CHAPTER TWO

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CHAPTER TWO

THEMATIC CONTENTS

We have noticed earlier that folk paintings of Bengal thematically speaking, are broadly divided into two types: a) paintings which are symbolically presented with a definite religious association, that is, the kinds of painting either directly or indirectly connected with religions and b) the paintings which are narrative and mostly secular in character.

The first category of this art, comprising floor and wall paintings, is primarily ritualistic in character. The functional purposes of both the paintings are the same, since they are intended to fulfil magic, either to defend oneself against the powers of evils which surround the living, or cause women, cattle, beasts and land to multiply and bring greater prosperity to the householder. One such painting is called as ālpanā, symbolical in form, and at times abstract in theme. This category of art presents symbolic significance of the vegetal abundance and rich world of flora and fauna. Nature's mystic elements, its power and unknown forces, its vastness and the beliefs in spirit inhabiting the trees and vegetations have been reflected in this art. The second category of art which in character is narrative is known as patas. These narrate largely the legends, myths and stories connected with gods or godly heroes and heroic activities of great men. Events connected with natural or any other calamities, impress them too. Summary of the content of work is
primarily secular. But in some tribal paṭas, such as in Cakṣudāna one, the painter has acquired a character which is almost mystic in significance. But there is no doubt that with the paṭa artists the motive is primarily narrative and representational. One notices here how this art expresses the collective soul of the region, its ideas and aspirations. The artist has recounted the life of the contemporary world that is spread before him. He is deeply involved in everything because he is one with them. He speaks a social language, which is addressed to all, that all may enjoy it and that, it is the expression of the ideas and common aspirations of people at large. The primary interest of this art is obviously secular. Even when they depict a god or godly action, they blend the hieratic formula with current popular lore. The stories of gods and goddesses as are presented by the paṭa artists represent that perfectly blended and unique artistic synthesis. It is interesting to notice that until today, this does not seem to have undergone any change.

ĀLPANĀS

As has been observed earlier the ālpānas are connected with the vratas performed by the women. The vratas are observed for fulfilling certain desires and wishes. The ālpānas are therefore designed as the 'painted desires' or pictorial representations of the desired objects in symbolic forms.
Vratas are wishful manifestations of these desires.

In a vrata these ālpanās are directly connected with rituals, and as such the objects are drawn somewhat symbolically but naturally. The painted media in such cases is infused with magic spell and thereby become effective. These are of different types; some are decorated with dots, circles, triangles and squares; and many other depict symbolic representation of different aspects and forms of day-to-day life, such as that of the sun, the moon or different parts of dwelling houses like kitchen, granary, cowsheds etc. In some ālpanās, motifs of tree or animal either symbolically or in generalised forms are presented. But what is interesting is that, as a rule the magical devices are always found to be encircled by swaying creeper-like designs. One is not very sure whether this floral linear motif encircling the magical objects has been treated as decorative device. One is however, tempted to associate this practice with the custom of bandhanī - an age old convention of putting a magical linear boundary against the sway of bad spirit. These customs and beliefs are current even in the sophisticated society today.

There is no doubt that the ālpanās primarily catered to the ritualistic uses, but one should not ignore that despite their ritualistic and magical significance, the ālpanās as form of painting have an innate decorative appeal. As a result, the forms and motifs of the paintings in course of evolution have left an undeniable impact on artistic expressions. One
notices here how the artists by their natural impulses change even some magical formulas to essentially artistic specimens. Indeed some of these paintings have all the features relevant to good pieces of art. But one should remember in this context that this art is essentially related to everyday life, and hence intrusions of a number of designs and motifs, which were possibly very much local and time-bound, could not be avoided. This has happened even in paintings required for rituals. It is therefore not surprising that along with symbols like purūṇa, kūmbha, foot prints, stalk of paddy, painted during the time of Lakṣmī-vratas, the painters do not hesitate to paint in this ensemble either the crescent moon or the cross or even contemporary agricultural implements. It is perhaps for this reason that the folk paintings in general have remained fresh, and original, despite some amount of repetition and convention.

But be that as it may, the ālpanās enclosing a space either circle, square or rectangle, known as Rāngoli in Maharashtra, Sathī in Gujarat, Mandana in Rajasthan, Aripan and Qupan in Bihar and Orissa, Chowk in Uttar Pradesh, Kolām in Tamilnadu, is nothing but a Yantra drawing, which actually becomes the pīth or seat of the deity to be worshipped.

