. Together with the personal creativity of the artists, these techniques and styles help to give the tradition a sense of distinctiveness and originality (Mukherjee, 1948). As Mukherjee states, the changes in the techniques or patterns of the art tradition may also be due to their failure to succeed in social communication. Finally, for the tradition to succeed and flourish, it has to have the support and understanding from the society. Acceptance or, unpopularity and rejection of the tradition depend not only on the following of the aesthetic tastes and preferences, but also on the affiliation of the artisans to the social and religious groups and their political interests (Mukherjee, 1948). The sociology of art is thus, aims at an objective study of art as, "(a) an

expression of the man's personal striving and fulfilment in the ideal plane and his unique sense of values that orient, articulate or explain the social values of an epoch of culture; (b) a vehicle of communication of prevailing social values moulding the values of destiny of the individual; and (c) a record and celebration of a culture or age, an unerring clue to the life and aims of a civilization as judged by the larger conscience of humanity (Mukherjee, 1948).

As for Mukherjee, a proper sociological approach to the studying of art would thus include an analysis of the social background and ideological preferences of the artist, the role of the artist's novelty or creativity in terms of the tradition, the form and the theme of art in relation to the socio-historical context, and, the position of the artistic tradition in terms of its acceptance or its unpopularity in the society (Mukherjee, 1948). These are the points under which the working definition of art for the present study has been formed. The study basically focuses on the phenomenon of folk art, particularly on the tradition of scroll paintings of India. The concept of folk has been borrowed from Robert Redfield's concept of the folk society and usually refers to those societies which are small, isolated, and homogenous, marked with a strong sense of solidarity, traditional behaviour, conventional ways of living, in which the familial group acts as the unit of action, and where the status is more important than the market (Redfield, 1947). Folk culture in such a sense refers to the ways of life of the rustic and the rural people who exist in such societies. Specifically speaking, the phenomenon of folk art as such has thus been described as the various forms of art which exist in such societies providing diverse ways of visual and auditory representation. But again, through the course of the work, this concept of the 'folk' as explained by Redfield, as being limited in terms of its communication is challenged by the folk tradition of scroll paintings as found in India.

This concept of 'folk culture' as such is of Western origin. Its application to study the Indian society which reveals a rich blend of aspects of both tradition and modernity thus becomes problematic. In this sense it is also important to take into consideration the parallel notion of folk culture as exists in Indian society. This study primarily deals with the scroll painting tradition as found in certain parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand. The idea of 'folk culture' in Bengal, which many scholars have referred to as '*lok sanskriti*', is pronouncedly different from its western counterpart. This

indigenous notion of the '*lok sanskriti*' is something which is an indispensable part of life and in effect refers to the Little Traditions that are present in every society. As Binoy Ghosh writes, it is very essential to distinguish between the concept of folk culture or '*Lok Sanskriti*' and people's culture or '*Sadhaaran Jansanskriti*' (Ghosh, 1978). The latter one refers to those practices which essential for a proper functioning of the society. *Lok sanskriti* on the other hand, is very different from its English translated version of 'folk culture'. The popular beliefs and practices thus cannot be clubbed under the term 'folk culture'. This concept in the Indian society is a much more complex one. It does not mark a contrast between the rural and the city life and instead refers to culture which is created by the folk societies and is transmitted down through generations as an indigenous form which gives identity to the community and the individual. Thus, keeping this mind, the concept of 'folk culture' has included the definition as proposed by the Western scholars but would be kept open to include the interplay of the factors of tradition and modernity.

In this work the aspect of tradition has not been viewed only as a form of art, or as a visual practice. In fact, the study also deals with the problem of their shift from being a primarily oral tradition to being viewed simply as a form of visual tradition. Obviously the scroll paintings themselves are first and foremost a unique form of art, but their real function in the folk society is their role in communication. Though the visual aspect of the tradition is essential, its importance in the folk or the rural society lies in its contribution in the field of communication. Along with the pictorial depiction, it is the aspect of performance which defines the tradition as a whole. It is this feature of performance, in the form of narrative poetry accompanied with scrolls, which was one of the major sources of communication before the coming of the modern forms of media. The pictorial illustrations in the scrolls were explained to the village audiences through narration. The themes in the past were mainly restricted to the religious mythologies and the cultural beliefs and values of the region, and thus this audio-visual narration enabled the transmission and the maintenance of tradition and culture values in the society. With the entry of the forces of industrialization and urbanization in the India, the cultural scene witnessed many transformations and changes. The introduction of modern forms of mass media had an adverse effect on many of these traditions, thus leading to a complete disappearance of the aspect of

performance and their entry into the commercial market as aesthetic goods for sale. But in certain parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, these practices still exist, although on a declining scale, as medium of communication alongside the modern forms of electronic mediation. In this paper hence, this practice of picture-storytelling has been referred to as a performance tradition, to highlight on its important feature of communication in society.

The concept of mass media, in relation to the present study has been referred to as those forms of media are a product of the technological development and expertise in the industrialized and urbanized society, and which deal with the 'mass' or the relatively undifferentiated composition of population which emerge in these new societies, and who are the receptors of these mediums of mass communication. As Denis McQuail states, the mass media in the modern world is marked by certain characteristics which make it different from the earlier traditional modes of communication. These include certain communicative purposes, the use of technologies for enabling communication to a huge population and to a larger area and forms of social organization (McQuail, 2010). In is in these lines that the concept of mass media has been used in the present work to include the medium of newspapers, radio, and television particularly, in the presence of the more advanced mediums of technology, in order to give attention on those forms of media which have affected the popularity of the traditional forms of media as the picture-storytelling tradition, in the villages.

In the era of globalization, with a growing unpopularity of these art forms and cultural practices, these traditional practices themselves and the artisans associated with it, seem to face a crisis of identity, both in terms of the social and religious identity of the artists associated with the practices, as well as the distinct and unique cultural identity of each of these performance traditions themselves. Cultural globalization, through the increasing outreach of the modern forms of mass media to larger areas has led to the growth of popular culture primarily based on consumption. Although this has not led to the homogenization of culture across the world, it has had adverse effects on the local cultures of the world which have now lost their importance as mediums of communication in the society and are treated simply as cultural practices of a distant past which are now kept in the museums as forms of art relating to local

and indigenous cultures. The question of identity is hence important, as by looking into the social and ideological background of the artists who create the product and also by looking into the present situation of the art form or the performance itself, one can understand the traditional practice and its significance in society. This work hence looks into the concept of identity in relation to tradition of scroll painting and narration, into the question of the religious identity of the community of painters associated with it, and into the questions of cultural identity of the tradition itself. The concept of identity in this sense refers to the role of the agency and the communication technologies in influencing the notion of the sense of self, both at the personal and at the group level. As the work deals with the community of scroll painters, it refers to concept of collective identity of the group.

In the course of the study, a brief review of literature has been incorporated, referring to the various theoretical approaches on which the work stands. In the case of the concept of identity, reference has hence been made to the theories as forwarded by scholars like George Herbert Mead, who maintained that it was the collective which shaped the identity of every individual who was a member of it. Collective identity in this sense was thus internalized among all members, with the individuals as entities who within such a context constructed a sense of self and identity and which also allowed the group or community to have unified social experience. But, it also takes into account the views of postmodernism which questions this collective categorization and the group experiences through the concepts of power and agency. In this respect, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of identity has been used, in which he claims that instead of conscious approaches, the 'identity' is constructed through a sense of embodiment of the agents with the 'habitus' in which they are born and socialized. But as the critics of Bourdieu argue, this concept of identity does not take into account the social location of the agents and also misses out on the intersubjective relationship between the agents themselves. The present study has thus focused on two kinds of identity, social identity on grounds of religious affiliation, as well as cultural identity. For the part on social identity, the idea of collective identity has been emphasized to show how the traditional affiliation to a social institution like caste and its prescribed occupation has given these scroll painters cum storytellers a platform for asserting their distinct social identity. This

idea of identity thus takes into account the views of Bourdieu, Hermanowicz and Morgan. It agrees to the notion of the habitus as being the very principle which, based on past experiences function as perceptions which enable the actors to cope with the changing and the unforeseen circumstances in terms of interaction. Adding to this, there also the view forwarded by Hermanowicz and Morgan, who argue that is by engaging in social practices which bring to light their symbolic position in the society, do groups and communities declare their social identities. In the case of the scroll painters cum storytellers of parts of West Bengal, they occupy a unique intermediary position between the Hindus and the Muslims, thus giving rise to a crisis of social identity in terms of religion of this community. But it is their association with the traditional or hereditary occupation which helps them in the assertion and maintenance of their social identity, even though in the recent times many artisans have chosen to take to other occupations. Therefore, while the habitus governs their interactions within the groups and helps in the maintenance of the identity by the fact that they have the same material and social conditions of existence and hence elicit similar responses from the habitus, their engagement in the social practice itself also facilitates the assertion of their social identity. The second kind of 'identity' that the study has dealt with is the idea of cultural identity of this particular tradition of scroll painting and narration, which has been severely affected by the forces of cultural globalization. In this aspect, it is again the Bourdieusian approach to identity which has been used to show the cultural tradition itself facilitates in the assertion of cultural identity of the performance tradition itself as well as of the artists associated with it. As the concept of 'habitus' is usually used to refer to certain ultimate values, categories and schemes which helps the groups or the communities which have the similar conditions of existence to elicit similar response, in the case of these artists-cum-performers, their 'habitus', defined by certain historical and socially situated conditions, allow them to still reproduce their customary practice of painting scrolls. Although in most cases the aspect of performance has faded in popularity, these scroll paintings as such then play a major role in maintaining the tradition itself and also preserving the cultural identity of the artists themselves.

As related to the social identity of the painters cum storytellers, these artisans belong to a specific community known as the *Patuas*. In order to gain a better understanding

of the social institution of caste, the theories of G. S. Ghurye, Louis Dumont, and M. N. Srinivas, along with the recent contributions of theorists like Nicholas Dirks, Andre Beteille, and C. J. Fuller have been used to gain a clearer picture of the role and condition of caste in pre-colonial India, during the colonial rule, and again in post-colonial India. This has enabled in understanding the relation between occupation and caste which plays a very important role in determining their social identity.

As for the cultural identity of this tradition itself and of those for whom it has been a hereditary occupation, the introduction of the modern communication technologies and the modern forms of media has totally altered the condition of social interaction between individuals and groups in society. This has also had an effect on the cultural identity of the local and indigenous forms of traditions all over the country. In order to understand the significance, the role and the influence of mass media on society and culture, it is hence important to reflect on the prominent debates in the field of mass media. In this regard, reference has been made to the Frankfurt School including Theodore Adorno and Max Horheimer notion of the culture industry, Marcuse's idea of the creation of one-dimensional man, Walter Benjamin's view of the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction, and also to the works of Jean Baudrillard, Stuart Hall and Louis Althusser, in specifically in relation to art, culture and the power of the modern mass media in society.

The present work is thus a humble attempt to explore the traditional performances, especially the case of the scroll paintings of India, in the contemporary era of new mass media. The use of term 'Performance Tradition' is particularly to emphasize on the aspect of performance as such in these folk practices. Hence, in this study these forms of scroll paintings have not been viewed simply as forms of folk art but instead as a performance, as substantiated by the existence of narratives alongwith the paintings, which make the practice or the tradition complete. Even though the communicative tradition of these scroll painting found all over India is gradually fading away, giving way to them being replaced as forms of folk art, they continue to survive, although in a very few places, as an alternative to the popular and technologically advanced forms of mass media. As a case to illustrate the tradition of scroll paintings, the Pat tradition found in the states of West Bengal, Orissa, and Jharkhand have been illustrated.

METHODOLOGY:

Rationale of the Study:

Massive improvements and changes in the field of technology for over the last few decades have had a great impact on society. Electronic media, consisting of print mediation and other forms of oral, visual and auditory mediation have all had profound impact on the pre-existing world of communication and conduct. Technological explosion from the past century, mainly in the domain of information and transportation have thus made decisive changes and transformations in the field of traditional media. These new forms of electronic mediation which offer better opportunities for communication and also better resources for the construction and development of both, individuals and society thus challenge the traditional forms of media, which appear dull and limited. In the case of India, most of the traditional forms of media, also called the folk media, have either died out or are on the verge of getting extinct, or have become highly commercialized. Very few of these do actually still act as a medium of communication. Any means of communication which cuts across regional and religious barriers, even only for certain sections of the people is worth fostering. In this context, a study of the traditional performance of storytelling accompanied by illustrated scrolls in certain regions of West Bengal and the bordering regions between Bengal and Jharkhand, becomes quite relevant and important, in order to show how this traditional performance, although it has got highly commercialized and is created while keeping in mind the needs and desires of the market, how it still exists as a form of media alongside the new electronic media.

Research objectives:

- To carry out a comparative and historical analysis of the different forms of folk art, particularly the scroll painting-cum-narrative traditions as they exist in various parts of India, to find the points of similarities and differences between them and the tradition of scroll painting and narration as found in parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand.

- To explore the question of social identity of the artisans associated with the performance tradition of scroll paintings.
- To look into the concept of cultural identity in the age of modern mass media, the impact that the process of cultural globalization has in relation to the existence of the local and indigenous forms of cultural traditions like the scroll painting and the role played by the tradition itself to maintain its unique cultural identity in the contemporary world.

Research Questions:

It is very important to understand how the hereditary scroll painters assert their professional identity and social significance in a rapidly changing social world, where due to the process of museumization, such scrolls are unrolled, framed, and separated from their songs, as a result of which, their role in communication and social organisation is easily forgotten and they are viewed only as items of ‘folk’ art. The present work thus looks into the situation of the traditional performance of scroll paintings in the age of new mass media. As per the objectives of the study, certain research questions have been formed for the purpose of bringing out clarity in the research, which have been addressed at different sections throughout the study. These are as follows:

- What is the present state or the condition of the traditional performance of scroll painting in different parts of India, from the perspective of their cultural importance in society and their significance in communication? What is their relation to the scroll paintings found in West Bengal, Orissa, and Jharkhand?
- How do the factors of caste, religion, gender and ethnicity influence the traditional performance of scroll paintings in India in general, and in the eastern part of India, primarily in the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand?

- How do these hereditary scroll painters of West Bengal and Jharkhand who peculiarly occupy an intermediary position between the Hindus and the Muslims, oscillate between the two religions? How do they then define their religious identity?
- Is there any relation between their hereditary practices of scroll paintings and their socio-religious identity?
- In the light of the growing popularity of new mass media and the larger forces of globalisation, how do local cultures and folk forms of art exist? Do they face a crisis of cultural identity?
- Is there any relation between these forms of folk art like scroll paintings and the larger question of cultural identity?

Methods of data collection:

The work is based on secondary sources for the purpose of data collection and will refer books, journals, and documents on the concerned topic, for gathering data required for the study.

Throughout the study, references have been made to Critical theorists, Postmodernists, Structural-Functionalists, and Indologists, and their works. For questions on cultural and religious identity, reference have been made to the works of Swami Vivekananda, B. R. Ambedkar, G.S. Ghurye, M. N. Srinivas, Louis Dumont, N. K. Bose, Yogendra Singh, Arjun Appadurai, Andre Beteille, Nicholas Dirks and others. For the section on mass media, reference have been made to the works of Marshall McLuhan, Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Michael Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Stuart Hall, and others.

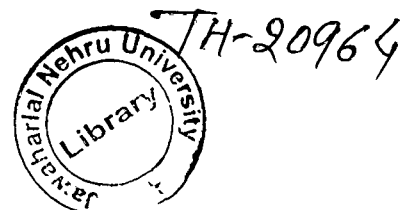
As a part of field sensitization, in addition to the secondary sources, few conversations with some scroll painters from West Bengal were also carried out. These have also been used alongside the available literature; in order get a better picture of the reality.

Limitations of the research:

The present work is an attempt to look at the traditional performance of scroll painting and the problems of cultural and religious identity in the era of the new mass media. Methods adopted for this research have been secondary sources only. This is one of the main limitations of the work. The patterns, facts, social processes thus described have been gathered from books, journals and other documents. It thus provides a limited picture of the reality. The lack of primary data or first-hand field experience leads to the problem of selective observation, wherein the patterns or the social processes over observation are as found in the sources of information. There also remains a fear of an overgeneralization of facts where the evidence of a few similar events leads to the assumption of the prevalence of a general pattern. As the present study will refer to secondary sources of information, these tendencies will be best tried to be avoided. But, as mentioned before, due to the lack of inclusion of primary sources of data, the scope of the present study is limited and the conclusions of the study will not be applicable for matters of generalizations.

The prime area of interest in this study is folk art, particularly the tradition of scroll paintings. These paintings have been a part of the larger practice of oral tradition. Over the decades, due to historical reasons like the colonial rule, climatic reasons, and with the competition from the technologically superior modes of communication, these forms of art have been waning in importance. Due to the oral nature of the tradition and the hereditary nature of this practice, and also due to the lack of literacy of the artisans, documents, biographies, experiences written by these performers is absent. It has been only in the past few decades that they have been documented and studied, from the British ethnographers to the modern day anthropologists and social scientists. Attempts have however been made to include as much of information as possible in both English and in the vernaculars of the regions in which these traditions exist.

The lack of time is another limitation of the study and due to the limited amount of time for this work will not be able to exhaust all the possible and available sources of information and knowledge under the concerned area of interest.



A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE CHAPTERS:

Chapter One: Introduction:

The research will start with an introduction, which will throw light on the topic, and also discuss the way in which the research will be carried out. It will start with an outline of the topic in general. After this, one of the most important parts of the research, the methodology of the study would be elaborated upon, the methodology, which would include the rationale of the study, the research objectives, the research questions, and the limitations of the study. This will be followed by a brief summary of the chapters which will discuss the primary objectives and questions of the dissertation. This will in turn be followed by a review of the existing literature on the theme of the research.

Chapter Two: Folk Art and Traditional Performances of India- A picture of the past and present situation:

This being the first chapter of the dissertation, it will begin by elaborating on the concept of folk culture theoretically, as done by Robert Redfield, and other cultural anthropologists. It will also include the definitions of folk culture as stated in critical theory. The discussion will then narrow down on the phenomenon of folk art. It will first explore the different forms of folk art in India, in general, and then move on, in particular, to look at the tradition of scroll paintings in different parts of India.

Folk art as such, or scroll paintings specifically, in this work then, will not be viewed literally and merely as forms of art, but instead as forms or tools of communication in rural parts of the country. The role of these scroll paintings in communication, especially of tradition, is something which will be emphasised. A historical and comparative analysis will be carried out to show the different forms of scrolls found in the country, both in the past as well as in the present, and the various roles they performed and still continue to perform as modes of communication in society. The state of the artisans or the painters associated with this tradition of scroll paintings in terms of their socio-cultural position in the society, their economic status will be looked into, in the course of the chapter. Factors of gender, religion, ethnicity, and

caste will be primarily reflected upon, in the influence they have upon the situation and the practice of the performance of scroll paintings.

The tradition of scroll paintings as present in parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand will then be elaborated as a special case, to delve into the questions of identity and authority of these scroll painters who, seem to oscillate between the two religions for their identity and who, despite of occupying a low social status are given the legitimacy and authority to represent, reproduce and thereby pass down tradition. This chapter will describe and illustrate elaborately the life and the social status of these scroll painters and throw light on their scroll paintings. For a better understanding, a historical background of this tradition would be given, followed by a description of their present condition. A historical trajectory would thus be followed, which would look into this traditional performance of scroll paintings accompanied with oral narration, explain the role of these scroll painters, their position in the society, and their relevance in the modern day world. Basic issues such as the origin and the history of the *Patuas*, their social and economic life, would be addressed in the course of the chapter. For this purpose, reference will be made to the works of Radhakamal Mukherjee, Mildred Archer, Gurusaday Dutt, and others who have contributed to the existing literature in the field of folk art in general and the tradition of scroll painting in particular.

Chapter Three: The Identity of the Patuas:

The present chapter will deal with the social identity of the *Patuas* and their unique position in the caste hierarchy and thus, also discuss on their power, legitimacy, and authority to reproduce and pass down traditions largely representing Hindu themes. Some of these *Patuas* residing in the border regions of West Bengal and Jharkhand also belong to the tribal population. The chapter will thus start with a discussion on caste system as seen in the works of M. N. Srinivas, G. S. Ghurye, and Louis Dumont. It will trace the role of caste in pre-colonial India, in colonial India, and the present day through the theoretical contributions by several scholars. It will then narrow down on the case of the scroll painters, elaborating on their economic life or their occupation, which is highly related to their social status in the hierarchy, their present

position in the social structure, and their intermediary social position between the Hindus and the Muslims, which is again highly debated. The chapter will also include the case of the *Meos* of Rajasthan, who claim to be both, Rajput and Muslim, thus illustrating instances of groups possessing both, Muslim and Hindu identity. It will thus focus on questions of whether these *Pats* or scroll paintings serve as a medium of maintaining and asserting religious or ethnic identity of the *Patuas* in the present day. Alongwith the issues of caste and religion, the chapter will also look into the factors of ethnicity, and gender, to explain their importance and influence in determining and framing religious or ethnic identity.

Chapter Four: Scroll Painting and Cultural Identity in the Age of Mass Media:

This chapter will deal with the objective and questions revolving around the existence of such traditional performances in the age of electronic mediation. It would explore the present condition of this tradition of scroll painting and the reason for its existence, where, inspite of its commercialization; it still survives as a form of media alongside the new forms of mass media. This section will also focus on questions like whether these scroll painters or *Patuas* try to assert their cultural identity through the medium of scroll paintings. It will also throw light on the role these scrolls play in the public sphere, in matters of creating awareness, or building resistance. Like the earlier chapter, this section will also bring in the factors of gender, and ethnicity, to demonstrate the role that they play in maintaining or structuring cultural identity of the scroll painters. The chapter will also elaborate on the whole practice of story-making from contemporary social and political events and issues, of how narratives are constructed, how these scroll and narratives often rebel and mock at the polity, and how reality and knowledge is recreated and represented through these scrolls and narratives.

Chapter Five: Conclusion:

This section of the dissertation will sum up the major discussions and the questions examined in the course of the study. It will also explain that the two forms of

mediation dealt with in the course of the research; that of the new mass media, and that of the folk media, would be better handled if treated not as forms which are polar opposites, but as forms with possibilities of negotiations between them, to have a better understanding of reality, in which both these categories are entangled and interconnected. This chapter will also focus on the major debates on tradition and modernity, the rural and urban nexus, and the relationship between social structure and culture and the question of social and cultural identity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

As the present work is dependent on secondary sources for gathering data and information on the subject, the following pages contain a review of the literature used in the research.

One of the primary objectives of the work has been to explore into questions about the religious or ethnic identity of the scroll painters, who oscillate between the two religious identities of Hindu and Muslim. These artisans follow Islam, but also occupy a place in the Hindu caste hierarchy. In this context thus, an understanding of the caste system as it existed and still exists in India is very important.

One of the most comprehensive and detailed account of the caste system is present in Louis Dumont's work 'Homo Hierarchicus': The Caste system and its Implications (1980). Quintessential for any study on the caste system, this book by the French anthropologist gives one of the earliest and detailed sociological analysis on the phenomenon of the caste system by elaborating on its basic features, as is found all over India. The ritual aspect of the caste hierarchy is very significant for its legitimacy. It is this aspect of the *varna* system, that Dumont starts his book with. He goes on to illustrate in his book how this concept of *varna* is extremely misleading when it comes to understanding the intricate complexities of the caste system. He also accuses of Indologists of confusing with these two terms of caste and *varna*, and states that caste which appears to be a unified group externally, when seen from within, it shows that even a particular caste is a complex group containing several sub-groups of diverse order and levels, which are attached to different occupations

and different rules concerning endogamy. His book is divided into different sections dealing with the characteristics of the caste system which he views as a system as composed of elements which only attain significance and importance in it being a product of the network of relations, in other words, based on the interdependence of the various caste groups present within it (Dumont, 1980).

'Caste and Race in India' by G. S. Ghurye is one of the most basic and popular texts on the subject of caste. This book provides a detailed description on the phenomenon of caste as found in India. Indologist G. S. Ghurye starts with describing the feature of the caste system in order to provide an explanation of the phenomenon for the absence of a proper definition of it in the vast body of literature that is available on the subject. He then presents a historical trajectory of the caste system by dividing the ages into four phases, namely the Vedic age, the post-Vedic period, followed by the period dominated by the *Dharma-shashtras*, and the modern period upto the nineteenth century. In this section he shows how caste system gradually penetrated the social structure, to becoming one of the most distinguishable characteristics of Indian society. The earliest reference being to what is known as the four castes of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, as found in one of the later hymns of the Rig Veda, the *Purushasukta*, as four orders or four classes, emanating from different parts of the body of the Purusha, or the Primeval Being, to the use later use of terms like varna and jati to describe them, with gradual modifications over time in the theory of purity and pollution, and in the traditional schemes of the four castes which were held to be ideal, and finally upto the fourth period where the conditions of caste organisations seemed to be similar to that of the nineteenth century. In the latter part of the book, Ghurye critiques the relation between race and caste as was prevalent at that point of time, discusses the phenomenon of caste as it is experienced in the modern-day world, starting from its situation during the British rule to the situation in post-independent India, with the emergence of reserved categories, such as the Scheduled castes and the Scheduled tribes (Ghurye, 1932).

For a proper understanding of the caste system as it functions today, and for the social processes associated with it, M. N. Srinivas's contribution on this subject is unquestionable. His work 'Caste in Modern India and Others Essays' (1962), thus provides the reader with a rich illustration of the present situation of caste as it exists

today. One of his major contributions in the study of caste is his recognition and coining of the process of 'Sanskritization', which he defined as a process through which in a after a generation or two, a lower caste was able to rise up to a comparatively higher status within the hierarchy by adopting the customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins who were considered as the ideal. In practice, apart from the Brahmins, the way of life of the dominant caste of the region was also adopted by the people of the region in an attempt to attain a higher position in the caste structure (Srinivas, 1962).

This book thus begins with an elaborate introduction on the phenomenon of caste in modern India. This is followed by a discussion on the important and prominent process of Sanskritization, which the author felt was brought about and catalysed by the British rule in India that induced developments in the field of communications, science and technology. Westernization as a process also accelerated the process of Sanskritization in the country. The upper castes, mostly the Brahmins, began to acquire and imitate the 'western' customs, habits and practices and thus become 'westernised', with the other castes following the way of life of the Brahmins and the British. As for the relation between the traditional concept of varna which was later applied to mean caste, and phenomenon of caste in Indian society, Srinivas states that there is substantial difference between the two, between the theoretical conception of caste as meant by varna, and the "ethnographic reality" as seen in terms of caste in the Indian society. With the coming of industrialization and urbanization of rural areas, the limits set in territories set by village chiefs were lifted, and this, together with Sanskritization led to the horizontal development of caste. The book also talks about the future of caste in India, where Srinivas states that caste as a phenomenon is very much present and a part of Indian society, mostly prominent in the field of politics, which has led to a weakening of the strict barriers between the different sub-castes and the non-Brahmin castes, but not to its total extinction. Even for the urban population, for whom 'jati' no longer functions as the endogamous unit, and there are no strict rules about following one's traditional caste occupation; caste ties still exist horizontally in the form of institutions and organisations created by caste groups. Srinivas' structural-functionalist stance is visible throughout this work as he emphasises on the different social processes in function within the social structure,

and also shows the shift from a vertical development of caste to a horizontal development of caste in terms of the social structure through the description of the Indian society in pre-colonial times, under colonial rule, and after independence (Srinivas, 1962).

For an understanding of the contemporary debates in the field of caste as found in India, the book on 'Caste Today', edited by C. J. Fuller, is of great help. Through its various articles, this book tries to explore on the present situation of the social institution of caste which has over the decades transformed itself in many ways but again continues to reinforce its values of social hierarchy through the help of new social processes and institutions. The main thread in the various articles on this book being the debate on the continuity and change in the phenomenon of caste in India, the work goes on to show how the traditional view of caste has changed but how the institution as such continues to have an impact on the social structure of Indian society. Referring to Weber's model of status group differentiation which proposed that the leading of different styles of life, together with their link to a common ancestor resulted in the formation of ethnic groups which if arranged into a vertical order marked by domination and subordination, would lead to the formation of groups, Fuller stated that exactly the reverse of the process was taking place in India where the vertical or hierarchical relationships are in a state of decay with a growing emphasis on the horizontally disconnected ethnic groups. This has resulted in the growing ambiguity and inconsistency of the social fact of caste. The article by Andre Beteille, 'Caste in Contemporary India' focuses on the questions related to the meaning and the legitimacy of the caste system, by looking at the case of the urban Indians who are mainly engaged in modern occupations and who are referred to as the urban middle class. Beteille is thus of the opinion that in the case of contemporary India, caste is no longer found in the form of a complete system as before. Carrying forward one's hereditary occupation is still strong among the cultivators and artisans and others inhabiting the rural areas, and in urban areas the practice of endogamy facilitates the maintenance of the identities of caste. In the present day, the social institution is hence associated more with 'jati' than with 'varna'. The article by Raymond Jamous on the Meo, who are both a Rajput caste as well as a Muslim community, is also important for this dissertation, in order to show the presence of

groups who have occupied an intermediary position between the Hindus and the Muslims in India.

Mass media occupies an influential position in contemporary society, whether in the field of politics, economics, culture, or even for that matter, everyday life. The book, 'Mass Communication Theory' by Denis McQuail thus gives a comprehensive idea on the different themes, perspectives and theories in this field of mass communication. He uses the term 'mass communications' to refer to the social phenomenon which emerged in the twentieth century, to describe the organised ways of communicating on a mass scale and at a distance, in a short period of time (McQuail, 2010).

The book is divided into eight parts. It starts with a historical note of the rise of mass media. This is followed by a discussion of the various approaches or theories of mass media. This section includes chapters containing discussions on the use of concepts and models in the study of mass communication. The third part focuses on structures, and deals with principles of the overall media system and its accountability in terms of being an 'institution' which is a branch of an industry that is subject to economic and business laws, and at the same time a social institution which meets the demands of the society, which is again subjected to certain laws and regulations in terms of public policy. It also deals with media economics and governance, and also on the growing phenomenon of global mass communication. The fourth part of the book focuses on organisations associated with the production of mass media, and the influential factors like the demands and the pressure from outside the organisation as well as from within in order to meet the requirements of the routine mass production of culture. The next section of the book concentrates on the content of the mass media, on the various concepts and issues for the analysis of content, due to the lack of agreement on where the correct meaning is to be found. The sixth part of the book deals with the issue of 'audience' as a crucial part of the mass media and looks into the different types of audiences, the relation between the communicators and the audiences, the theories of audience research, and issues of audience selectivity. The next section, on effects of the media, stresses on the various approaches or theories of media effects, the different kind of effects and the resultant changes induced by media, including socio-cultural effects in society. The last section of the chapter deals

with the future of mass communications and gives an overview of the whole concept from its inception during the early 90s to its present state, with questions on the end of mass communication, and the consequences of new mass media for communication (McQuail, 2010).

For a deeper understanding of the impact of the process of cultural globalization through the new communication technologies or the modern forms of mass media on the local tradition like that of the picture-storytellers, it is essential to get familiar with the major debates on mass society and mass media. On the topic of mass society, the work of Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies has been referred to, in the course of the work. Durkheim in his book on 'The Division of Labour in Society' reflected on the change of groups and communities based on 'mechanical solidarity' to those marked by 'organic solidarity' with a change in the division of labour. While he did not specifically use the term 'mass' to define the new society which emerged with the growth of a complex and specialized division of labour, he did elaborate on the features of such a society as being characterised by the growth of individuality and the interdependence of function of its members, along with the development of restitutive laws to maintain order in society. For Ferdinand Tönnies, in his work, 'Community and Society', the shift was from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, or a change from a society marked by communitarian ties built on 'natural will' to the growth of a society characterised by a deliberate 'association' of the members of the society in the form of a social contract, for the purpose of a conscious attempt to attain certain goals. It is this concept of *Gesellschaft* which emphasizes on the consciously created associations in the cities or urban areas which is similar to the idea of the mass society.

Moving over to the theories of mass media, one of the most influential schools of thought to deal with this theme has been the Frankfurt school. The theorists belonging to this school, who have particularly commented on the impact of the modern forms of mass media on art, include Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse.

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their book, 'The Dialectic of Enlightenment' particularly in the chapter on "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" have thus discusses on the role that these modern forms of

mediation play in shaping the society, its values and its thought process by the processes of standardization and commodification. These forms of mass communication enable the spread and the maintenance of the dominant ideology, by manipulating the minds of the masses into believing that pleasure can only be attained through the consumption of the commodities which the market provides them with. The masses are thus deceived in such a society and the possibility of social change is almost eliminated thus creating a condition of anti-enlightenment.

Herbert Marcuse in his volume on 'One Dimensional Man' stated that the production and consumption in the contemporary capitalist societies are such that they fail to arouse any criticism from the public or the consumer. The various forms of media, along with the wide range of commodities related to every aspect of daily life, thus creates a false consciousness among the populations, and thus the closing of all possible engagements with other discourses finally leading to the development of one dimensional pattern and behaviour among the individuals (Marcuse, 1978).

Among the scholars of the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin most elaborately discusses on the condition of art in the contemporary era. In his book, 'Illuminations', the chapter on "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is extremely important from the point of view of the present study as it throws light on the decreasing social significance of the art forms all over the world and its growing inability to transcend the ordinary experience and depict an alternative vision of the society in a world of endless reproduction of art forms for sale in the market as commodities. This commoditization of art has thus resulted in the loss of what Benjamin refers to as the aura of art. The original creation loses its significance and its distinctiveness due to limitless production and its de-contextualization from the original socio-cultural and historical setting within which the art was produced (Benjamin, 1970). Although his work basically referred to the high arts of the world and thus this views cannot be exactly placed in the context of folk art, his general view on the decline in the social significance of art leading to a loss of authenticity and distinctiveness of the creation itself, is a problem which is applicable to both forms of art, high or low.

Although the Frankfurt School did contribute a significant part to the body of literature existing on the different approaches to the study of mass media, an analysis of media in the contemporary world cannot be carried out by only referring to this school of thought. The study of mass media has been also taken up by postmodernists, and in this regard mention must be made of Jean Baudrillard. Through his books, 'Simulacra and Simulation', and 'In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities or the End of the Social and other Essays', Baudrillard states that due to the present day simulation made possible through the diverse forms of mass media, there no longer lies a difference between the real and its concept. As he claims, in the contemporary world, all referentials are substituted by a body of signs. Human beings in such world are totally separated from reality by the images and signs produced by the modern technologies in the field of media and mass communications. Thus when it comes to the power of simulation in the modern-day world, as Baudrillard states, it is no longer a matter of imitation or duplication but instead entails the substitution of the signs of the real for the real. There is a blurring between what is actually real and the image which is depicted by the process of simulation which creates a situation of 'hyperreality' (Baudrillard, 1994). This being the current situation, Baudrillard hence states that it has resulted in the loss of meaning and signification. This process of simulation and the production of hyperreality by the mass media have resulted in the de-structuring or the implosion of the 'social' (Baudrillard, 1983). The theories of mass media have thus been incorporated in the study to gain a better theoretical understanding of power and the impact of the mass media in the contemporary society and its impact on the local and indigenous traditions like that of scroll painting and narration.

Both, the theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of caste as well as the theories relating to the mass media, have been referred to in the course of the study to deal with the question of identity. As mentioned before, this work deals with two aspects of identity in the contemporary world, in relation to the scroll painters and their tradition, their social background and their religious preferences, and the condition of their tradition in the age of advanced forms of electronic mediation. In this context, 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' by Erving Goffman provides an important insight. Belonging to the school of Social Constructionism, Goffman believed that

collective identity of a group functioned in accordance with the aspect of power in society and that it was from the identity of the collective group that the individual found his own identity. Referring to the dramaturgical approach where a performance was shaped by both the audience as well as the social environment, interaction in the same manner in the real world helped in the creation of impressions of a desired goal and thus in the construction of identity.

But in recent times, these theories of social constructivism have been challenged by postmodern arguments which question this notion of collective identity and collective experiences. Among them, special mention needs to be made of the contribution of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu in his book on 'Outline of a Theory of Practice' attempted to overcome the rift between the values of Subjectivity and Objectivity by elaborating on the existence of the social structures which regulate social action, alongside the free human agents. His approach endeavours to link the micro and macro factors in human society which relate to the construction of identity. It is through his concept of 'habitus' that Bourdieu explains the construction of identity in society. 'Habitus' in the Bourdieusian approach refers to certain principles and categories which are the product of common conditions of existence in the form of common responses, in order to help the human agents cope with unknown or changing situations, in terms of their interaction with others (Bourdieu, 1977). It is this notion of the habitus which gives the individuals a sense of identity. This theory has been made to face criticisms for its negligence of social location and its overemphasis on the emancipatory power of the human agents (Bottero, 2010).

The question of identity in India cannot be understood from certain theoretical approaches only. This is the reason that references have been also made to the works of Arjun Appadurai and Yogendra Singh. Appadurai in his book, 'Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization', stresses on the factors of media and migration as being the most prominent forces in the larger processes of cultural globalization. These forces thus help in enhancing the work of imagination of the people around the world. By stating that globalization is not a simple process of cultural homogenization, Appadurai through his work shows how groups, communities and individuals, all seek to capture the 'global' and reinterpret and reproduce it within their local context (Appadurai, 1997). According to him hence, it

is through the local that the global is contextualized (Chatterji, 2009). Defining culture as those differences which express the boundaries between different groups and thus articulate the mobilization of group identities, Appadurai thus states that in the contemporary world, culture has now moved on to become a process which includes movements involving the naturalization of the differences which had been used to mobilize group identity. These culturalist movements as Appadurai suggests are the most general form of work of the imagination (Appadurai, 1997). Explaining the notion of identity through the concept of 'culturalism', he claims that in the age dominated by the forces of mass media and migration, identities thus produced take the aspect of cultural differences as their crucial point and hence these culturalist movements "can be directed primarily toward self-expression, autonomy, and efforts at cultural survival" (Appadurai, 1997: 147).

In the book, 'Culture Change in India: Identity and Globalization', Yogendra Singh deals with the concept of cultural identity in the era of globalization. The presence or absence of certain social and economic institutions, along with ecological background, structure of family, processes of socialization, traditional myths, stories, beliefs, values and other forms of symbolic expression all have a bearing on the culture of the place and therefore give a sense of identity to the culture itself. This sense of identity of the community is again maintained by the beliefs, myths, practices, and other material and non-material forms of culture. The population constituting the community hence internalizes these beliefs and practices and thus refers to the identity of the community or the culture to define their individual identity. This aspect of cultural identity has always across the ages witnessed major transformations and changes in its structure. In the era of globalization, with the entry of the modern mass media and development of the systems of transport, interaction has altogether reached a different level and this has influenced the concept of identity. Although the forces of cultural globalization have led to the homogenization of certain cultural attributes across the world, it has also enhanced in the growth of cultural identity. Yogendra Singh through this book therefore tries to look into the culture changes dealing with the structures of culture and their relationship with the social institutions and processes. It explores the relation between the process of globalization and the existence of local cultures, as well as cultural changes within the

processes of change in culture brought about by the multiple factors of cultural, technological, and economic globalization (Singh, 2000).

Within the domain of folk art in India, the present work revolves around the traditional practice of scroll painting and narration, which has been referred to in the course of the study as performance tradition. In order to understand the distinctiveness of the tradition as found in certain parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, the general condition of folk art and particularly scroll painting in different parts of India needs to be explored. In this context, Heinz Mode and Subodh Chandra's book, 'Indian Folk Art' is extremely useful and informative. This work concentrates on the phenomenon of folk art, while looking into the various forms of local and indigenous tradition which fall into this sphere of folk art from the Harappan Civilization to the contemporary period. In fact it is one of the very few books in this area of study which provides a comprehensive description of the prominent folk art forms all over India, in different regions, from the forms of sculpture at different regions and various kinds of art in the form of scroll painting, floor and wall painting, etc, from the Pahari tracts of Himachal Pradesh, to Gujarat, Maharashtra, the Deccan region, the Telengana region, the eastern regions of Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand, and the north-eastern state of Assam but also does not fail to substantiate it with proper arguments and critical views. Viewing these art forms as serving certain roles or have utilitarian purposes in society, it manages to view these art forms not simply in terms of their existence but also in terms of their importance and social significance in society.

Moving on to the specific theme in consideration, the scroll painting tradition as found in certain parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand; there are relatively fewer works on the study of social significance of the art form than on the aspect of visual representation in relation to the custom of scroll painting and narration. In the study of the performance tradition of scroll painting and narration as found in certain parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, the volume on 'Cultural Oscillation: A Study of Patua Culture' by Binoy Bhattacharjee, is indispensable. Being the first monograph towards a systematic understanding of society and culture in relation to the tradition of scroll painting, the author describes the origin and history, the economic and the social life, the social structure and the material culture of the scroll painters-cum-performers who

are known as *Patuas* or *Chitrakars* in this part of the country. Through a deep analysis of the various aspects of social life and the different life-cycle rituals and ceremonies, Binoy Bhattacharjee explores the unique intermediary position of the scroll painters between the Hindus and the Muslims, in terms of their social and religious identity (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

The work '*Patas and Patuas of Bengal*', edited by Sankar Sen Gupta, is also an extremely significant text, with articles contributed by different scholars contributing to the different aspects of the tradition as found mostly in West Bengal. It starts with a detailed introduction on the different art forms and craft traditions in India from a historical perspective, then gradually moving on to describing the various folk art traditions, and finally the scroll painting tradition. Throughout the book, different authors have discussed on the various types of scrolls found in West Bengal and about the community of painters who have long been associated with it as being the hereditary transmitters of tradition and culture, from a sociological perspective. Although the title of the book deals with the tradition as found in Bengal, it does include substantial discussions on the scroll painting and narration as practiced by the Santhal population, a majority of who reside in the Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand. Sankar Sen Gupta's article on the classification and dating of the scroll painters or *Patuas*, as they are known, throws light on the origin and the growth of the '*secular-pata*', which basically refers to the paintings dealing with secular and non-conventional themes illustrated and performed in the traditional manner as the '*religious-pata*'. Pradyot Kumar Maity's article on the other hand focuses on the religious pats and is important for its discussion on the scrolls as found among the Santhal tribes found in certain parts of West Bengal and in Jharkhand. The paper on the Kalighat painting tradition of the scroll painters of Bengal is also important to understand the transformations that this form of art went through when made to face the processes of modernity and industrialization (Sen Gupta, 1973)

As the topic of art has often been neglected in the realm of the social sciences, there are very few books which deal with the social significance of the art form and performance tradition of the scroll painters and their importance in society, from the function that they serve in society, from a sociological perspective. In the recent times there have been some writers who have expressed their interest in this field. Among

them in the present context, the paper “From Oral Tradition to Folk Art: Reevaluating Bengali Scroll Paintings” by Beatrix Hauser is very significant for its emphasis on the shift in the tradition from that which was primarily oral in nature, based on performances, to that which became merely a visual tradition, created mainly for commercial purposes, thus pointing out its decreasing social function with its increasing commercialization. Pika Ghosh’s articles on “Kalighat Paintings from nineteenth Century Calcutta in the Maxwell Sommerville Collection”, and “Unrolling a Narrative Scroll: Artistic Practice and Identity in the Late-Nineteenth Century Bengal”, have also, in the context of the present study helped in visualising the role that the tradition had played in the nineteenth century Bengal, in the period of colonialism, marked by a growing commercialization of the art form itself as well as its use to reflect upon and arouse notions of identity and feelings of nationalism in colonial capital (Ghosh,2000; 2003) As far as the present situation of this age-old practice of scroll painting and narration is concerned in the age of the modern mass media, studies from parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand shows a totally different trend in comparison to the tradition as found in other parts of India. Instead of giving up, they have taken to adopting information as well as the patterns of representation from the modern forms of media, but only to reinterpret them and reuse them in the traditional method of picture-storytelling. It is in this context that Roma Chatterji’s article on “Global Events and Local Narratives: 9/11 and the Picture Storytellers of Bengal” prove to be an important contribution, as regarding the present state of the tradition is concerned. Through her study of the painters-cum-performers from Medinipur, who have now taken to illustrating non-conventional themes relating to events of socio-political importance, she observes the role of this tradition, particularly through the example of the scrolls on the World Trade Center Attacks on September 11, and of the painters in the process of reinterpreting the global within the local (Chatterji, 2009).