WALL PAINTINGS

Like the floor designs, the wall paintings too, thematically speaking, are divided into religious and secular. Those belonging to the first category, convey the religious creed
of a particular community. These are done on auspicious occasions, either to celebrate auspicious events of the family or during the Pūjās. Besides, it has also been found especially in the upland stretch of West Bengal, that the village women on the first day of the year almost as a form of ritual decorate the outerwalls of the dwellings by painting. The subject matter of this painting is usually taken from the rich world of flora and fauna, at times, animal or human figurations also appear in these paintings. Needless to say that in spite of the fact that these are meant to decorate the wall, the painted objects like animals, symbolic or figurative forms of mother goddesses do not leave any doubt that the primary aim of this painting was magical.

**PATACITRAS**

Thematically speaking the paṭas are of two types: religious and secular. Religious paṭas are those which depict the stories connected with different religions. Thus the paṭas of the variety may be known as Hindu paṭas, Musalmānī paṭas, Kṣhristān paṭas, and even tribal paṭas. The secular paṭas mostly deal with secular themes connected with socio-cultural and political life of the people. In the religious paṭas the painters depict legendary or mythological narratives connected with gods and goddesses. But even when it is religious, appeal of the themes like Śiva-Durgā, Śītā-Rāma, Behula - Lakṣmīndar, Kṛṣṇalīlā, Rāma-Rāvana, Gāzī-Pīr, and mother Mary is mostly secular. One should not forget that the primary use of paṭa,
even of religious category is for mass communication, training, and entertainment.

Historically speaking, the pata painting therefore by the very character, places itself in the centre of several historical and cultural forces and thus it has preserved in it the reverberations of various cultural elements of the past and present. It is thus natural that in the patas one can easily listen to the echoes of a community, and this community might have been formed by the tribal and non-tribal people, a Hindu, a Muslim and Christian; the patuas without adhering to any particular religion, illustrate through pictorial imagery the psyche, the ethos of the entire social milieu. In other words, one can perhaps say that whatever exists in the subterranean life, is brought forth by these artists on the surface. Quite a few of these thus relate vignettes of day to day life not only in a variety of imageries, but also in different forms of motifs and symbols. The reason is simple. If the paintings of this sort reflect the socio-cultural and religious life of the people, then the people we have in our view, is an amalgam of varied cultural trends, coming from all walks of life.

Thus when one attempts to isolate one individual element from the other, one may find that it is not always possible, because by doing so the basic character of this art is lost. Indeed, in the panorama of life represented by the artists,
each trend has its unique role to play. Needless to say, the type of painting just referred to is best exemplified by the scroll variety (lāṭālī), where a series of panels illustrate narration in a series of events. The Paṭuās, or the painters, gradually unfold the story arranged in panels to his spectators, and sing the verses related to these themes. The cāukas or square variety of the paṭas depict either the divine bodies or of a selected piece of a story, or social event, of some importance. Since the Paṭuās depend for their livelihood on the people living in a society, this art-activity is primarily conditioned by the society they belong to. It is a peculiar two-way relationship - in one they speak for the society and in the other the society poses the questions and they answer through these paintings. It is therefore quite natural that social religion - other than heiratic religion happens to be the primary motivation of this painting.

As has been observed before, the paṭacitras have been familiar to the people in all spheres of life, and thus it is natural that these paintings have a deep socio-cultural significance catering to domestic, social, political and aesthetic needs. What is perhaps most important is to take notice of the fact that, the Paṭuās through their paintings communicate many vital features of their society to the general mass through generations. They create new themes, pour new ideas in their paṭa paintings. Indeed, judging from
the historical perspective one notices that the themes of pataś have taken new forms and shapes in different periods. As a matter of fact the environment of Bengal in the late 18th, 19th centuries was conducive for resurgence of an art idiom in scroll, that not only incorporated elements taken from traditional myths, ideas and ideations, but also stories connected with the newly emergent social values. The study of such social phenomena as reflected in these paintings may be necessary to enable us to understand the two-way relationship, that is the relationship which exists between the artists and their art forms on the one hand and social behavioural patterns in relation to these art forms on the other. It may be worthwhile to discuss these phenomena somewhat in details.

A. SOCIAL THEMES

With the coming of the European companies in India and consequent social changes, the conservative agrarian society of Bengal was suffering from the shock of erosion of traditional values. The main features of the eroded values as identified by the folk painters centered round growing Europeanisation of the society, resulting in breaking up of the family bondages, causing mundane love and luxury, and corruption in socio-religious behavioural pattern. Economic pressure and political activities in the folk and tribal base, as well as the impact of national, political trends moved the people to a great extent. To them, low social status was not the criterion for
judging the merits of an individual, even for obtaining the status in heaven. According to them the prostitutes are eligible to reach heaven by benevolent and meritorious activities, people of high origin may also suffer the torture of hell because of their sinful activities. This is voiced through the protest of Pārvatī who as a Bāgdī woman in the Māchdharā-pālā threatens Bhīma saying: 'Don't try to abuse me taking advantage of my low birth. Mind you, I'll push you down and trample on you.' In another paṭa Hirāmuni, a prostitute, attains heaven by virtue of her meritorious activities.

The Paṭuās were most affected by the growing modernisation of the country. The appearance of oleographs, camera and printed news-sheets threatened their very means of livelihood. Later, the introduction of 'talkie' or movies posed another serious problem for them. These have led the Paṭuās to criticise the evil aspects of the modernisation which, no doubt, was slowly but steadily shattering the traditional approach to life. The Samakāl-patas reveal the critical attitude of the Paṭuās towards the youngsters' attraction for toilets, costumes, shoes etc. at the cost of the peace of the simple rural life. They became

1 Archer, W.B., Bazar paintings of Calcutta, p. 13.

2 thākbo nā tor oi ghare/minse ore ki sukh mor/
kāpar sābān jocān debār sādhya jakhan neiko tor/
ekhan āmi selām diye/ natun pātra karbo biye/
chasāma pābo juto nebo/thākba sukhe sābān niye - excerpt from a Paṭuā song.
throughly critical through the Kaliyuga-paṭa about the introduction of the films and their corrupting influence on the society. Their orthodox attitude failed to appreciate even the Widow Remarriage Act, which according to them is supposed to shake off the traditional norm of life. They are against the non-traditional way of living including mundane luxury, which in its turn might have disturbed the traditional values. In a series of paṭas, the Patuās of Kalighat depict 'women lying languidly, wooed by foppish admirers' or madly embracing the westernised lovers. The lover on the other hand is seen bowing at the feet of his mistress or being trampled on by her. The Patuās discovered the domestic friction caused by the intrusion of modernised ideals and values. The painters depict slaying of the wife by the husband who holds a chopper in one hand, and an umbrella in the other. Near the crouching wife there lies a European handbag. The representations of handbag and the umbrella are typical features associated with the intruding westernisation in Indian life. This also aims to show, how aping of such life caused serious disruption in the traditional society of the Bengalees.

3 magīgulor chokher thāre chokrāgulo molore; or talkie haler bātōs lege ghōmtō khule gelō - excerpts from Patuā songs.

4 bidhabā se bale hese biye karechi kāl/ svādhīn āsef biyar āin emni hālchāl - excerpt from a Patuā song.

Craze for love beyond social sanction and incidents of infatuation have also been highlighted with a critical documentary approach. Contemporary court cases such as the ones involving Bhāwālraj (Bhāwāl-patā) and Giri Mohunt (Elokeśī-patā) having deeper social bearings were picked up by these painters to point out the hypocrisy and debased values of the contemporary social life. Corruptions in the religious circles were equally attacked by the patā painters. The most well known amongst this class of patās are the ones which depict a Vaiṣṇava guru consorting with a prostitute; crow is shown perching on the head of a priest, and Giri Mohunt of Tarakeswar serving terms of imprisonment for his infatuation for Elokeśī. These patās show a peculiar awareness of the artists for the good and evil. A Mohunt may suffer in hell or may languish in jail, while the prostitute Hirāmunī, is simply reaching to the heaven.

The Kalighat-patās apart, the Patuās in general seem to be very conscious about everything connected with society. From their awareness of social evils, these Patuās, apart from subtly hinting at economic disarrangement and oppression through Patā paintings and songs, severely attacked the system. The degradation of the social status of the general mass caused due to economically deplorable conditions are vividly depicted in the Cāṣa-palās and Āiver-māchdharā palās. Indeed, the day-today life and their drudgeries have appealed to these painters so much that they do not seem to have overlooked anything, not
even innovations like rationing system, family planning etc.