As the present study deals specifically with the performance tradition as found in parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, certain Bengali literary sources have also been of great help. The special editions on the scroll painting tradition in the journal *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana* , with articles by Suhrid Kumar. Bhowmik and Bijon Kumar Mondal, on the *Adibasi Pat* or Santhal scrolls, and Shyamalkanti

Chakraborty's historical perspective on the tradition, all help to gain familiarity with the history of the tradition in general and of the distinctiveness of the tribal scrolls in particular. Special mention also needs to be made in this respect, of the article by Sudhanshu Kumar Ray, of 'The Artisan Castes of West Bengal and their Craft' which was translated into Bengali in this journal. Based on the census reports of 1951, this article thus gives a detailed account of their history, their primary and secondary occupations, of their techniques and patterns in terms of illustration on scrolls, the different places across Bengal where they are found, and their present situation. The book, 'Patua Sanskriti-Parampara-O-Paribartan' by Dipak Kumar Bara Panda is also another book which gives a detailed account of the history of the tradition of scroll painting all over India and how it entered Bengal, their illustration of religious as well as non-conventional themes which makes them a very important source of communication, their occurrence in places outside Bengal, and the social, economic and the religious life of the artists associated with the tradition.

Through the help of the chapters that follow, this dissertation therefore attempts to explore this unique tradition of scroll painting-cum-narration as it has existed in different parts of India, and as it continues to exist in certain parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand. The age-old traditions continue to exist beside the more popular and more technologically advanced forms of mass media, not only as a form of visual tradition, but also as a form of communication which is capable of providing an alternate vision of reality. Besides, their analysis is also helpful in dealing with the questions relating to social identity of the artists associated with this tradition as well as the cultural identity of the local arts forms and traditional performances such as picture-storytelling tradition in the era of the larger processes of globalization.

CHAPTER 2

FOLK ART AND TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCES OF INDIA

A Picture of the Past and the Present Situation

Culture as a concept is very common in everyday life. It is a living or organic whole, which basically includes all human activities and their consequences and results in the form of belief, customs, values, dress, food, work, speech, their relations, and their ideas about their relations with the visible and the unseen elements of the universe. It can also be defined as the very human creation and use of symbols and artefacts. These elements of culture are not wholly discrete in nature, and influence one another, with change in one leading to change in the other. It provides the structure through which people interpret experience. It informs and guides both intention and action.

With the rise of the modern cultural systems in the world, the concept of culture has also undergone transformations, and it has also resulted in the emergence of different aspects or levels of the concept and their relation to one another. It is at this point of time that the concept of the 'folk' emerged, with the corresponding body of scholarship on the subject of folk culture.

The present work is an attempt to explore this aspect of the existence of the tradition of scroll painting in parts of Jharkhand and West Bengal in the age of the increasing influence and prominence of the mass media, with an aim to emphasize on the role played by the scrolls and the painters themselves in the assertion of their own identity as well as in the maintenance of this tradition.

This chapter will primarily deal with the concept of folk culture in general and folk art in particular, by a comparative and historical analysis of the forms of folk art and performance in different parts of India. It will begin with a brief discussion on the concept of 'Folk culture' as used in sociology and social anthropology. This will be followed by an elaboration on folk art, as it is found in different corners of the country, after which the discussion will narrow down to explore the tradition of scroll paintings in India. This will be succeeded by an explanation of the aspect of 'performance' in these traditions, which has, in most cases, diminished in the

contemporary world, in terms of its communicative importance in society. This will be finally followed by a description of this tradition of scroll paintings illustrating the case of the two states of Jharkhand and West Bengal, with an account of their origin, their condition in pre-colonial India, their role in the colonial times, and their condition in the present-day world.

CONCEPTUALIZING FOLK CULTURE:

Emile Durkheim in his work, 'The Division of Labour in Society' elaborated upon the existence of societies which differed in terms of their solidarity. For Durkheim, the main connection in this matter was between individual personality and social solidarity. He identified two major types of solidarity, which gave rise to two different types of societies. The social solidarity which resulted from the sharing of collective sentiments, values and attitudes and also from the complementary nature of the functions of its members is what Durkheim described as 'mechanical solidarity'. This type of solidarity reflected itself in the presence of repressive laws in the society. He used the term 'horde' as an ideal mental construct, to refer to the society marked by collective conscience. The opposition to this society were the complex societies marked by 'organic solidarity'. This solidarity which reflected in the growth of restitutive laws, and a more complex and specialized division of labour in society based on interdependence of functions of its members, characterised modern society (Durkheim, 1915).

Ferdinand Tonnies' classification of the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* were similar to the distinction made by Durkheim about the different kinds of society¹. *Gemeinschaft* or 'community' will according to Tonnies was a product of natural will, found in societies characterised by personal ties based on kinship, where function was based on customs, folkways and religion, and where the ideal types were articulated in village and town life. *Gesellschaft* or the association of society was on

¹ The views of Durkheim and Tonnies have been included in this discussion of folk culture in relation to their contributions in terms of the changing nature of society from that characterized by 'mechanical solidarity' to 'organic solidarity' or from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, because it was with this distinction between the rural community and the urban cityscape, that different forms of culture began to be conceptualized. Folk culture was thus associated with the village and mass culture was associated with the city.

the other hand, based on a rational will, which expressed itself in a deliberate manner, in a form of a social contract, developed for the attainment of certain goals and ends. The impersonal relationships and determined action in these societies were made possible through public opinion and legislation. While *Gemeinschaft* referred to the villages where the community ties and feelings were stronger than the individual, *Gesellschaft* referred to the cities where the population gathered together for the attainment of certain ends (Tonnies, 1963).

When Robert Redfield first used the expression 'folk', he employed it as an ideal type, as opposed to the contemporary city life. According to him, the modern industrial society could only be understood in terms of a comparison with its contrasting type, the 'folk society'. It was in this context that Redfield first used the concept of 'folk' to include in the comparison the peasant and rural societies which are small and isolated, where folklores and folksongs form an integral part of the society, and which characterises an ideal type that is opposed to the contemporary industrial and urban society. The ideal folk society would thus be the one in which the features of the social order are logically contradictory to those found in the city. This would involve information from different folk societies of the world in order to assemble most of the characteristics found. Redfield described this ideal folk society purely as a mental construct as it would include characteristics of various folk societies put together, and it would not be possible for any single society to correspond to it. In this context, he also referred to A. A. Goldenweiser who described 'primitive' societies as societies which were small, non-literate, isolated from other societies, patterned their life according to a local culture, had similar attitudes, knowledge, and performed identical functions in the society. The folk society according to Redfield was a small, isolated society, having hardly any communication with outsiders, with knowledge being based on oral tradition, composed of a non-literate and homogeneous population, with a very strong sense of collectivity in terms of sentiments, conscience, habits and customs, and solidarity. In addition to these features, the folk society was also characterised by the use of primary tools in terms of technology, with hardly in division of labour based on specialization as most of the population engaged in similar tasks, and the economic independence of the group or the community in terms of production and consumption. In respect to the

feature of culture, Redfield defined it as a system composed of an integration of the conventional understandings of the society, which guides the ways in which the members would deal with their everyday problems, and in fact, provides for every recurrent need of the members right from their birth to their death. This culture is thus nothing but an organised body of the conventional ways in which the individuals and groups within the society have faced their problems, which has over time got institutionalised and formalised into a body of rules. It is this very aspect of the society which according to Redfield differentiates one society from another. Redfield focussed on the non-material aspect of culture, which according to him consisted of the conventional ways of a society. Thus he believed that in the folk society, culture could be seen at its best use. The members of such a society are guided by already established customs and conventions which express the collective conscience of the society². "The culture of a folk society is, therefore, one of those wholes which is greater than its parts." (Redfield, 1947: 299). The ends in these societies are not questioned or given, but are implied by the common activities which constitute social life. It is the culture of the society which lays down rights and duties which are to be observed by the individuals. In this process, it is the culture which set the goals for the individuals making clear to them the importance of turning their efforts to the direction indicated by tradition. Every traditional object, or institution, or act is associated with a value, is considered sacred, thus leading to a fear of change. This conception of folk society would only make sense when it is compared to the modern industrial society (Redfield, 1947).

The elaboration of the concept of folk culture by Redfield, since its inception and ever afterwards, have been referred to by several sociologists and anthropologists alike, in their own works. But what seems to be problematic is this uncritical use and application of this concept as defined by Redfield, to the study of relatively simple societies of the world. Robert Redfield approached the question of folk culture from an inductive methodology by studying the concept in relation to the ethnographic facts as found in real life societies. Theoretically, he placed folk societies and urban

² Redfield emphasized only on the non-material aspects of culture, including the established beliefs, customs and practices, which he believed were at their best use in the folk society. But what he failed to recognize was the fact that these entrenched values, customs, beliefs and traditions were transmitted to the population and maintained over time through the material aspects of culture including rituals and various art forms.

societies at two different poles, providing a scale along which real societies were situated, with their position being determined by the characteristics which they reflected (Redfield, 1947). George M. Foster, in his piece on the limitations of this model of folk culture, pointed out the assumptions formed due to the creation of these ideal types and their relation to the study of the real life societies. One of these emphasised on the taxonomic value of the ideal types in terms of their help in classifying real societies and on their heuristic value, in terms of their providing a tentative hypothesis through which the general problems of culture can be analysed. Besides, these hypothetical constructs also presumed a functional interrelationship among its characteristic features. According to Foster however, these assumptions were problematic and their validity was questionable (Foster, 1953). In fact, the relation between the theoretical constructs of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* and the actual societies, was also mentioned by Tonnies, according to whom, these hypothetical constructs indicate all the characteristics which binds society together, and thus these concepts, instead of referring to different groups, or individuals or entities, in actual life were found interwoven in all associations (Tonnies, 1963). Redfield himself also, in this matter had recognised the problems involved in the process of classifying real societies with the help of ideal types. He had stated that the more new characteristics were added to the ideal type, the more distant would this 'type' depart from representing any one actual society or culture (Redfield, 1947). Hence, although the construction of these ideal types facilitated the testing of actual societies according to tentative hypotheses, its contribution in classifying societies on this basis was doubtful.

It is this feature of polarity between the folk society and urban society, which is problematical and which leads to stereotypical research. Foster noted that according to this context, every human society was 'folk', until its contact and communication with the urban centres, which led to a great alteration in its characteristics. Therefore, as folk culture existed from almost the origin of the society, exploring its origins was the same as exploring the origin or the roots of culture. For Redfield thus, the more important question laid in finding out what happened when this 'folk' culture came into close contact with the urban forces and the urban centres. Moreover, folk culture according to the polarization of the ideal types could not exist in the city, and this

made it impossible for explanation of the existence of folk culture in certain cities. Folk cultures, according to Foster, “continually incorporate into their fabric significant parts of the sophisticated, intellectual components of their own tradition, or of traditions that have been assimilated in the past, or which are part of a super (as contrasted to a national) culture area. Such a concept emphasizes the dynamic rather than the static qualities of culture.” (Foster, 1953: 164). Instead of the polarity between the concepts of folk culture and urban culture, thus Foster argues that a folk culture may be defined as a common way of life characteristic of certain or the entire population of many villages, towns and cities within a given area, which when in contact with the urban societies and urban cultures would gradually lose their folk elements and become integrated with the industrial societies (Foster, 1953).

FOLK ART AND TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCES OF INDIA:

The activity of art is a social process in which the elements of the artists, their works of art and the audience or the art public come together to involve in a meaningful interaction (Barnett, 1970). Change in any of the social institutions, organizations or processes have their repercussions in the growth, formation or decline in a particular art form. The social history of art in India shows this existence of various forms of art, both ‘high art’ meant for the courts and the temples, and the folk art. In order to analyse the contemporary situation of the tradition of the scroll paintings, it is essential to have a background of art and artistic traditions of India, from the feudal ages to the modern day. The following paragraphs will thus involve a historical journey in the sphere of art, particularly folk art and folk traditional performances of India, as found in different parts of the country.

With the rise of various forms of mass media which tend to create communities of consumption through the help of hyperreal images and symbols, with the growing tendency to replace the real or the truth with these signs, the increasing importance of the impact of images in human society cannot be undermined. In fact, from ancient times these images have played a significant role in the society, to impart information and to enhance communication.

In Indian society, art in its various forms has witnessed continuity over ages surviving most of the economic, social, historical, and political developments which had posed as hindrances to its growth and practice. But these forms of art belonging to the earliest phase of Indian urban culture are indebted to even earlier forms of folk art, or the peasant-village art, with the settling of the hunters, food gatherers and other nomadic groups (Mode and Chandra, 1985).

All art, during this period was functional, as Heinz Mode and Subodh Chandra write, "...whether its object was to give aesthetic shape to tools and articles of everyday use, or to bolster the ideology of social structures by the production of ritual objects and paintings" (Mode and Chandra, 1985: 21). The earliest form of folk art was thus performed by all the members of the population. Every individual member of the society was allowed to engage in art and thus make use of the objects produced. The objects produced reflected the concerns of the entire community. It was only with the settling of the nomadic population that the division of labour became complex, giving rise to specializations in each field. Growing contact of the villages with the towns, and also with the culture of the courts facilitated cultural exchanges between high art and folk art. The geography of the Indian subcontinent, with its vast area comprising of contrasting physical features, variations in terms of climate, resources, also played an important role in the art of India, together with the rise of separate provinces and states, and socio-cultural development, which have left behind their traces on these cultures. But in the case of folk art in particular, these differences did not affect them much. As it was not confined within the boundaries of the states, folk art was more dependent on the supra-regional factors pertaining to climate and soil, and thus on the decisions taken by the nomadic groups for settlements.

Folk art as such, has over times and decades passed roughly through three successive stages. First, there was an original and primeval stage before the origin of the class society. Second, was the stage which included mutual interchanges with the 'high' art and lasted from the Harappan era to the beginning of the colonial period. The third and the final stage which is persisting in the contemporary times is the one in which folk art is distinguishable and discernible, both as a factor which is historically rooted as well as one which remains as a more or less independent branch of art in its varied local forms or manifestations. Folk art, produced for particular social and religious

purposes, has been apart from its content and form, very short-lived, with its decline in importance once its reason for production is served. Continuity in folk art as such can thus only be possible when there is constant repetition and reproduction³ (Mode and Chandra, 1985). Within every village, one can find a group of professional painters and craftsmen who belong to a particular caste, and whose products are used for local consumption or sometimes, for barter; as well as a group of non-professionals who pursue art which is domestic and ritualistic. For the professional artisans linked to a particular caste, the mode of occupation is hereditary, with them being chosen for major artistic endeavours of temples or courts or other public bodies. For these artisans, there appears to be no religious restrictions on their activities in their professional lives, in the sense that they may undertake projects from anyone, irrespective of religion or caste. The second group of artisans, which includes non-professional artists and craftspeople, mainly forms the bulk of the folk artists⁴. These people mostly use materials and techniques of local origin, and their works, except for certain recent developments are not usually for commercial purposes. A considerable ratio of the artisans in this group is composed of women (Elwin, 1951).

In this field of folk art, the thread of continuity linking the past and the present lies in their use of motifs and symbols which have remained constant irrespective of the changing content of the messages which they carry forth. The main structure of this art therefore relies on a body of symbols, and thus the visual message of this tradition can be best understood when placed within the socio-historical context.

The early literary and religious sources throw very little light on the origin, history, or the nature of folk art as it existed at that point of time, although archaeological evidences reveal the existence of forms of folk art in India for thousands of years. There are many references to the work of artisans, their social conditions, their obligations, and their organisation in the early Buddhist literature. In these villages, the artisans resided at particular segments, as determined by their affiliation to the

³ Although not in a mechanical form as is done today, repetition and reproduction from time to time was essential for the folk art to serve its social function and survive in the society.

⁴ Although Elwin classifies the non-professional artists as those producing folk art, in the case of the scroll painters or *Patuas* of West Bengal and Jharkhand, it is different. They have always been a professional community of painters, associated with a hereditary occupation of painting scrolls, but their tradition has always been considered as a folk form of art.

caste structure (Mode and Chandra, 1985). Panini, the well known grammarian also spoke about a distinction between the artists employed by the court, known as the *rajashilpi* and the artist who worked in the village, known as the *gramashilpi* (Mookherji, 1962). Writings on art hence, even if they are found, do not deal with the phenomenon of folk art and mainly consists of the work of the higher caste professionals. As this tradition of folk art was not carried out on a commercial scale, it is very difficult to obtain materials showing a historical continuity in the tradition. Moreover, many of the practices in this tradition were domestic, and even for those which did not, it relied on the village patrons for their living. Changes in settlement patterns, climatic factors, along with the historical factors of wars and conquests, all have played a great role in the making, breaking, and remaking of various forms of folk art. Besides, as these artefacts are not global in origin, but rather local, the regional history and processes determining this tradition also have to be kept in mind. This again, taken with the fact that most of the research on the various forms of folk tradition discloses a rather unevenly distributed research, with some areas receiving more attention than the others. As there can be no historical evidence or socio-cultural explanation of folk art in India, in general, these kinds of available works show a distorted picture of the state of the tradition in India.

Broadly speaking, most materials available on the concerned area of interest reveal the prominence in the tradition of painting or the artistic mode of expression or representation through the help of two-dimensional symbols. These practices of painting and weaving been very popular forms within the folk tradition, with their ability to use symbols, signs, and pictorial categories in a narrative content to convey information and enhance communication. The importance of folk art in India lies in the fact that it is not only an essential part of the Indian tradition of art in general, but also plays a major role in providing a background to the history of art in India because of its long continuing tradition, its distribution in different parts of the country, and its ability to identify with the population easily. In this context, both the authors of '*Indian Folk Art*' suggest that mention could be made of the Great and the Little Tradition⁵ as propounded by the Chicago School of sociology. They propose that in

⁵ The concepts of the Little Tradition and the Great Tradition was first used by Robert Redfield, to refer to the cultural content of a society, with the 'higher' aspects of culture which are more systematically maintained and presented and revealed as the aesthetic and intellectual achievements of culture being

the case of India, it is the 'popular culture' which should be referred to as the Great Tradition which has been present since time immemorial, and which continues to survive today, with its marvellous creations in the fields of painting, architecture, and literature (Mode and Chandra, 1985). Even in the present times, painting as a form of folk art has gained much more prominence than the other forms like sculpture, or weaving, or architecture (Mode and Chandra, 1985). But although some of these artists have moved on to other occupations and for purposes of decoration, work in the homes, and the various compartments into which they are divided according to their activities or purposes, many others still practice this tradition in far and nearby villages and town, and even cities, as a secondary job.

As for their use of raw materials, although nearly all of these are perishable products, they are nonetheless found in their natural form almost everywhere in India. For the purposes of painting, colours are obtained not only from the extract of plants but are also prepared by the creation of dyes from clay, minerals, leaves, seeds, flowers, grains and other materials (Mode and Chandra, 1985). In early times, these forms of art were illustrated on rocks, on leaves, egg-shells, flattened earth, bones, as well as the walls of the house. The subject matter or the content of these paintings were not under any restrictions and there was a free flow of creative imagination.

It was with the gradual fading away of the relationship between the artists and the patrons that art in general suffered a serious setback. Stella Kramrisch pointed out that whether it was those artisans who sculpted or painted for temples and courts, or those folk artists who roamed from one village to another while showing scrolls, the very organisation supporting their guilds were based on close contacts between their rural homes and their passion helped them create various forms of art (Kramrisch, 1994). Having lost the earlier patrons and being cast out by the Muslim rulers, these groups lost their cultural significance and importance in society and lacked the zest and power to act as important determinants of culture during colonial rule. In the present day, what has remained of art forms is the growing prominence of free-lance artists whose illustrations reveal their imitation of the traditional forms, although in some regions still there can be found certain groups of artists whose creations are almost on

known as the Great Tradition, and the relatively lower aspects of culture being referred to as Little Tradition.

the verge of extinction due to the lack of patronage or commission (Mode and Chandra, 1985).

However, the revival of folk art in recent times mainly through the medium of paintings being sold in the market as a consumer 'folk' product for the purposes of decoration or to be preserved in museums, has in a way restored to some extent the significance attached to various forms of folk art, from the rock painting of the nomadic tribes to the domestic art drawn by housewives, and has also enabled the growth of academic scholarship on the same.

Heinz Mode and Subodh Chandra, in their combined work *Indian Folk Art*, distinguished three groups as far as the subject of folk art is concerned. First of all are the domestic paintings which are illustrated on the walls of the home, both inside and outside, as found in the case of the Mithila paintings, the Saoras in Orissa or the Warlis of Maharashtra. These paintings relate to the festivals of the community, or the life-cycle rituals or other events, demonstrated to avert any kind of evil from harming the community and thus to ensure the safety and the well being of the community. Forms of paintings known as *Rangoli* in Maharashtra and *Jhunti* in Orissa, usually referring to those done on the ground outside the main door of the house during festivals, also falls under this group. The second form of folk art, which the present research extensively deals with, refers to the professional forms of painting carried out by artisans who supplement their illustrations with narrative ballads or stories. The *Patuas* of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa, the *Chitrakathis* of Maharashtra, the *Garodas* of Gujarat, fall in this category. The third group of folk art consists of the works which are done in the service of the temple, mainly for all the pilgrims who take back mementos of the pictorial depiction of their deities from the holy shrines. Although some decades back, these pictures were painted, with the coming of the lithographs, the demand is met by the printed replicas of the deities. The use of symbols and motifs in the surviving traditions of folk art reveal continuity with the past. Though the content of these paintings have undergone transformations through the ages and under different circumstances, their form appears to be more or less constant through time (Mode and Chandra, 1985).

Moving on to the subject matter of folk paintings in particular, carried out by professional artists, these pictorial forms are found all over India, in different regions, each with a different style of depiction. A detailed description of almost all of these forms of paintings is a very challenging and comprehensive task. In this present work, mention will thus be made to certain forms of 'folk' paintings as simple illustrations in order to get a picture of the nature and content of these folk-culture artefacts, before moving on to an elaborate discussion of the tradition of scroll paintings and performance traditions of India.

Be it the *Mithila* art of Bihar, the *Pahari* paintings of Himachal Pradesh, the *Saora* wall paintings of Orissa, the ritual decoration or *Alponas* of Bengal, the *Warli* cloth paintings and the *Paithan* paintings of Maharashtra, the *Pat* paintings of Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Bengal, the *Par*-paintings of Rajasthan, the *Garoda* scrolls of Gujarat, and the diverse forms of tribal art as found in different part of India, all of these result in revealing an extremely rich 'folk' tradition in terms of painting, in the country. In Rajasthan, folk art in the forms of miniature paintings reveals a lot of local characteristics. It was this province in the north-western part of the country which had to face the most violent confrontations with the Islamic invaders. This resulted in the reflection of markedly Hindu features in the miniature paintings. O. P. Joshi in this work '*Painted Folklore and Folklore Painters of India*' differentiated between two traditional schools of painting in this context. One of them is the *pat*-painter or the *par*-painter who creates pictures for the storytellers, while the other is the *pichwai*-painter who paints in order to serve the needs of a religious institution, by replicating the image of the deities while keeping in mind the local cult, in order to meet the demands of the pilgrims who come to visit the holy shrines. Both these types of painters depict images showing similar themes repetitively, although the recent growth in their patrons mostly comprised of foreign tourists, local customers and curators, has affected the content and style of their works (Joshi, 1976). The *par*-painter produces images on long scrolls containing stories mainly from the popular epics of the *Devnarayankipar* and the *Pabujikipar* and also from the *Ramayana*. It is the composition and the structure of the scenes from the epics which decide whether the scroll is horizontally or vertically used. In many instances, the icons of the popular Hindu deities are added to secular images, irrespective of their significance and their

requirements. Use of colours is restricted to a few shades. Completed scrolls are sold off to the patrons who then sell it off to the *Bhopas* or the wandering storytellers who dress up and interpret the illustrations to the audience in the villages. The story-tellers however do not sell the scrolls under any situation. As of their position in the social structure, both the *par*-painters as well as the *pichwai*-painters occupy a relatively high social status, being members of sub-groups of the Brahmanic castes.

The state of Himachal Pradesh also provides a rich picture in the field of folk art. Apart from some of their works of embroidery, other forms of art in the forms of wall and floor painting which are still present in the modern day, have been recent additions to the research work on folk art of the region. Historically, this region was geographically distant from the centres of power and authority of both the Mughal as well as the British empires. This enabled it to be much less affected than most of the states of the Indian subcontinent. The area also provided a place of refuge for many groups who fled from the northern plains. This resulted in the amalgamation of various communities along with their cultural traditions. In this region, it is mainly the women who have upheld and preserved the practice of painting by repetitively producing the traditional images. In contemporary times, this art is observed within the household, practised on festivals and other communal events. These *Pahari* wall paintings, in most cases contain “highly schematized, house-like figures which have been interpreted as representations of a female deity” (Mode and Chandra, 1985: 172). The goddess is portrayed as a house, with accompanying portraits of other figures or symbols illustrated to clarify and explain the content of the whole painting. Similar representations are also found in the paintings of Saora and Warli, even in terms of the subject matter or the content as well as the symbolic interpretation. Another feature characteristic of Indian art which is clearly discernable from the *Pahari* paintings is the depiction of portable houses, which is similar to certain customs of the Santhals as well as some Hindu customs of the use of *palkis* or palanquins. These paintings are carried out both on the floor and the walls of the house. Unlike other forms of ritual decoration like the *alpona* in Bengal or the *rangoli* in Maharashtra, the *Pahari* paintings do not follow any rhythm. The compositions are not planned from before, and simplest of symbols are used to build a pictograph (Mode and Chandra, 1985).

The *Mithila* art or *Madhubani* paintings of Bihar also require special mention in the subject of folk art. This art form is produced by women belonging to the Brahman and Kayastha castes, in a region known as Mithila in Bihar. The illustrations are usually carried out on the walls of the mud houses on occasions like marriages and thread ceremonies. The painting of *kohbar mandalas* on the walls and the *aripan mandalas* on the floor are some of the practices which have continued till today. *Kohbar-ghar mandalas* are drawn on the walls of the nuptial chamber of the bride and the groom. Hindu gods and goddesses and nature deities are drawn, besides the bride and the groom who are drawn along with symbols representing fertility. The sole purpose of this painting is to ensure a happy marriage and healthy union of the couple through the birth of offspring. Since the 1960s, there has been a considerable degree of encouragement and support from the foreign art collectors, the curators, and many other governmental and non-governmental organisations, resulting in a wide recognition and a growth of professionalism of the art form (Brown, 1996).

In southern India, there are comparatively much fewer works of folk art or paintings unlike the regions of the north. In this part of the country, there can be very few examples of the kind of folk art that is practised in many other parts of the country. Heinz Mode and Subodh Chandra, in work, thus mention only one form of folk art which is found in the state of Tamil Nadu, which is the art of floor painting, known as *kolam*. Whenever the images of the deities were taken out of the temple in traditional portable vehicles for processions during festivals or religious occasions, women used to draw decorative motifs and pictorial diagrams on the levelled ground outside their houses covering an area of almost ten square metres (Mode and Chandra, 1985). As on the phenomenon of folk art in India on the whole, the authors thus opine that in the subject of folk art, the signs, symbols and motifs of the painting, used to arrive at a 'picture language' play the most important roles. The significance of these forms of art, sometimes accompanied with dance, song or poetry thus lies in their conveying the desired creative message through the graphic or pictorial form, to the community.

THE TRADITION OF SCROLL PAINTING:

Within the sphere of folk paintings in general, there lies the distinctive tradition of scroll-painting as found in different countries across the world. The scrolls are the medium on which the paintings are done in a horizontal or vertical manner. This tradition uses pictorial scrolls, sometimes along with narratives, stories, or dance to communicate to the audience the desired message. This tradition traces its existence not only to India, but also to the other countries of South Asia, including China, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, etc. Commonly known as 'pat' or 'pata' which refers to a scroll, this tradition of imparting knowledge and information played a major role in most of the rural societies in enhancing communication before the industrialization and urbanization of such areas and the consequent improvements of the electronic mediation in these communities. As Pradyot Ghosh writes, the origin and history of this practice is unknown, but the term as such is also found in Vedic text, mainly referring to cloth. The use of the word in a way similar to the contemporary use of the term is found in the epic *Mahabharata* written in around the 5th century B. C. The elaborate details of the technique of painting the 'pat' or the scroll is also found in the *Arya-Manjushriz-Mula Kalpa*, an ancient Buddhist text, which is also translated into Chinese and Tibetan (Ghosh, 1966). In India, reference to these scrolls is also mentioned in some ancient texts in Sanskrit and Pali. In some ancient caves in Central Asia approximately in 6th century A. D., paintings of Buddha were said to have been done in accordance to the 'pat' style of painting. Moreover, after Buddha, his followers used the medium of scrolls to illustrate and preach the *Jataka* tales, concerning the earlier births of Buddha, and also his teachings to society. Writings of the Chinese traveller Fa-Hien, on account of his travelling experiences in Sri Lanka in the 4th century A. D. also reveal the existence of scrolls in that period relating to the life of Buddha (Barapanda, 1999).

In the Indian subcontinent, this tradition of displaying scroll painting with stories or ballads can be traced back to the second century B. C. Evidences from the Buddhist, Jain, and Brahmanical bodies of literature discloses innumerable references to this practice of scroll painting. These scrolls had immense utilitarian value in that they were used to entertain and educated the people and performed an importance role in the process of communication. One of the oldest references of scroll painting can be

drawn to the Jain literature of the third century A. D. in the text of *Bhagavati Sutra*. This text refers to the life of *Mankhali Gosala*, who was one of the greatest teachers of Jainism. *Mankhali Gosala* was the son of *Mankha*, (which means scroll painter), who used to to paint picture of gods and goddesses on scrolls and show them in and around villages to earn a living. The term *Mankha* as found in use in several Jain and Buddhist scriptures and texts, thus referred to artists who used to paint picture on scrolls and display them across villages, accompanied with stories or bardic poetry. In Buddhist texts, these scrolls are also known as '*charana-chitra*' which means moving or mobile pictures, which mainly came into use after Buddha, in order to preach his teachings in particular and also for educating the masses with traditional customs and values in the forms of pictures and stories. The Buddhist text *Samyutta Nikaya* mentioned that during holy processions, along with the dancers, singers, and the instrumentalists, scroll paintings were also carries for display. These scrolls dealt with several stages of a human being's life, signifying moments of happiness and sadness, with the importance of 'karma' in a person's life, and the consequent rewards, or punishments in hell (Chakravarty, 2008).

Similarly in the classical Sanskrit literature, in about the seventh and eighth century, the two texts, Vishakhadutta's *Mudrarakshasa* and Banabhatta's *Harshacharitam*, clearly mention the practice of scroll paintings. The first part of *Mudrarakshasa* cites the use of *Yama Pat* by a spy disguised as a picture storyteller, thus confirming the idea that in those days scroll painters used visit houses showing their *Yama pats*, giving religious instructions, and preaching religious values and righteousness and good karma. Even in *Harshacharitam*, one finds mention of the *Yama pats*, explaining on rewards and punishments given to individuals on the basis of the virtues or the vices which they exhibited, through the medium of the painted scrolls (Chakravarty, 2008).

Thus, almost from the third century B. C. there has been a large body of literature detailing on the presence and the practice of the tradition of scroll painting. Even today, one can find these picture storytellers in different parts of the country, wandering from place to place displaying scrolls and accompanying them with stories or narrative poetry. Though the growing popularity of the widely available forms of modern media has undermined their role in imparting religious knowledge and values,

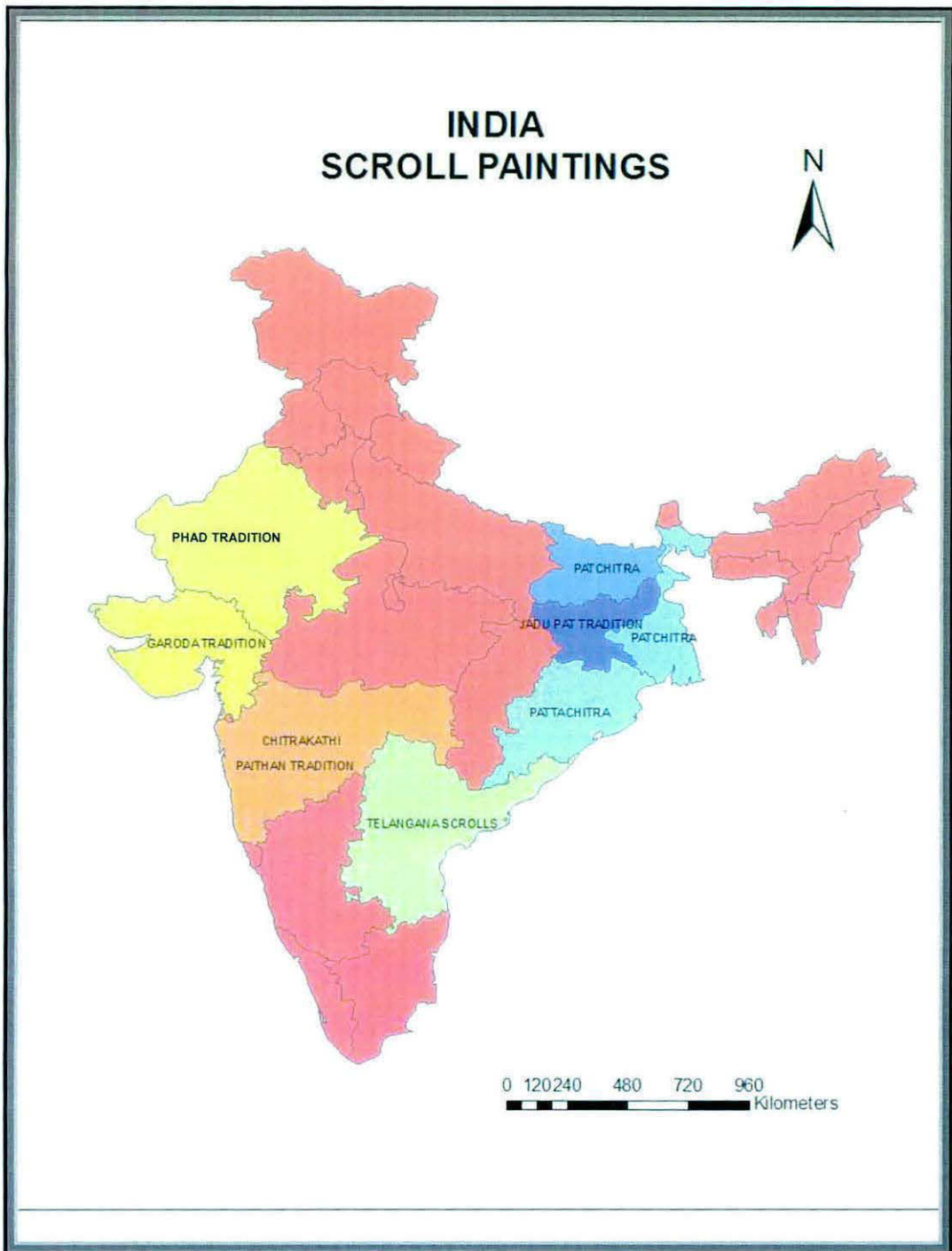


FIGURE 1: THE TRADITION OF SCROLL PAINTING AS FOUND IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF INDIA. (The Phad tradition of Rajasthan, The Garodas of Gujarat, the Chitrakathi or Paithan tradition of Maharashtra, the Telengana scrolls of Andhra Pradesh, the Pattachitra tradition of Orissa, the Pat tradition of Bihar, the Jadu-tradition of Jharkhand, and the Pat-Chitra tradition of Bengal).

and enhancing communication and the free flow of norms, values, morality and tradition, nevertheless, they still play an important part in the lives of the people from the rural societies, who find this medium of instruction, education and entertainment more easier to understand, and more representative of the life of their community.

As stated before, this tradition of scroll painting and display is not restricted to a particular region, but is found in different parts of the country, in differing styles of pictorial representation. Thus, there are the *Chittrakathi* painting or the *Paithan* paintings of Maharashtra, the *Garoda* tradition of Gujarat, the *Phad* tradition of Rajasthan, the *Telengana* scrolls of Andhra Pradesh, and the *Pat* tradition of Orissa, Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand.

But before moving on to a description of these various traditions, the important point to be emphasized on, at this juncture, is the aspect of performance. In most of the writings available on this particular tradition of folk art, there is very little discussion on the relevance and the importance of the element of performance. These traditions are mostly viewed as items of folk art, with an exclusive stress on their visual aspect, thereby overshadowing their significance as an oral tradition. Even those writings which mention about them as picture storytellers seem to focus more on this tradition as visual tradition rather than being an audio-visual tradition. Therefore before moving on to elaborating this ancient practice as found in different regions, it is essential to begin with a brief discussion on the concept of performance.

THE ELEMENT OF 'PERFORMANCE' IN THE PAT TRADITIONS:

Performances can be broadly defined as aesthetic practices, including ways of speaking, patterns of behaviour, manners of bodily demeanour, whose repetitions places the actors or the participants in time and spacing, enabling the construction of individual and group identities (Kapchan, 1995).

Richard Schechner wrote that all performance has a ritual action at its core, which aims at a "restoration of behaviour" (Schechner, 1985). For Victor Turner, there exists a dynamic and continuous process which interlinked performative behaviour and social and ethical structure. Performance in this respect is open, decentred and liminal

in nature. Performance genre according to Turner is not simply expressive or reflective of the social system, but instead it is reflexive, in that it often provides critiques, directly or indirectly, of the very social system of which it is a part and of the social life it grows out of (Turner, 1986).

Milton Singer in his work on tradition and modernity in south India, too observed the importance of the element of performance in social life. Performance for Singer was the basic constituent of culture. Each performance was thus marked by a time span, a set of performers, an audience, a place, and an occasion for phenomenon to take place⁶. These cultural performances including festivals, prayers, ceremonies, etc, were made of elements of cultural media, or mode of communication, including verbal or spoken language as well as non-verbal media, like song, acting, dance, narration and display of graphic and pictorial art, which enhanced in the communication of culture (Singer, 1972).

For Turner, a large portion of whose works deal with the aspect of ritual and performance, the genres of carnival, ritual, drama, all have in common a temporal structure which replaces the constant features with variables, and also provides a space for possibilities of spontaneous innovation and management in the course of any performance. As such a role in a performance enables the presentation of the self, and it is through performance again that these roles can be broken. Human beings are endowed with rich means of communication, verbal and non-verbal. Based on this, performances can be divided into two groups, social and cultural. There are again different types of social performance and different genres of cultural performance, depending on societies and cultures. In the genres of the carnival, theatre, ritual, etc, non-verbal communication plays the most basic role in the form of signs and symbols. But as Turner states, it is the social drama from which originated the major genres of cultural performances and narration, and to which it continuously refers to draw meaning. This social performance is the result of the suspension of normative role-playing which in its process replaces the usual activity of reflection with reflexivity (Turner, 1986). Following on Arnold van Gennep's study of the rites of passage, Turner gathered data from the Ndembu initiation ceremonies and the larger events of

⁶ These performances were thus according to Singer, an amalgamation of the ritual as well as artists and cultural aspects of a society. For a proper study of cultural performances, for Singer hence, the role of the cultural specialists and the cultural media, together with the cultural stage is very important.

the carnival, to find that all of these socially dramatic performances bore with them a meta-communicative and explanatory function that attempts to make social sense of split or rupture, ambiguity and division through reflexivity of the public (Turner, 1969).

Symbols are always effective in human society because through performances, they help in generating meanings in a social rather than cognitive space, and thus the participants are able to engage with these symbols in the interactional creation of a performance reality, rather than only being informed by them as knowers. Performance in this sense is then not just a medium for communicating information, as it does not aim in constructing symbolic reality through a description or a commentary, but instead by constructing a situation in which the participants familiarise themselves with symbolic meanings as a part of the process in which they are also engaged. The most important feature of performance thus lies not in the meanings contained in the symbols themselves, but the actual way in which this symbolic material emerges in the interaction (Schieffelin, 1985).

Performance then can be said to play an essential role in the creation, maintenance and mediation of communities. These performances, as Turner claims, whether done by individuals or by the representatives of a collective tradition, hold up “magic mirrors” to the society which turn events and practices beautiful or ugly, and which otherwise are accepted unquestioningly, and are moreover not recognised in the flow of the life of the social community (Turner, 1986: 22). Integrating the concept of liminality in his work on performance, Turner stated that in technologically simpler societies, ‘liminal’ performances made sense of the social structure by providing the example of anti-structure. In the technologically complex societies, ‘liminoid’ performances which had the capability of not only providing with an anti-structure, but contained the possibility for social subversion and rebellion. Performance in this sense is composed of symbols containing meaning. These performances not only comments on those meanings, but also interprets them for the larger community not in a reflective manner but instead in a reflexive manner, by critiquing and challenging them. (Turner, 1986). The concepts of performance and genre are highly interlinked, and it is not possible to talk about performance without locating it in a genre. Genre thus in a broad sense of the term refers to a network of sign relations in which history

along with its categories and valuations are embedded. Every genre thus reflects a particular or several ideologies. Performance genres are hence the very locations for the rise and the negotiations of the politics of identity (Kapchan, 1995).

Keeping this idea of performance in mind, if the tradition of scrolls is revisited, the importance of the 'audio-visual' element in it becomes clear. The need to look into this practice not merely as a visual tradition but also as an oral tradition becomes evident. In fact, it is this interplay between the visual and oral that defines the uniqueness of the tradition. *Pat* tradition can therefore not be described either as an exclusively visual practice or an exclusively oral tradition. It is the entire process of painting the scrolls and then displaying them across villages with narratives that makes this practice a tradition. As Turner's observation about the important role of performance in the social scene, similarly in this case of the *Pat* tradition, without the narrative ballads of the artisans themselves, who continually reinterpret and reconstruct every scene from the scroll in the course of the performance and also critically hold up in front of the audience certain social processes, practices or institutions which are unfavourable for the growth and development of society, the creativity of the scrolls cannot be fully explored. The intricately illustrated scrolls depicting mythical stories, epics, religious stories, or social events are incomplete without the commentary of the picture storytellers. In parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, where these scroll painters, alongside painting the scrolls, also display them in and across villages, depicting traditional as well as contemporary events, with rhythmic couplets also created by them, they play an important role in the society by not just reflecting these stories but also looking at them reflexively and critically. These scrolls thus play an important role in the process of communication where the display of the painting with the narratives does not aim at providing a description or a commentary, but instead in the construction of a situation in which the audience who as active interpreters also take up the role of participants and familiarize themselves with the meanings as a part of the process.

This performative aspect of the tradition of scroll painting is therefore as important as the tradition of painting on the scrolls itself, as it prevents from viewing these items simply as an art form, but as an audio-visual tradition. This folk tradition with its visual and oral tradition helps record events of history and of contemporary society

and thus acts as a reservoir of social memory. Folk art thus in this sense is not restricted to forms of visual traditions only, because in the so-called folk societies there was an absence of these modern, highly specialized divisions in society and the community life exhibited the presence of practices and institutions which were collectively shared and participated in, by the members. Art surely had an aesthetic value, but was more commonly used as artefacts having utility. These scrolls were then useful in the process of communication. Thus in the absence of the advanced forms of mass media, this customary practice of painting on scrolls which were portable, and then displaying them in and across villages, were used as a medium of mass communication for the purpose of both education and entertainment. It is only with the rise of the industries and the consequent urbanization of certain areas that led to the description of the non-urban and comparatively simpler societies as 'folk' societies. With this came up the study of folk culture and its division into separate although not exclusive, compartments of 'folk' art, 'folk' music, folklores, 'folk' dance, and so on.