The political incidents creating impact on the society in general have also been featured. The themes represent every episode connected with it, starting from the tribal rebellions to struggle for Indian independence. The special attraction of the artists seems to be the extremist activities. Even the recent war in Bangladesh did not escape their attention. The Patuas seem to have been drawn to any type of action of resistance, either vocal or subdued.

Of the political themes, one of the most popular and outstanding subjects is provided by the saheb-patas representing Chuar rebellion of Midnapur (1773 - 1816). Some of the songs relating to these saheb-patas have revealed the mockery of European justice where the Europeans are presented as taking extreme administrative and judicial decisions being advised either by their consorts or treacherous native officers. Their harlots are enjoying the tamasha. svadhinata-pata is another variety of pata which depict episodes relating to the freedom

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6 monar byathā bolite katā prānta kende qhe/ svadhīnātā sange bābu control keno jote - excerpt from a Patuā song.


8 pārojan sāheb sātjan mënke niqe vicār kartechen/ki ki vicār ? kāke mērbe kāke tope urābe/ kāke nājarvandā rākhbe/mohurīā sab kāgaj jogotech/chik phele bibira sab tāmasha dekchen - excerpt from a Patuā song.
fighters with a deep sense of reverence. Even recent political happenings like freedom struggle of Bangladesh has been painted by the Patuas in their Jay-Gangla and Mujib patas. It may be of interest to notice that while they depict the political happenings, they consciously avoid the contemporary party oriented politics and choice of their themes primarily depend on the emotional appeal of the events.

B. THEMES CONNECTED WITH RELIGION

Apart from the themes connected with socio-religious and political life, the Patuas have depicted a large number of ritualistic and cultic patas as well.

The religious life of the rural mass of Bengal is impregnated with faiths and beliefs, ranging from tribal mystic beliefs to non-tribal religion. Conception of hieratic Hindu folk gods and goddesses and also the ideals of Islam and Christianity have formed local myths and legends. Besides these, Bengali imagination has created a large number of godly heroes and heroines. The world of their religion is a complex one with a wide range of variations. Sometimes some of the hieratic gods have been treated with a down to earth treatment, while others have been left competing in their godly aroma. These variations make the panorama of the religious life of these people all the more complex. Among the patas relating to the religious themes one

bhārat svādhiṃ karlo jārā/hethā hothā morlo jārā / moder pūpya niya/tāder vānī sabāi māni eito bānchaniya - excerpt from a Patua song.
may detect two major types, one is magical and the other represents either hieratically accepted gods and goddesses or narrations connected with them.

i) Magical Themes

Of the pāṭas with magical themes the most popular and widely known type is the Čakṣudāna or Haribalo-mana-pāṭa used by the Santhals and Bhumijs. This type of pāṭa presented by the Jādu Paṭuā or Duṣri Paṭuā represents a recently deceased person and shows it to his family. The Paṭuā proposes to draw the iris of the eyes against some gifts which would restore the eyesight of the deadman suffering from the blindness in the after-world. This reminds one of the drawing of the iris of Durgā image, where the image maker is not allowed to draw the iris which is the prerogative of the Ācārya Brahmin though he prepares the complete icon. Needless to say that the Čakṣudāna pāṭa is entirely a symbolic one by which the artists wanted to suggest that by restoring the eyesight of the departed soul, he is given direction to find out the right path.

ii) Representation of Gods and Goddesses and Connected Lores

Of the themes representing gods and goddesses and connected legends and myths, one may classify them into two varieties: the type which represents gods and goddesses in cultic form and the other is narrative.
But before taking up the pataś of Hindu Puranic, Islamic or Christian categories, it may be worthwhile to discuss the tribal theme first, since the tribal gods seem to have held a different position. They emphasise in themselves the elemental forces of the visible world. Of tribal gods and goddesses, Mārāṅg Buru seems to be the most popular whose primary work is to punish those, even with death sentences, for committing serious offences. The deities presented in this type of painting have emerged from the animistic beliefs connected with elemental forms of nature, though are presented in anthropomorphic forms. For example Bāghut Bohā is presented in a human form riding on a tiger. But in representing unsurpassable mountain, epidemic disease causing thousands of death, drought and rain etc. bringing havoc to the world they generally take up direct representational method.