In the present work thus, this tradition of scroll painting and displaying with narration has thus been referred to as performance traditions to highlight their performative aspect and their role as a medium of mass communication in rural societies. In pre-industrialized and pre-urbanised societies these were the main modes of communication. Although in the modern world, their importance is fast fading, with many of them disappearing as practices of the distant past and some of them being revived as pieces of folk art to be preserved in the museums, a few of them still survive, with little changes in the form and the content of the practice. This paper thus looks into this traditional custom of the picture story-tellers and their present situation in the age dominated by the electronic media. The following section will hence discuss the various forms of these traditions as found in different regions of the country, before illustrating the example of the Pat tradition as practiced in Bengal and parts of Bihar and Jharkhand as a special case to delve into the questions of cultural and religious identity of the artists of this tradition and the significance of their creation in the contemporary age of electronic and satellite forms of media.

SCROLL PAINTING AND PERFORMANCE TRADITIONS OF INDIA:

As Ananda Coomaraswamy states, “Where European art naturally depicts a moment of time, an arrested action or an effect of light, Oriental art represents a continuous condition...” (Goswamy, 1998). Folk painters of India have always grappled from time to time, from one period to the other, nearly for two thousand five hundred years, with different strategies for coming to terms with time. In the process they have always taken something from tradition and have also given it back in return. Scroll paintings in general refer to paintings done on cloth or paper. Themes of the paintings usually deal with mythological or religious stories and also with the local myths or folklores with which the people of the region are closely associated with. This tradition of scroll painting and storytelling seems to have existed as early as the second century B. C. with abundant references of the art form in the Buddhist, Jain, and Sanskrit body of literature. Even today there exist groups of artists who wander from one village to another depicting scrolls relating to the popular religious epics, the myths and the life after death. From the *Chitrakathi* or the *Paithan* paintings of Maharashtra, the painted *phad* of Rajasthan, the *Telengana* scrolls, to the *Garodas* of Gujarat and the *Pata-Chitra* tradition of Orissa, Bengal, Bihar, and Jharkhand, all reveal a colourful picture of the surviving traditions in the 21st century. Moving from one tradition to the other, what is interesting to note is the variety both in the art form and in its presentation, from one region to another. Though the art and the performance together make up the tradition, it should also be kept in mind that in many regions, the artists who display the scroll do not necessarily paint them themselves, while again in other places both the pictorial depiction and the performance is given by the same group or in fact the same person.

In northern India, in the state of Rajasthan, the tradition of scroll paintings is known as the *Phad* tradition. This practice in fact is marked for one of the most elaborate and exquisitely created pictorial scrolls accompanied in narration. Known as *par*-painting, these scrolls deal with the legends of *Pabuji* and *Dev Narayan*. In current times however along with the classic compositions of *Devnarayankipar* and *Pabujikipar*, the painters have also taken to illustrating themes from the *Ramayana* and also the life of Krishna. These scrolls are illustrated and painted by the *par*-painters who are professional artists excelling in this tradition. These *par*-painters belong to a sub-caste

of the Brahmins and thus enjoy a relatively high position in the society. These scrolls often measure twelve metres in length and two metres in width. After their painting, these *par*-painters then sell the scrolls to the patrons who gives them commission, and who in turn gives them to the narrator or the showman called the *Bhopa*. This performer then dresses up in special traditional costumes and present and interpret the scrolls in front of the village audience along with music, dance and narration. These *Bhopas* are nonetheless not authorized to sell the scrolls. When a scroll becomes old and tattered and the paintings have faded away, it is taken to Lake Pushkar on an auspicious day with an invocation to the main deity through offerings and ritual chanting to leave the scroll, after which it is immersed in the holy lake (Joshi, 1976). These paintings are done using natural colours. The legends involve several generations of families and their extended relatives also, although in the painting themselves no chronological order is maintained in their depiction of lives or events. It is the role of the *Bhopas*, who in the course of the performance narrate it in a chronological order, interconnecting these scattered events through his song and his dance. This tradition thus gives immense scope for the narration or the performance to interpret the story for the audience. Unlike many other scroll painting traditions, in this particular practice there are many instances of convergence and divergence between the painted scroll and the narrative tradition (Mode and Chandra, 1985).

In the western part of India, in the state of Gujarat, there still survives the age old tradition of scroll painting done by the Garoda community. Although the tradition is on the verge of becoming extinct, for purposes of research on forms of folk in India, a study of this tradition is necessary. The Garodas belong to the Brahmin caste, or *gaur*, officiating priest for the communities of the Bhangi, the Dhed, the Meghval, the Vaghri, and the Nayak. Some legends also claim that they drew their ancestry from a Brahmin priest but were asked to serve the low castes by Siddharaja Jayasimha of Patan. Apart from the narration of scroll paintings and conducting religious ceremonies, they also conduct ritual narration of sacred tales, predict the auspicious and inauspicious days for the taking place of certain events, and also engage in astrology and palmistry. The tradition has been mainly preserved by the Bhat-Charans, the Bhavais, the Garodas and the Mana-Bhattas. In the present day, it is some of the Garoda families in the Ahmedabad, Kaira, Panchmahal and the

Sabarkantha districts, which still possess the traditional scripts and the traditional knowledge. The picture scrolls are known as *tipanu* or *tippan*, which means 'recording'. The scrolls are nearly 35 centimetres in breadth and 420 centimetres in length. Each of them is divided into both small and large compartments which are distinguished by thick horizontal lines. The scroll is viewed as a shrine, and thus when the people listen to the narration and view the paintings, it is considered as being equal to visiting a shrine. At the end of each scroll, there contains three pictures of death, the following journey to hell or heaven and the corresponding punishments or rewards, the moral being that no one can escape punishments in hell unless he or she is devoted to Vishnu. What is interesting to note is the adaptation of these epics and myths in the local traditions. Thus even in the paintings of the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, it is the local version which is illustrated. The painting is done on mostly done on paper. Continuous narration is practiced in this tradition and thus there are many scrolls having several incidents drawn within a single panel for the convenience of the narration of the story. In this manner the key points of the story can be highlighted. The popularity of this tradition can thus be gauged from its utility as a medium of entertainment and also as a moveable shrine that houses deities (Jain, 1998).

In the south-western part of the country, in the Maharashtra-Karnataka border, the Chitrakathi tradition of painting is worthy of mention. With the content drawn mostly from the epics and other mythological stories of the Hindu tradition in the form of two dimensional pictorial illustrations, these painters-cum-entertainers provide an idiomatic account of events. These story-tellers wander from one place to the other performing these stories (Mode and Chandra, 1985). These storytellers derive their name Chitrakathis from the designation to the Chitrakathi caste. As R. V. Russell mentions in his work on the *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, their caste name is derived from 'chitra' which means picture, and 'katha' which means story. The occupation of these groups of people belonging to this caste is to travel around, showing pictures about deities, myths, and other popular stories (Russell, 1916). They also used to organise puppet shows with wooden dolls which are made to enact scenes from the stories, although in recent times, this practice has become almost extinct (Dallapiccola, 1998). Earlier they were called *Paithan* paintings

although there was no reason behind this designation as none of the paintings were executed in Paithan (Stache-Rosen, 1984). Anna L. Dallapiccola in her article on the Chitrakathis of Maharashtra mentioned that in 1975, D. G. Kelkar of Pune had received them from his father-in-law who had in turn got them from a client in Paithan, and hence the Paithan paintings. At present, as she reports, there is only one group of Chitrakathis who are known to exist, who are still engaged in their traditional caste occupation. The Thakars living in the Gudewadi section of Pinguli village in Maharashtra claim to practice this tradition even in the present day (Ray, 1978). These Thakars belong to the Kshatriyas in terms of caste. They work in the fields, go to the river for fishing, and otherwise perform in the villages with their sets of pothas (Stache-Rosen, 1984). According to them, the paintings which they possess were drawn by their ancestors. Their paintings as a whole as referred to as Chitrakathis while each set of pictures for a particular narrative is known as *pothis*. These paintings are illustrated on rectangular sheets twelve inches in height and fifteen to seventeen inches in width and have no background colour (Ray, 1978). These paintings are drawn on paper, and it is interesting to note that in the nineteenth century in Maharashtra, most of these papers were imported from Great Britain, Italy and Holland. The paintings only contain the climax of an episode, leaving the work of elaboration to the narration of the performer and the imagination of the audience (Dallapiccola, 1998). The tradition was passed down from father to son, and as noted in the Gazetteer of Poona District for 1885, the women managed the household chores and never participated in the storytelling performance of their husbands (Stache-Rosen, 1984).

Moving on down south, to the world of the Deccani picture showmen, the tradition of the Telengana scrolls is truly admirable. By Deccan, is meant the territory south of the Vindhya mountains and the river Narmada, and to the north of the rivers, Tungabhadra and Krishna. Presently this region comprises of the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and northern Karnataka. It is in the state of Andhra Pradesh, in its north-western part, that the tradition of Telengana scrolls is found. At the time when these scrolls were painted, the region was under the rule of Muslim kings. The villages however, in which the population was mostly Hindu, practiced a Hindu way of life. One of the most exclusive feature or aspect of this tradition is the

unique purpose for which it was made. Unlike the scrolls of other region of the country which mostly contained scenes or episodes from the epics and other mythical stories, the Telengana scrolls narrate legends relating to the origin of a particular caste and the lives and deeds of the legendary heroes of this caste. Interestingly, performance was shown by the narrator or performer, only to people belonging to that caste, who were invited to the show. It was only in some cases that outsiders were also allowed to be a part of the audience. Again, picture-storytellers of only a particular caste were given the right to perform before an audience of a chosen caste. These performers were professionals who were hereditarily in this profession and were invited by members of particular caste groups to perform in their villages. Among the stories which were performed by members of particular castes, for audiences of a particular caste, the most popular ones are:

- the *Markandeya* and *Bhavana Rishi Purana*, about the origin of the weavers, performed by the Kunepullalus, for the Padmasalis;
- the ‘*Virataparva*’ episode from the *Mahabharata* performed by the Kakipadgilus and Pandavulus, for the Kanbis or agriculturalists and the Bhois or the herdsmen and domestic helpers;
- the *Daksha-yajna* and *Virabhadra* or *Mandel Purana* performed by the Ganjikotulus for the Dhobis or the washermen;
- the *Jambavanta Purana* (relating to the origin of the *Madigas* or the people of ‘unclean’ caste) performed by the Dakkalawadus for the Madigas;
- the *Goud Purana* or the *Ballanraja-katha* performed by the Goudchettis for the people of the Gouda caste who are primarily wine-sellers;
- And, the *Katamaraju-katha* performed by the *Mandanecollu*, using wooden dolls, for the Gollas or the Dangars who are shepherds by profession.

Their performances mostly commenced in the evening and continued for about a week. The main narrator in this tradition is accompanied by some male members in the family, who joined the narrator at intervals, while others helped with the musical instruments. When the scrolls got damaged and faded, it is cremated and immersed in

a river like a dead person, with the observance of Hindu death ceremonies. Women are rarely found engaging themselves in this practice, except for only some cases where they join in the singing. Most of the painted belonged either to the Mitra Mahamuni *gotra* or the Soma-kula sub-caste of the Kshatriyas. Although, till about sixty years ago, there were painter families living in several villages and towns of Telengana, in contemporary times, there exists only one family in the Cherial village of the Warangal district in Andhra Pradesh which still produces scrolls. Their pictorial style also bears resemblance with the Vijayanagara and the southern Nayaka paintings. These paintings are usually vertically illustrated, with stories portrayed in a series of descending horizontal panels, which are separated from each other through borders in the form of narrow floral designs. The scrolls are painted on cloth with the colour of the dominant background all paintings being red. As for the colours used, though in earlier times they used natural dyes, since the flow of the synthetic colour in the Indian market, the painters have taken recourse to this form of colour as it is less time consuming for drying, does not need to be prepared, and more so because it is economical in nature (Mittal, 1998).

Coming over to the eastern part of the country, the *Pat* tradition is widely practiced in the states of Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand, and also by the tribal populations inhabiting these regions. However, each of these regions boasts of a rich variety in terms of style of pictorial representation, content, manner of narration, etc. in the scroll tradition. In the state of Orissa, this tradition goes back to centuries. Known as *Patta-chitra*, this art form is deeply rooted in religion, and flourished under the cult of Lord Jagannath, especially with the construction of the temple of Lord Jagannath in Puri district in Orissa (Samantaray, 2005). There have been many legends about the origin of this tradition in this state of India. Some trace its roots in Bengal and hold it responsible because of the result of a shared cultural continuity and also for having a history of shared territorial boundary between the two states. Some others are of the opinion that this tradition has its roots in the cave paintings of Udaigiri and Khandagiri. Others are of the view that this tradition is a result of the wave of Buddhism which used these scrolls as a crucial form of communication. Due to the easy flow of cultural traditions between the two states of Orissa and West Bengal, to some degree one can find a similarity in both the states in terms of the

scroll paintings. As in other centres of pilgrimage across India, in Orissa, with the construction of the lord Jagannath temple in Orissa, the patronage for the scroll painting began to grow, with an increasing number of devotees wanting a painted picture of the deity to take home with them. Along with scrolls on Lord Jagannath, there were also scrolls on other religious deities and themes (Barapanda, 1999). As Prafulla Kumar Samantaray mentions, these scrolls also play a major role in the ritualistic arena, in the sense that when the devotees are not allowed to have a view of the deities of the Jagannath temple, on a special ritual event, it is in the form of scrolls that these deities are then worshipped. Known as *anasar pati*, this scroll depicts the painted images of the three deities of *Jagannath*, *Balaram* and *Subhadra*. These paintings are done by the scroll-painters known as Chitrakaras. These artists follow certain rituals while painting, as these scrolls are considered to be sacred. What used to be sold as souvenirs at the temple complex, is an elaboration of this painting, and was known as *Yatri-pati*. Besides the portraits of the temple deities, these scrolls also depicted stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The colours used were made from different natural products. The main focus of the painting is on the expression of the figures and the emotions they seem to portray, which are shown through the strong use of colour. In recent times, this tradition of painting in terms of its style has also been replicated on wooden and bamboo baskets, on pots, masks and even playing cards (Samantaray, 1995). As for the painted souvenirs found in the temple complex of the Puri, since the invention of the oleographs and the lithographs, these hand-drawn paintings have suffered a major setback. However, with the art being recognised as one of the popular forms of art of Orissa, there has been a renewed attempt to keep alive this age old traditional practice (Barapanda, 1999).

In order to keep the tradition alive, the Chitrakaras have taken to newer patterns of style and better ideas to increase the utility of the scrolls in the market. In terms of themes, these scrolls have taken up the new themes dealing with the life and the teachings of Lord Buddha, themes on Jainism and on the life of Jesus Christ. The art form is also not confined to the Chitrakaras alone. Instead of the simple paintings with emphasis added on the expression of the characters, there has been increasing importance given to the ornamentation of the painting on the whole. Thus, with time,

these paintings have shifted from their only place in the religious sphere to occupying a place in the drawing rooms of art lovers as pieces of decoration (Samantaray, 1995).

TRADITION OF SCROLL PAINTING AND NARRATION IN THE STATES OF WEST BENGAL AND JHARKHAND:

Taking all the above illustrations in mind, the discussion thus can now be advanced with an elaborate description of this tradition of scroll painting and narration as found in the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand, as a special case or example showing the condition of this age-old tradition of scroll painting and the performances associated with it, in the contemporary age of the mass media. As mentioned before, India is home to an extremely rich variety of folk traditions which have existed since antiquity. Within the domain of folk art, there lies a wide range of artefacts, which differ from one another in form as well as content, apart from the fact they come from different regions. Even for a specialized form of tradition such as that of the art of scroll painting and narration, different regions in India show a rich diversity in terms pictorial depiction, style, purpose, content and narration of these scroll. Hence in this case too, the tradition as found in West Bengal and Jharkhand, both show very different characteristic features, which might be result of local inferences and also due to the impact of various factors, in terms of scrolls within the great tradition of the 'folk' scroll paintings of India. Even within these two customary practices, there is a wide difference in their characteristics. The main reason for these two regions being chosen as the main case for the study of scroll paintings and performance traditions in the modern day of electronic media in the present paper is because of the unique features found in this traditional practice, which are exclusive to these regions, as will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

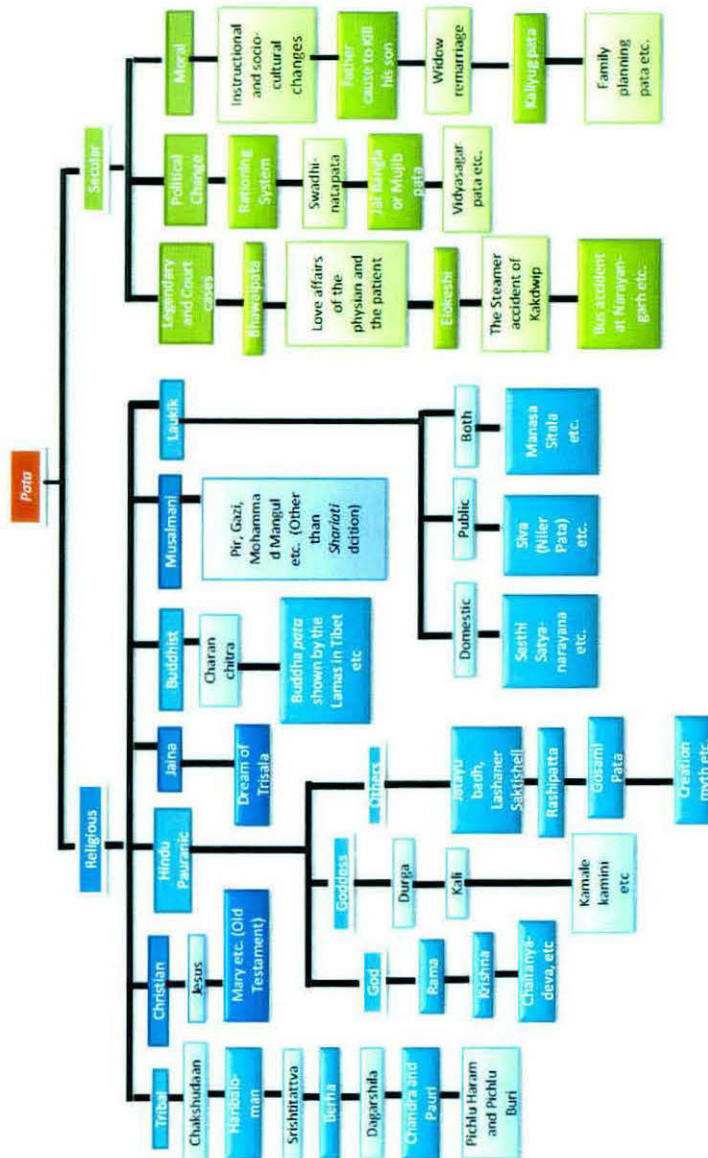


FIGURE 2: A CLASSIFICATION OF THE 'PATS' IN TERMS OF THEIR CHARACTER, AS FOUND IN CERTAIN REGIONS OF WEST BENGAL AND JHARKHAND. (Maity, 1973).

The *Pata-Chitra* tradition of West Bengal:

Of all the folk forms of pictorial art still practiced in the rural villages of West Bengal, the most important is the tradition of the scroll paintings, known as the *pats*, painted by the folk artists known as *Patuas*⁷. The word *pat* originally refers to a piece of cloth. There are several instances of the word *patta* in Sanskrit literature to refer to cloth. However, there are studies which show that the word *patta* was originally an Austro-Asiatic word. In the two major languages of the Santhali and the Mundari, of the Austro-Asiatic *Kol* tribe, the word *pat* was used to refer to the silk or jute fibre which was used for weaving the cloth. In earlier times, when the use of paper was unknown or even when it was not widely in use, the artists used scrolls of cloth to paint pictures on them, and thus the word gained a new meaning and *patta* or *Chitra-patta* as such began to be used to refer to the canvas on which paintings were done. There are thus two types of *pats* or paintings as described by David J. McCutchion and Suhrid Kr. Bhowmik in their on this art form of Bengal, the *Chauka pat*, which is rectangular or square in shape, and the *Jorano pat*, which is in the form of a scroll. While the rectangular paintings mostly include illustrations of deities or single episodes of certain myths and are mainly created for the purpose of sale, the scrolls portray a story or a few scenes from a story in the form of continuous pictures. These generally vary in size, from one to three feet in width and from about ten to twenty feet in length (McCutchion and Bhowmik, 1999).

Each *pat* is in the form of a moving gallery containing a series of pictures which comes one after the other in a continuous flow, in the course of which a story unfolds from the beginning to the end, along with narrations of lyrical compositions created by the *Patuas* themselves (Dutt, 1990). In 1891, H. H. Risley described these *Patuas* as "...an endogamous class of low Mahomedans, who paint pictures illustrating Hindu mythology and hawk them from door to door with songs" (Hauser, 2002). The themes are usually based on the mythological and religious stories of the epics, the *Puranas*, and other myths including some local stories of *Behula* and *Lakhinder*, *Chaitanya*,

⁷ H. H. Risley defined the *Patua*, *Patikar*, and the *Salubi* as, "an endogamous class of low Mahomedans who paint pictures illustrating Hindu mythology and hawk them from door to door with songs. Although *Patikars* are supposed to be Mahomedans, they...are very lax in their religious practice". In, Risley H. H. (1998 *Reprint*). *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Firma KLM Private Ltd, Calcutta, p. 169-170.

Satya-pir, etc. These are the most popular form of stories in the villages (Chakraborty, Ashish, 1989). As Dutt explains, from the subject matter of the scroll paintings in this region of India, the pats may be divided into three classes which represent three main principles. The first, deals with *Rama-lila*, which represents the heroic aspect of life, deeds and the consequent awarding of punishments or rewards to the individual. The second group belongs to those who depict the *Krishna-lila*, which portrays the aspect of spiritual devotion or *bhakti* and even refers to the idea of romantic love and beauty, also portraying a romanticised rural life in Indian villages. The third group may be described as dealing with the aspect of power or *shakti*, or the tantric philosophy of Bengal (Dutt, 1990). As mentioned above, besides these, there are stories ranging from the epics to the life of the local heroes in these scrolls.

One of the most important feature of this art as found in the recent times, which is very important to keep in mind, as far the objective of this paper is concerned, is the introduction of new topics and ideas in this tradition to enhance its utility in the modern day and to make it more popular and resistant to the electronic and satellite forms of media. Thus together with the religious and mythical scrolls, the *Patuas* have also taken up to showing scrolls pertaining to the social and political issues of time (Chakraborty, 1989; Ghosh, 2003; Chatterji, 2009). They have also captured international events like the 9/11 episode (Chatterji, 2009) and the tsunami of the year 2004. In the present day, every storyteller carries five to six scrolls with them when they travel across villages for performance. Every performance starts with episodes form the *mangala kavya* or other auspicious themes before moving on to display the secular ones, relating to the local or even international events. The scroll is unrolled with one frame showing at a time. As the story progresses, the frames are consequently rolled up, with connections with the previous scrolls been made possible through the performer's narration and through the memory of the audience. The scrolls make a synoptic presentation of the content wished to be delivered to the audience, leaving the viewers to fill up the details using their own imagination (Chatterji, 2009). After every performance in the village, the *Patua* asks for gifts or '*daan*' and alms or '*bhiksha*'. Mostly he is paid in kind, with rice, but sometimes is also given a meal, some old clothes and some minimum amount of money. In the modern day, he obviously gets paid in cash for the commissioned paintings that he

prepares. This being a seasonal occupation, the *Patuas* engage in other work in the monsoon season as it is not possible for them to travel or perform at that point of time (Hauser, 2002).

In West Bengal, the *Patua* families are distributed over a wide area including the districts of Medinipur, Birbhum, Purulia, Murshidabad, Howrah, Nadiya and Kolkata (Bhattacharjee, 1980). These *Chitrakar*s or *Patuas* were organised into marriage circles which later led to the formation of three sub-regional schools of *pat* painting, out of two survive in the present day. These schools are the Tamluk – Kalighat – Tribeni Samajik School, and the Birbhum – Kandi – Katwa Samajik School. The third school, at Berhampur – Murshidabad does not exist anymore, and the regions now come under the Birbhum – Kandi – Katwa School. Each school is marked by a distinctive tradition and style in terms of the painting itself and also the content or the subject-matter of the scrolls (Ray, 2008). The Medinipur scroll painters also fall under the first school, although they have incorporated different styles from different schools and have even imitated the tradition of the *Jadu Patuas* of the Santhal Parganas in Jharkhand (Chatterji, 2009).

These scrolls of the rural part of Bengal are very important, from the point of view of their significance in the history and development of art in general and also their role as the predominant form of media in the rural society. Gurusaday Dutt, in his article on the indigenous paintings of Bengal, pointed out that this tradition is the direct descendant of the art of the pre-Buddhist art and pre-Ajanta epoch, a prototype of the scroll paintings as found in Orissa, Nepal, Tibet, China and Japan. This art according to Dutt has always remained a rural art, free from any kind of influences of the court. Marked by simplicity and expressiveness in conception as well as in technique, there is nevertheless the use of formal design. Moreover, unlike other traditional schools of art, this tradition is still a surviving one, and even though it is in a degenerated condition, some of its living representatives have still managed to retain their hereditary genius. These groups of people, who are supposed to be the descendants of the *Chitrakar*s, who are mentioned as one of the artisan castes in the Sanskrit body of literature, are called *Patuas* by the higher caste Hindus. These artisans thus in the contemporary day, along with engaging themselves in other kinds of occupations, still

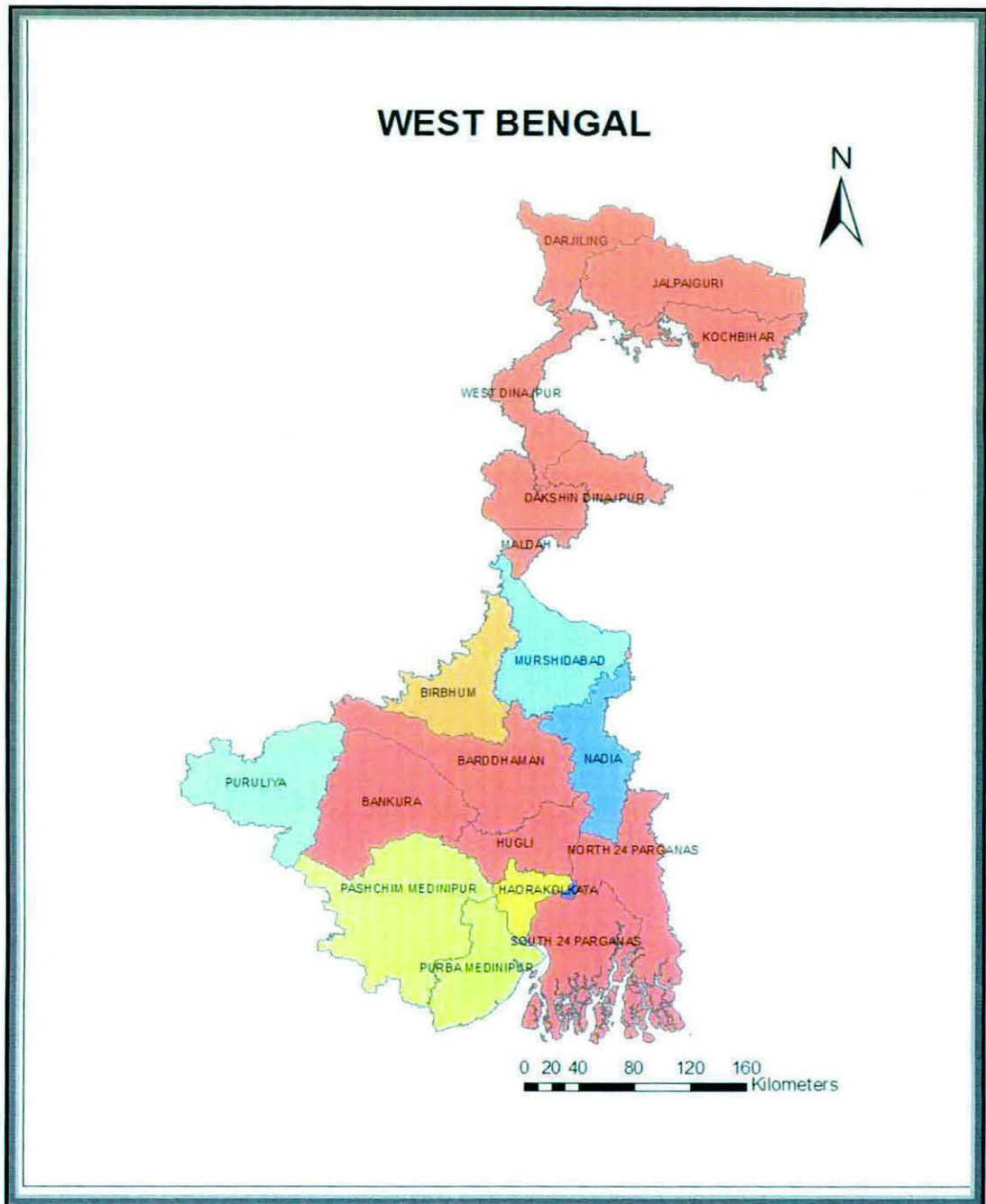


FIGURE 3: THE MAIN DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL WHERE THE TRADITION OF SCROLL PAINTING STILL EXISTS. (Murshidabad, Purba Medinipur, Pashchim Medinipur, Birbhum, Puruliya, Nadia, Haora, and Kolkata).

manage to pursue their calling of painting and displaying picture scrolls in villages. (Dutt, 1990).

Origin and History of the *Patua* community:

The origin of the pat or the scroll being lost in obscurity, the painters of this tradition as existing in Bengal, the *Patua* community have a number of legends about their origin and their roots. These *Chitrakaras* are mentioned in the *Bramhavaivarta Purana*, as being one of the nine descendants of the Supreme Artist Lord Vishwakarma. It was from these nine sons that all the artisan classes descended. The *Chitrakara* is thus one of them. The *Patuas*, as McCutcheon and Bhowmik observed were at initially not *Chitrakaras* but belonged to the Austro-Asiatic group. Their main occupation consisted of displaying scrolls along with narration, in and around villages. With the impact of the Brahmanical society in Bengal, these *Patuas* who belonged to the Austro-Asiatic group started calling themselves *Chitrakaras* as both the groups performed the same occupation. The Hindu groups however objected this move which blurred the distinction between the *Chitrakaras* and the *Patuas*, and the entire caste-group was declared as polluted and corrupt. The curse of the angry Brahmins resulted in their fall from their previous 'high' social status (McCutcheon and Bhowmik, 1999). According to Binoy Bhattacharjee too, these artisans drew lineage from one of the nine sons of Vishwakarma, which later formed the Nabasayaka caste group. According to the popular legend, the *Patuas* were banished from the Hindu social organisation for their erroneous painting of Mahadeva. In anger, Mahadeva cursed the entire community and stating that they would henceforth be called Muslims. When they pleaded to the deity after his anger settled down, the god declared that they would occupy a midway position between the two religious communities and thus neither be Muslims or Hindus. This being the legend which is most commonly used to describe the origin of the *Patuas*, there are many other such mythical stories relating to their origin, among the different regions and the different groups of the *Patuas* (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

However, that these *Patuas* have a tribal origin and history is evident in most of the works carried out on this group of artisans. Thus although their ancestral homeland cannot be possibly traced in terms of the exact region, it is probable that they had their

roots somewhere in the Chota Nagpur area of Malpaharia before they entered into Bengal through Bihar or Orissa. They came along with their traditional occupations of snake charming, bird-catching, training animals for tricks, carrying out roadside shows and performing magic, and also with their tribal lifestyle patterns and practices of drinking liquor on all occasions and taking meat. However, their gradual contact and communication with the Hindu community weakened these practices and they gradually took to the occupations of scroll painting and idol-making. The *Patuas* with their skills quickly adopted the tradition of painting images from the Hindu painter castes of the Sutradhars and the Acharyas. The *Patuas* thus Sanskritized their entire way of life to obtain a higher position in the Hindu society. It was with the arrival of the Muslims in India, and particularly in Bengal, that they began to convert themselves into Muslims. An enquiry into the social period being marked by the Hindu rulers in Bengal showed that it was an extremely harsh time for the groups belonging to the 'lower' castes as the values of casteism and hierarchy based on this caste division was specially and openly encouraged by the royal court. Domination by the three twice-born castes of the rest of the society, which was further justified by the royal patronage, led to a situation where the 'lower' castes welcomed the Muslim rule. Being looked down upon by the 'higher' caste Hindus, these *Patuas* who occupied one of the lowest strata of the Hindu caste structure, took up the religion of Islam, in hope of getting patronage from the Muslim rulers. They also adopted Muslim names and cultural traits. The new Muslim rulers also used the medium of scroll painting for mass education of the population in terms of propagation of Islam. Some even say that it was when the Maratha plunderers wreak havoc on rural Bengal from 1741 to 1751, and the Muslim rulers took more interest in saving the people from their own religious community, that the *Patuas* took shelter in Islam. Others still claim that their swing from one religious community to another was an attempt by the small community to be exempted from the *zizya* tax which was imposed on the Hindus by the Muslim rulers (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

Whatever the reasons for their conversion may be, the process as such did not get completed because this process of acculturation as such is a long process and cultural assimilation which takes place as a result of this acculturation is even longer a process. More importantly, a good deal of income of these *Patuas* came from the

Hindu patrons for whom they illustrated pictures of gods and goddesses and narrated mythical stories, and even engaged in idol making. These *Patuas* therefore had to be cautious so as not to lose the patronage of the Hindus and thus even if they got converted; their Islamised way of living had to be concealed from the Hindus. With the gradual decline of the Muslim rule, and the rise of British powers, many of these groups swung back to being Hindus. Muslim patronage at this period was of very little worth, and besides, the *Patuas* were assigned a very low position among the Muslims too. Furthermore, the *Patuas* also believed that the new British rulers favoured the Hindus, both politically and economically. Thus they decided to go back to being Hindus. But they had internalised the socio-cultural practices and rules of the Muslim society and it was impossible for them to abandon all these beliefs and practices. So they ended up assuming an ambiguous social position between the Hindus and the Muslims. Moreover, with the coming of the British, and with the technological advancements leading to massive industrialization and urbanisation in the country, there was replacement of the older cultural practices and values by the new ones. There was a decline in the interest of the village community with regard to the religious scrolls, and this led to the engagement of the *Patuas* in newer occupations of masonry, mechanics, etc. This led to a weakening in their ties with the Hindus, from whom these *Patuas* illustrated and narrated scenes and episodes from Hindu myths and epics. These *Patuas* were thus neither Hindus nor Muslims⁸. One could find evidence of the existence of attributes from both the religious communities in them (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

One interesting aspect at this point of time was as noted by Roma Chatterji who observed that in the Bengal census of 1981, as mentioned by both Risley and Hunter that, both the *Patuas* and the *Chitrakaras* were classified as separate castes (Chatterji, 2009). This could be possibly because of two reasons, first because the census data was based on knowledge of the community and in this regard, the *Chitrakaras* who were according to the Hindus, the descendants of the 'Supreme Artist' lord

⁸ Unlike the other community of painters engaged in the tradition of scroll painting, in different parts of India, who belonged to the higher castes, the *Patuas* have always occupies a very low status in terms of their social standing. They have been looked down upon both by the Hindus as well as by the Muslims in the society because of their intermediary religious position. It is their low social status which makes it all the more interesting to then understand their power in re-interpreting and reproducing tradition in society.

Vishwakarma, never considered the 'lower caste' or Muslim *Patuas* as one of them, even though both of the groups carried out the same occupation. The second reason could be because of the fact that, as the origin of these *Patuas* pointed to a tribal entity; they were not regarded as a part of the Hindu or Muslim community and thus were identified as being members of the Austro-Asiatic tribe.

Coming back to their history, their ambiguous position was again under question when in the later part of the nationalist movement, the country experienced fierce riots between the Hindus and the Muslims. It was in the year 1946, that violent riots broke out in Calcutta, spreading out to the whole of Bengal, Bihar, Punjab, and the North-Western Frontier Province. With the strong ideas of partition of the country, the call for identification with a particular religious community was essential. The need for identification with one religion was extremely crucial at this point of time, resulting in a more organised movement from Islam towards Hinduism. Some Hindu social reform organisations like the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Bharat Savashram Sangha strengthened their attempts to add force to the Hindu revivalist movement by bringing back to the Hindu social order all those who had converted themselves or had given up the Hindu religion (Bhattacharjee, 1980). The *Bangiya Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti* ('The Society for the Advancement of the Chitrakaras of Bengal') was thus created in this context, to re-convert or bring back the groups like the *Patuas* back within the Hindu fold (Chatterji, 2009). Attempts were made by the organisation in the form of distribution of circulars, often written in verse, to these *Patuas*, urging them to give up their Islamised traits and religious beliefs and instead adopt the Hindu religion and its traits. Many of these *Patuas* were brought back into the Hindu social order through the help of purificatory rites called '*suddhi*' which ensured these groups a re-entry into the Hindu social order with an honourable social position. The *Patuas* were thus urged to get themselves enumerated as caste Hindus in the census of 1951. But as year passed by after Independence from the colonial rule, ideas about the provisions for ensuring the safety of the minorities started getting into the focus and with the General Elections in 1952 and 1957, the Government's plan to ensure a democratic and secular society was confirmed. The *Patuas* thus saw that the Muslims enjoyed democratic rights and other safeguards and special benefits from the government in the form of stipends, and appointment in the offices equally at par with

the Hindus. The condition of the *Patuas* however had not improved with their conversion back into the Hindu fold as they were still looked down upon by the rest of the Hindu population, and besides, the Hindu society even at this point of time exhibited strong elements of the prejudices of the caste system. The idols were also not so much in demand anymore (Bhattacharjee, 1980). As Bhattacharjee states, "In reality the *Patuas* were banished socially and economically from the Hindu community" (Bhattacharjee, 1980: 113).

The *Patuas* thus found comfort among the Muslim community which sympathised with their condition, and this led to a fresh movement of 'islamization' by the *Patuas*. However, studies show that irrespective of their egalitarian ideals, hierarchical divisions among the Muslims still exist. Even in the Muslim community the *Patuas* were attributed the lowest social position. This revealed an attitude of indifference and disregard for the *Patuas* from both the Hindus as well as the Muslims. Most of the *Patuas* thus converted themselves to being Muslims while some remained as Hindus (Bhattacharjee, 1980). In *The Patas and Patuas of Bengal*, Sankar Sen Gupta, in the Introduction to the book mentioned, as per the information that he received from the Office of the Registrar General in the year 1972 that information on castes and tribes other than those categorised in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes would no longer be collected in the Census. The official document further stated that according to the Presidential order of 1956, the *Patuas* were neither under the category of the Scheduled Castes nor under the Scheduled Tribes (Sen Gupta, 1973).

Whether their personal religious positions were Muslim or Hindu, they were never considered as a part of any of the community by its esteemed members, and even if they were included, they were consigned an extremely low social position. The history of the *Patuas* show a continuous swing from one religious and cultural position to another, and this is evident in their social life which reveals a mix of both Hindu and Muslim traits in terms of values, customs, rituals and beliefs. Their continuous shift from one community to another in terms of their personal identity has taken a toll on their minds and there is still confusion in their minds when it comes to choose sides, of Muslim or Hindu in matters of their identity. Although of late there has been a strong inclination to becoming true Muslims, these are more on the lines of availing the facilities and provisions that the Muslims enjoy than any other reason.

Years of oscillation between the two religious communities, has led to this group occupying a mid-way position between them. Observation reveals that all these *Patuas* have two names- one Hindu and the other Muslim, and in their social life display an interesting intermixture of the cultural traits of the two religious communities.

Economic life of the *Patuas*:

In the book on *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal*, Sudhanshu Kumar Ray's article on '*The Artisan Castes of West Bengal and their Crafts*' based on the census data of 1951, elaborately discusses on the occupation of the *Patua* men as divided into main craft and subsidiary crafts. Accordingly, the main occupations for men included painting on cloth or paper, scroll painting on cloth only, earthen image-making, and decoration on walls by painting (found only in the district of Birbhum). For women, the main occupations included making of earthen dolls and toys, painting on ceremonial pottery called *Ghata Chitra* or on wooden seats known as *Piri Chitra* which are supplied to them by the potters and carpenters respectively, to be used for ceremonial occasions. Among the subsidiary crafts, snake-charming (only found in the district of Birbhum district), making fireworks, and *tinkari* are the popular ones (Ray, 2008). Binoy Bhattacharjee observed that there was no strict division of labour based on the sexes among the *Patuas*. Some elderly women among the *Patuas* also expertise in occult practices related to bewitching and influencing people. The old women and men usually stay back at home and engage in mat-making. The children either go to school or otherwise accompany their parents when they travel for scroll narration. According to Bhattacharjee, the modern range of occupations of the *Patuas* included the traditional caste occupation of the *Patuas*, which consists of scroll painting, snake-charming, performing magic, creating indigenous medicines, making clay toys and dolls, bamboo-cutter, pith work, etc, the occupations which are practiced in the rural areas by both the Hindu and the Muslim community like cultivation on land, contract labour, carding along with weaving, carpentry, hut making, basket making, garland making, and modern occupations including masonry, tube-well mechanic, radio mechanic, *bidi*-making, and teaching which have become popular due to the impact of industrialization and urbanisation in the rural areas. At

present the so-called Islamised occupations of cow-leech, carder, and mason are regarded as socially prestigious jobs among the *Patuas* (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

As for their traditional caste-occupation of scroll painting, this was never their only or the main occupation. Nomadic in nature, these groups adjusted themselves most kinds of jobs. With the growth of television, cinema and mobile phones, this customary practice of painting scrolls and exhibiting them across villages has declined in prominence and in importance as a medium of communication in the rural areas. Of late, there has been a revival of the art form with the government taking initiative to preserve it as one of the local traditions of Bengal. Individual curators have also made great efforts to conserve the artistic tradition. These scrolls now have a place in the international market. As Hauser explains, art has shifted from being an oral tradition to a visual tradition, and thus a consequent shift from performance of the scrolls to viewing them as pieces of 'folk' to be used for consumption, and to be treated as a product having an aesthetic value (Hauser, 2002). Thus although these pats can be still found in the different regions of West Bengal, they are mostly created for consumption rather than as mediums of mass communication for the rural society. However, as Roma Chatterji claims, there is but one exception to this current trend of the tradition. This exception is the tradition of scroll painting in the Medinipur district of West Bengal. At a time when in most of the districts, there are very few painters who carry on this tradition due to lack of patronage, or even of an audience, this district, and particularly the village Naya in this district boasts of a vibrant community of *Patuas* who actively engage in producing scrolls. Although most of the scrolls are now created to suit the market, both national and international, there still exists a practice of performance among these *Patuas*, even in the contemporary day. The importance of these scrolls thus lies in the fact that unlike other forms of media, who are only aimed at consumption, the pat tradition is unique as it allows the receptors to actively engage in re-interpreting the event by re-establishing it in mythical time (Chatterji, 2009).

Social Life and the Social Structure of the *Patuas*:

Like most other communities, the *Patuas* celebrate all the 'liminal' periods of life through rituals and ceremonies. In all these life-cycle rituals, one finds a good mixture of the cultural traits of the both the religious communities of Muslims and Hindus. The ritual ceremonies associated with childbirth, initiation, marriage, and death, all disclose a intermixing of the customs and practices of the two religions. There has been over time, however, a change from the displaying of tribal characteristics to a display of Muslim and Hindu rules and customs, which have again varied in their degrees, in different time periods, along with their change from one religion to another. Acculturation is a process which takes a long time, and once it is developed it is very difficult to get rid of the cultural traits which have been internalized. Due to their oscillating nature from one religion to another, and then back to the previous one, only to go back to the latter, has left innumerable traces in the minds and the social memory of the community as a whole and it is this which reflects in the blend of the attributes and customs of the two religions by the *Patuas* in their daily social lives and even on special occasions. Apart from these life-cycle rituals, even in the annual cycles, there is an expression of mixed culture, even to the extent in the religious rituals. Although the community practices Islam, there is a flow of elements of Hindu religious values and customs.

The *Patuas* in general occupy a fairly low social status in society. In terms of their identity, they stand somewhere between the two religions of Islam and Hinduism. They illustrate Hindu gods and goddesses on their scrolls and sing and narrate Hindu myths in front of audiences and patrons who are exclusively Hindus. Again in their personal life, they practice their rites of marriage according to Islam. Sudhanshu Kumar Ray, who wrote extensively on the *Patua* community as per the information gathered from the West Bengal census of 1951, mentioned that these people occupied a peculiar and unique position between the Hindus and the Muslims. Although they practice Islam, they have also incorporated the social customs, beliefs and practices as followed in the Hindu society. Thus although it is the Muslim priest who presides over the marriage ceremony of the *Patuas*, the women of this community put vermilion on their forehead, wear conch shells and follow many customs which are pursued by the Hindus. All the members of the *Patua* community also interestingly

have two names, one Hindu and the other Muslim. Their peculiar social and religious stance has led them to occupying a very low social position, unlike other *Chitrakar* communities of Rajasthan and Gujarat, who occupy a fairly high and respectable position in the society (Ray, 2008). As they follow their rites of passage according to Islam, although in an unorthodox manner, they conceal from the others Muslims their Hindu practices. Again, since their patrons are largely Hindu, the *Patuas* also try to conceal their Islamized traits for the fear of losing their patronage. With a history of painting for the Hindu audience, the social life of the *Patuas* also show a reflection of these attributes. Though most of these *Patuas* have converted themselves to Muslims to escape the brunt of the hierarchy of the Hindu social structure, the cultural and social norms and values, customs and traditions have been internalized by all the members of the *Patua* community and have thus become a part of their social memory and their social identity.

It was with the shifting of a group of *Patuas* to the city of Calcutta with the construction of the temple at Kalighat, that a new turn was witnessed in the tradition. These *Patuas* started by selling painted pictures of the temple deity as souvenirs. From about the 1830s to the 1930s, these inexpensive images painted on cheap quality paper were usually purchased by pilgrims and tourists alike, as mementos to be taken home, for purposes of decoration or religious beliefs. These migrant painters restructured the traditional scrolls to single images or sheets. Along with a change in the form of the painting, there was a noted change in the subject matter of the paintings. Unlike their rural counterpart, who focused on religious and moral themes, these painters, producing for a mass market, introduced new themes alongside the religious ones. There were thus images of Islamic prophets and angels, together with a depiction of contemporary events of socio-historical, cultural and political significance. This genre of painting thus exhibited repetition of topics and formulas for the growing market. By incorporating techniques which enabled the quick production of cheap quality pictures, the migrant painters from the villages of Bengal were able to respond to the economic opportunities which came up in the course of the changing circumstances of the late 19th century (Ghosh, 2000).

With the emergence of colonial rule in India, the consequent impact of urbanization and industrialization of the rural areas had an impact on the culture on these areas.

Calcutta, being the colonial capital, experiences major changes in terms of both material as well as non-material aspects of culture. The newly formed urban intellectual elite in Bengal imitated the culture and lifestyle of the British, while using English as their major mode of communication. It was only after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, that ideas of nationalism grew and resulted in a crisis of identity among the Bengali intellectual elite, thus leading to a search for new meaning in old symbols and also trying to find out old meanings in new symbols. In this context, there was a revival of the 'folk', the need to save folk culture and to present it in a sophisticated manner (Hauser, 2002). These scroll painters' critical reaction to new modes of cultural production like the cinema, photography, etc along with their use of imagery for storytelling and preaching religious values and beliefs, highlighted their major role in the socio-cultural transformations that resulted in modernity in colonial Bengal. Their portrayal of goddess worship in Bengal and their critique of the processes of westernization and modernization thus illustrated the importance of the roles of both these painters as well as their creations, in articulating and strengthening ideas of religious identity (Ghosh, 2003).

In the contemporary times, although the school of Kalighat paintings do not exist any longer, their impact on the scroll painters of the rural areas of West Bengal have been quite prominent. Moreover, with the demand for these painting in the international market, and also to maintain the popularity of these scrolls, in the world dominated by the television, cinema and the internet; these painters have taken recourse to including non-conventional themes together with the traditional ones. These scrolls are created from the ideas of the *Patuas* themselves along with the information from the newspapers and the television reports (Chatterji, 2009). Including events like the 9/11 attacks in America and the Tsunami, population control, global warming, to even influencing voting behaviour in the villages, these scrolls still try to fight the popularity of the modern forms of mass media by depicting modern incidents in a traditional manner which is more easily understood by the people of the rural societies.

The *Jadu-Patuas* of Jharkhand:

Of all the ethnic groups in India, the Austro-Asiatic Kol tribe is the oldest. Apart from the *Kol* tribe in West Bengal, the other prominent tribe is the *Oraon*. It was from the Chota Nagpur region that this tribe came to Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, and the newly created state of Jharkhand. Suhril Kumar Bhowmik is of the view that it is from these tribes that the tradition of scroll painting has come to Bengal. Whether vertical or horizontal in structure, it was these scrolls which were the main mode of communication by the Buddhists. The source of the modern day scroll painting in Bengal can hence be traced to the Adivasi *pats* (Bhowmik, 2008).

In the present state of Jharkhand, one of the divisions is the Santhal Parganas. This division comprises of six districts of Dumka, Jamtara, Deoghar, Godda, Sahibganj and Pakur. It is in these regions, that one finds this tradition of scroll painting among artists who are known as *Patuas* or *Patkars*, also known as the *Jadu-Patuas*. Their art is in many ways comparable to the art of the African tribes. Although they are also present in a few areas of Bengal inhabited by the populations of tribal origin, they are most prominent in the region of the Santhal Parganas, which earlier was under the state of Bihar, and now falls under the province of Jharkhand. They mainly illustrate pictures of Santhals who have recently passed away, using them for a particular *pat* (known as the *Chakshudan pat*), and also of myths and tales of Santhal tribal legends and customs, and the myth pertaining to creation of the tribe (Dutt, 1990). According to Heinz Mode and Subodh Chandra, the paintings of the *Jadu-Patuas* can be categorised into seven main thematic groups, including the portrayals of life in the realm of the dead; the myth of Creation; the festivals of the Santhals, their dances, certain emblems representing the Santhal clans, and also certain episodes from the life of Krishna as being parallel to the life of the Santhal themselves (Mode and Chandra, 1985).

Unlike the *Patuas* of the West Bengal, who are assigned extremely inferior positions in terms of social status, the *Patuas* in these societies are treated with respect. But the purpose and the technique of scroll painting and narration is quite different from that of the non-tribal *Patuas* of Bengal. These painters-cum performers deal with *pats* showing the ill-effects of bad work or karma, and the consequent punishments

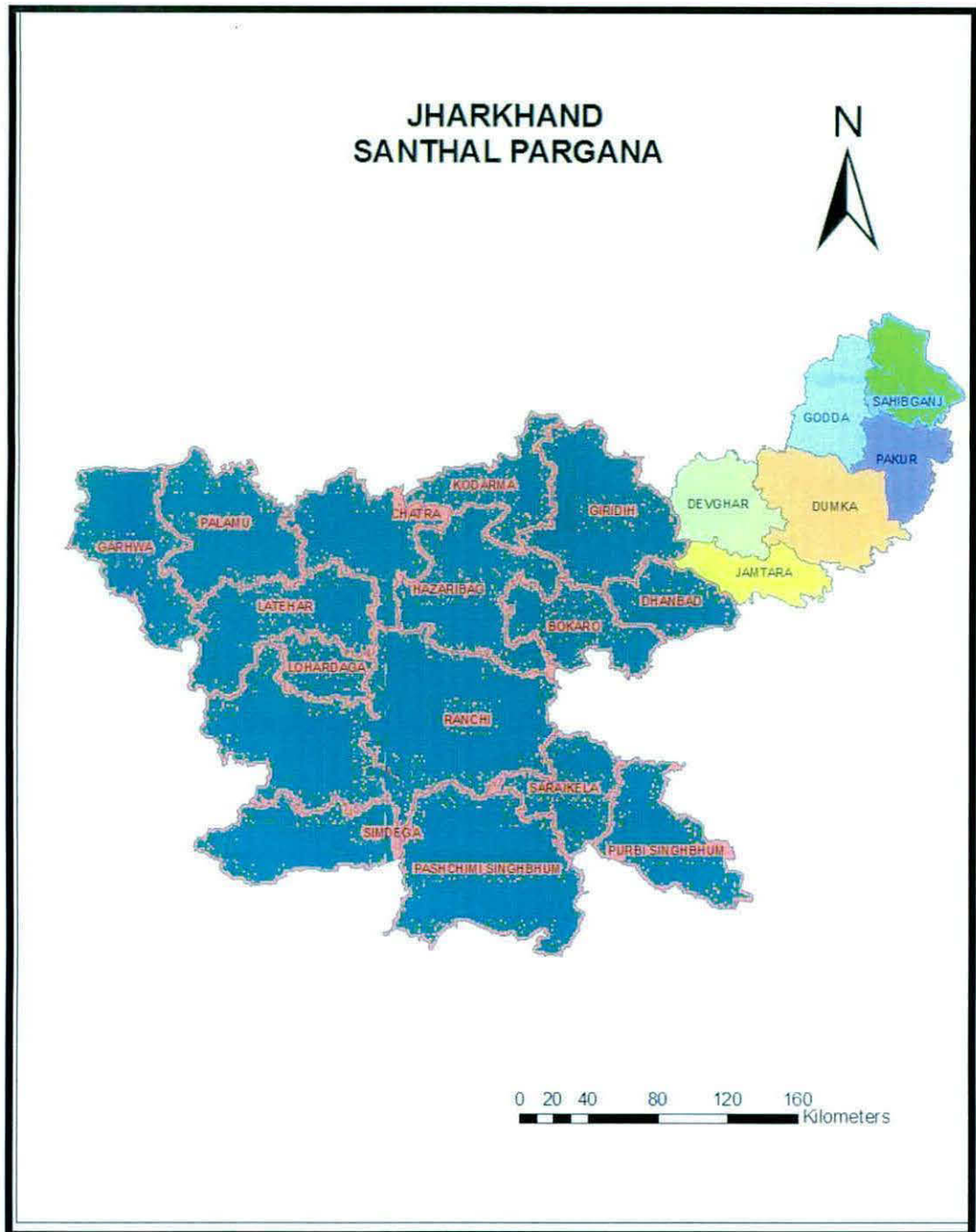


FIGURE 4: THE SANTHAL PARGANAS OF JHARKHAND. (Including the six districts of Deoghar, Jamtara, Pakur, Sahibganj, Dumka, and Gokha, where the tradition of scroll paintings still exists in the modern-day.)

received after death, in hell, for all the bad deeds (McCutchion and Bhowmik, 1999). Even in Banabhatta's *Harshacharitam* and Vishakhadutta's *Mudrarakshasham*, there are instances of mention about these pats known as *Yama Pata* (Bhowmik, 2008). Also known as 'jam-pat' locally, these scrolls illustrate scenes from hell, depicting the punishments and that rewards that are received after death, mostly stressing on the punishments received in hell due to misdeeds on earth. These scrolls are accompanied with narrations relating to religious values and beliefs. There is also a popular practice of drawing the picture of the recently deceased people by the *Jadu- Patuas*. This form of pat painting is also known as *Hari-bala-mana-pata* (Maity, 1973). Usually, in these societies, whenever a person dies, a *Patua* visits the house of the deceased, calling out in loud the name of the head of the family. He then tells the family that the spirit of the person who has died recently, is suffering in the life after death (McCutchion and Bhowmik, 1999). He conveys this to the family by drawing a portrait of the deceased without the iris of the eye. The *Patua* thus tells them that this dead spirit is wandering about blindly in the 'after-world' and will remain in this position until his or her eyesight is bestowed, which can be only done by the *Jadu-patua*, for which he should be paid (Maity, 1973). He explains that this absence of the eye is preventing the dead person from rebirth. This punishment of the losing of eyesight is as prescribed by God, or *Marang Buru*; a punishment for all the misdeeds of the person that he or she committed when alive. The *Patua* then asks for a metal pot containing water, and then with the help of his special brush and a drop of water from the pot, he draws the iris of the eye, thus relieving the deceased from blindness and ending his suffering. This is one of main means of livelihood. This type of scroll is also known as the Chakshudan pat or the eye-giving scroll (McCutchion and Bhowmik, 1999). In return for the drawing of the eye of the deceased the *Patua* is given money and other article of domestic use by the family of the deceased person. It is perhaps because of their semi-magical power to restore eyesight of the dead person, that these *Patuas* are known as *Jadu Patuas*, *Jadu* meaning magic, and *Patuas* meaning painters. They are also known as the *Duari Patuas* (Maity, 1973).

Most of the scrolls of the tribal society deal with illustrations containing representations of the world, as it is perceived after death, involving the torture of the spirit of the deceased by the God or *Marang Buru* for has ill-deeds. Even today, as

both McCutchion and Bhowmik mentions these *Patuas* play a very important role in the tribal society. They occupy a very significant position in the society and have a very profound impact on the people of the society. Every member of the Santhal society believes that the *Patua* is attributed with some strong supernatural and mystical powers. Even the *patua* himself claims, that while in the process of painting, the *Marang Buru* or Supreme God comes to his aid, helps him and gives him special powers which thus makes it possible for him to see everything in the world of the spirits.

There are different types of scrolls in the Santhal society. They include the *mara*(death)-*haja*(loss) pat and other mythological pats concerning the origin of the Santhals, the *Chakshudan* pat, etc. The *mara-haja* scrolls are differently drawn, according to the requirements of the groups and families of the society. Hence, if a Santhal is lost in the forest while hunting or any other activity, his relatives contact the *Patua* also called *Patkar* in these societies, and with the help of his drawing on the scroll with the power of the Supreme God in him, the *Patua* is able to portray his condition and thus make all the family member see whether the missing relative is alive or dead. Scrolls depicting the origin or the creation myth of the Santhal tribe, describing the birth of their ancestors, *Pilchu Haram* and *Pilchu Burhi*, and their seven sons and seven daughters, and the seven sons who were married to their sisters, and so on and so forth, is also beautifully depicted by these Santhal *Patuas* who use these symbols in a way to maintain their own ethnic and cultural identity. The concept of the life after death is very popular among the Santhals. One of the most popular form of scroll painting is therefore the *Yama-pat* which shoes the sufferings of the human spirit after death, because of this or her misdeeds on earth by the *Yama*, the God of Death, or the *Marang Buru*. Such themes, both in folk paintings as well as in the form of folklores emphasize on the concept of rebirth and its significance. This idea of rebirth is similar to the one that is in use, in the theories of both Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. As McCutchion and Bhowmik claim, that at the time when Buddhism was being spread across lands and regions, it was this form of scroll painting, with an emphasis on the life after death, known as *paraloukik pat*, were used as popular means of propagating the ideas and preaching the teachings of Buddhism (McCutchion and Bhowmik, 1999). The *paraloukik pat* later came to be known as

jam-pat. The practice of scroll painting can thus be argued to have a tribal origin. It is only this form of scroll painting that has managed to remain entirely naive throughout the ages and not got affected by the styles or the patterns from other regions. The examples of *Jadu-pats*, the *Yama-pats*, and the other mythological pats with their schematic constructions, “single-line rubber-bodied effects” and “thin sharp-edged colour combinations” reveal a striking similarity to the world of primitive art, which remains unaltered and unaffected by the modern forms of art even today (McCutchion, 1989). The primary role of this *Jadu-Patuas* in the tribal society was hence to alert people about the ill-effects of their bad works and evil practices and thus the need to follow the customary traditions and beliefs of the society. Through this role they ensured the maintenance and the preservation of the traditional culture of the tribal society and also make certain that the society is kept under control and moral and religious order is maintained.

Colouring in folk art is also an important aspect to be explored as it is through the different techniques and styles of pictorial illustration of the figures that they get emphasized in different degrees, which gives the audience the purposed effect and encourages a visual and emotive response. Instead of a parallel depiction of reality, the *Jadu-patuas* combines the conceptual with the purely visual to create an illustration which signifies a new entity (Mode and Chandra, 1985).

It is at this point that a difference between the *Patuas* of Bengal and the *Jadu-Patuas* of Jharkhand can be observed. As P. K. Maity writes, in terms of their style of depiction in the scrolls, the *Patuas* emphasise on the judgement scenes dealing with stories of saints or deities, thus ending the scrolls with illustrations of the deity or the saint, elaborating his or her story, detailing about their good works, and ending with a scene for the court of Yama, the god of death, while the *Jadu-Patuas* emphasize on the lives of the deceased people enjoying worldly comforts in the after-world to, in a way emphasize on the importance of their role in the society (Maity, 1973).

The main difference between the *Patua* and the *Jadu-Patua*, which gets reflected in their works, is thus a result of the different roles that they play in the society. Although for both the groups, the primary occupation is scroll painting, the role that these scrolls play in the society is quite different. As mentioned before, art in the

primitive society was functional, and was created to meet certain ends. It was later that these forms of visual tradition and other practices were treated to have more aesthetic value than utility in society. The *pats* of the Santhal society having remained almost unchanged since its inception, bears a close resemblance to the tribal society. As S. K. Ray writes that these *Jadu-Patuas* have never been use mediums of folk entertainment. A *Jadu-Patua* is thus someone who is believed to be “an undisputed authority” on matters deals with the semi-magical mortuary rites of the deceased which are important from the point of view of ensuring the deceased a proper rebirth. He plays a crucial role in society by possessing special powers which helps him to see how a person is put to death by an evil spirit, and even to make sure that the spirit of the dead body successfully reaches heaven (Ray, 1961). In the tribal society he thus acts as a mediator between the two world, that of the humans and that of the spirits.

With the coming of the saint Chaitanya to the region, which is now known as Jharkhand, there was a noted change in the religious belief and the cultural traditions of the tribal society. With his teachings, a lot of the people took up Vaishnavism as their religion. People of the Kol tribe already had ideas of Lord Krishna. With the preaching of Chaitanya, a considerable part of the population started adopting the religious principles of Vaishnavism. In the scrolls of the *Jadu-Patuas* of this region thus, along with the popular depiction of the myth of creation, the *Chakshudan* scrolls, and other mythological stories, there are also scrolls depicting the historical situation of the time period when Vaishnavism as a religion spread among the tribes and also on the life and the teachings of Chaitanya (Bhowmik, 1999). Nowadays, along with these traditional themes, the Santhal *pats* also depict non-conventional themes such as control over land and other resources by outsiders, their exploitation by the money-lenders within their myth of creation as instances of encounter with foreign modes of control and domination.

Interestingly, in terms of gender, there was never any strict division of labour between the sexes and the women were free to follow occupations of their choice. They also used to participate in the performance of the scrolls. However, in recent times, with their growing conversion, there have been noticed an increase of restrictions in terms of their movement and choices in social life. Women are mostly restricted to the

household, and although they help in the creation of scrolls, very few women go out in the villages for performances.

Summary

In an age marked by 'mechanical reproduction', the gigantic growth of the forms of mass media, both in form, marked by developments in technology, and expansion in terms of outreach, art has in most of the societies lost its utilitarian value and has become a commodity. Unlike the 'high' art which were used in courts and temples, folk art was a part of the social community. It played an important role in the society as a vehicle of communication. As discussed before, with the growth of the television, cinema, mobile phones, and the internet, the global cultural order has witnessed a great transformation. With the technology reaching out to the rural areas, the folk cultures of these areas have also undergone immense change. In this light, the folk as well as the tribal scroll painters and narrators of West Bengal and Jharkhand continue to keep this tradition alive and thus act as the culture keepers of society.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIAL IDENTITY OF THE SCROLL PAINTERS

Notions of culture and identity become very important features for understanding the social and political processes and institutions of a society. In Indian society, even today, caste remains as a significant marker of both individual and group identity. “When we think of India it is hard not to think of caste...A long history of writing, from the grand treatise of Abbe Dubois to the general anthropology of Louis Dumont, or from the desultory observations of Portuguese adventurers in the sixteenth century to the eye-catching headlines of the *New York Times*, has identified caste as the basic form and expression of Indian society.”(Dirks, 1992: 56).

The scroll painters or *Patuas* come from particular socio-cultural and economic backgrounds and thus knowledge of their position within the social structure in particular and within the society in general, and also of their socio-historical conditions, become relevant in order to gain a complete understanding of the scroll paintings. This study does not aim to look at scroll paintings simply as forms of folk art. Therefore, an appreciation of the socio-historical and cultural conditions of which they are a product, which forms the matter of their content, is important. An exploration of the socio-cultural conditions of the painters or the *Patuas* is hence pertinent in order to make sense of the impact of societal and historical conditions on this form of painting, especially its content, and also the power that these *Patuas* have, irrespective of their ‘low’ status in society, to construct and recreate knowledge, as well as to comprehend the influence that these forms of art have on the identity of the painters themselves. The main objective of this chapter is thus to highlight on the religious and ethnic identity of the *Patuas* or the scroll painters, who seem to occupy an interesting midway position between Hindus and Muslims in terms of their personal identity⁹.

⁹ For a background on the socio-historical and cultural conditions of the *Patuas*, it is very necessary to look into the factor of caste, as this particular social institution has serious impact on the religious and ethnic identity. Moreover, every caste is associated with a traditional and hereditary occupation, which has an impact on the social status of the people in the society. This chapter thus looks into the phenomenon of caste, in relation to their prescription of certain hereditary occupations which, even

THE CONCEPT OF 'CASTE': AN INTRODUCTION:

Caste as a social phenomenon, to begin with, is highly complex in nature, and cannot be identified through the help of a single compact definition. There exists a vast body of literature on caste over the ages, exploring the concept of caste in different ways, emphasizing on their common features, their developments through time, their particular characteristics, and their impact on other social institutions. Different scholars have identified different features and characteristics of the phenomenon at various points of time. Definition of the concept itself has been highly debated. There have been many reformers who have tried to get rid of the system, from time to time. In the period of colonialism, these reforms took a major shape, with social thinker from all parts of India undertook various measure to get rid of the social evil of the caste system. These culture interpreters of the society including Swami Vivekananda, Raja Rammohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule, B. R. Ambedkar, M.K. Gandhi, and others attempted to show the population the evils that this social order promulgated, and the negative effects that it had on the development of society. While Gandhi upheld the principle of Satyagraha as the strongest weapon of any human being, and condemned the practice of untouchability, Dr. Ambedkar realised that there was no way out of the hierarchical system except to come out of it and negate it. It was in this light that he along with his followers converted to Buddhism. Swami Vivekananda believed that the greatest form of prayer was labour and that there was no distinction between sacred and secular. True castes he believed were the congregation of those of particular natural tendency. It was only when these diversions degenerated into castes in the form of iron-bound groups that it became problematic. The caste system was thus according to him a trade guild and not a religious institution. The solution lied according to him in raising the 'lower' up to the 'higher' rather than bring down those higher to lower position (Swami Vivekananda, 1989).

In the academic field of the social sciences, one of the early writings on caste was developed by Govind Sadashiv Ghurye, one of the founders of sociology in India. In his classic work, '*Caste and Race in India*', he elaborated on the phenomenon of caste by illustrating the prominent factors underlying it. Unaffected by modern and

though may not be practiced today, still manage to have a serious impact on the religious and social identity of the community traditionally associated with it.

contemporary ideas of duties and rights, Indian society based on the caste system, was marked by a number of features. First, the society was not homogenous and was divided into segments or caste groups, admission to which was determined only by birth. Different caste groups occupied differing degrees of social status, and any chance of social intercourse between them on equal terms was forbidden. Each caste group had a particular governing body with arrangements for meting out justice to its fellow members. Second, these caste groups were ordered in a hierarchical manner, with varying degrees of status for different castes, although social precedence among caste occupying the middle rung of the hierarchy were unclear and differed from place to place. Third, interactions in terms of food and social intercourse between these groups were marked by several restrictions. The notion of pollution and ritual purity was central in this regard, and this idea did not just restrict itself in terms of food, but also to ideas of pollution by touch or even by shadow. Fourth, as can be observed from the features mentioned above, segregation of the different castes in a village ensured civil privileges for certain castes while causing religious and civil disabilities for the other 'lower' castes in the village. Separate caste groups resided in separate quarters of the village. Strict codes of conduct governed the behaviour of the 'lower' castes in terms of clothing, housing pattern, their usage of roads and other public spaces, and their performance of rituals as they were considered to be one of the greatest sources of pollution. Fifth, usually each caste was associated with a hereditary occupation, and the freedom to choose any career was not viewed as something right. However, apart from the castes at each end of the social structure, the ones in the middle order had relatively more freedom in their choice of occupations from agriculture, trading, or performing military services. Attention was given to prevent the members of the respective caste groups from taking up professions which were degrading, and would lead to a loss in their social and ritual status. Finally, these caste groups were further divided into sub-castes, which were endogamous in nature (Ghurye, 1932).

This aspect of strict restrictions on marriage, is in fact one of the most evident and dominant features of a caste society, although due to the existence of hypergamy, exceptions to this rule are found at a few place. The elements of hierarchy and status, traditional occupation, and civil and religious privileges and disabilities, refer to the

caste as a whole. The remaining features of restrictions on food, on social or communal, and ritual life and the rules pertaining to endogamy, all refer to the sub-caste. For Ghurye, every caste is divided into smaller groups which are endogamous in nature. These groups, known as sub-castes, form the real units of the caste system and the genuine basis of the fabric of Indian society. These sub-castes however, accepted the existence of the caste system as a whole, and their own interdependence, in terms of the social and economic life of the groups in the village which helped in maintaining civic relations with one another although in a relation of subordination and super-ordination, and prevented these sub-castes from dividing the entire system into independent units and becoming exclusive groups (Ghurye, 1932).

On the subject of caste, the contribution of the French sociologist Louis Dumont is unquestionable. In his classic work, entitled '*Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste Structure and its Implications*', Dumont held the view that the political and economic domains of social life assumed a position inferior to, and was included within the religious domain, and that the central feature of the caste system revolved around the concept of purity and pollution thereby justifying and maintaining the notion of a hierarchy. Dumont referred to C. Bougle¹⁰ while mentioning the phenomenon of caste as a system of stratification which divides the entire society into a number of groups, entry to which is ascribed by birth. These groups are as such distinguished from each other and at the same time in a relation with each other by the three characteristic features of "*separation* in matters of marriage and contact, whether direct or indirect (food); *division* of labour, each group having, in theory or by tradition, a profession from which their members can depart only within certain limits; and finally *hierarchy*, which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to one another" (Dumont, 1980: 21). But apart from this preliminary explanation, caste as such is such a multifaceted phenomenon that, generalizing it on the basis of some characteristics is extremely problematic and confusing. The caste which appears to be a unified group externally, when seen from within, it shows that even a particular caste is a complex group containing several sub-groups of diverse order and levels, which are attached to different occupations and different rules concerning endogamy. The whole, thus Dumont states, should not be viewed in terms of their constitutive elements, but

¹⁰ Bougle, C. (1958). Contributions to Indian Sociology. II.

instead, as a system in which certain principles govern the functioning and the arrangement of its fluid elements. The main ideological principle of this system revolves around the concept of the 'pure' and the 'impure'. The entire caste system is thus founded on the hierarchical coexistence of these two principles, more precisely on the superiority of the pure to the impure. All the features of the caste system exist to ensure this separation of the pure from the impure. This opposition is then manifested in the polarity of the two extreme categories of the Brahmins and the 'Untouchables'. It is the association and consequent specialization of certain groups in impure tasks, whether in practice or in theory, that leads to the attribution of the label of impurity. Moreover, as these groups are hereditary in nature, this notion of impurity assumes a permanent character and stays with them. Hierarchy for Dumont is thus the essential value underlying caste system and he views this system as 'a series of successive dichotomies' where the caste groups are partitioned on grounds of their birth, their social functions, and consequently the differential forms of treatment that they are given. (Dumont, 1980).

A discussion of caste, its transition through the ages and its present form and function, is incomplete without including the contribution of M. N. Srinivas, who spent a lifetime researching on the phenomenon of caste. He defined caste, "as a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group, having a traditional association with an occupation, and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed, among other things, by the concept of pollution and purity, and generally, maximum commensality occurs within the caste." (Srinivas, 1962: 3). This definition and its stress on the unchanging social boundaries of the social groups is however problematic as Srinivas goes on to show that caste as an institution in present-day India is much more complicated in nature. Every caste is further divided or segmented into several sub-castes, each of which is endogamous in nature. One of his most remarkable contributions to this theme is the concept of 'Sanskritization', which he first developed in his work, *'Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India'* (1952). The caste system, he believed, was a rigid system with each caste occupying a fixed position. The possibility of movement was however not totally absent, especially in the middle ranks of the hierarchical structure. A 'low' caste could thus ascend to a higher status or a higher position in the hierarchy by

adopting the food habits and other lifestyle practices of high castes, in most cases, the Brahmans, and by Sanskritizing its rituals also. In other words, it referred to the taking up the customs, beliefs, practices, and rites of the Brahmans, along with the adoption of their entire lifestyle as far as possible, although such a movement was forbidden in the religious texts. This process is what Srinivas refers to as 'Sanskritization'. Alongwith the imitation of the Brahmanical mode of life, it is the dominant caste which plays an important role in advancing or retarding the process of Sanskritization. Thus, castes occupying the highest position in the caste ladder are more Sanskritized than castes occupying the lower and the middle levels of the hierarchy, and this has led to the Sanskritization of lower castes as well outlying tribes. Although the existence of a ban on the adoption of Brahmanical practices by the lower castes has prevailed on a theoretical level, in practice it has not been so effective and Brahmanical customs and way of life has spread over all Hindus and even some tribes. This process of Sanskritization has been at the core of Srinivas' writings on the condition of caste in contemporary times. On the present condition of the phenomenon of caste, Srinivas has observed a weakening of caste ties vertically, to be accompanied by the growth in the caste ties horizontally. Thus, unlike Dumont, Srinivas maintained that a distinction was necessary or essential, for purposes of sociological analysis, between caste at a political level and that of caste at a social and ritual level (Srinivas, 1962).

N. K. Bose however, viewed at this problem from a different perspective. According to him, while studying ancient Indian society, one should have a scientific outlook and thus not merely look at its exploitation, but instead look out for what this exploitation is for, and treat it as a social fact under observation, in order to get a fruitful result. As for the phenomenon of the caste system, he believed that the actual ideal on the basis of which Hindu society was constructed was never realised and thus the productive system on which caste occupation was based on, was never emphasized. The economic system has been the backbone of the *varna* system. *Varna* system according to Bose was a social order which ensured a functional order in society, by making sure that all the different castes were subservient to society. Thus through his work he argued that although the evil side of the traditional caste system should be brought to justice and dealt with, its aspect of production and social

solidarity and its regulation of the relationship between individual and society should also be acknowledged (Bose, 1975).

CASTE, VARNA AND JATI:

As mentioned earlier, in the body of literature available on the subject of caste, there have been major debates on the overlapping terms of *varna* and *jati*. The relationship between these two terms is so strong, that sometimes they lead to confusion. But, regardless of the connection between the two concepts, there exists a considerable amount of difference between them, and for any study on caste, a detailed recognition of the relationship between these two concepts is very essential. Sociologist G. S. Ghurye elaborated on the terms of *varna* and *jati* through a description of caste through ages. He presented a historical trajectory of the caste system by dividing the ages into four phases, namely the Vedic age, the post-Vedic period, followed by the period dominated by the *Dharma-shashtras*, and the modern period up to the nineteenth century. According to him, the earliest reference to what is known as the four castes of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra, was found in one of the later hymns of the Rig Veda, the *Purushasukta*, as four orders or four classes, emanating from different parts of the body of the Purusha, or the Primeval Being. Varna in the early Vedic age meant colour and was used to differentiate between Arya and the Dasa. It was only later that these four classes were called four Varnas. In the later Vedic age, this distinction between the Arya and the Dasa was drawn to demarcate between Arya and Shudra. *Varna* thus came to be associated with caste. In the post-Vedic period, *jati* was used as a term to refer to the numerous sub-divisions of a *varna*. Along with the mention of the four varnas, Ghurye revealed that in this period, mention was also made of certain 'mixed castes' and also out-cast classes. Ghurye stated that the term *jati* was also used as a vernacular expression referring to caste. The word is however also found in many instances, as being used indiscriminately, while referring to *varna* (Ghurye, 1932).

According to the French sociologist Dumont, an elaboration on the relationship between the concepts of *varna*, caste, and *jati* is very essential and relevant in the study of the caste system of India. The relation between caste and the traditional

theory of *varna* is important when one notices the dominance of the discussion of the *varnas* in all classical literature, and even its prominence in the current day, where caste is still defined in terms of the *varna* theory. This transition Dumont believed could be understood from the homology present between the two systems, both of which are structural in nature. The model of *varna* reflects hierarchy in a simple way and illustrates it in a manner which is universal throughout India, as compared to the proliferation of castes and sub-castes, which makes comparison of different places possible. For an analysis of the caste system, Dumont refers to the traditional theory of *varna*. He remarked that irrespective of mutual differences, on the whole, the *varna* system implied a kind of homogeneity between the twice-born, who are then differentiated from the *Shudra* who does not have details of duties or occupational choices assigned, apart from their only duty being to “obey or serve” (Dumont, 1980: 68) without envy. This, according to Dumont revealed a contrast between the *varna* hierarchy and the caste system, as in the latter, the twice-born castes could not be clubbed together as being essentially homogenous. One of the striking contrasts of the traditional theory of *varna* with the caste system is the former’s emphasis on function rather than on birth. Dumont claimed that what the traditional texts described as *varna*, must have been a caste system in its initial years. As for the term *jati*, it was meant to refer to groups which were born out of the ‘mixing of *varnas*’ which gave rise to mixed categories, which occupied an inferior position in terms of hierarchy (Dumont, 1980).

According to sociologist M. N. Srinivas, influenced by the structural-functionalist tradition, explaining the caste system in terms of *varna* had led to the oversimplification of the complex structure. He stated that rules of *varna* were too rigid to describe the caste system. As according to the *varna* theory, “caste appears as an immutable system where the place of each caste is clearly fixed for all time” (Srinivas, 1962: 8). But this cannot be taken to be true, as positions of several castes tend to be vague in the middle levels of hierarchy accompanied by mobility, although in the extreme ends, no such mobility is allowed. Studies also show that the traditional ritual position of a caste has undergone change alongwith the acquisition of political power. Srinivas hence, rightly opined that there was considerable difference between the concepts of *varna* and the “ethnographic reality” as is seen in terms of caste.

Unlike the simple division of the four orders, Indian society accounts for the presence of a vast number of castes, with sub-groups in every linguist area. This *varna* scheme, according to Srinivas, thus speaks only of the broad categories of society and does not reflect the effective and real units present in it. In fact, even for a description of the broad categories of Indian society, the *varna* scheme is misleading as it does not account for the groups as members of the society, which fall outside the fourfold division as mentioned in the classical religious texts. Srinivas' study explaining the social mobility of various caste and even some tribes clearly shows the limitations of the fourfold classification as expounded by the *varna* theory, thereby also revealing how this model of classification has led to the misinterpretation of caste system as it exists in reality (Srinivas, 1962).

Thus for both Dumont and Srinivas, there existed a stark difference between the theoretical concept of *varna* and the ethnographic reality of caste. As about the concept of *jati*, it is used to refer to the various sub-divisions of a *varna*. *Jati* in this sense thus refers to the caste divisions within a *varna*. A conceptual clarity of these terms is thus very essential for an understanding of the social institution of caste as it exists among the scroll painters of West Bengal and Jharkhand.

CASTE SYSTEM AND THE DIVISION OF LABOUR:

The division of labour in a society reveals a lot about its structure. In order to get a better picture of the caste system as it existed in India, and as it does today, an understanding of the division of labour is significant. This is more so because in this case, the system itself regulates and sets down particular categories of occupations for separate caste groups, which are deemed to be hereditary in nature, and deviation from which is not encouraged and not viewed as something right. Caste has been one of the most prominent indicators of religious and social identity in India. One of the major features of the caste system is the restriction on the choice of occupation. Specific caste groups are allotted specific occupations with regard to their status in the hierarchy. The castes occupying the lowest ranks in the hierarchy are associated with professions that are regarded as defiling and polluting by the upper castes, who engage themselves in occupations which are ritually pure, requires superior skills, and

confers a high status in society. The caste system therefore enforces organic solidarity in society, with different caste groups engaged in different occupations, thus leading to specialization of jobs and consequently, interdependence in society. The most important proof of this division of labour is the existence of the *jajmani*¹¹ system in India. Barter system prevailed in this society, and the role of money was negligible. Patron-client system of relations existed, where one specialized caste performed jobs for other castes, in return for services from these other castes. This interdependence however did not mean harmony among the castes. The *jajmani* system too reflected hierarchy. Interdependence was again regulated by strict norms which controlled the social interaction of the different castes. The division of labour hence reinforced the hierarchical structure of the caste system by segmenting groups in different occupations, based on their social standing and their ritual status in the caste system. In turn, this division of caste-groups in terms of occupational choices influenced their status in the hierarchy. A discussion of this division of labour based on organic solidarity as encouraged by the caste system is thus important while considering questions of religious and social identity or groups or individuals in society.

As observed by G. S. Ghurye, a caste or a group of castes usually associated themselves with a particular occupation or a particular group of occupations which they considered as hereditary and, a deviation from which was not socially encouraged. Each caste-group had a hereditary occupation which was backed by religious sanctions. However, Ghurye also accounted for a group of occupations including agriculture, trading, or military services, which were considered as being eligible, to be performed by almost any group. What was more important was to keep a check on the choice of occupations of any member within a particular caste-group in order to prevent them from engaging in tasks that were socially degrading in nature. Apart from the social check from fellow members of the caste-group, and the moral restraints, there existed restrictions imposed on them by other castes who did not allow people belonging to other castes to follow their hereditary occupations. He referred to the Census Reports of 1901 to show the existence of different caste-groups

¹¹ The *Jajmani* system in India existed as a kind of exchange system in the villages before the influx of the monetary system in the market. As the entire population was divided in terms of caste differences and separate but hereditary occupations, the *jajmani* system existed in the form of patron-client relationships, with the castes being interdependent on each other for their exclusive services.

practising occupations apart from their own, or with several caste-groups sharing the same traditional occupation. Although there are restrictions set on the fellow members of each caste-group by their rules and customs, they may be viewed as dictum stating that the occupation assigned to each group is permitted to a preference and therefore, every profession, apart from a few exceptions, is open to individuals from all caste-groups. In this respect, Ghurye quoted Baines to reflect on the position that although the relationship between caste and occupation has been a traditional one, backed by the classical theories and the ritual texts, they do not determine the profession of everyone or even some of the members of the caste group in the present day (Ghurye, 1932).

Keeping in line with Emile Durkheim, Louis Dumont also believed in the importance of the 'whole' and accordingly focussed on the ways in which the interaction between the different individuals and groups took place to ensure social solidarity. The caste system in India, with the caste-groups composing it belonging to different categories of occupations theoretically and ritually assigned to them, presented a model of organic solidarity. Dumont thus believed that the caste system for its survival required the specialization and interdependence of the groups constituting it. He referred to Hocart in saying that caste and occupation are interlinked through the institution of religion, whose evidence can be seen in professions of the priest, barber, or the washerman. One's occupation was deterministic of one's relative purity in the caste structure, although certain professions were considered to be religiously neutral and were thus followed by many different castes. Unlike Ghurye, who accounted for a gap between the traditional theory prescribing separate occupations for separate castes and sub-castes and the actual occupations of these groups in contemporary times, Dumont focussed more on the use of hereditary personal relationships in order to express the division of labour, regulating exchange between the patron and the client in a manner which was in accordance with the norms and customs. He distinguished between two types of castes, based on their profession. One of them he called the functional castes, which were traditionally associated with a particular profession, which actually preceded them or resulted in their formation. The other type concerned those castes whose relation to their occupation was a matter of accident but of long standing (Dumont, 1980).

Ghurye in this context, added the significance of linguistic aspects in terms of a caste's relation to its occupation, and thus stated that caste names were quite often the names of professions or trades, although tribal names, names of sects, and others were also found, and also sub-castes were not named after their hereditary occupation and instead were a product of territorial distinctions. This accounting of differences on the basis of profession was one of the ways in which the caste of the group was designated, although this designation was more 'attributive' in nature, or something which was external, and not effective, as all the members of the particular caste were not compelled to follow the hereditary occupation (Ghurye, 1932). About the *jajmani* system, Dumont stated that there were certain principles which governed the system of prestations and counter-prestations carried out by all the castes as a whole in the village, as opposed to the monetary system of exchange. Even within the middle ranks, this form of exchange was not based on egalitarian grounds but was instead marked clearly by understandable categories of rank and also by totally contrasting functions or duties of the patron and the client. Hence, for Dumont, these religious prestations and economic prestations were interconnected and interdependent, and this interdependence took place within the prescribed religious order. Power also played a major role in determining the relationship between caste and professions. For the dominant caste of a village, whose economic and political power enabled it to achieve a superior position than the other castes, the relationship between caste and profession was unimportant. The position of the other castes in the village in this regard, is then dependent on their relationship with the dominant caste. As for the intermediary castes, this link between profession and caste was weak, while for the lower castes whose choices were limited in terms of profession, the relation between caste and profession was quite strong (Dumont, 1980).

As for M. N. Srinivas, studies conducted still show the prevalence of continuity in certain areas and among certain groups, between rural and urban occupations. In villages as well as in urban areas, he mentioned, certain groups still practice their traditional occupations or something similar to it, thus maintaining and carrying forth the hierarchical attitudes associated with it. For those who migrated to the cities, alongside maintaining the traditional occupation, they also reside in settlements inhabiting their caste fellows. For the educated and urbanised population however,

this notion of a hereditary occupation does not hold much value. Industrialization, Srinivas declared, required certain types of socio-economic relationships, which were in conflict. The development of communication, legal system, health, literacy, industries during this period of colonization, noted a marked change in the social interaction of the people and the social life in the villages. Every village in colonial India became a part of the wider political community and the economy. The entry of money into the villages improved the economic condition of the lower castes and thus had a positive impact on their social condition as Sanskritization became prominent. Srinivas added that there was a strong coherence between the ritual and economic aspects of the hierarchy. The lower castes were still economically dependent on the higher castes, and this prevented them from achieving a higher social and economic status. Again, those castes which were at an economically or politically favourable position, were able to raise themselves in the ritual hierarchy and thus in their overall social status.

CASTE IN PRE-COLONIAL INDIA:

The origin of the institution of caste has been highly researched by sociologists, anthropologists, Indologists, and early colonial ethnographers alike. A brief trajectory of the phenomenon as such is therefore essential to understand its present power and relevance in the contemporary world.

From its mention in one of the earliest written bodies of Hindu scriptures, the *Purushasukta*, to the present day, the institution of caste has undergone a lot of transformations. Although even in the present-day context, the influence and impact of the caste system can be seen in several aspects of social life, the meaning and function of the phenomenon has of course changed from its situation in traditional, pre-industrial Indian society.

In the Rig-Veda, the term *varna* was not used to refer to any of the classes. It was only used to refer to the *Arya varna* and its contrasting pole, the *Dasa varna*. *Jati* as a term was used in this post-Vedic period to denote the numerous sub-divisions of a *varna*. On this, Ghurye claimed that *jati* as a term was also the vernacular term for a

'caste'. This was followed by the Brahmanic literature of the post-Vedic period, focussing on the '*varna-dharma*' or the specific duties and regulations associated with the four *varnas*, governing their individual and social life, and the period of the *Dharmashashtra*, the philosophy of *Manu* and *Yajnavalkya*, that the solidarity of a caste as a unit of social organisation became more prominent and recognised. After this period dominated by the Dharmashashtras, one could see the gradual rise of caste-organisations with the pattern similar to the ones found in the nineteenth century. Traditional occupations also got modified, while in terms of marriage, endogamy prevailed. Reform movements in the field of religion occurred in many parts of India, thus influencing the traditional social institution of caste and altering it in many ways (Ghurye, 1932).

Pre-colonial India was a somewhat 'feudal' type of society, with the majority of the population residing in villages and a few living in the cities. This city life again, did not mean a radical break from a traditional way of life. Village economy was based on subsistence, where barter system prevailed and role of money was negligible. Status was attained by birth, and caste determined rights and duties of individuals and determined relationship between individuals and groups in the society. As for the political domain, there existed local chieftains who were given power by a king, or an emperor. Relations between chieftains were mostly characterized by warfare and were thus very unstable in nature. Castes in the village were independent. Each caste was aware of solidarity within the group itself, and also of solidarity with other castes. Besides, several neighbouring villages were also bound together by ties of kinship, ritual and economy. It was only with the coming of the British and their improvement in the fields of printing, postal services, newspapers, books, the telegraph, buses and railways that rapid improvements occurred in the field of communication thus facilitating the growth of the horizontal solidarity of a caste (Srinivas, 1962).