In connection with Hindu gods and goddesses, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Durgā, Kālī, Lakṣmi, Kṛṣṇa, Yama, Jagannātha are widely represented icons. But among them the Paṭuās show their preferences for Śiva, Durgā, Kṛṣṇa, Yama and Jagannātha. Though the gods and goddesses are mostly represented singly or independently, they are also found to be accommodated on a

These gods are known as Candra and Duārsāni (for drought and rain), Māṅgar and Berā (hunting) Dāgarsila (battle), Dauri (journey), Sulā (epidemic disease) etc.
single scroll with more than one gods or goddesses. The Daśāvatāra or Pañcakalyāṇī-paṭaṣ are the best examples of this kind. In the Daśāvatāra-paṭaṣ, Jagannātha, Rāma, Caitanya, Durgā, Manasā, Śiva etc appeared along with ten Avatāras of Viṣṇu. In this connection it should also be noted that in the majority of these paṭaṣ these godly figures are represented as either blessing or cursing according to the demand of the story. For example it is found that the story of the invocation of the goddess Durgā by Rāma to kill Rāvaṇa, or Manasā taking revenge against Cānd Sadāgar, have always appealed to the Paṭuās.

The stories connected with Yama seem to have occupied very important place in the arena of scroll painting of Bengal. We have already discussed in detail in the previous chapter that Yama had been conceived of as a god imparting restraint and upholding Justice and Law. He at times has been identified with Dharma or Dharmarāja. Flanked by Kāladūta and Yamadūta, Yama is seen pronouncing the judgement and punishing the evil-doers. The hell scenes depict different types of punitive actions sentenced on the sinners. Jagannātha trinity depicted in the ultimate panels are also of equal importance. As noticed earlier the approach of castelessness and universal brotherhood propounded in Jagannāthapurī inspired the paṭa painters.

The theme relating to Gāzī-paṭaṣ or Pir-paṭaṣ has been derived from the Islamic lore. The episodes of struggle
for supremacy between a Muslim Darvesh and the tiger worshipping Hindu ruler of the Sunderbans, have inspired the artists. It is interesting to notice that the Royal Bengal tiger is worshipped both by the Hindus and Muslim as Dakṣiṇa Rāya and Kālu Mīān respectively. The triumphant Gāzi is shown frequently in Faridpur and Barisal districts of Banğladesh as riding on a tamed tiger. This is done by the Muslims of 24-Parganas as well. One of the popular themes connected with Gāzi-paṭa relates a story how a disciple of Gāzi begged milk for Gāzi from the wife of a milkman, and the woman refused. This made a fakir very angry which eventually caused death not only to her, but a number of cows belonging to her husband. The horrified milkman begged mercy of the fakir and vowed that he would make regular offerings of milk to the Gāzi. The pacified fakir eventually brought back life to the dead. Besides, the symbolic tiger is also often shown terrifying the non-believers ultimately leading conversion to the fold of the Gāzi. Satyanārāyaṇa of the Hindus are accepted by the Muslims as Satyapīr. In the Pīr-paṭa both occupy distinctive places. The Yama is also found to be accommodated sometimes in the Gāzi paṭa.

In regard to Khriṣṭa-paṭa, the Paṭuās narrate primarily the story of Jesus and Mary. But there too, they take liberty

**Hindu kule Nārāyaṇa Muslim kule Pīr/duikule pāp kheye hayeche jahir** - excerpt from a Paṭuā song of Midnapur.
of infusing local religious fervour and popular myths and mythical figures. But it is interesting to notice in this connection that in the Khrista pāta, the patuās mostly depict drudgeries of life and represent Khrista and mother Mary as spiritual protector.

From the aforesaid description it is clear that whether a pāta is tribal or non-tribal, Hindu or Muslim, the objective of the Patuās is to give a narration first, highlighting the morality aspects. These narrative themes primarily and with ethical note. The positions of the god or godly heroes have always been found to be subservient to them. Later on, large varieties of myths and legends have been incorporated with stories connected with gods and goddesses. It is to be noted that the approach and spirit of the myths and legends which are connected with male and female deities have no hierarchic basis or values, rather they are born of local ideas and ideations.

This secular quality of the religion has influenced the legends of Śiva and Durgā where even the Mahiśāsuramardini aspect of Durgā is understood from the essential sense of human emotion.

The Śiva-Pārvatīlīlā-pātas depicting Cāga-pālā, Śankharaparāṇa-pālā etc reveal the folk sentiments towards the beloved god Śiva and his relationship with Uma or Pārvatī.