CASTE IN COLONIAL INDIA:

According to the Indologists, as the creation of modern nation-states in Europe in around the eighteenth century was accompanied with the formation and the growth of civil society in the form of churches, educational institutions, civic organisations;

similarly caste, in the Indian context, was already a kind of civil society, in the sense that it resisted political interference and regulated the private domain. But Nicholas Dirks, in his work, "*Castes of Mind*", stated that this could surely not be the case, as caste unlike the civil society in the West, resisted the growth of any kind of social institutions which reformed the old or promised to bring about social change (Dirks, 1992).

Dirks asserted that the concept of caste, as it is used today, is somewhat a product of colonial rule rather than being an institution of ancient Indian society. Colonialism thus had a deep impact on Indian society in that it created new forms of society which were taken to be traditional. Social identity was a complex and political matter involving several referents like "temple communities, territorial groups, lineage segments, family units, royal retinues, warrior subcastes, occupational reference groups" etc, of which caste was one of the categories (Dirks, 1992: 59). This institution was too redefined and reconstituted by further factors of village, region, kinship groups, etc. Dirks added that it was colonialism which created what is now recognized the Indian tradition, including the hierarchical caste structure with the Brahmin at the top, with village based systems of exchange, a nominal amount of ceremonial remains of the former state, and with fetishist competition for ritual goods which no longer had any value or played any role in the political system of that time (Dirks, 1992).

Caste in colonial India was recorded as an important source of evidence detailing the customs of the people of India, which was then made available for all kinds of governmental activities. The introduction of the census further strengthened this usage of caste by installing it as the most fundamental unit of India's social structure. As for the individuals, Dirks noted that for colonial anthropology, they had simply become the 'body', which in the pre-colonial times was subjected by tradition, and which in the colonial period could be measured by science as nothing but a body, explained without any reference to the mind, will, or agency. Anthropometry was used as the main device in the survey carried out in different regions of India, to collect physical data about caste and tribes. The concept of race was also linked to the institution of caste, and it was this phenomenon of caste which was believed to determine the social, cultural, moral, biological and economic characteristics of all their members.

The results of these surveys were also used in the early years of Indian nationalism to curb popular agitations, alongside justifying the colonial assumption about the futility of Indian nationalism and thus the utility of the colonial rule. Thus, caste acquired new forms and new meanings in the colonial period, in addition to the politicization of invented forms of caste in the census, in the development and implementation of legal codes, in the introduction of the revenue systems, and in the appropriation and reinterpretation of Indian tradition (Dirks, 1992).

Caste was in this context viewed in religious terms and social stratification was seen as a religious phenomenon. Educated Indians, in order to balance India's inferior position in terms of economic and political development to the West, portrayed the view that Indians were relatively spiritually superior. Max Weber, Henry Maine, C. Bougle, Louis Dumont, all those writing on Indian society agreed that caste was viewed as a religious institution. Early sociological writings also revealed that the prevailing assumption that in respect to Hinduism, religion and social structure were inseparable, and thus Hinduism as such stood not only for a particular religion, but also for a particular kind of social structure which dominated the Indian scene, that being the caste system. It was with the British ethnographies of the early twentieth century, the existing view of the Hindu spirituality as occupying a superior position as compared to the West, by and large disappeared (Beteille, 1996). The process of Westernization also resulted in the formation of a new and secular caste system superimposed on the earlier one, in which the British occupied the highest position, the Brahmins the second position, and the others at the base (Srinivas, 1962). Hence, "Brahmins looked up to the British, and the rest of the people looked up to both the Brahmins and the British." (Srinivas, 1962: 51).

Unlike in pre-colonial India, it was with the development of communication and literacy together with developments in the field of science and technology, leading to the growth of roads and railways, and media in the form of press and the radio in colonial India that Sanskritization spread over to all those areas which were previously inaccessible. The introduction of the new legal system, the new judicial system and the new form of government marked by parliamentary democracy, all based on western ideals and values also played a major role in increasing this social process of Sanskritization throughout the country. Occupational specialization, which

was a very important factor responsible for the maintenance of the caste system, gradually started getting blurred as increasing number of Brahmin priests started taking up secular jobs. The need for using the available technology like electronic lights, radios, cycles, water taps, along with changes in their dress patterns, forced them to loosen their beliefs and ideas on ritual purity and pollution (Srinivas, 1962). This further coupled with advancements in the field of education and legal rights, led to the growth of caste journals, caste hospitals and cooperative societies led to strengthening of caste ties horizontally. The forces of urbanization and Westernization broke the isolation of the village and enabled social change to occur in however limited way possible. Every village in colonial India became a part of the wider political community and the economic network. The entry of money into the villages improved the economic condition of the lower castes and encouraged Sanskritization to take place. The lifting of the previously set territories by the chieftains, led to a gradual fading away of the feudal order and thus the growth of caste ties horizontally (Srinivas, 1962).

CASTE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA:

On the subject of caste, and particularly on the problems of continuity and change in terms of the phenomenon itself, there has been wide debate. In this matter, both anthropologists and sociologists have been more confident about structural continuity rather than contemporary change. Critically assessing the phenomenal contribution of Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, C. J. Fuller stated that even in modern day there were many villages which were cut off from urban influences and had not witnessed almost any kind of development be it in the field of agriculture, education or infrastructure, and also negligible social change since independence, while also mentioning of other villages which had experienced considerable change from traditional times and where the institution of caste had become a lot different in form and function than the earlier ethnographic records. He states that castes are still being constructed historically, with the vertically integrated forms of relationships based on hierarchy transforming into horizontal ethnic groups. Under these circumstances, the social fact of caste has become all the more vague,

with growing ambiguities in matters of definition of their social identity by the individuals themselves, as well as their views in relation to the identification of others (Fuller, 1996).

This phenomenon of caste undoubtedly exists in matters of endogamy as well as its increasing importance in politics. However, it is not found in the form of a complete system as before. Carrying forward one's hereditary occupation is still strong among cultivators, artisans and others inhabiting the rural areas. Even in urban areas, where the impact of the caste system has weakened considerably, endogamy and traditional rules of marriage have maintained and reproduced identities of castes and sub-castes. Nevertheless, on the whole, there has been a more permissive attitude towards inter-caste marriages although most of them are instances found among the urban educated people in the higher occupational strata. The percolation of caste in the political arena has also led to caste being recognised as 'ethnic groups' or as 'ethnic identities' and 'ethnic loyalties' (Beteille, 1996). The Constitutional abolition of 'Untouchability', together with the provision of reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, have been some of the measures taken to ensure an egalitarian social order in the country. In contemporary times, caste has strengthened itself in State politics, and their entry into the democratic and industrial processes have not led to their extinction. Although there have been attempts to condemn this use of caste-links for elections, reports of elections of the Panchayats and the different municipalities in recent years still show the significance of caste considerations in matters related to the voting behaviour and thus its increasing significance and growth in activities relating to the political life of the country (Srinivas, 1962).

Caste has been one of the most prominent indicators of social and religious identity in Indian society. Whether in the case of pre-colonial India, or the contemporary situation of the country, caste remains as an important social institution affecting and influencing interaction and social status in Indian society. Although, as Beteille rightly observes that the traditional form of the caste structure has undergone massive change, there have also been new contexts for the reproduction of caste groups and caste-based identities. One of the basic themes of this phenomenon centres on the concept of ritual purity and pollution, on the basis of which different groups are divided into castes which get arranged in a hierarchical structure. Whatever the

origins may be, the institution of caste has no doubt undergone severe transformations and alterations throughout the ages, from its role in the pre-industrial Indian society to the contemporary situation. Quite contrary to the prevailing assumptions held by many, that traditional Indian society has always been static and it is only through its connection with modernity that it has undergone changes, it has been found that the aspect of social change in Indian society has always been there. The institution of caste has always shared a very important relation with its related notion of prescribed hereditary occupations for each caste groups. Most hereditary occupations have been backed by religious sanctions. Occupation as such has been a major determinant of the relative purity of a caste group in the hierarchy. In many cases, castes have been named after their hereditary occupation. Although in the present-day, for the industrialized, urbanized population, the notion of hereditary occupation does not hold any significance, there still exist certain groups in the rural areas which continue to practice their traditional profession, even as a secondary source of living. For many others, who have moved on to pursuing other 'modern' occupations, their long standing relation with their hereditary occupation have influenced on their social and religious identities.

This section thus focuses primarily on this relation between the caste and the notion of hereditary occupation and its impact on the social identity of the scroll painters of West Bengal and Jharkhand. Taking into account that most of the scroll painters have taken up other occupations which are more profitable, this chapter then tries to show how this very idea of association with a common hereditary occupation has resulted in the maintenance and assertion of social identity of the community of *Patuas* in West Bengal and Jharkhand, how it has justified their peculiar intermediary position between the two religious communities, and has allowed them to perform the role of legitimate transmitters of tradition in Indian society.

THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY:

Before engaging in a discussion about caste-based occupations and social identity, it is important to understand the context in which the idea of identity has been used. The term 'identity' has been used in various ways in contemporary social science, thus revealing its variations across the disciplines in its theoretical importance and position, and in its conceptual meanings. Hence, while some use it to refer to the culture of a nation or group or collectivity, for others it is used in the sense of referring to social identity of a group, and for others still, it is used in a sense to refer to parts of a self, comprising of meanings which they attach to their multiple roles in the society.

One of the earliest theories on the theme of identity was traced by George Herbert Mead, who emphasized on the concepts of 'society' and 'self' and stated that it was society which influenced and shaped the individual self, and this in turn influenced and shaped social behaviour. Identity was thus constructed in this manner with the projection of the self to the others. Mead's concept of the 'generalized other' in this sense is useful as it refers to a social group or community which gives to the individual a sense of identity. This taking up of the attitudes of the community or social group, to which an individual belongs, in terms of the organised social activity in which the group is engaged, allows the individual to develop a complete sense of self. It is through this process that the complex cooperative activities and processes in human society become possible (Mead, 1934).

The concept of identity as such has been, time and again, invented and recreated in a wide variety of theoretical frameworks in all the social and behavioural sciences. The various social movements both in India and abroad, also led to an increasing emphasis on the study of social identity of the population, in relations to the concepts of 'nation', 'caste', 'ethnicity', and 'gender'. In this situation, the idea of the community has also gained in importance, together with the category of identity have been involved in answering the larger questions on religion, ethnicity, caste politics, human rights, etc (Jodhka, 1999).

In the field of issues and debates on identity, one of the most influential theories has been constructed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. According to him, in the

course of their social life, human beings are bound to face unforeseen and unexpected events. It is at this point that a body of principles which is categorized, by integrating past experiences, that then helps through the help of perception and certain acts, in taking a proper course of action towards the solution of the problem. This strategy-generating principle is what Bourdieu calls 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977). Working according to the probabilistic logic, this 'habitus' includes "system of schemes of perception and appreciation of practices, cognitive and evaluative structures which are acquired through the lasting experience of a social position" (Bourdieu, 1989: 7). It is this concept of 'habitus' which makes available certain practices and representations for the purpose of classification. This way, it helps to make sense of one's own place as well as a sense of the place of others (Bourdieu, 1989). In is within this context of 'habitus', that the discussion of identity can be situated. The similarity of the material conditions of existence of a group or community and its common habitus, which generates both perception as well as practices, thus allows for the construction of identity¹² of the members who within their group, experience embodied sense of self. The 'habitus' of any group or community characterizes a symbolic order within which it carries out its practices, which then acts as the common cultural framework for all the members. These symbolic values are attached to cultural practices, with the 'habitus' of each group being formed by the very choice of using these values and defining oneself through them and also constructing identity by attaching oneself to these values.

Keeping the views of the idea of collective identity as forwarded by Mead, and of the postmodernist view as stated by Bourdieu as the background, the present chapter aims to explore the social identity of the scroll painters of West Bengal and Jharkhand, in terms of their religious position and their social standing.

¹² The tradition of scroll painting, the practical work associated with it which is the hereditary occupation of the scroll painters, and the relative idea of social status that comes with it, all function together as a form of 'habitus' for the community of *Patuas*, which helps in the construction of their religious and social identity.

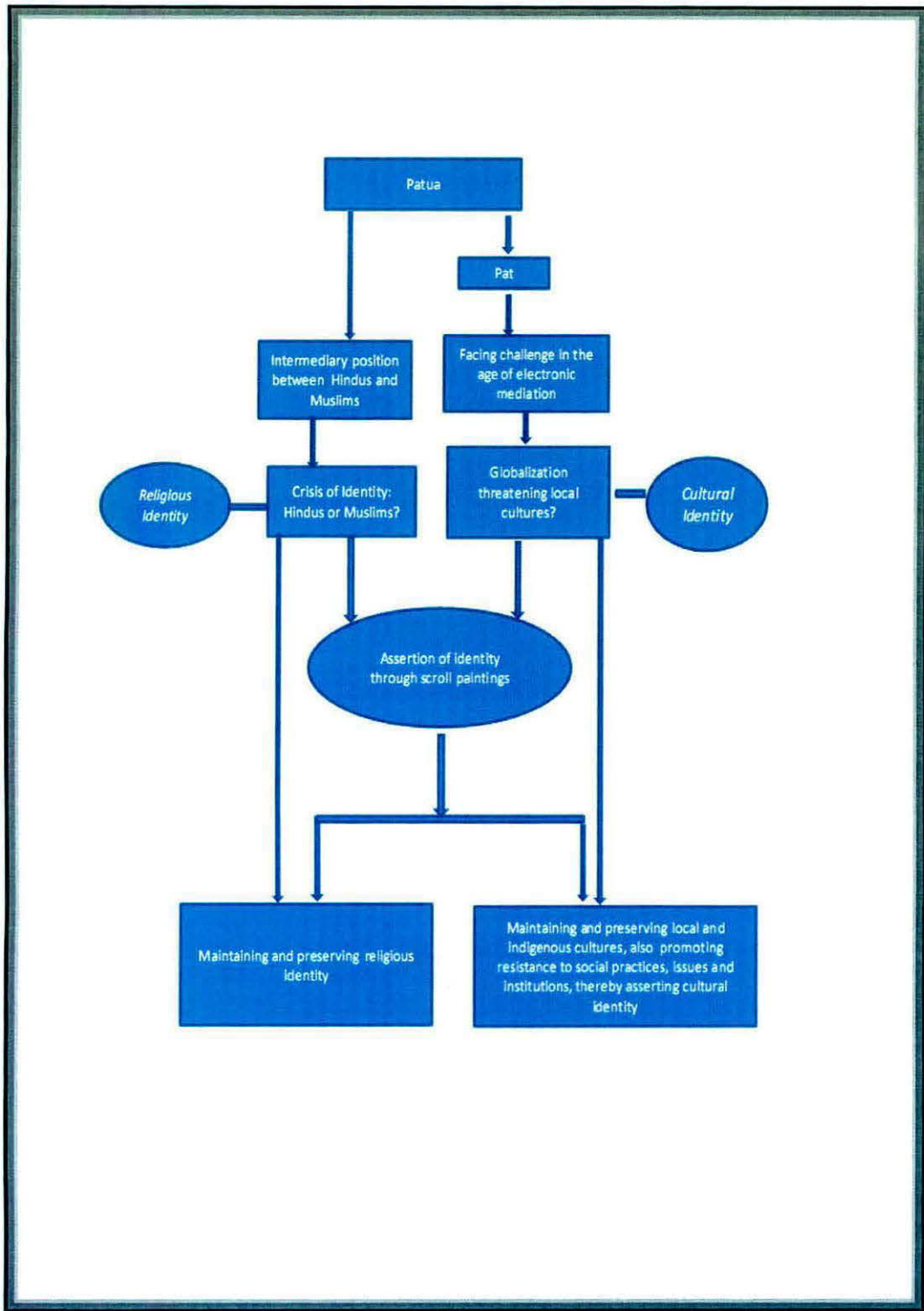


FIGURE 5: A DIAGRAMMATIC FLOWCHART OF THE TWO KINDS OF IDENTITY THAT HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED IN THE WORK.

THE SOCIAL IDENTITY OF THE *PATUAS* OR *CHITRAKARS* OF WEST BENGAL AND JHARKHAND:

The *Chitrakars* are a group of scroll painters who, in the eastern part of the country, are also known by the name *Patua*. In the states of West Bengal and certain parts of Jharkhand, the *Patuas* are an occupational group of painters, occupying an interesting position between the Hindus and the Muslims. In Jharkhand, these *Patuas* are found in those areas, primarily inhabited by the Santhal tribal population. In West Bengal, they are found in the districts of Midnapore, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Purulia, Burdwan, Nadiya, Hugli, Howrah, and Kolkata. They are associated with the traditional Hindu artisan castes as well as the Muslim community. Most of them thus have two names, one Muslim and the other Hindu. Thus, while on the one hand, this situation may be looked at as a crisis of religious identity, on the other hand, it could also be analysed how the tradition of scroll paintings, or how the customary of practice of their hereditary occupation, which is painting the scrolls and narrating them to an audience, influences or in fact helps in the assertion of their social identity in terms of religion. It is this second perspective which this study deals with, in terms of an explanation of the social identity of these scroll painters in an age of electronic mediation.

The Patuas of Bengal:

The name *Patua* originates from the word '*pat*' meaning scroll, and thus refers to the occupational group which is associated with the tradition of scroll painting and exhibiting it along with narratives. Although in recent times, these *Patuas* have taken up other professions also, they claim this traditional practice of scroll painting, storytelling and narration as their hereditary caste occupation. A detailed written record of the history of the *Patuas* is missing, but research shows their mention in the 5th century, in the dramas of Kalidasa and in those written by Banbhata in the 7th century. It is in the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, written approximately in the middle of the 13th century, that details are given on the early origin of the *Patuas*, their occupation, their caste status, etc and also of their expulsion in the 13th century from the *Naba Sayaka* caste group, to which they belonged. This group included nine castes, namely *Malakar*, *Karmakar*, *Kangsakar*, *Sankhakar*, *Kumbhakar*, *Tantubya*,

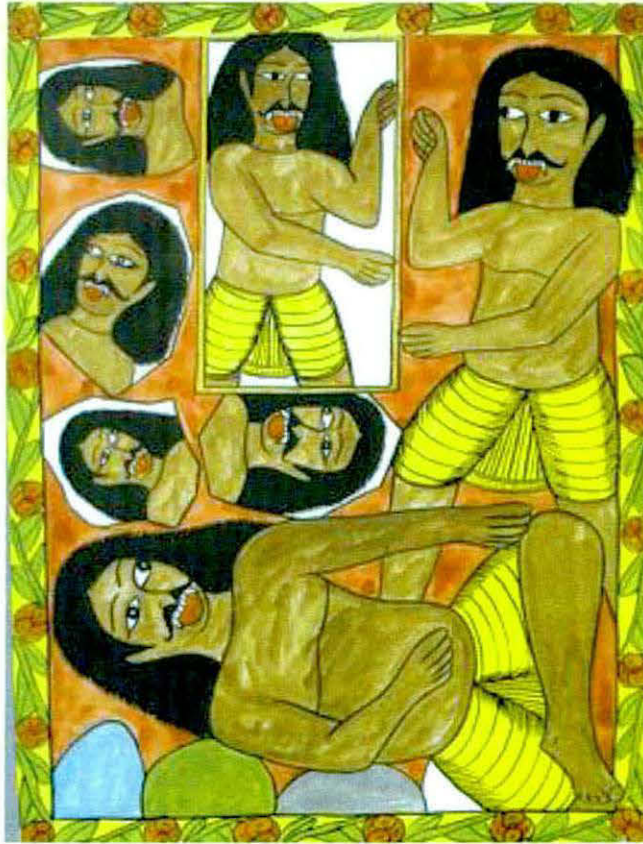


FIGURE 6: A SCROLL DEPICTING THE ORIGIN OF THE PATUAS (Ghosh, 2003)

The common myth describing the origin of this traditional practice involves the story of a monster which used to kill and eat people every night. The people of the village one day made up a plan of killing the monster by making a mirror. When the monster saw his reflection in the mirror, he got startled to see a monster as powerful and huge and hit the glass, thus causing to break it. With each broken piece reflecting the image of the monster, He got scared, thinking that they had multiplied in number, and so hit his head and wept until death. When the people came up next morning and saw the dead monster, in order to tell it to the other villages, a man came with the idea of painting the story on the leaf and performing it across villages, in return for which he was given food and other materials. This transformed his means of livelihood and he took to painting pictures on cloth, illustrating stories of the epics along with narrating them in and across villages (Ghosh, 2003).

Sutradhar, Swarnakar, and Chitrakar. Legends have it that the reason of the *Patuas*' expulsion from their traditional caste group was due to the sacrilegious act of painting of Lord Shiva without his consent and also for hiding the brush in the mouth to hide the guilt, thus leading to the pollution of brush used for the painting, and also the painting itself. On his anger, Lord Shiva thus cursed the whole *Patua* community by saying, "From today, you will become *Mlechcha* (Muslim)" (Bhattacharjee, 1980: 3). The community then fell at the feet of Lord Shiva and begged for mercy and asked Him to tell them how they could now earn their livelihood. After Shiva's anger subsided, He declared that these *Patuas* would stay neither as Hindus nor as Muslims. They would follow Islam and abide by Muslim customs in their personal life, but would earn their living by illustrating images of Hindu gods and goddesses. Leaflets published by organisations like the *Bangia Chitrakar Unnayan Samiti* and the *Bharat Seva Sangha* during the nationalist movement also quoted verses from the Purana to show that these *Chitrakars* were originally a clean caste but due to their disrespectful attitude, they lost their previous status and were regarded as Muslims. This is however the most common legend of the origin of the *Patuas*, and there are in fact a dozen of these stories justifying their peculiar position in the society (Bhattacharjee, 1980)

With their increasing Islamization¹³ in the society, the legends have also changed and increased over time. However, as Binoy Bhattacharjee's monograph on this group of scroll-painters reveals, there is no reference to the *Chitrakars* in any scripture relating to an elaboration of the caste structure of the Hindus, and the author thus rightly feels that this mention in the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* is merely a way of rationalising their unique position in the society after the Muslims came into political power (Bhattacharjee, 1980). In the book, 'Tribes and Castes of West Bengal' there is a mention of similarity between the *Chitrakars* of Bengal and that of South India. But studies show that the *Chitrakars* of Bengal are granted a social status much lower than

¹³ Binoy Bhattacharjee uses the term 'Islamization' possibly influenced from M. N. Srinivas' term Sanskritization, to refer to a process which is similar in its procedure and structure to the one described by Srinivas. Islamization was thus a social process of the *Patuas* who belonged to the 'lower' caste, to convert themselves to Muslims in order to attain a relatively higher social status. Not only an imitation of the way of life of the Muslims, but by converting their religion and by adopting their beliefs, values, habits and patterns of behaviour, the *Patuas* attempted to come out of their extremely 'low' social position. The term has however also been used by Yogendra Singh (1972).

that of the Chitrakars of South India who now belong to the “Aryya Kshatriya Varna of Chandra Vansa” (Mitra, 1953).

While certain studies show their resemblance with the other ‘lower’ castes such as the Bagdis and the Bauri of Bengal, Herbert Risley mentioned of the possibility of tribal origins of these groups. Instances of the existence of bride price, consumption of liquor on ceremonial occasions, the burial of the dead, hinted the chances of these groups having tribal links. The political organizations of the *Patuas*, their forms of justice and their nomadic nature all bore considerable traces of tribal culture. These together with other factual evidences expressed a likelihood of their tribal origin from their ancestral homeland somewhere possibly in the Chota Nagpur area of Malpaharia from where they entered into Bengal and gradually adopted the profession of scroll painting. With the coming of the Muslim rule in the then Bengal, these *Patuas* then slowly started converting into Muslims for gaining security and patronage. But this process of acculturation was still taking place when the Muslim power subsided, resulting in the reverting back of the *Patuas* to the Hinduism (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

One of the important aspects which need special mention is the fact that although the *Patuas* received patronage even from the Hindus due to their recital of the Hindu myths and epics, this apart they did not allow any kind of social interaction¹⁴ with the *Patuas* to take place and maintained safe distance with them because of their Muslim identity (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

Again, in the eve of Independence of the country, from the colonial rule of the British, the outbreak of riots among the Hindus and the Muslims also influenced their religious position once again. Several Hindu nationalist organisations distributed pamphlets and leaflets, and even hosted public meetings stating the previous Hindu position of the *Patuas* and thus the need for them to return back to the Hindu social organisation. But despite of their attempt to bring the ‘lower’ caste groups into the Hindu mainstream, this ‘re-conversion’ did not help them much as far as any

¹⁴ Referring to Dumont’s opposing principles of purity and pollution; a quite different picture could be shown in the case of the *Patuas*. Thus although according to the rules of ritual purity, the so-called ‘higher’ castes never engaged in any kind of social interaction with the ‘lower’ and impure castes like the *Patuas*, during the performance of the pictures with narration, the scrolls themselves were regarded as being sacred by the ‘higher’ castes and the principle of ritual pollution through social interaction was forgotten. The *Patuas* thus irrespective of their ‘low’ social status were accepted as the legitimate transmitters of Hindu tradition.

improvement in their social status was concerned, and thus many *Patuas* returned to their former religion. The adoption of the title '*Chitrakar*' by many members of these groups is probably a result of their earlier mobilization (Chatterji, 2009).

Jadu-Patuas of Jharkhand:

Research shows that the *Chitrakars* are distributed all over India, in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and parts of South India. In Bengal, what distinguishes them from the *Chitrakars* of the other region is their unique intermediary position between the Hindus and the Muslims. As stated by Binoy Bhattacharjee in his work on the *Patuas* of Bengal, L.S.S.O. Malley, in his Bengal census report of the year 1901 wrote on community of *Patuas*, known as the *Jadu-Patuas*. These *Patuas* have been recorded as a minor caste under castes and sub-castes in the Census of 1901. As for their socio-religious customs and practices, there is not much of a difference between them and the non-tribal scroll painters. Bhattacharjee reported that they lived in the jungle areas of the Santhal Parganas in Jharkhand, with also a few of them in Bankura, Birbhum and Purulia districts of West Bengal (Bhattacharjee, 1980). These tribal *Patuas* claim to be the predecessors of the Muslim or the Hindu *Patuas* in the art of scroll painting. Unlike the latter group of scroll-painters who used to earn a living by showing scrolls to rural audiences in villages, and getting food and clothing as payment in kind for their performance, from both their patrons as well as from the villagers, the *Jadu-Patuas* are treated with respect in the tribal society. Other than their illustration and exhibition on scrolls on the 'Origin of the *Adivasi*' and the myth of creation, in which they perform the role of folk-entertainers in the tribal society, they also occupy a very important role as the unofficial but final authority on mortuary rites of a deceased person. They are thus, the unofficial position of the magico-religious priest of the tribal society, ritually capable of leading the body of the deceased from the world to heaven. The act of '*Chakshudaan*', through which he relieves the suffering of the dead person, is one of the main means of livelihood of the *Jadu-Patua*.



FIGURE 7: A SANTHAL SCROLL OR JADU-PAT OF JHARKHAND

'Gender' in the community of Patuas:

Gender concerns the way human society deals with human bodies, and the various consequences of this 'dealing' in the personal lives of people as well in their collective social lives. This is also mentioned in Simone de Beauvoir's classic phrase, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1989: 267). The concept of gender and the differences that are based on gender are thus differences which are a product of social construction. Thus in different societies, there are different levels of super-ordination and subordination of males and females respectively. In very few societies, do women actually hold dominant position in the society, with an upper hand in almost all the spheres of activity, including personal and social life. The concept of gender in the *Patua* community has undergone quite many changes over time. The status of women in this respect has also witnessed a lot of upheaval, from its early days of formation to the present day. In terms of their social identity, the role of women and their social position in terms of gender along with their position in the caste hierarchy has varied with their Sanskritization, their changes in the occupation, their identification with Islam, and also in relation to the social condition of women in the larger society in the concerned time period. In pre-colonial times, these women were actively engaged in the illustration and the display of the scrolls, and used to accompany the family to distant villages for performances (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

But due to the growing prominence of the Islamized customs in the lives of these *Patuas* who are increasingly endeavouring to represent themselves as Muslims, have led to an adverse situation in terms of the liberty of the women in these societies. Previously, these women used to go out with their families to perform outside, and alongside, would also sell stationary and other goods like clay toys, which they themselves made at home. Nowadays, the *Patua* women from comparatively wealthier families are not encouraged go out to display scrolls. For the most of the others, their conditions of poverty leave no other option than the women going out for different jobs. But, compared to the other Muslim communities in the villages, these women still continue to enjoy a greater degree of freedom. They participate in discussions and decisions related to the domestic affairs. As Bhattacharjee observed during his field visits, none of these *Patua* women wore the 'burqha' (Bhattacharjee,

1980). This tradition of scroll-painting has always been a seasonal occupation, even in those cases where it was the primary occupation. These *Patuas* thus, along with painting scrolls, also made clay idols, while others were snake charmers or magicians. The women in the family also made clay dolls, and even acted as mid-wives in the villages (Chatterji, 2009).

It is extremely difficult to categorise the *Patua* population on grounds of occupation on the basis of sex as in most of the families, the *Patua* women work along with their husband. In most cases, while preparing a special scroll for a foreign buyer, or for a museum, the whole family works on it. In some places, women still continue to accompany their husbands in near and distant villages, and some of them also display these scrolls in front of an audience. As seen from their engagements in the various kinds of occupations, it can be observed that women are as such, not discouraged to work outside the home, or there is no taboo associated with the taking up of any work by women. As for the aged population, those elderly men and women in the *Patua* community, who are not able to travel long distances anymore, owing to their old age, they stay at home and engage in mat-making. Most of the children go to school, or accompany their parents, or otherwise stay back at home to look after cattle. Although recent developments in their social life, due to the growing impact of Islamization show the intensification of restrictions laid on women by the *Patua* community; perhaps as a measure to stand up in the eyes of the other Muslim communities who look down upon them, their intermediate position between the Hindus and the Muslims leading towards an interest to uphold the social customs of both the religious communities has resulted in a leniency in terms of differences based on gender. As found out through conversations¹⁵ with the *Patuas* of West Bengal, especially Medinipur district, very few women accompany their husbands to perform in the villages anymore. With the commercialization of these scrolls and their growing importance as forms of 'folk' art, the performances of these *Patuas* are nowadays even arranged for foreign audiences.

¹⁵ These informal conversations performed as a part of the field sensitization, were carried out in an event organized by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, on the 'Picture Showmen Traditions of India', on the 18th and 19th of November, 2010. These conversations were mainly carried out with four scroll painters; Rani Chitrakar, Shyam Sundar Chitrakar, Sahajan Chitrakar and, Prabir Chitrakar, all from Naya village, Pashchim Medinipur, West Bengal.

Rani Chitrakar of Naya village in Pashchim Medinipur, has thus even been to the United States of America for a conference on scroll painting tradition. Hence in most cases, though the women are not allowed to perform in and around villages, they do accompany their families or themselves go to the various national and international festivals and conferences based on folk art and traditional performances. Whether their religious ideologies resulted in the restrictions on the movement of women was not clear, but most of the men blamed it on the degrading social conditions in the villages due to which they considered it unsafe for the women to go out in the villages, and moreover, as these most of these *Patuas* are not nomadic anymore, the women stay back at home to look after the children and to perform the household chores.

The Social Structure of the *Patuas*:

As about the position of the *Patuas* in the social structure, lack of detailed works on their social identity may lead to the false assumption that they are a homogenous community of artisans who paint scrolls. But a careful observation will reveal the eclectic position occupied by these *Patuas* between the two communities of the Hindus and the Muslims. For the local population, these *Chitrakars* or *Patuas* are a peculiar community who are neither Hindus nor Muslims, but who follow both Hindu and Muslim rites and also accept food from both the communities. As for social interaction with the other small tribal communities like the *Santhals* and the *Koras*, this is restricted and the *Patuas* do not take cooked food from them. Although almost all of the *Patuas* practice Islam, there are a few Hindu *Patuas* also. However, all these various groups classified as *Patuas* may be broadly divided into four sub-castes, with each of the unit being endogamous in nature. These sub-castes or sub-groups are also arranged in a hierarchical manner. The groups belonging to the highest sub-caste, refused to accept water or cooked food from the 'lowest' sub-castes, but accepted the same from the other two sub-castes. As most of them share the same surname, be it '*Chitrakar*' or '*Patua*', it is not possible to decipher their sub-caste in this manner. Pattern of residence is also not strictly on the basis of sub-castes, and cases of different sub-castes living carry out together in the same village are also seen. Although the traditional occupation with which they are recognised is still practiced in certain parts of Bengal, along with the growing industrialization of these areas, there

has been a shift to other areas as well. Though each *Patua* sub-caste is associated with a particular occupation, there is no taboo associated with any of them. There are also no strict rules about the following of the prescribed occupations by the sub-castes. These sub-castes are again subdivided into further segments with a hierarchical structure. Although there are variations in different regions, according to the commonly accepted divisions the hierarchy of the *Patuas* social structure comprising of the sub-castes are as follows:

CHITRAKAR PATUA

MAL PATUA

BEDE PATUA and/or DUREE PATUA

MASKATA and/or CHILE PATUA

Of the four sub-castes, the *Chitrakar Patua* occupies the highest rank in the social structure. Their primary occupation is scroll painting and exhibiting it through narratives. They also engage in idol making in some instances. They are followed by the *Mal Patua* who occupies the second position in the hierarchy. They are snake charmers by occupation, but also practice scroll painting. The third sub-caste, in term of social ranking is the *Bede Patua*. Also known as the *Duree Patua*, with 'duree' meaning distance, these *Patuas* are nomadic troupes, who earn a living by performing magic shows and taming animals like monkeys, bears and goats with their tricks. The women accompany the men and help in their performances, and are also known to be experts in occult practices. The lowest ranking sub-caste among the *Patuas* is the *Maskata Patua* or the *Chile Patua*, who are associated with performing illegal abortions. They are also one of the indigenous medical practitioners in the villages, and derive the name '*Chile*' meaning scrape away, from their occupation of treating eye cataracts in the villages. Because of their 'low' social status, the *Chitrakar Patuas* do not take cooked food from them and also avoid any kind of social interaction with them (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

This hierarchical division found among the *Patuas* is a result of the Hindu influence on their social organisation. But although they theoretically associate every sub-caste with a particular occupation which in turn leads to differential level of social status to

each sub-caste, Binoy Bhattacharjee observed that there were no such restrictions on, or taboos associated with the choice of occupations among the *Patuas* (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

Their distinctive nature of oscillation between the two religions has led some degree of instability in the community of the *Patuas*. Their adoption of the Hindu caste structure and its rules and regulations resulting in restrictions on social intercourse obviously poses a friction with the egalitarian principles of social organisation of Islam. But what is interesting to note, is their intermediate position and their claim to both the religious communities, despite of the confusion that this unusual position leads to, in terms of their own conceptions of their identity and of the societies' view of them. When asked about their religious identity, the scroll painters of Naya village avoided any direct talk about their caste affiliation and of their religious identity as practitioners of Islam. Shyam Sundar Chitrakar for instance mentioned that as artists they were not supposed to be restricted within the boundaries of the caste structure or with a particular religion.

The Social Life and the Material Culture of the *Patuas*:

In matters of inheritance and property, the *Patuas* originally exhibited tribal patriarchal customs but at present, due to their Islamization, most of these rules of inheritance are in accordance with the Muslim law of inheritance. In effect, the recognition of women's rights in terms of property reflects this Muslim influence. On the whole, the *Patuas* do not seem to give too much importance to permanent positions like land and others, possibly due to their nomadic nature (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

The *Patuas* are an endogamous community and this endogamy is even observed with the sub-castes. Although some of the Muslim *Patuas* have, of late declared that they should not follow these restrictions about marriage, as according to Islam, such divisions as those of the sub-castes do not exist; there have been very few marriages outside of these rules till today. As for the regulations on marriage, the *Patuas* try to prove their claim to both religions, and thus although polygyny exists theoretically and is further approved by the religious sanctions, there has been no case of polygynous marriage in the villages. Cases of divorce and remarriage are very

common among the *Patuas*, with the rate of divorce being higher among the Islamised *Patuas* than the Hinduised *Patuas* (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

The *Patuas*' construction of their house and rules regarding the first entry into the house takes place in accordance with both, Muslim and Hindu customs and beliefs. The Hindu ritual of the ceremonial removal of earth in month of *Asvin* (September-October) and filling it up with mustard oil and vermilion, along with the reading of the holy Quran by the *Maulvi* of the village before entering into the newly constructed house, reveals an interesting mixture of the customs of both the religious communities. However, when enquired about certain rituals, the *Patuas* are shy of admitting it. This feature of the observance of a ritual and at the same time, a strong endeavour to conceal it from the outsiders reflects their oscillating attitude between the Hindus and the Muslims (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

The life cycle rituals are important in understanding the religious position and identity of the *Patuas* as in these rituals, performed to mark the significant moments of transition in the lives of individuals, the entire community in the village participates. The first of these ceremonies, associated with the birth of the child, is not related to rituals either strictly Hindu or Muslim in nature. This is followed by the name giving ceremony, known as the *Ekika*, or the *Akhika*, a Muslim term used to describe the ceremony. As Bhattacharjee notes, that although in the past, the term *Annaprasan* was used, this being a Hindu term in recent times been replaced by the Muslim *Patuas*. The date for the ceremony is fixed in most cases according to the religious yearbook of the Hindus, while some of the *Patuas* consider Friday as an auspicious day. It is important to note that every *Patua* has two names, one Muslim and the other Hindu, with the Muslim name beginning with the same alphabet as the Hindu name of the person. For example, if the Hindu name is Sudarshan Chitrakar, the corresponding Muslim name is Sukuruddin Chitrakar., or if the Hindu name is Naren Chitrakar, the corresponding Muslim name is Nurmohammad Chitrakar. Although in recent times, some *Patuas* have expressed their desire to use their Muslim name only, in practice, the *Patuas* still have two names, and in fact this is one of the distinctive features of the community of the *Patuas* (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

The next important ceremony, the initiation ceremony, known as the *Khatna*, or circumcision, is a Muslim ritual, and as Bhattacharjee notes, in the Birbhum District, all the *Patuas*, whether Muslim or Hindu, had undergone this rite. The major event following this is the ceremony of marriage. The practice of dowry is a recent practice among the *Patuas*, and is given from the bride's side in the form of both, cash and kind. According to the Islamic rule, the groom is required to pay an amount of money as security to the bride. The particular day of the wedding is fixed in all cases, by checking with the *Panjika* or the Hindu religious yearbook or calendar. The ceremony is presided by the Kaji, or the Muslim priest, who reads out verses from the holy Quran and prays for the newly wedded couple. The last rite of an individual's life, the death rite also hints the intermixing of both Hindu and Muslim customs. All these *Patuas* believe in life after death and rebirth. After death, the body is buried according to Muslim rites. Although previously, the women used to accompany the male members in the funeral procession, but nowadays, no woman takes part in it. After the relatives come back, they take a bath in the pond, touch fire put on cow dung paste, and a piece of iron, and then enter the house (Bhattacharjee, 1980). These traits show the presence of the Hindu customs, alongside the Muslim ones in the social life of the *Patuas*.

The *Patuas* and their Occupation:

According to the census of 1951, as mentioned in the '*Tribes and Castes of West Bengal*' the *Patua* community is associated with the following occupations:

1. Main craft pursued by men:
 - a) Painting in miniature on cloth or paper, and scroll-painting on paper only.
 - b) Earthen (sunbaked and reinforced) image-making.
 - c) Decoration on walls with painting and engraving on walls in stucco (found only in the district of Birbhum).

2. Main craft pursued by women:

- a) Earthen doll and toy-making (both baked and sunbaked) from solid clay by hand modelling or from clay-sheets cast in terracotta moulds.
- b) Painting on ceremonial pottery (*Ghata Chitra*) or on wooden seats (*Piri Chitra*,) both supplied to them by traditional potters and carpenters respectively.

3. Subsidiary crafts pursued by men:

- a) Snake-charming (found only among a few families at Ayas and other villages of Birbhum)
- b) Fireworks (found at Beliaghata, and eastern suburb of Calcutta)
- c) *Tinkari* (found at Madhabitolla of Katwa etc).

As illustrated from the classifications listed above, it is clear that the *Chitrakars* do not depend solely on the traditional occupation of painting and showing scrolls in villages. Although they hold this occupation as honourable, they are engaged a number of other professions.

With increasing urbanization and industrialization of the rural areas, more and more educated people have moved out in search of jobs, and thus lead to a decline in the carrying out of the caste occupation of the *Patuas*. Some of them, have however given up the tradition of exhibiting scrolls, and have taken up to singing in the villages for a living. These devotional songs depicting stories or episodes from the myths or the epics are believed to bring good news and fortune to the family (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

Although the census reports affirmed that the professions of snake charming and performing magic were restricted to the villages of Birbhum, Bhattacharjee's own study of the different districts of Bengal showed that this profession of snake charming was not only confined to these villages but were one of the major occupations of some of the *Patuas* in the districts of Purulia, Murshidabad and Burdwan, together with Birbhum. Over the years however, this profession has witnessed a marked decline, due to their incorporation into the Muslim community which looked down on this profession, and also due to the reason, that it was not an

economically profitable profession anymore. The number of *Patuas* engaged in performing magic and selling herbal tablets infused with the power of magic has also declined significantly. W. W. Hunter in his report in *Statistical Account of Bengal* in 1876, mentioned that this type of occupation along with petty thefts, were attributed to tribe known as the Bediyas, who are now considered to be a sub-caste of the *Patuas*. This shows that the practice of magic has also been one of the traditional occupations of some of the *Patuas*, though it has reduced in importance as an occupation with lesser people opting for it, and even if it is practiced, it is done secretly. On the contrary, the profession of mat-making has gained popularity in recent times possibly with the growth of the local and international market. These mats are made by women of the *Patua* family, and one of the main factors responsible in the rise in the popularity of this profession could be the restrictions made on the women in terms of their freedom of movement, under the impact of Islam and the Muslim customs. As for the occupations of *Ghata-Chitra* (painting on earthen pottery) and *Piri-Chitra* (Painting on wooden seats) both of which were used in the Hindu marriages, they are still practiced by the women in the *Patua* community although the number of women engaged in it has declined over time, due to the non-remunerative nature of the work. One of the traditional caste occupations of the *Patuas* besides scroll-painting is the 'shola' or pith work. Studies show that these works have also declined in importance over the years, although some of them are being used in different ways for the purpose of decorations during the religious and social festivals (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

However, in relation to these traditional occupations of snake charming, showing animal tricks, performing magic shows, etc, which have diminished both because of their growing unpopularity in the younger generations and also because these are considered as shameful and are concealed from outsiders, research conducted by Bhattacharjee shows the growing number of people in the rural occupations connected with the land. Nonetheless, the ratio of increase of *Patuas* in this occupation is much lesser than the other communities, like the Muslims, Hindus, Santhals, and the others. Most of the *Patuas* however do not possess any cultivable land of their own, apart from a few of the educated and conscious *Patuas* who have taken this decision. The number of contract labourers is however on the rise. Casual day labour has higher

wage rates as compared to the agricultural workers for whom the wages are nearly fixed. Thus the *Patuas* seem to prefer this casual day labour as it also does not tie them to a particular region and gives them the freedom to go to other places. The professions of carpentry, hut-making, basket-making, weaving, and garland making, are among the favourable occupations of the *Patuas*, and they sometimes carry out these professions along with their primary occupation. As a result of the increasing urbanization and industrialization of the rural areas, and with the education of the *Patua* community, many of the people from the younger generation have taken up modern occupations, primary among them being that of masons, teachers, vendors, brokers, radio mechanic, etc. The work of a mason requires special skills, and the *Patuas* who are naturally good in skilled work, have gained popularity in this field. This job, being recognised as one of the traditional occupations of the Muslims, has become the chief contributor in the increasing number of *Patuas* in modern occupations (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

Even today, these *Patuas* consider scroll painting as their traditional occupation which has given them their name and their identity. Although with the introduction of television in the villages, this time-honoured practice of scroll painting and exhibiting it along with narratives in and across villages has suffered a setback, they still continue to hold an important position in some of the rural societies of Bengal and parts of Jharkhand (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

Of the *Patua* community in Bengal, the *Patuas* of Midnapore, Birbhum, Purulia, Murshidabad, and Kolkata have attracted a lot of investigations in the recent years. The entry of the foreign investigators and the corresponding demand for the scrolls in the international market, together with the interest of the curators and cultural organisations to retain this age-old tradition has in a way led to revival of the art, albeit in a new manner. The introduction of fairs particularly for the scroll painting of different districts of West Bengal as well as certain bordering parts of Jharkhand has also helped in the renewal of the art form in a major way. The introduction of the more technologically advanced forms of media like the television and the cinema has obviously had an adverse impact of the *Pat* tradition of the *Patuas*, leading to the decline in the number of *Patuas* found to practice their traditional caste occupation, except in situations where they receive patronage from the curators, both foreign and

national, and also from the world market. Of the places where the tradition still exists under these conditions, there is a tendency to meet the demands and the requirements of the market, and in the recent times there has been research on this important theme of the decline in their aesthetic value. This penchant for market demand has led these artefacts to be viewed mainly as items of folk art, resulting in a shift of genre from “a primarily visual tradition to a primarily visual tradition” (Hauser, 2002: 105).

However, as studies conducted on this practice of art and storytelling reveal, this tradition still exists in a few places in West Bengal and in the Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand. Unlike most of the regions of the country where, in the age of mechanical reproduction, the traditional art forms had degenerated, in this case the artists to some extent has embraced modernity and this absorption has not led to deterioration or a collapse of the traditional performance. This instance of revivalism can be particularly seen in the district of Midnapore, also called Medinipur. Within this district, the village Naya is an exception to the rest of the districts, where in most cases the *Patuas* who still paint scrolls, do so as a subsidiary occupation, along with other jobs. In Naya, the *Patua* tradition is very much alive and nearly the whole village is engaged in the practice of scroll painting. Unlike earlier times, they do not earn a living by simply showing these scrolls in near and far villages. These paintings have a great demand in the national and international ‘folk-art’ market, for both individual customers as well as organisations. But alongside selling them, they still prepare scrolls for an active audience in the villages. These scrolls are also accompanied by the narratives, created by them. Roma Chatterji observes that unlike the modern forms of media, the *Patua* scroll does not simply present a “*re-counting* of events that have already occurred”, but instead focus on offering a view of a way of living in the world, where ‘the world’ is “as it is posed by the narrative universe presupposed by the *pata* performance.” (Chatterji, 2009: 2).

In the case of the *Jadu-Patuas* inhabiting the Santhal Parganas in Jharkhand, they paint scrolls generally on the myths of creation. Their style has however, in current times, been imitated by the *Patuas* of Medinipur, thus leading to a loss of their originality. However, these tribal painters have still managed to retain their sense of creativity in this traditional practice. Whether they practice this as their primary occupation, or as a subsidiary one, the Santhal *Patuas*, or as they are more commonly

known as *Jadu-Patuas*, continue to show scrolls and sing narrative verses with them from door to door. But what is important to know is that apart from being folk-entertainers, they also occupy a very serious and important position as the magico-religious priest of the tribal society. Dealing with scrolls also relating to the death rituals, these *Patuas* function as the “undisputed authority on the semi-magical mortuary rites of the deceased” (Maity, 1973: 74).

Their act of ‘*Chakshudaan*’ an act which helps in showing the deceased the way to heaven, is one of the key roles that they play in the society and which is again, in most cases, their main means of subsistence. Whether or not they remain folk-entertainers by displaying scrolls, this ritual act is only conducted by them. It is the *Jadu-Patua* who goes to the bereaved family with a ready-made painting of the deceased member of the family. The portrait however lacks the iris of the eye, signifying that the deceased is presently in a state of blindness, wandering in the ‘Afterworld’ and will remain in this situation until his eyesight is brought back. This eyesight can again be brought back only by the *Jadu-Patua*, owing to his magical powers and his religious superiority, for which he is paid, in cash or kind, or sometimes in both, by the family members. It is believed that only when the *Jadu-Patua* finishes the painting by filling in the iris of the eyes, thus bestowing the eyesight of the deceased back that he or she goes to heaven (Maity, 1973). In this context, it is also interesting to make note of the differences in the style of the paintings, of the *Patuas* in general, and the *Jadu-Patuas* in particular, in terms of the portrayal of the life after death, which shows a relation of their paintings with their occupation. Hence, in the paintings of the *Jadu-Patuas*, the emphasis is given on the deceased people enjoying a comfortable afterlife, which in a way highlights the importance and significance of their roles in the society and their ability to ensure this situation in the life after death. For the Muslim or the Hindu *Patuas*, who do not occupy such an important magico-religious position in the society, the emphasis in their paintings remain on the importance given to the judgement scenes, and thus highlights the role they play in society of ‘value-keepers’, or of maintaining tradition in society (Ray, 1961).

While exploring into the economic life of the community of the *Patuas*, one characteristic feature of the community which can be observed at every stage in history, and in every situation whether supportive or discouraging, is the capacity of

the *Patuas* to adjust their skills to any economic or social environment. This is evident in their constantly changing themes of the scrolls over time. Although the statistical analysis of the dynamics of occupations among the *Patuas* from nearly their origin to the recent times explain that these changes have been more on the lines of what is economically profitable, they have always been aware of safeguarding their intermediary social position between the two religious communities and conscious of not hurting the sentiments of either the Muslim or the Hindu community.

Coming back to the discussion on identity, 'social identity' as a concept has been time and again invented and reinvented in a variety of theoretical frameworks in all the social and behavioural sciences. Marilyn B. Brewer has identified four important variations in the theme of social identity, first being 'person-based social identities', second, 'relational social identities', third, group-based social identities, and fourth, 'collective identities'. It is the third type, 'group-based social identities' which is relevant in the discussion of the social identity of the groups of scroll-painters known as *Patuas*. Group-based social identities as such refer to awareness and viewing of the self as an integral or interchangeable part of a larger group or unit (Brewer, 2001). J. C. Turner defined this form of social identity as a depersonalized idea of the self necessitating "a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person" (Turner et al., 1987: 50). The concept of identity as suggested by Pierre Bourdieu through his idea of the 'habitus' is also useful in this context, with its focus on the construction of social identity of a group or community by defining oneself through the values and the practices of the 'habitus' and, also explaining and expressing one's identity through by attachment to the 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977).

The social identity of the *Patuas* is then highly related to their association with their traditional caste occupation. It is through this association with the hereditary occupation that the *Patuas* seek to justify their intermediate position between the two religious communities and achieve a distinct social identity for the community as a whole. This chapter has tried to understand this theme of the social identity of the *Patuas*, by looking at the origin of this community, its present condition, the social life and material culture of the *Patuas*, gender differences in the community, and the economic structure of the *Patuas*. These differing aspects of social life, both past and

present, help in gaining a broader picture of the community life of the *Patuas* which facilitates a proper knowledge and appreciation of the reasons for the emergence of a particular social identity of the *Patuas*, or the very factors which influence the structuring of social identity in the community and, of the community as a whole. The origin of the *Patuas* is a debated issue, but in general throws light on the historical conditions responsible for the present state of identity of the *Patuas*. Most of the writings on this topic point out to their origin as a nomadic tribe somewhere in Central India, from where they spread out to different directions and entered Bengal either through Bihar or through Orissa, or both. Their original occupations included bird-catching, snake-charming, performing magic, training animals for entertainment, etc. Once in contact with the Hindu community, they gradually lost their tribal entity and also deliberately imitated the Hindu way of life in order to achieve a higher social status. Gradually there was a marked change in their occupations also, and many of them took to scroll painting and idol-making inspired from the *Sutradhars* and the *Acharyas* in the Hindu society. However, the nature of the work required them to move from place to place. The goods produced by the *Patua* women, including the clay models and trinkets were bought by the Hindu women. Islamic rule played a very important role in changing the social, cultural and political life of the country.

During the times when the Hindu kings ruled Bengal, the 'lower' castes had a tough time as casteism and caste hierarchy were encouraged by the king. The domination of the upper classes on the 'lower' classes were so harsh that the Muslim rule was welcomed on expectation of being able to provide some relief. The *Patuas* being among the lowest in the caste structure converted themselves to Islam. For economic reasons however, they could not give up the tradition of scroll painting and the displaying them, the audience for which was largely Hindu. This led to the ambiguous position of the *Patuas*, as they had to conceal their Islamized ways from the Hindus. With the decline of Muslim rule, many *Patuas* converted back to Islam. Even with the British rule, where many sections of the Hindu population were favoured by the colonial rulers, and were given many benefits, some of the *Patuas* became Hindus. The Hindu-Muslim riots in 1946, in Calcutta, worsened their position with many organisations arranged purification rites for the re-entry of the *Patuas* in the Hindu social order. But after Independence, these *Patuas* observes that they were still

regarded as an outcaste by the Hindus. This led to a fresh movement of Islamization of the *Patuas* again. Oscillating between the two religious communities over a long time period in history, has thus resulted in the creation of this unique case of social identity among the *Patuas*, where they cling to a Hindu past and follow Islam in the present day, but are unable to leave one completely, thus occupying an intermediate position between them (Bhattacharjee, 1980).

In regards to the intermediary position of the *Patuas*, a similar case can be seen among the Meos of Rajasthan and Haryana. The Meo are a community consisting of more than 400,000 people, spread out over approximately 1200 villages in an area known as Mewat, covering parts of Haryana and Rajasthan. What is interesting to note is their claim to belong to both, a Rajput caste, and the Muslim community. They claim to be the descendants of the second *varna*, the Kshatriyas and proudly draw lineage from the Hindu Rajput ancestry who, they argue, were the first to settle in the region of Mewat. According to them, it was their confrontation with the Sultans that led to their forcible conversion to Islam in the early 15th century (Aggarwal, 1969). The hierarchical values of the caste system and the egalitarian ideology of Islam have always contradicted each other. But as Raymond Jamous observed in the course of his study, “among the Meo, caste and Islam are not only compatible but are articulated with each other.” (Jamous, 1996: 180).

Hence, like the *Patuas* they seem to lie halfway between the Muslims and the Hindus they practice Islam but draw lineage from a Hindu caste. But the basic difference between them and the *Patuas* lies in the truth that they are perceived locally as a ‘high caste’ like the Brahmins (priests) and the Baniyas (traders), unlike the *Patuas* who occupy a very low ritual and social status. Locally, the Meos are the dominant caste. Although they bury their dead as Muslims do, and observe the ceremony of ‘*nikaah*’ as the marriage ritual of the Meos, they are extremely conscious of their social position. They follow the distinction between ‘*kachha*’ food and ‘*pakka*’ food, and receive cooked food only from the higher castes. ‘Lower’ castes are not allowed to enter the Meo household due to their ‘impure’ status. These Meos are an endogamous caste, in that they do not accept or give women from or to other Rajput groups or other Muslim communities. These Meos are also divided into a number of patrilineal clans known as ‘*got*’, the founding ancestor of each being the

descendant of Hindu divinity. It has been a few centuries that the Meos were converted to Islam. Various Islamic rituals and features are a part of the Meo community which also perceives itself as belonging to the Rajputs or the Kshatriya caste (Jamous, 1996).

In recent decades, the Meo has been influenced by Muslim reformist movements like that of the '*Tablighi Ja'maat*' for their development as Muslims, and this has led to their non-participation in the Hindu festivals, non-entry to the Hindu temples, their fasting during the time of Ramadan, and an overall increase in the presence of the Meos in the mosques. But the endeavour of the reformist movement to persuade the Meo to abandon their belief in the caste system and the kinship structure was highly unsuccessful. During the nationalist struggle, just as in the case of the *Patuas*, several organizations came forward to convert these Muslims into Hindus. But unlike the case with the *Patuas*, the Meos resisted, and this resulted in a massacre, with many of them fleeing away to Pakistan. Though recent studies show their greater interest in abandoning the caste structure, the Meos still aim to preserve their local identity and local relationships (Jamous, 1996). This example of the Meos, together with the instance of the *Patuas* thus shows that "caste system is primarily a social and economic arrangement and not merely a part of Hinduism" (Aggarwal, 1961: 1680). Although the *Patuas* do not occupy a high position in the caste hierarchy, the fact that they were able to retain a position in the Hindu society as transmitters of Hindu tradition indicated that caste was influenced and also dependent on the factors of economy and society. Even in the case of Jharkhand, although they do not occupy a high position in the social structure, they occupy important positions in the society by acting as the magico-religious priest of the tribal society. This factor of caste therefore, might not be very important as having a direct influence on the social identity of the *Patuas* in the modern day as most of them are Muslims, thereby abandoning the caste structure; but the relevance and the significance of the age-old social institution lies in the fact that through its prescribed hereditary occupation for the *Patuas*, the community still draws its identity. From the time that they abandoned their tribal entity and started adopting Hindu customs, they were gradually associated with a caste name and a particular caste occupation. It is this notion of hereditary occupation among the *Patuas* which continues to define their community, and even

though they are practising Muslims, their role as the scroll-painters of the Hindu gods and goddesses and as the transmitter of Hindu myths, customs and tradition is also justified along the lines of their former link with this religious community as reflected in the *Puranas*.

As for the practices of social life, the life-cycle rituals, and the cultural artefacts that are a part of their daily existence, these too reflected their 'in-between' position among the Hindus and Muslims. Forced to adapt to different religious and cultural positions throughout history, there have remained traces of both the religious and cultural communities, which has now become an integral part of their life and their identity now. Even their adoption of a particular religious doctrine in their personal life has not been able to affect to a great extent, their social life. Thus in their social life, they hide from the Hindus those practices and customs which they look down upon, and again hide from the Muslims those traits and practices which are deemed undesirable in that community.

In this process of creating and building a social identity, both the factors of 'me' and 'we' play major roles, and it is the relationship between the two that makes group life and action feasible and thus the construction of social identity possible (Brewer, 2001).

For the purpose of knowing themselves as well as others, it is essential for the group or the community to socially declare their identities and make them prominent by engaging in social practices which brings to light their symbolic position in the world (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 1999). It is through their association with a common 'habitus', and its related qualities of similar perception and practices that a group derives its notion of social identity. The group or community thus reflects attitudes of a 'generalized other' in association to which it constructs its own identity. In this context, the aspect of occupation has had a very strong impact on the maintenance of this peculiar form of social identity among the *Patuas*. While the historical factors have in a way, led to the formation of this identity, the social and economic factors have maintained it in the modern day. In this case, it has been the traditional caste occupation which has always identified the *Patuas* as a community of scroll painters. Even today, although many of them have moved out to other occupations and a very

few people are carrying forth the customary art form with its narrative poetry, thus leading to this form of traditional performance being recognised simply as a form of folk art or a visual tradition; scroll-painting or *Pata-Chitra*, from which they derive the name of their community, still defines their social identity. Their identity resides in the shared representation of the social category¹⁶ of the '*Patua*' or the '*Chitrakar*' as a whole, which may be subjected to change as a function of the intergroup environment, if they all together stop pursuing their hereditary occupation or drawing lineages from them.

Thus, there is a common or shared sense of identity among the members of the group, and the self is identified with the group as a whole, giving rise to 'we' feeling and a collective sense of identity. Identities in these groups are then not a product of interpersonal relationships among and between certain individual members of the group, but instead formed from common ties or membership to a shared category. In group-based social identity, the analysis of self extends beyond an individual person to a social unit. The boundaries between in-group and out-groups become more important than the boundaries between individual self and other members of the group (Brewer, 2001). Moreover, the behavioural traits and characteristic features of the individual self are all assimilated for representing the group as a whole, thereby focussing on the betterment of those features which help the group stand out in relation to others, while aiming to boost and augment unity and consistency within the group (Turner et al., 1987).

Sometimes, special performances or ritual acts by certain groups may lead to a construction of a particular identity of these groups (Hermanowicz and Morgan, 1999). Accordingly, for the *Patuas* their painting and particularly the display of the scrolls with narrative poetry is a special performance or a ritual act which affirms their unique social identity, although this identity is actually an oscillating position between Hindus and Muslims. Their traditional caste name, and now the name of their community; their act of painting and illustrating the scrolls with the help of songs or

¹⁶ With less people from the community participating in the performance tradition of scroll painting and narration, the traditional caste occupation has come to be associated with the symbolic order of the 'habitus' of the community of the *Patuas*. This 'habitus', which centers on the growth of certain perceptions and practices then becomes the very ground through which the scroll painters assert their identity.

poetry, have all led to a 'ritualization' of their daily life, and their occupation. This activity, which may otherwise be viewed as everyday, usual or habitual, becomes sacred for the group because it identifies them. Its creative and liberating aspect of the scroll can then be properly appreciated and understood and consequently the social identity of the *Patuas* in terms of their religiously pluralistic situation is formed in society. This 'ritual' aspect of the traditional practice of storytelling through scrolls is in a way Durkheimian because it reflects the common belief, sustains the collective sentiments, revives the collective conscience, and thus plays an important role integrating society by revitalizing the tradition. In this respect, it may be said that these rituals are prescriptive. These groups use these rituals in order to arrive at a definition and therefore make clear both the larger community as well as for themselves what they hold as valuable and right.

Summary:

For the *Jadu-Patuas* of Jharkhand, their role in the tribal society being that of a mediator between the human world and the 'Afterworld' is also one of their primary sources of living. The relation between occupation and social identity is quite clear in their case, as it is their function in the society which provides them with a social status and also serves as a primary source of living. In the case of the non-tribal *Patuas* of West Bengal, the relation between economy and social identity is enmeshed in the social institution of caste. The prevalence of caste-specific occupations leads to the growth of a particular form of identity among the groups. Similarity in occupation leads to similarity in the way of life in general, and this similarity in terms of conditions of existence gives rise to the growth of a habitus, which then guides all further perceptions and practices of the group or the community. In the case of the *Patuas* of Bengal, it is this association of their community with their traditional caste-occupation of scroll painting and narration that justifies their intermediary social position between the Hindus and the Muslims and thus helps in the construction and maintenance of social identity of the community. Hence, even though in many places, this tradition is not carried out as a serious means of living, the community of scroll painters derive their notion of social identity from their long-standing association with their hereditary occupation which is also reflected in their surnames. Although the practice of scroll painting and storytelling has in fact never been the only and the

primary source of living for the *Patuas*, it is still through this occupation that the community derives its sense of social identity. This chapter hence brings to light some of the major debates on the themes of caste and occupation and social identity. What is evident from the discussion is the fact that the social identity of the *Patuas* in the age of increasing electronic mediation, with a rapid decline in their traditional performance of storytelling through scrolls, and thus in the very occupation which them their name and their identity, social identity lies in the acceptance of the shared identities among the members, with the affiliation to the community as a part of their individual social identity.

CHAPTER 4

SCROLL PAINTING AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF MASS MEDIA

“The major modern communication systems are now so evidently key institutions in advanced capitalist societies that they require the same kind of attention, at least initially, that is given to the institutions of industrial production and distribution. Studies of the ownership and control of the capitalist press, the capitalist cinema, and capitalist and state capitalist radio and television interlock, historically and theoretically, with wider analysis of capitalist society, capitalist economy and the neo-capitalist state” (Williams, 1977: 136).

Globalization as a process is observable all over the world. Broadly speaking, this process can be explained as a compression of the four corners of the earth, and also the strengthening of the consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson, 1991). This compression of the world increases both, a sense of dependency, as well as spread of cultural interactions across communities and, national and international territories. Along with the factors of migration and the rise of cultural diaspora, there is intense growth in the field of social, cultural and economic interactions. With the telecommunication revolution, marked by an immense growth in modern forms of mass media and their reach to the different parts of the world, these social, cultural and economic interactions among diverse and similar individuals, groups and communities have become enhanced. As Yogendra Singh points out, the very cultural processes which this process of globalization promotes, becomes significant in this aspect, as they undergo various possibilities of cultural adaptation, assimilation, integration or even conflict in the course of contact (Singh, 2000).

It is within this broad framework that the present chapter is primarily based. With urbanization reaching out to rural areas, marked with a development in the field of telecommunications, the notion of culture and the structure of communication are continually in the process of undergoing transformations. In this context, the artefacts of folk culture which served a functional purpose in the society previously are getting recognised as items of ‘folk art’. The scroll painting tradition of West Bengal and

Jharkhand also stands in a similar position, with threats of extinction or end of utility. With the growth of the modern mass media, these traditional forms of media like the scroll painting have faded in popularity. They are thus faced with a major situation of crisis. This deals with the crisis of cultural identity¹⁷, for both the tradition of scroll painting or *Pata-Chitra*, as well as for the scroll painters or *Patuas* who paint these scrolls. But instead of giving up, they cope with these situations of crisis, and it is this aspect of the traditional scroll painting communities of parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand that this chapter mainly deals with. The first part of the chapter will thus be dealing with an introduction to the theme of cultural identity and globalization, and the question of globalization leading to a threat of local cultures and local identity. This will be led by an exploration into the vast body of literature existing on the subject of mass media in contemporary society, with a discussion on the major arguments as brought out by some of the schools of thought, which are pertinent to the present study. This will be followed up by an explanation of the situation of the performance tradition of scroll painting and narration in parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, looking at the particular customary practice of art and storytelling, from its first encounter with the western modernity through colonialism to its present state as it exists today. This will finally be followed with an elaborate dialogue on how this *Pata-Chitra* tradition in Jharkhand and West Bengal have dealt with this situation of crisis of cultural identity in the age of electronic mediation.

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND GLOBALIZATION:

By 'identity' in general, is meant the attribution of a social category in which an individual or a group is qualified to be a member or a part of. Recent discourses on the issue of identity suggest a cultural turn¹⁸, whereby the related concepts of

¹⁷ For understanding the crisis of cultural identity as experienced by the *Patuas* in West Bengal and Jharkhand, it is very important to pay attention to the present trend that their scroll paintings have taken. With the diminishing of the aspect of the performance in their tradition in most areas, it is through the medium of scrolls that these artisans construct their cultural identity as artists portraying and preserving a local and indigenous tradition. These scrolls then, a product of their traditional caste occupation as well as their 'habitus', helps in the assertion of their cultural identity.

¹⁸ Since the 1980s, the world has experienced an explosion of new cultural movements, from religious revivalism, new traditionalism, to the rise of new cults, thus engaging in a struggle for re-establishing a new cultural identity (Friedman, 1989)

symbolic construction, representation and reflexivity have gained in significance. Identity then can be explained as a concept which defines an actor's experience of a particular category, role, or group and which also included the public acknowledgement of that experience. As Yogendra Singh writes that at a subjective level it is through the human nature and the growth of consciousness that, identities are formed and gain significance, while on the other hand, they are also formed through the sharing of cultural practices and customs in common within specific territories, ethnicities, and ecologies. As the process of globalization gains momentum, marked by significant changes in the economic and demographic scene of the country, the cultural implications of this process then needs to be emphasized upon. Cultural identity thus becomes an important construct, affecting the social, economic, and cultural lives of different societies, through the development in technology and communications, which in turn influences the social organisation and the previous forms of communication in society, and also the processes of acculturation and assimilation (Singh, 2000).

Unlike earlier, when the concept of culture was determined by the generalizing principles of positivism which gave rise to abstract categories of culture and society, the post-modern writings of culture abandon this positivistic outlook in exchange for an understanding of the concept based on the principles of reflexivity, with more emphasis on the local dimensions of culture. From social anthropology to history, sociology, and other social sciences, there has been a shift to include an integrative paradigm of the dual concepts of the subject and the object, especially in the field of culture studies. This has thus resulted in an attempt to transcend the dichotomy of the concepts of the global and the local and to achieve a balance between the two. Technological revolution in the field of communication has also highly influenced social practices and institutions, leading to a reformulation of the concepts and methods used to study culture (Singh, 2000). Arjun Appadurai is of the opinion that culture as a concept can be better used to deal with embodied difference and thus used for expressing or enabling the mobilization of group identities. Culture thus is a process through which differences are naturalized and mobilized to express group identity (Appadurai, 1997).

Globalization of the modern-day world is thus a significant process signifying unique developments and transformations in every field. The concept of culture has also undergone alterations in this aspect. The cultural implications of the contemporary process of globalization have thus become more meaningful with the coming of the technological revolution and its consequent bearings upon the formation of local cultures and identities. Although different societies differ in terms of their influence of this process of globalization, due to differences in their historicity and their social conditions, and also due to the differing nature of contact of the process of globalization, the process as such has on the whole, led to major transformations in the area of culture, in the developing countries, leading to the sharpening of inter-cultural and inter-ethnic identities. Yogendra Singh, in his work, states that in the light of globalization, the most significant damage to the society is the loss of its cultural identity without a proportionate amount of benefit in terms of economic and social development in return. It is due to this reason that cultural conflicts and acts of violence increase in society as a result of competition between unequal groups or societies, and also due to unlimited exposure of the foreign culture and entertainment through the medium of television, leading to a loss of the traditional norms and morals of the society. It is noteworthy to observe that societies which are ethnically more homogenous in terms of their structures and their population are better able to adapt themselves with the processes of globalization than those societies which contain strong ethnically and socially diverse structures and groups, which are bound to face anxieties in their process of encounter with the challenges of globalization (Singh, 2000).

In this far-reaching process of globalization, the most ground-breaking feature is reflected in the advancements in the field of technology and communication. The concept of communication in the contemporary world has radically changed, due to the technological developments, leading to the invention of the press, the radio, the cinema, the television, the telephone, and the Internet. These inventions have transformed the process of interaction in society. They have enabled communication to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state. As Y. Singh writes, "The notions of time, space and symbolism of culture undergo new transformations of meanings under the impact of these new telecommunication technologies." (Singh, 2000: 55). As for

the influences of these technological developments on the society, they can be both integrative in terms of bringing about social cohesion and facilitating development as well as be disruptive and bring about conflict in society (Singh, 2000). Arjun Appadurai is of the opinion that the electronic media plays a key role in altering the wider field of mass media and other traditional forms of media. This electronic media transcends the previously formed boundaries of nation-state or culture and allows new possibilities for the construction of “imagined selves and imagined worlds” (Appadurai, 1997: 3). In the context of the local cultures and local identities in the contemporary era, globalization thus has a major effect on the local and national cultures and the local identities. Mass communications through the mass media has no doubt influenced the economic condition of the world in general, in terms of economic growth, banking and trading practices, management, etc by enabling easier and faster ways of exchanging information, and has also in many ways accelerated the growth of local and regional cultural identities. But on the other hand, it has also led to the homogenization and sometimes even the fading away of many cultural attributes, and is perceived as a threat to local cultures of groups whose distinct identities have become lost and their cultures commercialized due to the effects of globalization in their societies (Singh, 2000).

As Appadurai suggests that along with the growth of electronic media, it is the growing feature of migration that has broken the boundaries of local, regional or national spaces within which audiences were previously enclosed. It is although incorrect to think of this new and advanced form of media as the opium of the masses, as there is increasing evidences to show that audience does not indulge in passive consumption but often raises resistance, and practices selectivity. Global pressures have in many instances led to the production of local identities Global processes involving electronic and satellite modes of communication and migrant populations thus fold global pressures into small politicized arenas thereby producing ‘locality’ (Appadurai, 1997).. However, the consumers or the audiences of the modern mass media are not free agents or individuals as “consumption in the contemporary world is often a form of drudgery, part of the capitalist civilizing process” (Appadurai, 1997: 7).

It is in this light that the theoretical approaches to the study of mass media will be explored in the present study, to gain a better understanding of the various perspectives that have risen at different points of time to analyse the role or the function and the effects of the mass media. Being dominated by the positivist paradigm, views regarding media have since the commencement of the period of 'modernity' in the social sciences, have been profoundly challenged by a series of theoretical perspectives from structuralism, deviance theory, discourse theory, to theories within Marxism. There have been different schools of thought which have dealt with the theme of mass media. These schools however, have been products of different historical, social, and intellectual contexts. What is important in this present context is their perception about the power of the different forms of mass media and their influence in society.

THE THEORIES OF MASS MEDIA:

After the First World War, there could be noted a growing consensus about the powerful influence of the media by both the 'right' as well as the 'left' perspectives. Both viewed the media as a powerful body, creating mass audiences through the new technologies in the form of the press, the radio, or the film, which ensured the mass production of communication. This audience created from the growing urbanization and industrialization of society was more susceptible to manipulation by the mass media due to the unstable and alienated condition of the population who faced situations of anomie because of their rootlessness and their displacement from one kind of society to another. Being no longer anchored in their previous networks of social relations, they sensed a loss of their roots, with their already internalized 'rural' values being no longer applicable for guiding their life in the new society. This conventional belief in the power of the media was however challenged by theories which questioned the assumption about the passivity of the audience.

Theories related to the media in around the 1950s and the 1960s argued that media had a very limited audience. Reassessing the susceptibility of human beings to become totally and powerfully influenced by the mass media, theoretical approaches around this time period demolished the earlier view and instead argued that audience

were rather active receptors of the media and in fact helped to bring to the media a variety of different uses and needs which in turn influenced their response to the media. Again, around the late 1960s and the 1970s, this view was challenged in two contradictory directions. The development of television revolutionizing the whole idea of the mass media resulted in the reassessment of these views about the negative ideas about media influence. The ideas of the 1950s and the 1960s were also severely criticized by the Marxist and the neo-Marxist critical tradition which exerted a strong influence in terms of research and theory of mass communications during the 1970s. According to them, the media acted as agencies promoting certain ideologies at the expense of the other, and thus played a significant role in maintaining class domination in society. Unlike the critical theory, the liberal tradition believed in the limited effects as far as media influence was concerned.

As for the present condition, the clash between the two major ideologies, that of the critical theory's views of the mass society, and the liberal-pluralist tradition dealing with the effects of mass media, has now given way to placing emphasis on the more important questions on culture and mass media within Marxism, leading to the formation of different ways in within Marxist studies on the questions related to media. Modern theories of this tradition thus nowadays also include structuralist views in regard to the writings on mass communications. Discourses relating to media in the field of structuralism have also been mainly concerned with the systems and processes involved in the signification and representation in the media, which can be understood from the analysis of films, visual images, texts, etc. Louis Althusser's view of the concept of ideology in this matter contributed an important shift from the traditional Marxist terrain. His view of the concept of 'ideology' as such dealt with its representation of the imagined relationship of individuals with their actual conditions of existence. Rather than using it to represent a distorted version of reality, Althusser used it as a medium through which all people experience the world. While preserving the traditional Marxist ideas of the 'base' and the 'superstructure', with the possibility of 'economic determinism', Althusser added the indispensability of the use of 'ideology'. Applying this framework to the study of mass communications, it can be said that media in the modern day functions as ideological state apparatus in the place of the earlier repressive forms of state apparatuses. The efficacy of the media hence

does not lie in imposing false consciousness among the population, or in altering their attitudes. Instead it lies in their being able to influence and impact on the unconscious categories of the human mind, which makes it possible for conditions to be represented and experience to take place (Gurevitch, 1982).

Culturalist tradition of the media, carried on by Thompson, Hoggart, and Williams contradicted this notion of economic determinism as carried forth by the Marxist tradition. Contemporary works, like those of Stuart Hall attempt situate the media and other practices within a society which is pictured as a complex expressive totality. Culture in this sense is perceived as an all-encompassing reality comprising of all social practices, the praxis through which humans create history. It opposes the base-superstructure model as maintained in Marxism with its notion of economic determinism. Instead, it favours a relationship based on the dialectic between social beings and social consciousness. Based on their different historical conditions and the relationships which form their life, culture arises among the social groups as values and customs, as well as means, which then helps them to understand the social situations and react accordingly to their conditions of existence (Gurevitch, 1982).

Human society since its inception has found some way or the other to enable communication between individuals or groups. Be it through language or through symbols and signs, interaction and communication has always been a vital part of human existence. It was with the growing of the new forms of media like the press, the radio, the film, and the television, around the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the communication order witnessed a marvellous growth, development and expansion. These forms of media which transformed the erstwhile patterns of interaction are together known as 'mass media'. In the classical sense of the term, 'mass' as such referred to the audience that was created by the media, implying a large number of people totally undifferentiated along the lines of sex, race, or class. The audience for the media being referred to as 'mass', the technological medium of producing and transmitting these messages, therefore came to be known as mass media (Bennett, 1982).

There have been a wide range of scholars who have contributed to the theme of mass society. Writings concerning this theme have also been found in the works of the

founding fathers of classical sociology. Emile Durkheim's (1915) work on the division of labour in society, on about the rise of the community based on organic solidarity, marked by the dissolution of the traditional social organizations and the social relationships, and Ferdinand Tonnies' (1963) conception of the transformation of society from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, all seem to point out to the theme of mass society in general, expressing negative attitudes to the processes connected with the growth of the mass society including industrialization, urbanization, developments in the fields of polity, education, and the modern forms of communication.

This growth of the mass society was also accompanied by a growth of a new and distinct form of culture, known as mass culture. This phenomenon of 'mass culture' was considered as a massive threat to the moral and the aesthetic qualities preserved and illustrated in the traditions of the 'high culture' of the elite sections of the society as well as to the relatively inferior, crude, simple but healthy forms known as 'folk culture', constituting of the practices and customs of the social and cultural lives of the common people (Bennett, 1982). This new form of culture, commercially produced for passive consumption by the masses by means of its popularity was thus held as responsible for the decay or the destruction of the individuality and the creative aspects of both the traditions of 'high culture' and 'folk culture'. Mass culture as such was thus viewed as a mechanical form of culture which was imposed on the population irrespective of their needs, demands or their sensitivity. Produced to be sold in the market as a commodity, culture in this form encourages passive consumption and thus leads to political domination (MacDonald, 1957).

"The contrast between the organic community and mass society clearly depends on a highly romanticized conception of the past, as is evidenced by the fact that it has proved impossible to state, with any precision, when the one ended and the other began" (Bennett, 1982: 37). Theories of the mass society and the mass media are based on the idea of a historical contrast in terms of the society of the past and that of the present. Society in the past was thus characterised by the dominance of the community, where individuals occupied a fixed place legitimated by a system of values and customs. There was in this type of society, a clear cut distinction between the 'folk' and the 'elite'. It was with industrialization that the traditional social

relationships were broken and an undifferentiated mass culture was spread all over the society.

It was the thesis on the 'culture industry' by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School of critical theory in 1972, which marked one of the most interesting works on mass media in Marxism. According to them, it is through the development of the mass media that, cultural power is exercised and the spread of the dominant ideology is made possible. Through the culture industry, the minds of the consumers is manipulated, and the audience is thus forced to think that pleasure can be availed only through the consumption of popular culture. Creating a mass society, the 'culture industry' minimizes any possibility of individuality in terms of preferences or their identity. "Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished products is removed" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972). The public is provided with a wide range of hierarchically arranged products of different qualities. Consumers thus choose the mass product manufactured for their type. They remain as nothing but statistics on the research charts of various organizations and industries. The differing budgets of the mass products of the culture industry are however in no way related to the meaning or the factual values of the products hence produced. The customer no longer remains a subject, but instead becomes an object. The traditional promise of a work of art being a creation which would reveal truth by providing alternatives to the conventional ideas and paradigms has become lost, with art becoming a hypocritical product representing the dominant ideology (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972). Social change under such conditions was impossible because the consciousness of a need for the change was limited and restrained as the effects of the culture industry led to a stage of anti-enlightenment through mass deception (Adorno, 1991).

Herbert Marcuse, who also belonged to the Frankfurt School of Critical theory, in his work, 'One Dimensional Man', argued that it was the rationality of the production in the capitalist societies which left the social system immune and unaffected to criticism. Both the apparatuses of production as well as the created products, together inflict on the social system. Starting from the means of communication and

transportation, the availability of a varying range of commodities in terms of food items, clothing, accommodation, the variety of sources of information and entertainment, all together carry with them certain fixed habits, behaviour or attitudes. The consumption of these products as a part of the daily lifestyle thus leads to intellectual and emotional relations of the consumers with the producers and in fact to the whole society. These products thus produced manipulate the minds of the masses who are indoctrinated with the irresistible choices of products in the market. This thus leads to false consciousness among the individuals. As for the role of the media, Marcuse replied that it too impeded the growth of consciousness among individuals and prevented the growth of any discourse. Any kind of subversion is averted by the tendency to discuss political issues and debates keeping it only restricted to questions of which techniques are best capable of maintaining the system and its contradictions unquestioningly. The possibilities of envisioning alternative political ends which could transform the society or transcend it altogether to a different level than that of the existing social arrangements is totally excluded and avoided (Marcuse, 1968). This hence leads to the closing of all possible ways of engaging with discourse that could provide better alternatives as compared to the existing social order, and instead encourages a condition which prevents the growth of the consciousness among the individuals, needed for the change to happen. "Thus emerges a pattern of *one dimensional thought and behaviour* in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to the terms of this universe" (Marcuse, 1968: 27).

For Marcuse then, the media encumbers the process of human thinking. It in fact directs and defines the very terms and the procedures through which the world is supposed to be perceived. The language used in the media, marked by its unified structure, hindered the development of any kind of structural or conceptual thinking. The way in which they build up the social structure with its varying range and diversity of commodities meant to be useful for every aspect of life, together with the mediation of the different forms of mass communication, conditions the entire intellectual and conceptual capability of human beings, and provides the consumers with such fascinating and spellbinding definitions that it in turn inhibits any kind of cognitive mediation on their part (Bennett, 1982).

The Frankfurt School theorists thus were opposed to the growing culture that was a product of industrialization, urbanization and the technological developments in the field of communications and transportation. The liberating aspect of culture was highly suppressed by the bourgeois order which induced the dominant ideology into the minds of the consumerist public by manipulatively re-producing almost every aspect of human life as a commodity in the market. Art, in this situation was also no exception. Every creation of art seems to reflect the dominant ideology. The idea that art played a major role in helping the society to imagine an alternative vision of the existing social conditions no longer held true. Its power to enable the social imagination to rise above the stated norms and rules and to bring about a change was lost.

In this aspect, particular mention should be made of another theorist of the same tradition, Walter Benjamin. He basically argued that the development of techniques in the field of art, leading to its technical reproduction on an unlimited scale, has resulted in a deprivation of their original 'aura, or their individuality and distinctiveness. This limitless production of art has brought about a loss in their sacredness and uniqueness and has thus led their entry into the political domain in such a form which can be both produced and consumed by the masses. Works of art were always reproducible in the past, and historical evidence shows the diffusion of several creations to produce other pieces of art. The feature of mechanical reproduction in the newly created industrialized and urbanized society is however something totally different. In the past when these works were imitated, they were done so intensively, from a creative point of view and were far more limited in number, always marked by long intervals. It was only with the introduction of lithography that the technique of reproduction in terms of art was shifted altogether on a different level. This system allowed reproduction to take place on a much larger scale than what had been never witnessed before, and enabled these pieces of graphic art illustrating everyday life to be sold in the market. This form of technology was again taken over by the invention of photography. Photography marked a very important development in the world of art. The important artistic function of the hand was replaced by the eye looking into the lens. This invention allowed pictorial images to be reproduced at a very high speed. However, the art reproduced in this context was highly de-contextualized; its presence in terms

of time and space in which it was first created was lost. This also affected the authenticity of the artefacts reproduced. The authenticity of a piece of art lies in its substantive duration in terms of its reproduction and the testimony to the historical context of which it has been a part of. When the substantive duration in terms of reproduction of the work of art ceases to exist, the speciality of the work being a witness to a historical condition is endangered. This in turn puts the importance and the impression of the original work at a very vulnerable state. Both the uniqueness and purpose of the art is lost.

As Benjamin writes, in the contemporary times there is among the masses an increasing urge to indulge in the consumption of the reproduced items though these are transitory in nature and lack the distinctiveness and the permanence of the original product. Art as such is inseparable from its roots in tradition. This tradition is however is very open to change. Yet, wherever the works of art have been used and reproduced, before the mechanical process came into existence, they have been done so keeping in mind their uniqueness and originality. The earliest works of art as Walter Benjamin stated had their origin as being part of a ritual. The authenticity of a piece of art has its basis on its original use value. Limitless reproduction of the artefacts leads to a loss of importance of the original or authentic material, and the overall function of art as such is reversed from its use for purposes of secular and sacred ritual to its use for politics. The mechanical production of art also changes the way the masses perceived the art. The modern-day forms of art, whether in the form of moving images like the film or the still image like photography and printed pictures, all contain a progressive reaction, marked by a fusion of visual as well as emotional enjoyment in them, along with the view of the expert. This aspect of fusion is of great importance according to Walter Benjamin. As he states, a decrease in the social significance of an art form, leads to a more sharpening of the distinction between enjoyment on the one hand and criticism on the other hand, by the masses (Benjamin, 1970).

On the theme of mass media, Jean Baudrillard's contribution is extremely important. For Baudrillard, the modern world is marked by an explosion in the kinds of information due to the various forms of mass media, but is again characterised by a decrease in meaning. Suggesting three hypotheses in relation to mass media,

information and meaning, Baudrillard opines that information is directly related to the destruction of signification and meaning. That information produces an acceleration of meaning is nothing but a myth. Instead of enhancing communication, it wears itself out in the stage of producing the communication, and instead of creating meaning, “it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning” (Baudrillard, 1983: 98). This process of simulation in which the desire of the audience is put forward and given the highest importance, works very carefully in order to keep up this false wall of simulacra, the falling of which would disclose the actual reality of the loss of meaning. Through the medium of mass media and the various other forms of technologies involved in the production of information, a cyclical process takes place, “that of simulation, that of the hyperreal: a hyperreality of communication and of meaning, more real than the real. Hence the real is abolished” (Baudrillard, 1983: 99). Following this, there is also a de-structuring of the social. The modern forms of media thus carry out an elaborate process of decrease and ultimate loss, both, of the social as well as of the meaning. Contrary to the view of Marshall McLuhan who believed that the medium was the message, in other words that it was in the medium itself where all the contents of meaning were absorbed, Baudrillard believed that even in the medium there is a movement, retreating back from what is real, thus leading to the creation of a world of hyperreality. The medium thus no longer performs the role of being a mediator between one form of reality and another, or between one condition of real and the other. With the end of mediation or any kind of intervention between the two forms, the function of media as being capable of producing meaning ceases. This implosion of content, of meaning, and of the medium itself, altogether leads to the implosion or the absorption of the social (Baudrillard, 1983).

Prevalence of human communication over time and at a distance is a much older phenomenon than the modern mass media. This process of communication was very much integral, even to the organization of early societies, where mass dissemination of ideas were carried out in matters of religious awareness and political duties. The European Churches in the Middle ages are thus regarded as ‘media’ by Denis McQuail, enabling ‘mass communication’ of religious values and ideals. It was only with the invention of the printing press that independent media came into being (McQuail, 2010). The printing press revolutionized the entire world of

communication. This was followed by the other forms of media including the film, the radio, and the television, which revolutionized the aspect and the ability of communications in the human world and placed it altogether at a different level. In around the 1960s, newer forms of technology gave rise to what was known as 'New Media'. Including other mediums of communication including the Internet, or the mobile phones, this 'New Media' was different from the older media by its interconnectedness and interactivity, its ability to reach out to individual members of the audience or individual users as both senders and receivers, as well as its quality of 'delocatedness' (McQuail, 2010). For McQuail, one attribute which can be readily applied to the concept of human culture, something without which culture cannot develop, survive or exist, is the feature of communication. He thus identifies culture as something collective and shared with others, as having some symbolic form of expression, as showing some regularity or pattern and maintaining a dynamic continuity over time (McQuail, 2010).

Communication playing a vital role in human life, the aspect of communication changes is bound to have enormous repercussions on society on the whole, and in almost all aspects of social life including the economy, the roles played by individuals, their relation to the society itself, the organization of work, etc. This is important not only from the point of view of the technologies involved in the communication process but also for looking at the organizations associated with the new forms of media, and the impact of this on the promotion and the favouring of certain types of social and political structures.

In this perspective, Phillip Elliot in his article on the "Intellectuals, the 'Information Society' and the Disappearance of the Public Sphere", states that the modern world is witnessing a continuous decrease of the involvement of people as active political citizens of the nation and, is instead marked by the population being considered as nothing more than mere consumption units in a corporate world. In the field of culture, this trend has led to a continuous depletion of the concept of 'public sphere' as described by Jurgen Habermas or what C. Wright Mills defined as the community of publics. Instead of a society where the population takes part as members of the market, the idea of the 'public sphere' as propounded by Habermas or the idea of the community of publics as defined by C. W. Mills, emphasized on the prevalence of a

society based on contests and debates between the politically expressed demands which grounded in terms of information and knowledge. The present society where the people take part in the matters of the market as active consumers, limits their achievements and their scope to achieve higher goals that the profit-oriented market sets up for them. The assumption that developments in the field of communication and technology will create more increase the chances of access to information and also create new opportunities of two-way communication, is challenged and questioned by the privatization of information in the hands of producers who main aim is to protect their commercial secret from the society and invest in the production of commodities for sale. Information which in the past was available as a public right, is also gradually becoming a commodity to be purchased, with those types of information which are not profitable and do not have a market, not being produced anymore. As Elliot argues, in such a society marked by a disappearance of the 'public sphere' in the increasing privation of information, conflict will be solved by the material rather than the ideology (Elliot, 1986).

Taking up the views of the modern media as illustrated by the Frankfurt school, the neo-Marxist tradition, and the postmodern definition, the concept of mass media has been included in the present study to include the mass mediums of communication which have created an atmosphere of commodification and consumption in every field, and although have not led to a complete cultural homogenization, has certainly had an adverse effect on the local forms of communication and culture through their creation of the world of 'hyperreality'.

In this context, it is thus important to acknowledge the features of folk society in general and to recognize the significance of the traditional form of communication as scrolls, in their contribution to the field of pictorial journalism by creating a cultural environment which encourages opinion from the active audience and promotes debate on polity and society, thus to some extent performing the role of a 'public sphere' in the age of electronic mediation and privatization and commercialization of information, knowledge and culture in society.

THE INDIAN SITUATION:

In India, it was the encounter with colonialism that marked the country's earliest contact with European modernity. It was with the nationalist movement and the exposure to the western culture and the colonial rule that the Indians became very conscious of their socio-cultural identity. Since then there have been many visible changes in the cultural scene of the country. With processes of industrialization, urbanization, and globalization taking place, the life of the population residing in the country from their modes of consumption to their modes of transport, food, clothing and leisure activities, all have undergone many changes.

In terms of the diverse groups and communities of India, there are studies to prove both, the increase in the ethnic and regional self-consciousness of tribes, communities and caste groups, as well as cases of cultural integration in the society. Various changes in the form of social, economic and political developments have created new linkages and platforms for interaction amongst the various cultural regions, the tribes, religious communities and caste groups. The popularity of the media in the form of influence as well as outreach has also played a very important role in this aspect and strengthening these processes. It is in the evolution of the processes of industrialization, the growth of political institutions and the entire process of nation-building that the local and the regional cultural identities face chances of feeling threatened. The growth of institutions in the fields of economy, education, information, political structure, and other services thus create a pressure for homogeneity and conformity in the relationships. This often puts pressure on the different kinds of groups through power or domination to introduce standardization in institutional relationships, which often also leads to resentment and conflict out of the fear of impact that the global institutions have on the local cultures (Singh, 2003).

India has always been home to a rich variety of indigenous traditions. The oral tradition present in India throughout centuries, in varying forms and in different regions, have always encouraged a reflective and critical audience, thereby encouraging an atmosphere of active debate and creative expression. With the phase of industrialization in India, with new forms and patterns of interaction due to newer social processes and institutions, the society in general was thus faced with several challenges in the domain of culture.

Since the introduction of the mass media and its consequent effects on the universalization of communication, together with the availability of various mediums of communication in the form of the press, the radio, the television, the satellite networks, there has been a massive transformation in the scenario of communication in India which has also brought about a revolution in the sphere of entertainment and information. This coupled with a speedy development in the field of transport and an ever-expanding network of markets of cultural objects or cultural exchanges have all paved the way for the globalization of culture, where culture is more like a commodity, produced in the capitalist market to ensure profit. This aspect of commodification and marketization of culture is often perceived as a threat for all the local and regional cultural identities, where the above mentioned processes may bring about displacement and a decontextualization of meanings and values attached to specific cultural objects or processes in certain societies. Every local culture survives through distinct and indigenous features in terms of its components, its characteristics, the values and customs and process attached to it, which are also in a way, its means of survival. However, when there is an overarching pressure for homogenization of these local and indigenous forms of cultures, along with their cultural beliefs and practices themselves, the people who have been accustomed to, and internalized into these cultures, its erosion may have serious impact on the quality of life of the people and thus adversely affect their mental and physical health. Globalization thus as a process, has far-reaching potentials in India with the presence of both kinds of forces, of acceptance as well as rejection in the form of social, cultural and political movements. Markets are the most important mechanisms through which globalization reaches out to wider areas. The changes in the market and the trade relations have brought about a change in the pattern of consumption, in the production of cultural objects, and in religious practices, thus altering the lifestyle pattern of the population residing in the areas influenced by the processes of industrialization, urbanization and a concurrent growth of trade and commerce. These modifications have again had an influence on the forms, symbols and the usages of communication media in the regional and local cultures. Although this process of globalization has just started in India, the processes connected with it have had upsetting influences on the local cultures (Singh, 2000).

Yogendra Singh thus states that this globalization of markets and products have had an adverse effect on the traditional field of art, especially folk art. This form of art which was locally produced, by artisans, mostly for ritual or social uses has in the contemporary times been converted into commodities to be sold in the market. The lives and the occupation of the artisans connected with these art forms have also become destabilized and thus threatened in an age where their art forms are easily producible in the factory and their role in the society gets undermined (Ibid). Singh rightly points out that the “most revolutionary aspect of cultural, social and economic globalization is reflected in the advances in technology of communication” (Singh, 2000: 55). The various forms of mass communications like the printing press, the television, the radio, computer, Internet, mobile phones, all have enabled the process of communication to go beyond the boundaries of the state or of a specific cultural region, and have also made possible interaction to take place not only on the face-to-face or primary level but has also extended it to secondary and even virtual levels. From the publication of newspaper to the latest technological developments in the field of media, India has witnessed a revolution in the field of information technology and communication. These forms of mass communication have had both positive as well as negative impact on the local cultures of the Indian society. Where they have played a positive role, they have been successful in empowering the local cultures and expanding their reach, hence leading to the strengthening of cultural and emotional bonds between them. Again where they have had a negative influence on the local cultures, they have led to the threatening of the local cultures and thus a reassertion of cultural and ethnic identity among the groups. Although the media plays a very significant role in manipulating the minds of the masses and in turn ensuring conformity in them, different forms of folk and local cultures help the audience to retain their reflective and critical skills and not just remain as passive viewers of whatever is given to them. In some cultures, globalization has to some extent helped generate more debates on identity and local interests (Singh, 2000).

Cultural identity as such, is formed by complex set of factors comprising of the process of the gradual growth and development of values, beliefs and practices of a groups of people as a result of their historical, social and cultural experiences over time. Factors like ecology, the economic institutions, the social structure, the family structure, and the social processes associated with the society, all give a particular

identity to a culture, which is then expressed through the help of certain symbols, certain practices, certain beliefs and customs, etc. Those residing in the area marked by these cultural processes identify themselves with this local culture both consciously and unconsciously. In the case of India, the cultural identity of every tribe or caste or community was earlier based on a practice of occupational specialization, along with other features of customs, beliefs and ritual practices unique to the group, which governed their social, cultural and even personal lives. Although long-lasting, the impact of the process of globalization is but different from other processes of westernization and modernization, which were the result of the colonial rule in the countries which implied cultural encounters from a perspective of power. (Singh, 2000).

In this context, Yogendra Singh, in his work, marked out two kinds of culture in India, one being the local and the other being the regional. Local culture according to Singh was usually restricted to a particular settlement or village. Most elements of the culture in this context were attached to the locality. In some cases, certain groups may engage in the production of special practices or performances which may play an importance role in making up the identity and the local culture of the people of the particular region. In the case of the regional cultures, they are usually based on the persistence of cultural traits much wider than that of the local area, although they do share some practices and traditions in common with the local cultures. Language, way of living, contributions in the fields of art and literature, traditions of various historical and socio-cultural movements, are all factors which play an important role in the formation of regional cultures and identities based on such cultures. It is only when factors both external and internal have a strong impact on the local and regional cultures; in so far as to break their thread of continuity and threaten their existence that the condition of these relatively smaller cultures becomes vulnerable. The existence of processes which have at times destabilized the internal processes of continuity and tradition in the Indian society, have been present much before the entry of the development of globalization. The significance of the process of globalization thus lies in the enlargement and the increase in the intensity of the interactive relationship between the local and the global (Singh, 2000).

Any civilization contains different groups, each carrying the components of the common tradition as well as including their own unique practices and beliefs. As mentioned before, it is the process of nationalism which has played an important role in the reinterpretation and the revival of the traditional cultures of India. For the term 'tradition', Milton Singer referred to McKim Marriott's work on *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*, while describing it as the act of handing down and also what is passed down through generations. It thus refers to both the process and the product. Faced with the constant changes and transformation through both internal and external factors, these local traditions have in contemporary times been forced to reaffirm to their own selves, of what they had been, what they have become and what lies in future for them. Every tradition has always contained a specific body of practices, values and beliefs which make up its culture, which is carried forth through both human and non-human forms of media. This cultural content is then transmitted and presented on special occasions. These performances act as the direct observable units of the social and cultural structure of the local or regional groups. Such performances, as Singer states are cultural performances consisting of music, narration, dance, acting, certain themes, and props which allow the cultural content of a group or community to be performed in front of an audience and thus be transmitted to the others of the same generation as well as of the younger generations (Singer, 1975).

A study of the Indian society would reveal the existence of several forms of cultural and folk media and the custom of specific cultural performances practiced by local groups, tribes or communities in order to keep their tradition alive and maintain its features. These folk cultures were different from the 'high' cultures which referred to the court or the temple art. They were created by specific groups of artisans less for their aesthetic utility and more for their function in the society to maintain the customs and the traditions and to ensure order and morality. They were more close to the life of the common people of the society.

In the case of pre-colonial India, which was dominated by the feudal mode of production, there was a clear-cut difference between the folk culture and the elite cultures. The peasants, who followed the folk tradition, based their social lives and interactions on the values and the beliefs of the folk culture. This form of culture was

however not cut off from the high or the elite culture which was more systematic and organised in terms of its content and form. There was instead a relation of reciprocity between the two cultures in matters of adaptation or adoption of the themes, patterns or styles. However, the entry of the capitalist and industrialist economy in the rural society brought about many changes in its patterns of culture and in the prevailing social structures. Novel social process in the realms of culture, polity and economy transformed the traditional structure of the villages and the communities. This was marked along with the growth of a new form of culture, commonly known as 'mass culture' or 'popular culture'. The emergence of this new form of culture due to the technological changes in the mediums of communication, as well as the development of the transport facilities together allowed communication and social interaction to take place at a much higher pace and on a much wider level than could have ever been possible in the past. This new form of culture was however not restricted to the territorial boundaries of groups, communities or cultures. It was majorly backed by the market forces, and thus brought with it the attitudes of consumerism, migration, weakening of social and personal ties and a growth of individualism. Culture in this sense began to be treated as a commodity. These changes also seriously affected the condition of the traditional folk communities and especially their folk art (Singh, 2000). Separating the product from the artisan, it also detached the creation itself from its ability to produce aesthetic expressiveness, which also had serious repercussions on the social structure, especially in the rural society where these forms of culture were the sources of education as well as entertainment.

Nonetheless, studies show that on the whole, the Indian tradition has managed to survive in many places, irrespective of the presence of obstacles due to social change that came about, together with the processes of westernization, modernization, industrialization and urbanization. Speaking particularly about folk art, the social organization being based in the village community, these folk artists played their hereditary roles and focussed on the task of preserving the age-old forms of art, along with their themes and patterns. With the transformations in Indian society, these artists in different regions of the country chose to adopt new patterns, but then, their scope for expressing or asserting individuality in a radical manner was not quite possible as the art forms themselves, and their professions as artists were both intricately linked to the social and the religious structure of the particular village,

community or culture to which they belonged (Mookherjee, 1986). With the fading away of the hereditary patrons for whom these artists produced and performed, and on whom they relied for their livelihood, the tradition of folk art indeed received a major setback. 'Folk' art which Stella Kramrisch describes as the unknown art, that which is created in the village or the rural areas, including local art, tribal art, and art which are practiced by women only, or by the non-Brahmin priests on behalf of women, thus underwent change in both form and the content with the change in the social and the economic structure of the Indian society (Stella Kramrisch, 1994).

PATS, PATUAS AND THE CRISIS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY:

Symbols, symbolic artefacts, objects or practices containing a symbolic value, all contribute to the construction of the notion of cultural identity. In the case of the scroll painters, the notion of cultural identity is collective. Individual members of the community also derive ideas of their personal identity in the society from their association with the larger group. As mentioned before, Yogendra Singh wrote that the economic institutions, the ecology, the social structure, the family structure, and the social processes associated with the society, all implant the idea of a particular identity to a culture. This culture is then expressed through certain beliefs, symbols and practices. The culture of the society is thus according to a Bourdieusian point of view, a 'habitus' which includes certain internalized dispositions in relation to activity in the social realm, which influences perception and practices in the everyday life (Bourdieu, 1989). If culture of a group or community is its 'habitus', then cultural identity is also formed from the association of the group or of the individual self to this 'habitus'. Following this thread, therefore in a moment of crisis of cultural identity, the importance and the significance of the 'habitus' or some of its aspects cannot under any cost be undermined. This section then shows how the creation of the artists, in the form of the scrolls helps in the assertion of the cultural identity of the community as well as the tradition itself.

As per the theme of the present study, it is important to look at the relationship between the process of globalization; particularly cultural globalization and its relation with the folk art, specifically scroll paintings. As has been mentioned, in the case of India, the folk artists associated with this tradition were not in a position to

radically express their innovative ideas because more than for purposes of decoration or aesthetic creativity, they had a proper role to play in the social order, related to the preservation and maintenance of traditions beliefs, values and customs through their art form. In the cases where they merged with the new form of culture, the mass culture, they resulted in producing aesthetic or artistic commodities for the market. In these instances, these particular art forms lost their social significance or their purpose of creation and became like any other 'folk' art form to be sold in the market or to be viewed simply as a visual tradition. In other cases, where the social and the religious structures of the society and their roles prevented them from adapting any new methods or themes, they died out in competition to the popularity of the modern mass media and the easily reproducible forms of artefacts available in the market, thus remaining as distant memories of past traditions. At this point, what must be kept in mind is that, with technological development in the field of mass media, especially in the audio-visual field, like the television, or the film, or the internet; or even with the development of the various forms of technical expertise enabling in the reproduction of art in the form of non-expensive readily available prints in endless copies, art as such in almost all of its traditional forms can be easily reproduced thus killing what Walter Benjamin called the aura of the original creation. What then is important to look at, is not just the traditional forms of art, and their condition in the contemporary age of the popular culture and mass media, but more importantly the role that these art forms still continue to play in the society, and their relation to the social structure in the contemporary age of electronic and satellite mediation. Every art is thus meaningful in its original socio-historical context, where it plays a significant role in reflecting the attitudes and values of a particular culture. But what is more important to note, is the condition of these art forms when they are taken out of their original conditions and roles and are placed in new socio-cultural situations where they are made to face forces which are contradictory to their growth. The artisans then, in this context play important parts of representing these traditions and an exploration of their traditional roles, the transformation of these roles and its impact upon these art forms is relevant for purposes of explaining the condition of folk art and traditional performances in the age of mass media. The tradition of scroll painting, which is the main subject matter of the present research, is a tradition which is found in varying styles in different regions of India and even for that matter, in South Asia. This

custom of scroll painting has been in this study, perceived as both folk art and traditional performance, thus underlying the significance of its recognition as an audio-visual tradition instead of its emphasis simply as a visual tradition. These paintings as found in different regions of India have always been accompanied with songs, narrative poetry or even dance, and together they entertained and educated the rural audience. Through the portrayals of mostly religious and moral themes in the paintings, illustrated in different patterns and styles of representation, with the narrative performance, this tradition enabled a presentation of religious, moral and social values in an audio-visual format which was easy to understand for the audience. Backed by their hereditary roles in the hierarchical social order as the tradition and value-keepers of society, the performance and presentation of these scrolls were considered as important and even sacred in some societies. This tradition of scroll painting could then under these conditions be described as a form of mass media, with the 'mass' in this sense loosely referring to the undifferentiated folk audience. As, it was only with the coming of the processes of industrialization and urbanization and its impact on certain areas leading to an overall change in their social, cultural, political and economic structure, that the non-industrialized and non-urbanized rural areas were held as being starkly different and were designated as 'folk' societies. In this context emerged the dichotomous relationship between the urban and the folk, and between the concept of the 'mass' and that of the 'folk'; with 'mass' referring to an undifferentiated body or group of people in urban areas, and folk referring to the relatively simpler, rural population. It can then be argued that these were the conditions which led to these mediums of communication such as scroll painting to be regarded specifically as 'folk' media. If, for once, the term mass media can be taken up broadly to describe those mediums of communication which reach out to a wide population, then the tradition of scrolls can also be described as a mass media, which before the invention of the modern technologies in the field of communication, used to be the one of the main mediums of communication, of both education and entertainments for the population of the pre-industrial societies.

The present condition of the tradition of scroll paintings in the various parts of India, as has already been discussed in the second chapter, is quite bleak, in comparison to the important position that they held in the pre-industrial society. In many regions, the traditions are nothing more than the nostalgia of a recent past. In other regions, the

tradition in the form of the *Chitrakathis* of Maharashtra, the *Garodas* of Gujarat, and the *Telengana* scrolls still exist though they are on the almost on the verge of becoming extinct. In the tradition of the *Phads* of Rajasthan, and the *Patachitras* of Orissa, they still exist in the society as offering religious guidance and detailing on the socio-cultural religious events and saints of the regions. But overall, the growing tendency that can be seen in most of these painting traditions is their decreasing social significance and their increasing cases of reproduction in the form of printed photographs and visuals which thus challenge and weaken their popularity and their authenticity. What has also been noticed is, the growing use of this art form in its varying patterns for purposes of decoration, which has resulted in the depletion of the significance and importance of these art forms for the role that they used to play in society and is also a threat to the artisans pursuing this art form, as with their easy reproduction in the market and with the more popular forms of modern mass media entering the rural scenario, that they are forced to abandon their traditional occupations and instead take up modern jobs to earn their livelihood.

In such a situation, a quite different and challenging role in terms of the artisans as well as their creations has been observed among the scroll painting tradition of West Bengal and Jharkhand. Unlike most other forms of scroll painting, which have succumbed to the era of 'mechanical reproduction' and the existence of the modern and technologically advanced forms of mass media, or have lost their charm and are existing on the edge of extinction, the scroll painters of parts of Bengal and Jharkhand, have adapted new themes and newer methods in order to survive in the age of technology. Although it would be definitely incorrect to say that the tradition in these regions has remained unaffected by the introduction of the newspapers, the television, the cinema, and the Internet, they are still found in certain regions. What is more important to note rather than their numerical composition in terms of the population of practising artists, as compared to the past, is the way in which they cope with this situation where both the artists themselves, as well as their art forms are facing a situation of crisis – of cultural identity.

While Ajit Mookherjee in his work on *Folk Art of India* wrote about the absence of the freedom or ability of the folk artist to use her or his creativity and express radical thoughts or notions, what is instead found among the scroll painters of Bengal and

Jharkhand, especially in the contemporary times, is an attitude of openness towards the new forms of mass media and their content, from which they have also borrowed some of their content. Thus although the invasion of modernity has influenced and hampered the popularity and the social significance of the scroll painting tradition in both West Bengal and Jharkhand, the customary practice of scroll painting and narration itself has not allowed the element of tradition to be lost. The embracing of modernity has hence not led to rejection of tradition.

Therefore along with the illustrations of stories and episodes from myths and epics, these scrolls in the modern times also depict and present events of socio-cultural, historical and cultural importance (Ghosh, 2003; Chatterji, 2009).

These scroll paintings from West Bengal and the Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand are vertical in pattern and different from the wall and floor paintings found in the same regions. Hierarchically, these scroll painters, or *Patuas* of West Bengal, occupy a low status in the Hindu social order, backed by ancient text accounting for their fall in the hierarchy due to their transgression from the prevailing norms. The *Jadu-Patuas*, who reside mostly in the Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand and are also found in certain parts of Bengal, are tribal in origin and are assigned a respectable position in the society. Nowadays, these *Jadu-pats* are however also drawn by the non-tribal painters, who seem to occupy an oscillating position between the religions of Islam and Hinduism. Some of these painters have also taken up themes and patterns from the tradition of the *Jadu-Patuas*. Broadly speaking, a fusion of tribal and village traditions can be witnessed in some of these creations. These *Pats* or scrolls were displayed by the artists who at the same time carried these in and around villages performing them with the help of songs and narration to the village audience.

While many of the early scroll paintings of parts of Bengal bear resemblance to the Rajput and the Mughal styles, or even to the Etruscan paintings, the *Jadu-Pats* drawn for the Santhal audience is somewhat similar to the tribal paintings of Middle India (Kramrisch, 1994). For most of the *Patuas*, the tradition of scroll painting has always been a seasonal occupation. They generally go out in and around villages performing with their scrolls after harvest, while in monsoons they take up other jobs (Hauser, 2002).

The scroll paintings as found in parts of Bengal are thus still significant for the fact that this centuries old tradition, has carried on and survived to the present day, partly also owing to the literary and scholarly work of the writers of the Bengal Renaissance. Although these scrolls are mostly created for the purpose of sale in the market as souvenirs for foreign tourists or as products having a 'folk' aesthetic value and thus their need to be used for purposes of decoration, or even as authentic artefacts of a 'folk' tradition to be kept in the museums; scrolls are still produced by some village artists in the rural areas occasionally for their original and traditional purpose. As Jyotindra Jain rightly points out, it is the introduction of the modern forms of mass media, especially the growth and popularity of the film, which has infringed upon the traditional custom of storytelling and has caused effects detrimental to the prevalence of the age old traditional of scroll painting and narration (Jain, 1998). In the case of the *Jadu-Pats* of the Santhals, with the intrusion of media into the tribal society, these scrolls have also lost their popularity, but as the theme of these scrolls is mostly magico-religious, with the *Jadu-Patuas* being assigned a respectable and superior position in the tribal society, they still remain significant for the social lives of the tribal society. Unlike the non-tribal *Patuas* of Bengal, whose scrolls served as an important audio-visual medium of communication, enabling the education and entertainment of the village audience through the presentation of scrolls; the scrolls in the tribal society of the Santhals are not so much used for entertainment. Instead, these painters are regarded as the magico-religious priests dealing with the other worldly spirits and life after death (Maity, 1973). Thus although the introduction and reach of science, technology and modern education in the interiors of the country has resulted in the weakening of beliefs and practices associated with magic and superstition, these *Jadu-Patuas* are still revered by the tribal population and their practices are regarded as spiritual and authoritative.

In the case of the *Patuas* of Bengal, it was with the construction of the Kali temple in the city of Calcutta in around the 1830s that some of the *Patuas* from the villages migrated, in order to paint souvenirs for tourists and pilgrims, illustrating the depicted deity on inexpensive paper, thus marking a change in the form, from the lengthy scrolls to the single images meant to be sold in the market (Ghosh, 2000). It was primarily this change which marked a shift, in both, the *Patuas* from their traditional occupation, which was not to sell scrolls but to display them along with narrative

poetry and, the tradition as such, from the themes to the format of presentation, which was not meant for performance and storytelling, but for sale in the market.

Thus in the realm of folk paintings, particularly scroll painting, these Kalighat paintings, as they are known, altogether represent a different genre from the rest of the traditions of scroll paintings in India, and even in Bengal. Although they cannot be strictly categorized under the heading of 'folk art', as their primary aim was to respond to the economic opportunities that had opened up in the city with the construction of the temple, and also with the overall changing social circumstances of the time, the repercussions that this art form had on the prevalence of the tradition in Bengal as it is today, on the whole, both in terms of the patterns and styles of representation and the themes, is very important and relevant in the attempt to explore the present condition of the tradition of scroll painting in the age of the mass media.

The Kalighat paintings were a product of the age of 'mechanical reproduction' in Bengal. This period also marked the early years of colonialism in India. The exposure of the folk culture of Bengal, to the British styles of painting, along with their technological advancements in the form of lithographs, oleographs, prints, photographs, and other mechanised techniques of reproduction of art and culture had a strong effect on the development of new patterns and stylistic features in the school of Kalighat painting. As Jyotindra Jain writes, in order to understand this genre of painting, it is important not only to refer to the traditional scroll painters of Bengal, but also those artisans associated with the making and painting of clay images, as well as the stone workers and the wood carvers, who also painted in styles similar to the Kalighat paintings (Jain, 2003).

Gradually along with the paintings of the temple deity, these painters started illustrating themes from other religious traditions as well as from non-religious subjects. Produced mainly for the mass market which grew with development of the tourism industry, stimulated by the new modes of transport and communication, these paintings displayed a repetition of topics and themes. The transformation of the tradition from that of scroll painting and storytelling to a form of visual art to be sold in the market in the form of single images was also marked by a change in the attitude of the artisans towards their work. Whereas in the rural areas, they produced for the village audience as a visual medium which was accompanied by narration, in the city

this form of art was just like any other commodity. This hence led to a division of labour among the artists, to increase the number of copies on cheap quality paper in less time, in order to meet the demands of the growing market. The lengthy scrolls were modified to depiction on single sheets. Portrayal of contemporary events included the illustrations of popular proverbs, scenes from the novels of the time, the life in the newly cosmopolitan city, the attitudes and the attires of the newly created urban upper and middle classes, etc (Ghosh, 2000).

This form of painting also played a major role, helping in the emergence and revival of the Bengali identity in colonial capital. It was during this period that the British were gradually changing from their position as merchants to becoming the rulers of the country. These scrolls in this context played a significant part in reviving the Bengali identity in the growing Westernization and more specifically Europeanization of the region (Ghosh, 2000). Bengali identity as such was defined through these forms of art which were used as instruments by the Bengali nationalists to pull the attention of the native population to the nationalist movement and also to the ideas of the emerging nation. The scroll painters also reacted to the situation of the crisis of the Indian identity in these times, with the growing appropriation of the Western lifestyles by the urban educated population. Through the help of their scrolls, thus alongside the traditional topics, they began to voice criticisms against the ill effects of the processes of Westernization and modernization in the country and the adoption of the new modes of cultural production including the print media, the cinema and photography (Ghosh, 2003). These works can hence be described as a 'cosmopolitan folk culture'¹⁹ which is modified from its actual rural form but is also not wholly a product of the urban mass culture. Through their illustration of religious themes and the images of gods and goddesses, and also religious festivals, these scroll painters played a significant role in strengthening and articulating regional identity in the nineteenth century (Ghosh, 2003).

Born as a colonial product, these folk paintings expressed the increasing consciousness of the Indian masses of that period. Their paintings addressed the

¹⁹ It was Milton Singer who first used this term in his book '*Semiotics of Cities, Selves, and Cultures. Explorations in Semiotic Anthropology* (1991), to refer to those cultures which were a little modified from how it existed in the village and were also sometimes assimilated to what is known as mass culture of the urban areas.

common masses, and raised questions on the changing social system. This thus resulted in a fundamental change, in terms of their attitude, their style and also the content of the paintings. These paintings adopted the use of caricatures and satirical images, while dealing with the current socio-cultural or economic events. The portrayal of gods and goddesses in their scrolls also appeared as being transformed due to the new social conditions, thus often seen to be occupying an inferior position to the human beings. As Ajit Mookherjee states, “Art had ceased to be mystical” and instead became a platform for “revenge for past social injustice” (Mookherjee, 1986: 66). As discussed above, topics in these Kalighat paintings included street scenes, festivals and popular amusements, events portraying sorrow or happiness from everyday life, along with illustrations of the negative aspects of a gradually decaying social order, and diminishing of cultural traditions including paintings of drunkenness, domestic quarrels, prostitution, negligence of social values, growing tendencies of Westernization, etc. (Mookherjee, 1986).

Under the colonial rule, these Kalighat painters had hence become the pictorial newsmakers of colonial Calcutta. Caricatures of the new Indian bourgeoisie, of English dresses and customs, became quite popular in the market. But, it was with the advent of the lithographs and the oleographs that this tradition received a major blow on their popularity. With the easily available colourful prints being available in the market, the demand for these paintings severely decreased, and the painters who had migrated from the rural parts of Bengal in order to earn their livelihood through their traditional occupation of painting, began to search for other means of survival. Altogether, these reasons led to the fading of the popularity of the painted images and gradually the death of this tradition (Mookherjee, 1986).

These paintings therefore marked a different genre altogether in the tradition of scroll painting where these illustrations themselves became major platforms for voicing opinions and critiques. These *Patuas* then with the help of the paintings themselves kept the notion of public sphere alive in the society. Unlike many other forms of art, which emphasize on the maintenance of tradition in terms of their patterns as well as the content, this practice of scroll painting and narration, depicting elements of both tradition as well as modernity (See Figure 8 and 9, on p.170), was hence more close to the actual social reality. Interestingly, though they represented reality, they did so in a



Fig. 9. The deities Shiva and Parvati seen in more intimate interaction, in keeping with the long tradition of Bengali depictions of the divine couple.
UPM 29-225-3

FIGURE 8: KALIGHAT PAINTING ILLUSTRATING A TRADITIONAL THEME (Ghosh, 2000).



Fig. 5. Two women with hookah (tobacco apparatus).
UPM 17857, Cramp Collection

FIGURE 9: KALIGHAT PAINTING ILLUSTRATING A MODERN THEME (Ghosh, 2000).

creative manner which allowed for an alternate vision of reality and at the same time did not impinge it on the audience, but allowed for the social imagination to build in a reflective and reflexive manner.

Due to the colonial domination and subjugation, the emerging pattern in Indian painting exhibited a strong urge to define a national identity. In the case of Bengal, revivalism in art hence endeavoured to refer back to the glorious past, in order to regenerate the present, through the help of historical and mythical themes. In the sphere, apart from the Kalighat paintings, the *Saheb-Pata* and the *Santhal-Bidroha Pata* made important contributions to the context of the colonial situation and instances of revolt. In about 1943, Bengal witnessed a major cyclone, followed by famine, leading to severe damage in agriculture and livelihood. Lack of food and maladministration led to the loss of several lives (Mallik, 1940). It was an amalgamation of these various factors like British colonialism, invasions in the past by other communities and kingdoms, and natural calamities, which resulted in a radical change in the lives and practices of the people of this community. As gathered from the conversation with Shyam Sundar Chitrakar of West Bengal, it was understood that at this point of time, as a consequence of the natural calamity, most of the earlier scrolls and even the earlier patterns and styles as found in most of the areas of Bengal, were lost in time, as the tradition itself did not demand the preservation of scrolls as such²⁰.

In the present day, the Kalighat School of painting has absolutely disappeared. However, its thematic styles and patterns and techniques of representation have been taken up by the scroll painters of the Medinipur district of West Bengal, which boasts of the most vibrant community of *Patuas* practising their traditional occupation in the present day. Unlike the other regions of Bengal where this medium of scroll painting still exists, although in a decadent condition, where the themes or the topics of the painting have remain unchanged from time immemorial, thus relating to certain

²⁰ Shyam Sundar Chitrakar stated that most of the older patterns and styles were lost in the calamity as there was no practice or method of preserving them in the community. He being quite elderly in terms of age, along with some other artists have over the decades tried their best to keep some elements of the traditional practice alive. But again, it can then be said that due to the loss of the traditional patterns and styles of representation among them, these Patuas instead of giving up, thought of better ways to keep alive their practice and represent modernity within tradition.

scenes and episodes from the religious myths and epics, or the lives of saints; in this school of scroll painting in Bengal, one finds a variety of new themes existing side by side with the older popular stories.

In the case of the scrolls from the Santhal Parganas, these scrolls have always served a very important role in the tribal society. Apart from detailing to the audience about the need to uphold the moral order in the society by showing them scrolls pertaining to the life after death, and the corresponding scrolls relating to the punishment or rewards received by people from hell or heaven as per their moral, social and individual conduct in their human life, these scrolls also deal with the life after death.

Anthropologist Malinowski had written that for what lay beyond the control of the people of the simpler and pre-modern societies, there existed the institution of magic. It was thus this fear of the unknown and the uncontrollable that created the institution of magic (Malinowski, 1948). The Santhals, in a similar way, believe that after death of a person, she or he goes about wandering blindly in the afterworld, suffering due to their bad deeds on earth. It is only through the *Jadu-Patua* or the scroll painter of this tribal society that the blind spirit can get back her or his eyesight and go to heaven. The whole process involves the painting of the iris of the eye on the scroll illustrating the dead person, by the *Jadu-Patua* in return for gifts and offerings in money and in kind. As believed, it is through this act that the deceased person finds the way to heaven. From this practice, the importance and the significance of the scroll painter in the tribal society becomes clear. He officiates as the magico-religious priest and hence occupies a much esteemed position in the society (McCutchion and Bhowmik, 1999). Although there is not much writing available on the social significance of the *Jadu-Patua*, his traditional occupation and his scrolls, the existing body of literature do point out to the fact that over the years they have undergone many changes. The entry of the modern education system in the lives of these Santhals, have led to a weakening of their belief in magic and superstitions. The conversion of many tribals into other religions such as that of Christianity has also led to a decline in the popularity of these practices. Waves of Vaishnavism in parts of Jharkhand also affected many beliefs and practices in this society. Moreover, most importantly, influences from the tradition of scroll painting in West Bengal have also had an impact on the tribal *Pats* and the *Jadu-Pats* of the Santhals. Many recent scrolls show an increasing trend in terms of

adaptation of styles of representation in their scrolls from the non-tribal pats of Bengal. Although in the modern-day period, along with the display of the *Yama Pats* and *Pats* detailing on the myth of creation of the Santhals, there have been scrolls on certain non-conventional themes relating to land rights, exploitation of the tribals by the money lenders, seizing of land by the landlords, exploitation of the natural resources by the outsiders, as well as scrolls on the lives and the deeds of the freedom fighters of the nationalist movement in India, the *Jadu-Pats* still exist in the society as providing the population with an understanding and knowledge of the other world which they cannot see or know. In this case the *Jadu-Patuas* act as the mediator between the two worlds and thus providing them with a possible explanation. Although the impact of the entry of the modern forms of communication cannot be sidelined, since the function of these scrolls is not limited to purposes of entertainment, they have not been able to totally overpower the importance of this tradition in the tribal society. As the purpose of scroll painting and display in the tribal society of the Santhals, has not been restricted to that of communication, with the scrolls performing roles not only as a form of media enabling education, awareness and entertainment, but also performing a vital function in the social life and the popular value and belief system of the Santhals pertaining to their ideas of heaven or hell and rebirth, they still hold a strong place in the lives of the Santhal population. However, with the increasing transformation of the tribal society, these Pats or scrolls then help in the assertion of the *Jadu-Patuas* as well as of the *Pat* tradition in terms of their cultural identity in the contemporary era of globalization.

Though these scrolls have become popular in the contemporary times less for their communicative purpose and rather more for their being sold in the market as curios to be used for purposes of decoration or to be kept in the museums, their persisting role even up to the present day, no matter how infrequently, in the field of communication, as a form of relatively crude form of media undamaged by technology, existing besides the more popular and glittery world of the modern mass media, cannot be undermined.

The more this tradition is viewed merely as a form of visual art, the more its power of performance becomes important to keep in mind, in order to understand this tradition as an audio-visual form of communication. As mentioned by Beatrix Hauser, it was

the commercialization of the scrolls which had a major impact on their waning in popularity and almost disappearing from the social scene, and rather being used as artefacts for the purposes of decoration or for displaying in exhibitions and museums (Hauser, 2002).

The impact of the technologically advanced forms of electronic mediation in the form of television, film, photography, newspapers, Internet, etc. have no doubt played a major part in terms of impinging on the popularity and the significance of these traditions. However, on the other hand, as Arjun Appadurai rightly comments that it cannot be assumed that this mass media acts as the opium of the masses, which are nothing but passive receptors of the content delivered to them through these forms of mass communication. Critiquing the idea of mass culture forwarded by the Frankfurt school and also the notion of bureaucracy of Max Weber, Appadurai claims that studies have both the existence of new forms of religiosities throughout the world as well as the fact that media also provokes resistance, selectivity and broadly speaking, 'agency' (Appadurai, 1997).

Borrowing on the idea of the 'collective representation' from the classical sociologist Emile Durkheim, Appadurai observes that the technological and cultural forces have led to the growth of the power of imagination which in the modern-day world has become the collective representation of the societies and communities all over the world, transcending individual will, performing the role of the very platform for collective action. Globalization in the contemporary world is then not a process of cultural homogenization. Processes involving the modern forms of mass media and individuals and societies which are constantly in a state of motion and transformation have resulted in the production of locality. Globalization and modernization as processes happening on a world-wide scale are thus interrupted and affected by the narratives of the modern mass media, which results in contextualising the global processes and rewriting them in a vernacular pattern. Globalization, thus according to Appadurai is a localizing process. In relation to the process of globalization, thus Appadurai states, it is the local within which the global events are contextualized and represented. The production of 'locality' takes place in the contexts of the availability of diverse technologies of interaction and the relativity of context, rather than its production within the communities themselves. Knowledge and conditions, it should

be kept in mind, are made local, they should not be assumed to be local from the beginning. In this production of locality in the present day, the factors of increasing commoditization and mass mediation, along with the power of the nation-states, play the most important roles. Imagination thus plays an extremely important role in human social life in the modern-day world. Appadurai describes this new role of the imagination through both, the old idea of the mechanically reproduced images as forwarded by the Frankfurt School, the idea of the imagined community as introduced by Benedict Anderson, and the idea of imagination as being similar to the concept of collective representation as stated by the French classical sociologists. This imagination in the modern social world is mediated through the various forms of mass media, which induces conditions of collective reading, criticism, and thus collective imagination, which makes communities feel and imagine things together (Appadurai, 1997).

As Benedict Anderson showed, the introduction of the print capitalism in the world marked a massive change in the order of communication. It made possible to have contacts and communication between groups which never had the chance or the possibility of face-to-face interaction, and which along with other technological innovations accelerated the spread of the Euro-colonial thought in the dominated colonies, thus leading to the growth of the imagined communities of nationalism throughout the world (Anderson, 1983).

In this context, it can then be said that the modern forms of mass media which are much more powerful than the print media in terms of their impact on the human society due to their being technologically more advanced, and their ability to go beyond the nation-state, have resulted in a much more influential impact on the imaginations of the people all over the world. Appadurai refers to as "*mediascapes*", the power of the bodies of electronic mediation to produce and disseminate information, which are now increasingly available for both private and public interests throughout the world, and also the images of the world as created by these forms of media including television, newspapers, journals and films. The importance of these global cultural flows or *mediascapes* is their ability to provide to the audiences all over the world large and complex inventories of images and narratives, within which the world of politics and news and that of the commodities are mixed. The world of

media is thus perceived as constituting of interconnected images and symbols portrayed through the forms of print media, films, the television, and billboards, with the content that they produce as having a blurred boundary between fiction and reality (Appadurai, 1997). These *mediascapes* centre around the production of images, and narratives and “what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which strips can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places” (Appadurai, 1997: 35).

The work of imagination is not anything new, and its reflections are seen in the works of art, legends, and myths which have existed in terms of a wide variety and different kinds from time immemorial in all societies. All societies have from time to time produced their own versions of cultural artefacts both materialistic and non-materialistic in order to bring to light to the members of the society the power of imagination. Through the medium of myths or various art forms, the society has always emphasized on the potential possibility of transcending and restructuring the ordinary social life.

In the context of the present work, it can thus be said that the scroll painters also played a major role in the past, in enabling and enhancing the social imagination of the village community by acting as one of the major sources of mass communication. But the popular idea that with the entry of the modern mass media, they have become nothing but mere forms of visual art cannot be supported. It is obvious that in comparison to their condition and their importance in the social lives of the village communities in the pre-industrial society, before the coming of the modern forms of mass media, nowadays most of them are on the verge of extinction. But among those scroll painters, who still continue to profess their traditional occupation, whether as the main means of their livelihood or as a seasonal occupation along with other jobs, like the scroll painters of Bengal and Jharkhand, their role as an alternative form of media in the society cannot be overlooked and the relevance of their roles should not be underestimated. Hence, even though the majority of their creations are meant for sale in the commercial market, their choice of the themes, their patterns of representation and their mode of presentation, are all very important factors pointing to their roles as both the tradition and value-keepers as well as the carriers of ideas of

the possibilities of transcending the levels of the existing social order and thus bringing in social change. As mentioned before, in the age of globalization, where the growth and development of these local art forms are severely hampered by the popularity of the modern mass media, the role played by these forms of cultural traditions, such as the scroll painting tradition is of extreme importance. Their function in dealing with this situation of the crisis of cultural identity needs to be understood in order to fully realize the potential of this age-old practice which has of late been forcefully put into the domain of 'folk' art. This paper thus argues that through the help of the illustrations on their scrolls pertaining to both traditional themes as well as the non-conventional themes, this custom of scroll painting, enables in the assertion of the cultural identity not only of the art form itself, but also of the artist associated with it. The expressive possibilities of art or myth has certainly entered the lives of the ordinary or the people, with the widely available possibilities of reproduction of cultural artefacts, but that does not undermine their expressiveness per se. The *Jadu-Pats*, and the *Yama Pats* of the Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand, as well as the *Pats* or the *Patachitra* tradition of West Bengal, specifically in the Medinipur district, all of these practices of scroll painting thus show their role not only as preservers of the traditional art form, but also continually expressing through their pictorial forms the critique of society and the possibilities of social change. Their art thus lies between the realms of tradition and modernity. Their choice to express their views about society through their art by illustrating scrolls of issues of political, social, and cultural relevance hence reveals their interest in keeping the reflective and critical values of the society alive. Appadurai's idea can then be well placed within this context when he says that, "the farther away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely are they to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world" (Appadurai, 1997: 35).

One feature of this tradition which is as important as the painting itself is the aspect of performance. When it is argued that this age-old tradition has lost its social significance, what it basically refers to is the characteristic feature of performance. These scrolls as such still exist today, in not only the different regions of West Bengal and Jharkhand, but also all over the country. But what is almost lost is their

performative aspect, and it is this problem which has led these traditional cultural practices to be shifted to being considered merely as a visual tradition.

In the case of the *Patuas*, both of Jharkhand and Bengal, they never used to sell scrolls, but used to accompany them as props for narration in a performance. It was only with the commercialization of scrolls that they began to be sold in the market as commodities having an aesthetic value (Hauser, 2002). This performance played a very important role in keeping alive the tradition. It was the pictorial depiction of events and stories on the scrolls which imparted the painters with legitimacy and authority. But each artist illustrated the themes in their own way, often deviating from the actual story or event by adding or deleting certain parts. Their narration thus played a very significant part in explaining the illustration. This narration usually consisted of rhymed couplets corresponding to each scene of the scroll. As the narration continued, the *Patua* unrolled the scroll to the appropriate scene (Ghosh, 2003). As Pika Ghosh writes, "One must, however, remember that, unlike the relative fixedness of the painted scene, each recording is but one version of the available repertoire. The fluidity and flexibility of the oral presentation and transmission process make the unknown painter's words irrecoverable, and some painted scenes have therefore remained difficult to identify." (Ghosh, 2003: 844). Sometimes the divergence of the oral narratives and the painted scrolls from the standardized version of myths or epic or the popular stories may be accounted for a difference in the audiences. This traditional form of storytelling gradually started decreasing with the scrolls being sold in the market. The tradition based on performance was thus changed to being viewed as a practice of art.

With the emergence of the modern and popular forms of mass media in the nineteenth century Bengal, this genre faced threat from all possible directions. The stability of the social existence of the *Patua* community was also disturbed by the categorization of this group as according to the British census requirements. But despite of all these, the tradition still continues to survive. Although in a decaying condition, the art from still continues to the present day, to express their views and articulate their opinions about the nationalist movement, to the problems of poverty, uncertain incomes and the social conditions of the time (Ghosh, 2003).

In the present times, this art form has been challenged by the forces of globalization, which although do not attempt at homogenizing the cultural aspects all over the world and producing a mass society, does adversely affect this form of art and all other similar forms of folk art through the threats of the growing popularity of the modern forms of mass communication. Therefore, it becomes important to stress on the vital role played by this tradition of scroll painting, in not only asserting unique cultural identity of the creative tradition itself but also of the artists who are associated with it as their traditional occupation. These scrolls in the contemporary age, through their depiction of events of international importance such as the tsunami or the World Trade Centre attacks (Chatterji, 2009), or of social issues which need awareness like global warming, population control, the ill-effects of dowry, etc. or others of critiquing the society like the problems of poverty, or the negative effects of modernization and Westernization, etc. clearly aim at asserting their uniqueness and their authenticity, not as a mere art form but as an expression representing an alternative view of reality or performing the role of a public sphere. Their attempt to represent the important and the recent events of national and international importance, like that of the Indian nationalist movement (See Figure 10, on p.180), the World trade Centre attacks (See Figure 11, on p.180), or the Tsunami (See Figure 12, on p. 181) also shows their continuous effort to remain as an important source of information and communication, even in the age of the modern mass media. Their endeavour to incorporate information from the modern forms of mass media themselves and portray them in a traditional medium, in a creative manner, highlights on their attempt, not to be viewed simply as a visual tradition, but instead as an important source of mass media, besides the modern forms of mediation.

But, what can now be observed is that in this age of mechanical reproduction, the artisans have lost their cultural status. Although in the past these *Patuas* occupied a very low position in the social hierarchy, their scrolls were considered as authentic sources of myth and tradition in the society and as such they occupied a high cultural status. Even the 'higher' caste Hindus, who otherwise avoided all kinds of social interaction with these communities in fear of ritual pollution, provided them with patronage, considered their scrolls as sacred and the performances as capable of bringing spiritual blessings. As for the tribal *Patuas* or the *Jadu-Patuas*, they were assigned a high and respectable position in the society. But along with the entry of the



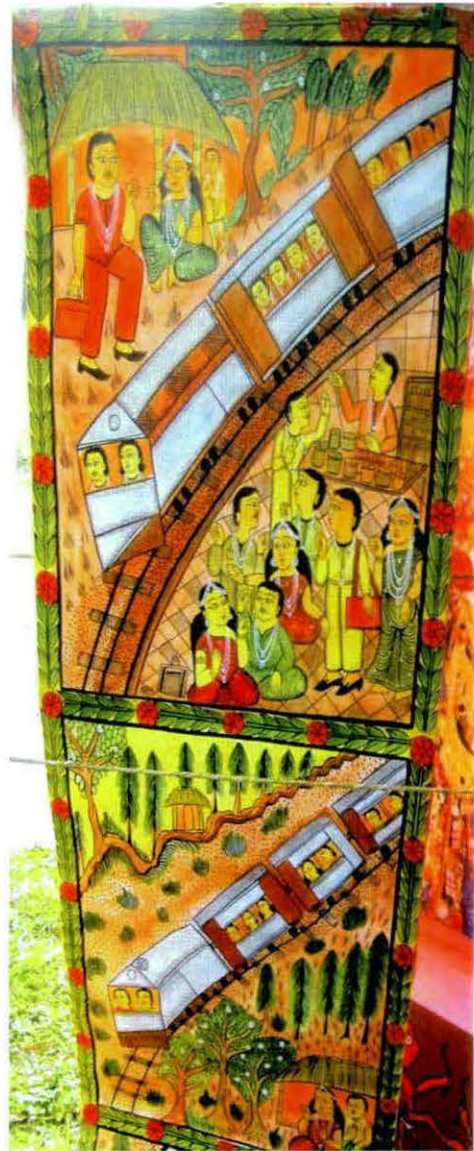
FIGURE 10: A SCROLL ON THE INDIAN NATIONALIST MOVEMENT



FIGURE 11: ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTER ATTACK IN AMERICA



FIGURE 12: ON THE TSUNAMI.



*FIGURE 13: ON THE GYANESHWARI
TRAIN ACCIDENT.*

THE INDIGENOUS AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA OF WEST BENGAL AND
JHARKHAND

modern forms of mass media in the rural areas, the social position and the cultural importance of scroll painters of both regions have suffered majorly. Though for the *Jadu-Patuas*, the condition is not so bad, for the non-tribal *Patuas*, who although educated and imparted knowledge to the village-folk about religious values, beliefs and customs, were not themselves considered to be essential in any rituals, the condition is worse. The decline in their social and cultural significance as artisans capable of providing to the people ideas of transcending the ordinary social order, has also led to the decline of the tradition as a form of performance.

The traditional form of storytelling has almost lost itself to the hyper-real images produced by the mass media. As Roma Chatterji writes, this aspect of performance along with the pictorial depiction of scrolls together has been a form of audio-visual media where the audience actively participates by re-interpreting the event locally. With the narrative structure of the paintings resembling the mythical narrative form of *mangala kavya*, these scrolls in the present day, instead of just repeatedly illustrating the traditional themes, have also taken up to dealing with contemporary themes. It illustrates new events and stories on scrolls, with the narratives being constructed from the newspapers, television, indigenous forms of theatre or from other popular sources. In the course of the presentation, the audience is shown only one frame at a time. Links with the earlier images in the scroll are made possible only through the song or the narration of the *Patua* and through the memory of the audience. One of the important themes apart from the ones mentioned above is the intermediary position of the picture-showmen themselves which gets reflected not only in the themes but as also used as rhetoric devices to underline the relationship of kinship between the two religious communities. The performance is carried out in such a manner so as to distance the audience from everyday life and ordinary experience, and rather to transform it into a mythical and aesthetic experience. This performance tradition of the *Patuas* therefore does not aim to narrate the event in the exact manner in which it took place, as the modern forms of mass media would endeavour to accomplish, but instead on presenting it as it is created by the narrative structure, thus transcending the ordinary world and depicting the event in a unique manner. This audio-visual tradition which was one of the major forms of mass communication in the villages before the entry of the print media and other forms of electronic mediation, is thus different from the other forms of mass media not only in terms of



*FIGURE 14: A SCROLL ON THE
NANDIGRAM INCIDENT IN WEST
BENGAL*



*FIGURE 15: A SCROLL ON THE
EVIL PRACTICE OF DOWRY*



FIGURE 16: A SCROLL BEING USED AS A POPULAR AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIUM TO COMMUNICATE THE AGENDAS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES (The Telegraph, May 12, 2011, Kolkata)

the use of advanced scientific technology of the latter, but also, as Chatterji mentions, that unlike the modern forms of mass media which is centred around the idea of consumption, these scrolls welcome the active participation of the audience in terms of their freedom to interpret it by re-locating it within the mythical structure of narration and the mythical world of the performance (Chatterji, 2009).

This aspect of the pat tradition as an audio-visual medium of communication, although practiced by a limited number of artists, reveals the uniqueness of this tradition and its importance in allowing the social imagination to transcend the boundaries of the ordinary world. Even where the performance aspect is no longer, popular, these scrolls through their presentation of everyday life in a mythical structure, discloses their power of creativity and their important role of asserting the cultural identity of both the painters as well as their creation.

As a part of a field sensitization, the conversations with a few *Patuas*²¹ revealed that in most cases, with the growth of the foreign market, the function of the scrolls had no doubt lost their former social significance. They are now mostly created for sale in the international market. But again, it is this element of the commercialization of scrolls that has revived the form of art. However, the relevance and the importance of this particular tradition of picture-storytelling lie in its role in responding to this situation. Hence, instead of just illustrating the traditional themes or the events as reported in the newspaper and television, they reproduce and re-present information and events using their indigenous forms of art. Both Sahajan Chitrakar and Shyam Sundar Chitrakar thus mentioned that in the villages although the inflow of the modern forms of mass communication has eaten into the traditional practice, this traditional form of communication still persists. Even though most of the villages have access to one or more forms of mass media, they still consider the picture-storytelling tradition as being more authentic and close to the heart of the village audience. Thus, when they would go back after the event gets over, they would engage themselves in making scrolls to narrate to the audience, about their experiences altogether.

²¹ In the event named *Akhyan*, in the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, in the 18th and the 19th of November, 2010, the researcher engaged in informal conversations with a few *Patuas* who had come to display and sell their scrolls, in order to gain some knowledge about the actual conditions. Although due to the lack of time, proper interviews could not be carried out, the conversations did prove to be of help in somewhat relating the situation of the *Patuas* as observed first hand and as explained in the secondary sources.

As stated by Appadurai on the production of locality in the modern world, the *Patuas* also seem to strengthen this statement through their using of the global forms of media like the television and the newspaper reports to create a version of an event which is local in nature and is constructed by the styles of the traditional practice itself. This tradition of painting of scrolls thus allows the feature of 'locality' to gain significance by contextualizing the global events in a local manner, a way which is locally understandable by the active audience.

Moreover, the contemporary world is such that the binary opposition between the organic life of the village community and its representation in the mass media through the form of hyper-real images is not very productive (Mukhopadhyay, 2008). With the entry of developed means of transport and communication, along with technological advancements in other aspects of the rural life, there no longer exists a stark contrast between the cultural and social life of the village, and that of the city. Differences are obviously there between the two modes of life. But it would be far more rewarding to understand the forms of modern mass media and the scroll painting cum narrative tradition, within a world entangled in the process of globalization, not as two binary opposites, but as conflicting and diverse mediums of communication in interaction with one another, whether in terms of conflict or in terms of agreement and convergence.

This tradition of scroll painter and storytelling among the painters or the *Patuas* of both, parts of West Bengal as well as Jharkhand thus still continues to play an important role in the present times, even with its increasing use as 'folk' art forms which are commissioned either by the elite art lovers, or curators of museums, by acting as a parallel form of media alongside the technologically advanced forms of electronic mediation. Unlike the modern forms of mass media which intend to make the 'local' into 'global', this particular audio-visual tradition continually experiments with new themes while altering the older ones, and thus endeavours to contextualize and represent the 'global' into the 'local'. And, it is this very quality of the tradition to transcend the levels of ordinary life and experience and represent an alternate view of the world, that allows this practice of picture-storytelling to compete as one of the major local forms of art which asserts the distinctive cultural identity of the art form itself, and also of the artists associated with the creation and the performance of the

tradition. This act also plays an important role in the maintenance and the preservation of local and indigenous forms of cultures. It also enables the promotion of resistance to certain social institutions and processes thus again affirming of the distinct cultural identity of the *Patuas* and of the *Patachitra* itself.

Looking back on the theories of the mass media, this study of the *Patuas* reveal that the concept of the mass society as creating mass culture as forwarded by the Frankfurt theorists, is relevant in the present day situation, but their views on the growth of a mass culture which can be homogenously applied to the entire population is entirely wrong. One of their strongest critics also lies in their assuming the audience to be passive receptors which is already proved as being untrue. Walter Benjamin's view, although it mostly deals with the area of 'high art' or which was also known as bourgeois art, does capture some really relevant points of crisis in terms of originality and authenticity of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. Again, Baudrillard's view of the modern mass media leading to a loss of meaning with the process of simulation through the hyper-real images and signs is also pertinent in this context of the tradition of scroll painting which through the medium of pictorial depictions and signs, instead of leading to the end of the social (which happens in the case of the modern mass media), in fact leads to maintenance of community and social life through the transmission of social and moral values as important themes in their illustrations and narration. The concept of public sphere is also very significant in the contemporary era with the growing privatization of the forms of information and the commercialization of information itself which obstructs the growth of critical public opinion and forces on a feeling of consensus from the people of the society. Taking all these various perspectives, the role of the practice of scroll painting and narration can be understood in terms of their attempts in keeping up a notion of public sphere, in maintaining and preserving the concept of the social and challenging the popular system of mechanical reproduction, in preventing the growth of a homogenous mass culture, and thus addressing their crisis of cultural identity by performing their traditional occupation of being picture-storytellers. And thus using this medium of scrolls to portray issues relevant to the present day and thus challenging to the modern mass media in their ability to engage the audience in active participation and allow them to be reflective, critical and thereby encourage independent thinking. In this

way they are able to maintain their individual and distinctive cultural identity as a tradition as well as the cultural identity of the artist associated with it.

Summary:

Unlike the earlier chapter dealing with the social identity of the *Patuas* where it was shown that the traditional occupation had a great role to play in maintaining an identity of the scroll painters and their paintings per se, in the society, this present chapter emphasizes on the concept of cultural identity which seems to face a crisis in the era of cultural globalization, and its preservation through the medium of scroll painting itself. For the religious identity of the *Patuas* or the scroll painters themselves, it is their association with their hereditary occupation which provides them with a particular religious identity. As is in the case of the *Patuas* who are seen to occupy an oscillating position between the two religious communities of Islam and Hinduism it is this association with the traditional occupation, whether they still engage in it or not, which provides them with a particular kind of social identity. Their being referred to as the *Patuas* or the *Jadu-Patuas* in the society assigns them a particular social position and identity in the society. It is this alliance between them and their traditional occupation which also plays an important role in giving a particular social identity to the art form itself and allows it to be contextualized to a particular region, thus associated with certain attributes. On the other hand, on the question of cultural identity, it is through the tradition of scroll painting, sometimes associated with narrative songs that the cultural identity of the *Patachitra* tradition of both Bengal and Jharkhand is maintained as well as the cultural identity of the *Patuas* themselves, as being the artists associated with this form of art and narration.

It is through the idea of a 'habitus' or a common set of internal dispositions, pertaining to perception and practice, developed from past experiences, that cultural identities can be affirmed. In the case of the *Patuas*, their long association with the occupation of scroll painting and narration has resulted in the development of certain ways of life, unique to the community, which then in turn influences their practice of occupation as well as their perception. It is hence, these scroll paintings which being a product of their 'habitus', which help in the assertion of the cultural identity of the *Patuas* associated with the art as well as of the cultural identity of the age-old tradition itself as found in parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

As Eric Hobsbawm writes, traditions which seem to, or perhaps claim to be old in terms of time are most often found out to be quite recent in origin and sometimes even for that matter, invented: He used the term 'invented tradition' in a broad, but not imprecise sense, to include both, 'traditions' which are actually invented, constructed and formally instituted, as well as those which emerge in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period, establishing themselves with greater rapidity (Hobsbawm, 1983). Referring to a set of practices, usually of a ritual or symbolic nature, these invented traditions are in other words responses to new and unknown situations which attempt to establish their own past by "quasi-obligatory repetition" (Hobsbawm, 1983: 2). Invented traditions as such thus denote the attempts endeavored to structure some parts of the social life in the contemporary world as invariant and unchanging (Ibid.).

This notion of the 'tradition' getting somewhat deliberately invented and grafted, or the old one getting modified, reinvented and re-institutionalized for new purposes is important at a time when the larger processes of globalization have caused transformations and changes at the level of culture as well as social structure in every society thus leading to weakening of the older social patterns and the local forms of culture.

Various scholars have contributed over the decades, to this theme of tradition and modernity in the larger context of the processes of globalization and telecommunication revolution in India. S. N. Eisenstadt stated unlike the assumption held by the classical sociologists on the homogenizing effects of modernization as developed in modern Europe to carry over to all the modernizing and modern societies of the world, the actual developments in the non-Western societies have been quite different (Eisenstadt, 2000). As in the case of India, he believed that the presence of certain peculiar and distinct structural characteristics, the process of modernization did not lead to breakdown in its traditional structure (Eisenstadt, 1965). Yogendra Singh stated that in Indian society, the aspect of modernity did develop, but

only in the form of a sub-structure and a kind of sub-culture, which affected and influenced the different aspects of life and society in varying degrees. Structural changes in the Indian society has obviously been present, since the post-colonial phase of modernization, but the chances of a complete institutional breakdown have been almost absent. A growing trend has also been noticed in the transformation of the traditional role-structure to the modern ones. But again in this, the people associated with the roles are often found to retain certain values of tradition rather than modernity. Since every society consists of categorical values which are distinct from one another, Yogendra Singh thus stated that there is a possibility of the combination of traditional values with the modern ones, in the case of India (Singh, 1972). And it is this feature which allows in having a deeper understanding of the diverse directions in terms of influence and change associated with the process of modernization in India.

In the field of folk art, over the years there has been a renewed interest in the preservation and maintenance of the different art forms found in the relatively simple societies, or in the rural areas. The process of cultural globalization has also contributed to the recognition of various forms of art all over the world. Through the advanced forms of technology in the field of communication, several indigenous forms of folk culture have got revived and appreciated by a larger audience. Different forms of folk items are now recognized at an international level, both as items of aesthetic value as well as commodities to be sold in the market for purposes of decoration. In fact, it was with the process of industrialization and urbanization that divides began to be created between 'urban culture' and 'folk culture' (Foster, 1953). The cultural artifacts which were thus used for functional purposes in the social life of the pre-industrial societies got transformed as 'folk' items having an aesthetic and commercial value.

But, although many of the traditions which were on the verge of dying out, got revived through the new, technological forces that have dominated the cultural scene, what has often been overlooked in this process is the very transformation of these folk 'artifacts' in the process of recognition. Most of these folk cultural forms, be it music, dance, or art, all existed in the simple societies as certain significant parts which performed particular roles for ensuring order and stability in society. To take up the

instance of the 'folk' art form of scroll paintings, these traditions existed in different parts of India and even in parts of South Asia, from ancient times, as mediums of communication in society. These pictorial scrolls depicting various themes, performed with narratives or stories, poetry, songs, music, or even dance, performed the role of audio-visual mediums of communication in societies till the dawn of the modern forms of technically produced mass media. It was only with the coming of the technologically advanced forms of media and other forms of electronic mediation, that the role of these performance traditions lost their social significance and they instead got relegated to being viewed simply as folk art. It is this broad theme with which the present study has been concerned, in the course of the different chapters.

In the field of scroll paintings, as found in various parts of India, recent observations reveal that in most of the cases, the traditions are on the verge of extinction, and in some of the places where they still exist, they have lost their aspect of performance and have come to be recognized as visual traditions per se. In this context, the case of the scroll painters or the *Patuas* of West Bengal and Jharkhand, have disclosed a different response. Although this particular tradition has also witnessed several circumstances which have hindered the growth and prosperity of the tradition and have even threatened its existence, what makes this particular tradition in some regions of West Bengal and Jharkhand stand out in relation to the rest of the others, is the way in which they have coped with the unfavourable circumstances. The traditions in these regions are linked to a tribal origin. But with their coming to over to the states of Orissa, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar, they incorporated the local norms, beliefs and cultural practices. The scroll painters associated with the tradition as found in West Bengal, have also had a long history in terms of their continuous negotiations with their religious and social identity. As for the tribal painters of Jharkhand, their condition regarding the social and religious identity of the community was much more stable, although religious invasions from time to time, from the neighbouring states did have an impact on their social, cultural and religious practices. Their differences in terms of their function in society resulted in differences within the tradition itself, as practiced in West Bengal and Jharkhand. Hence, while in the case of the *Patuas* of West Bengal, their scrolls performed the role of a major medium of communication for the society, in the case of the Santhal *Patuas* of

Jharkhand; their main role in the society was that of being a kind of magico-religious priest, performing rites related to the deceased people and for their safety in the Afterworld. These Santhal *Patuas* however also painted scrolls and narrated it in and around the villages for imparting traditional religious knowledge and thus enhancing communication.

It was with the entry of the colonial rulers that marked a watershed between their traditional practices and the new ways in which they reinvented their art. For the purpose of facilitation of the British administration, new states and provinces were created. Thus was created the state of Bengal, which included most of the regions of the present states of Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. With the formation of Calcutta as the colonial capital, the state as such came in contact with extremely new and different situations; from different modes of power, control and governance, to the influences totally different social and cultural processes and institutions. This had a marked effect on the social life and the cultural traditions in the entire country, and particularly in the province of Bengal. The rural and 'folk' traditions associated with culture and the social life of the region, in the face of the new situation also experienced changes and alterations. The tradition of scroll paintings as are now found in parts of West Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa, all came in contact with new social and cultural forces which hindered their growth and popularity. But again, at this point, it is interesting to note how instead of submitting themselves in defeat to the material and non-material aspects of the Western culture, they modified their own tradition in order to maintain it alongside the foreign way of life. The growth of the Kalighat painting also brought about a massive transformation in the tradition of scroll painting in the entire region. These paintings, done by some of the migrated painters who came into the city of Calcutta to earn a living, included the use of cheap quality paper to create images on single sheets to be sold in the market as souvenirs. This school of painting marked a change in the styles and patterns of representation and the use of materials, as well as in the themes illustrated, which along with the traditional religious pictures, also included illustrations reflecting a satirical response to the social and cultural transformation of the traditional Indian society. Although this genre died with the end of the colonial period, they had an impact on the scrolls of the region.

Hence in the modern-day, this tradition is still found among some communities of scroll painters of West Bengal and Jharkhand, who in their own little ways attempt in the preservation of their age-old tradition in a world dominated by the modern mass media. In this context, it becomes important to explore their conditions in a world dominated by simulated images which produce 'hyperreality' (Baudrillard, 1983) through the various forms of mass media. These various forms of folk art symbolize the indigenous cultural traditions of every society. This factor also helps them in the construction of feelings of collective identity. The notion of collective identity is then based on larger social processes in the field of culture and society. It is this notion of identity, particularly dealing with the social identity of the *Patuas* and the cultural identity of the *Patuas* as well as of the tradition that has been the main themes of discussion in this study. Taking on the theoretical standpoint of George Herbert Mead, for arriving at a working definition of construction of collective identity, the work also majorly depends on the Bourdieusian concept of identity. In fact through the concept of 'habitus' as described by Pierre Bourdieu (1977), this work has attempted to look into the question of social and cultural identity of the tradition of scroll painting and narration, as well as of the community of painters associated with this tradition.

As per the focal theme of the study, for the purpose of facilitating a deeper understanding and knowledge of the present situation of the performance traditions in the age of mass media, particularly in the realm of the scroll painting-cum-narrative tradition in India, some research objectives were framed to guide the course of the work. The present work on the whole, through the help of the different chapters, has thus endeavoured to specifically attend to these objectives and answer them.

One of the first objectives was to carry out a comparative and historical study of the different forms of scroll painting-cum-narrative traditions as they exist in various parts of India, to find the points of similarities and differences between them and the tradition of scroll painting and narration as found in parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand. What is important to keep in mind at this point, is that in the present work, this tradition of scroll painting has been chosen because of its importance in the pre-industrial society as a major form of 'mass' communication. In this work therefore, they have been defined as performance traditions instead of being referred to as mere

forms of folk art. From the study it was thus observed that apart from the differences in the form and content of the paintings and the kind of performances associated with it, the picture-storytelling tradition in the different parts of the country showed a diverse variety. It was even more evident with the coming of the forces of modernization, Westernization and consequently industrialization and urbanization. These forces, a product of the colonial rule in India, brought about massive transformations in the social and cultural processes and institutions of Indian society. As a result, most of these traditional practices and performances gradually faded in significance and got lost, amidst the new forms of mass media and communication. Among the few which still existed, they were categorized as forms of folk art, to be kept in the museums. In such a situation, the practice of scroll painting and storytelling in certain parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand revealed quite a different picture. Instead of submitting in defeat to the more advanced forms of mediation in the sphere of communication, and the growth of new types of occupations which had no relation with the caste or the social status of an individual or community, this tradition as found primarily in certain parts of West Bengal and the Santhal Parganas of Jharkhand maintained and preserved the social and the cultural identity of the artisans associated with it as well as the cultural identity of the tradition itself.

The second objective of the study was concerned with the social identity of the artisans or the *Patuas* associated with this performance tradition. In this context, in the realm of the social identity of the scroll painters or the *Patuas* of West Bengal and Jharkhand, in terms of their religious identity and their social position, what has been observed through this study, is a strong relation between the traditional caste occupation of the *Patuas* and their social status. As for the *Patuas* of West Bengal, they occupy a unique midway position between the Hindus and Muslims. A long history of continuous conversion and re-conversion has now resulted in this peculiar position where they seem to oscillate between the two religious communities for their identity. This oscillatory nature of the *Patuas*, along with their attempt to conceal the displaying of attributes of one religious community in front of other, leads to a crisis of social identity of the community itself. In terms of social status, they occupy a very low status in the Hindu caste hierarchy and are also looked down upon by the Muslims. As for the occupation, although they engage in many occupations other than

scroll painting and narration, their traditional caste occupation has been that of scroll painting and storytelling. What is interesting to observe then, is the power that they still have in society, irrespective of their extremely low social status, to create and re-create tradition and knowledge in society.

Referring to the concept of 'habitus' as dealt with by Bourdieu, this work thus shows that the *Patuas* construct notions of self identity from the idea of the collective identity of the community as a whole. This community as such, speaking in general terms, shares a common history, and common socio-cultural experiences and situations of existence. This notion of the scroll painters as belonging to a single community of *Patuas*, has come from their association with their traditional caste occupation, whether or not they still practice it as a mode of earning a living. Their association with a particular occupation also led to a similar way of living and the growth of a similar culture in them. This also reflected in their composition in the scrolls and in their narrative performances. This common way of life, together with use of common symbols, formed from earlier experiences acted as internal dispositions thus helping the *Patuas* to respond to situations in a similar manner and thus leading to the growth and maintenance of the community. In the modern times, even though most of these *Patuas* have taken to other occupations, it is through this sense of belonging to the same community and their identification with the common 'habitus', that they construct their notions of social identity. Thus even if they claim to belong to both the religious communities, they manage to assert a unique social identity for themselves in the society. As about the *Patuas* of Jharkhand, their position in terms of social status is quite different from the scroll painters of Bengal. But though they occupy a respectable social position in the tribal society, even their social identity which is although more stable than that of the non-tribal *Patuas*, are also often adversely affected by the growing instances of religious conversions in the tribal society. Thus in a way similar to the non-tribal *Patuas*, they too draw on notion of social identity of the community as well as of the individuals through their common 'habitus' which gives rise to similar perceptions and practices.

In terms of their identity, throughout ages they have been known as a community which expertises in the illustration and display of scrolls alongside narration, thus performing the role of an important medium of 'mass' communication in society. It is

within this context that the third objective of the study was framed, concerning the concept of cultural identity in the age of modern mass media, the impact that the process of cultural globalization has in relation to the existence of the local and indigenous forms of cultural traditions like the scroll painting and the role played by the tradition itself to maintain its unique cultural identity in the contemporary world. With the coming of the British, there came along new social forces of Westernization, modernization, industrialization and urbanization, all of which had a massive influence on the non-material as well as the material aspects of the cultural system in the society. With the proliferation of the advanced forms of mass media and the developed forms of transport, the meaning of communication changed in Indian society. These scrolls which were once a major form of communication in society now came to be recognized merely as forms of folk art.

While in the other parts of the country, many of these traditions gradually faded away, the remaining of them came to be recognized as visual traditions, thus neglecting the significance of the aspect of performance in them. With the absence of any form of performance in their practice, they came to be regarded as forms of folk art, thus losing their social significance in the human society as important, reflective and reflexive forms of communication in society. In the case of certain regions of West Bengal and Jharkhand however, the response from the community of scroll painters were totally different. In this situation of a crisis of cultural identity, where the local forms of culture have got overshadowed by the dominant forms of mass media and are gradually becoming extinct, the manner in which they have coped up with this situation is very different. Instead of giving up their tradition, in a world dominated by the technologically advanced forms of mass media, they chose to adopt modernity and reflect them through their tradition. Thus along with their illustration of conventional themes, they took to portraying events and themes of socio-cultural and political importance.

In the present times, these *Patuas* gather information and stories from the reports on the television, the radio, and the newspapers, and use them to create their own versions of the event and stories, which are then illustrated and presented in the tradition medium of scrolls, sometimes accompanied by narrative poetry (Chatterji, 2009). Even though in some of the rural societies in West Bengal and Jharkhand,

performances are still carried out with the help of scrolls and narration, with the overall waning in the popularity, of the aspect of performance in these traditions, it is the medium of scrolls, or the visual tradition which has gained significance in representing the tradition as a whole. This work thus shows that these scrolls, which are a product of the *Patua* community and their 'habitus', thus plays a major role in the assertion and maintenance of the cultural identity of the *Patachitra* tradition itself as well as the community of the *Patuas*. By adapting to the new situation through their modification in the themes and well as in the methods of representation, these scrolls use the information from the 'global' to re-contextualize them within the 'local'. These scrolls through their representation of new events of socio-cultural and political importance, thus continuously attempts at performing the role of an alternative form of media, which critiques the existing social order and provides a view of an alternative way of life, thus acting as a kind of public sphere encouraging critical and reflective positions to be present in the society.

As observed throughout the work, the question of identity becomes very important in an age where the forms of communication allow interaction to develop beyond the territorial boundaries of nations and cultures. The human agents are not passive consumers of what the society gives to them. They do play an important role in the construction of their identity. Again in terms of collective identity, it is problematic to assume that the individual has no role to play in the construction of the collective identity of the group. It is hence helpful in this context to make sense of the interplay between the agents and the social world in the construction of identity, rather than simply focusing on the role of the social structure or the individuals in the formation and maintenance of social and cultural identity in the contemporary world.

Besides the question of identity, it is also the construction of binary opposites in the form of 'structure and culture' or 'folk and urban' which is problematic in the study and observation of social reality where the categories are mixed up. This work clearly shows the problems of assuming the concepts of 'folk' and 'urban' as binary opposites. Though with the invasion of the modern means of transport and mass communication, there has been a strong effect on the culture of the rural societies, thus blurring the boundaries in terms of what is authentic 'folk' culture and what is 'mass' culture, there still continues to be a prominent tendency to mark these rural

forms of culture and social life as 'folk'. But as this work shows the attempts made by the folk form of scroll painting to re-contextualize and reproduce the 'global' within the 'local', it becomes clear that it is thereby much more productive to think about these binary opposites not as contradictory but in terms of negotiation between the two processes in existence alongside the larger processes of cultural globalization. In the case of the debate between the structure and culture, through the help of this work it can be said that the assumption that social structure is the only means through which forms of culture and identities are constructed and maintained is wrong. Human agents, social and cultural processes, and cultural artifacts like those of the different art forms, often play a major role in the maintenance of the social structure. This is evident from the present study where the practices of the community and its mediums of representation help in the assertion and the maintenance of the social identity of the scroll painters as well as the cultural identity of the tradition itself as whole and the painters associated with it.

With a growing emphasis on the debates of meaning and functions of culture in the contemporary era, in the realm of the social sciences, it is therefore important to observe and study these invented traditions'. A sociological analysis of these traditions, such as that of scroll painting and narration, facilitates in a better understanding of the social significance of these art forms, not as visual traditions or mediums of entertainment, but instead as relatively crude forms of 'mass' communication. They offer a comprehensive picture of the past, as well as present and also suggest alternative vision of the society as possible in future. Thus while the study of Great Tradition of societies is surely important to gain knowledge about their sacred scriptures and other literary traditions, written and preserved over time and illustrating the highest intellectual and artistic achievements of the society, an analysis of the Little Traditions of different societies is also essential, particularly in the age overshadowed by the larger processes of globalization. As observed in the case of the scroll painting and narrative tradition as found in parts of West Bengal and Jharkhand, during the moments of crisis of cultural identity, be it during the period of colonial rule or the contemporary age dominated by the growth of mass media, it is through this form of Little Tradition that the Great Tradition of Indian society has been maintained and preserved. These Little Traditions in the form of folk cultures thus

help in getting an intimate view of the way of life, cultural beliefs, values and practices, and the spurts of intellectual and artistic creativity of the common people of the society which often remain hidden and in fact neglected under the glamorous world created by the mass forms of media.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

- Adorno, T. (1991). "Culture Industry Reconsidered" in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, Routledge Publications, London.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso Publications, London.
- Appadurai, A. (1997). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Aggarwal, P. C. (1973). "The Meos of Rajasthan and Haryana." In Ahmad, Imtiaz ed. *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims*, Manohar Book Service, Delhi.
- Barnett, J. H. (1970). "The Sociology of Art", in Albrecht, M. C., Barnett, J. H., Griff, Mason (eds) *The Sociology of Art and Literature: A Reader*, London.
- Baudrillard, J. (1983). *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities...or the End of the Social, and other Essays*, Semiotext(e) / Foreign Agents Series, New York.
- Benjamin, W. (1970). "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Jonathan Cape, London.
- Beteille, A. (1996). "Caste in Contemporary India." In Fuller, C. J. ed.(1996). *Caste Today*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Bhattacharjee, B. (1980). *Cultural Oscillations*, Naya Prokash, Calcutta.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). "The production of belief: contribution to an economy of symbolic goods", in Collins, Richard et al (eds.) *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader*, Sage Publications, London.

- Bose, N. K. (1975). *The Structure of Hindu Society*, Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi.
- Chakraborty, A. K. (1989). “Ramayana in the Scroll Paintings of Bengal”, in *Patua Art: Development of the Scroll Paintings of Bengal. Commemorating the Bi-centenary of the French Revolution*, Alliance Francaise of Calcutta and the Craft Councils of West Bengal, Calcutta.
- Dallapiccola, A. L. (1998). “‘Paithan’ Paintings: The Epic World of the Chitrakathis’, in *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*, Marg Publications, Mumbai.
- de Beauvoir, S. (1989). *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books, New York.
- Dumont, L. (1980). *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.
- Durkheim, E. (1915). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, The Free Press, New York.
- Dutt, G. (1990). *Folk Art and Crafts of Bengal: The Collected Papers*, Seagull Publications, Calcutta.
- Eagleton, T. (2000). *The Idea of Culture*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., Oxford.
- Elliot, P. (1986). “Intellectuals, the ‘information society’ and the disappearance of the public sphere.” In Collins, Richard et al. ed. *Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader*, Sage Publications, London.
- Elwin, V. (1951). *The Tribal Art of Middle India*, Oxford University Press, London.
- Fuller, C. J. ed. (1996). *Caste Today*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Ghosh, P. (1966). *Kalighat Pats: Annals and Appraisal*, Firma KLM Private Ltd. Calcutta.
- Ghurye, G. S. (1932). *Caste and Race in India*, Popular Prakashan, Bombay.
- Goswamy, B. N. “Coming to Terms with Time: Aspects of Narrative in the Visual Arts” in, Jain, Jyotindra ed. (1998). *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*, Marg Publications, Mumbai.

- Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J., Woollacott, J. ed. (1982). *Culture, Society and the Media*, Methuen and Co. Ltd, London.
- Hobsbawm, E., and Ranger, T. ed.(1983). *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Jain, J. (1998). “The Painted Scrolls of the Garoda Picture Showmen of Gujarat”, in *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*, Marg Publications, Mumbai.
- Jamous, R. (1996). “The Meo as a Rajput Caste and a Muslim Community.” In Fuller, C. J. ed.(1996). *Caste Today*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Joshi, O. P. (1976). *Painted Folklore and Folklore Paintings of India: A Study with reference to Rajasthan*, Concept Publishing Co., Delhi.
- Jain, J. ed. (1998). *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*, Marg Publications, Mumbai.
- Jain, J. (2003). “Kalighat Painting: Other Perspectives”, in Sinha, Gayatri ed. *Indian Art: An Overview*, Rupa and Co., New Delhi.
- MacDonald, D. (1957). “A Theory of Mass Culture”, in Rosenberg, B. and White, D. M. (eds.) *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, The Free Press, Glencoe.
- Maity, P. K. (1973). “Religious Pata and the role of the Patuas as entertainers”, in Sen Gupta, Sankar ed.(1973). *The Patas and the Patuas of Bengal*, Indian Publications, Calcutta.
- Malinowski, B. K. (1948). *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays*, Beacon Press, Boston.
- Mallik, S. (2003). “Impulses of the 1940s.” in Sinha, Gayatri ed. *Indian Art: An Overview*, Rupa and Co., New Delhi.
- McCutchion, D., and Bhowmik, S. K. (1999). *Patuas and Patua art in Bengal*, Firma Klm Pvt. Ltd. Calcutta.
- McQuail, D. (2010). *Mass Communication Theory*. Sage Publications. London.

- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviourist*, University of Chicago, Chicago.
- Miller, B. S. ed. (1994). *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, Indira Gandhi National Centre For the Arts, New Delhi; and, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd, Delhi.
- Mittal, J. (1998). "The Painted Scrolls of the Deccani Picture Showmen: Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century", in *Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art*, Marg Publications, Mumbai.
- Mode, H., and Chandra, S. (1985). *Indian Folk Art*. Alpine and Fine Arts Collection Ltd. New York.
- Mookherjee, A. (1986). *Folk Art of India*, Clarion Books, associated with Hind Pocket Books, New Delhi.
- Mookerji, R. K. (1962). *Notes on Early Indian Art*, Indian Press, Allahabad.
- Morphy, H., and Perkins, M. (2006). "The Anthropology of Art: A Reflection on its History and Contemporary Practice", *The Anthropology of Art – A Reader*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford.
- Mukherjee, R. (1948). *The Social Function of Art*, Hind Kitabs, Bombay.
- Robertson, R (1991). "The Globalization Paradigm: Thinking Globally", in D.G. Bromley (ed.) *Religion and Social Order*, JAI Press, Greenwich.
- Russell, R. V. (1916). *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*, Vol. II, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London.
- Schechner, R. (1985). *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania.
- Sen Gupta, S. ed.(1973). *The Patas and the Patuas of Bengal*, Indian Publications, Calcutta.
- Singer, M. (1972). *When a Great Tradition Modernizes*, Praeger Publications, New York.
- Singer, M. ed. (1975). *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

- Singh, Y. (1972). *Modernization of Indian Tradition: A Systematic Study of Social Change*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.
- Singh, Y. (2000). *Culture Change in India: Identity and Globalization*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.
- Sinha, G. ed. (2003). *Indian Art: An Overview*, Rupa and Co., New Delhi.
- Srinivas, M. N. (1962). *Caste in Modern India and other Essays*, Media promoters and Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Bombay.
- *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1989), Vol. 1, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.
- *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1989), Vol. 2, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.
- *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1989), Vol. 3, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.
- Tonnies, F. (1963). *Community and Society*, Translated by Loomis, Charles P., Harper Torchbooks/ The Academic Library, Harper and Row Publishers, New York.
- Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oaks, P. J., Reicher, S. D., and, Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford.
- Turner, V. W. (1969). *The Ritual Process*, Aldine Publications, Chicago.
- Turner, V. W. (1986). *The Anthropology of Performance*, Paj Publications, New York.
- Williams, R. (1976) *Keywords*. Fontana Communication Series. Collins, London.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

ARTICLES:

- Bourdieu, P. (1989). "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring), pp. 14-25.
- Bottero, W. (2010). "Intersubjectivity and Bourdieusian Approaches to 'Identity'." *Cultural Sociology*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 3-22.
- Brewer, M. B. (2001). "The Many Faces of Social Identity: Implications for Political Psychology." *Political Psychology*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (March), pp. 115-125.
- Brown, C. H. (1996). "Contested Meanings: Tantra and the Poetics of Mithila Art". *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Nov., 1996), pp. 717-737.
- Chatterjee, R. (2000). "Representation of Gender in Folk Paintings of Bengal." *Social Scientist*, Vol. 28, No. 3/ 4 (March-April), pp. 17-21.
- Chatterji, R. (2009). "Global Events and Local Narratives: 9/11 and the Picture Storytellers of Bengal". *Indian Folklore Research Journal*, No. 9, pp. 1-26.
- Dirks, N. (1992). "Castes of Mind." *Representations*, No. 37, Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories, pp. 56-78.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (1965). "Transformation of Social, Political, and Cultural Orders in Modernization." *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (October), pp. 659-673.
- Eisenstadt, S. N. (2000). "Multiple Modernities." *Daedalus*, Vol. 129, No. 1 (Winter), pp. 1-29.
- Foster, G. M. (1953). "What is Folk Culture". *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 55, No. 2, Part 1 (Apr. – Jun., 1953), pp. 159-173.
- Friedman, J. (1989). "Culture, Identity, and World Process." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter), pp. 51-69.
- Ghosh, P. (2000). "Kalighat Paintings from Nineteenth Century Calcutta in the Maxwell Sommerville Collection." *Expedition*, Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 11-21.

- Ghosh, P. (2003). "Unrolling a Narrative Scroll: Artistic Practice and Identity in the Late-Nineteenth-Century Bengal." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 3, pp. 835-871.
- Hauser, B. (2002). 'From Oral Tradition to "Folk Art": Reevaluating Bengali Scroll Paintings'. *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 105-122.
- Hermanowicz, J. C., and, Morgan, H. P. (1999). "Ritualizing the Routine: Collective Identity Affirmation." *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (June), pp. 197-214.
- Islam, M. (2006). "Postmodernized Cultural Globalization: Threatening Folk Culture(s) in India." *Social Scientist*, Vol. 34, No. 9/10 (Sep. – Oct.), pp. 48-71.
- Jodhka, S. S. (1999). "Communities and Identities: Interrogating Contemporary Discourses on India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 41 (October 9-15), pp. 2959-2963
- Kapchan, D. A. (1995). "Performance". *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 108, No. 430, *Common Ground: Keywords for the Study of Expressive Culture* (Autumn, 1995), pp. 479-508.
- Mukhopadhyay, B. (2008). "Dream Kitsch – Folk Art, Indigenous Media and '9/11': The Work of *Pat* in the Era of Electronic Transmission." *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 5-34.
- Ray, E (1978). "Documentation for Paithan Paintings". *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 239-282.
- Redfield, R. (1947). "The Folk Society". *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Jan., 1947), pp. 293-308.
- Risley H. H. (1998). *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Firma KLM Private Ltd, Calcutta, p. 169-170.
- Samantary, P. K. (2005). "Patta Chitra – It's Past and Present". *Orissa Review*, Vol. LXII, No. 5, pp. 48-51.

- Schieffelin, E. L. "Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality". *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (Nov., 1985), pp. 707-724.
- Stache-Rosen, V. (1984). "Story-telling in Pinguli Paintings". *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 45, No. 4, pp. 253-286.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE (for illustrations):

- "The Factory on the Moon: Bengal's Audio-Visual Conscience-Keeper", *The Telegraph*, Thursday, May 12, 2011, Kolkata.

BENGALI BOOKS AND ARTICLES:

- Bara Panda, D. K. (1999). *Patua Sanskriti – Parampara-O-Paribartan*, Pustak Bipani, Calcutta.
- Bhowmik, S. K. (1999). "Lokshilpa : Adibasi Samajer". *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana (A Research Journal of Research Institute of Folk Culture)*, Special No.: Folk Arts and Crafts of Bengal, Vol. 12, No. 1 (April-May-June), pp. 81-101.
- Bhowmik, S. K. (2008). "Banglar Patashilpa O Adibasi Jorano Pat". *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana (A Research Journal of Research Institute of Folk Culture)*, Special No.: Patachitrakala: Patua Songs: Gurusaday, Vol. 21, No. 1 (April-September), pp. 41-44.
- Chakraborty, S. (2008). "Pat: Itihaser Patey". *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana (A Research Journal of Research Institute of Folk Culture)*, Special No.: Patachitrakala: Patua Songs: Gurusaday, Vol. 21, No. 1 (April-September), pp. 9-13.
- Ghosh, B. (1978). *Banglar Lok Sanskritir Samajtatva*, Signet Bookshop, Calcutta.

- Mondal, B. K. (2008). "Jadu Ba Chakshudan Pat O Jadu Patua". *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana (A Research Journal of Research Institute of Folk Culture)*, Special No.: Patachitrakala: Patua Songs: Gurusaday, Vol. 21, No. 1 (April-September), pp. 45-46.
- Ray, S. K. (2008). "Pat-Chitrakar Ba Patua". *Loksamaskriti Gabeshana (A Research Journal of Research Institute of Folk Culture)*, Special No.: Patachitrakala: Patua Songs: Gurusaday, Vol. 21, No. 1 (April-September), pp. 14-26. Translated by Pradipta Kumar Sen, from, Ray, Sudhanshu Kumar (1953). "The Artisan Castes of West Bengal and their Craft." In *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal*, ed. Ashok Mitra, Census of India, West Bengal Government Press, Calcutta, pp. 293-349.