12 Dutt, G.S., Patuā Sangīt, songs, 21 & 22, pp. 74-88.
Their family problems and consequent solutions depicted in these paṭas are nothing but a visual representation of typical conjugal life present in rural Bengal. The expression of love and affection, misunderstanding and misgivings, sorrows and happiness are depicted so vividly in the settings of an average Bengali household that the identification of Pārvatī and Śiva respectively with a Bengali girl and a groom seems to be fully achieved.

The Paṭuās even vividly narrate the food stuff which have been collected by the couple through begging. As all the sources of begging are exhausted, the narrator depicts, how Pārvatī is advising her husband to concentrate on agriculture instead of begging. Śiva tries to sidetrack the issue with the explanation of non-availability of agricultural implements including the bullocks and plough. Pārvatī gives almost a revolutionary verdict: 'My Lord, break your trisūla and prepare coulter with it and use my tiger and your bull for drawing the plough'. This indeed, is a revolutionary idea projected by the Paṭuās to whom agriculture was much more important than any other religious activity. The artists depict how Śiva and Pārvatī have to struggle hard for living like the rural folk (Gaṇa-pāḷā and śiver-māchārā-pāḷā). The paṭas known as Śiva-paṭas visually represent the entire saivite literature with special emphasis on the clash between Śiva and his father-in-law Dakṣa and other episodes connected with his consort Pārvatī. But there too, emphasis is more on
emotion, than rituals.

Similarly Kṛṣṇalīlā exerts much impact on popular mind of Bengal. Even the tribals, to whom he is popularly known as Kāhnā, have depicted him in a series of pāṭas. Among the myths connected with him, Rāsalīlā and Vastraharaṇa find prominent place. Birth of Kṛṣṇa, killing of the demons, Naukā vihāra, Vastraharaṇa, Kalīyadamana, Jugalamilāna, Kṛṣṇakāli, Rācha, Kubjā, etc. are the popular themes, selected for the scrolls. On a close analysis of the themes, marked preference of the Paṭuās have been noticed for popular episodes of heroism, boyhood scenes and the scenes of dalliance with the gopīs.

In depicting the boyhood scenes, the Paṭuās have brilliantly tackled the delineation of Vātsalya form of love by depicting baby Kṛṣṇa in the arms of Yośaḍā, scenes of stealing of butter and curā etc. The boyhood scenes of Kṛṣṇa starting from birth up to the killing of Kṛṣṇa with its dramatic appeal attracted the Paṭuās to a very great extent. The sequences relating to quelling of Kalīya, the giant snake, by Kṛṣṇa is another unique theme depicted as slender Kṛṣṇa wriggling out of the huge coils of the snake. Besides quelling of Kalīya, Kṛṣṇa's actions in killing demons like Putanā, Keśi, Kubalayāpīḍa, Vakāśura, Ariṣṭāśura etc. have also been dramatically depicted by these painters. In this connection it may be noted that the paṭā painters have not strictly

observed the chronological sequence of events.

For the cauka paṭas, some interesting event of the story depicted in the scroll paintings have been selected which suit the rectangular size of these paintings. Amongst these scenes Rāsalīlā, Kaliyadamaṇa, tending of the cows, Vastraharana, Naukāvihāra, Nanicuri and intimate love scenes with Rādhā are the most popular ones.

Apart from the individual gods and goddesses, the paṭa painters have very often depicted stories from the epics. It is to be noted in this connection that among the epical stories, the legends connected with Rāmāyana seem to have influenced them most. They present mostly the basic themes connected with killing of Sindhu, exile of Rāma, abduction of Sītā and destruction of Rāvaṇa. In doing these the artists coming from different areas have highlighted different phases of story. The painters by disregarding chronological sequence very often have taken liberty of introducing new sequences within the set order. For example, in some very rare paṭas we find Daśaratha inspecting famine condition prevailing in the kingdom preceding the Sindhu-vadha sequences which normally begins either with the panel depicting Jātāyu's friendship with Daśaratha, or with Daśaratha's hunting expedition.

Invocation of Durgā by Rāma though not a very common feature, is not altogether absent. Alterations in sequences are more common in the episodes relating to Rāma's exile and
abduction of Sītā. This is perhaps due to the fact that there remained a wide range of action packed sequences to inspire the painters in these episodes specially in comparison to the killing of Sindhu episode. Another interesting feature is the lesser popularity of the agniparīkṣa of Sītā in comparison to the other aspects. This might have been either due to probable attitude of the folk people to whom chastity of Sītā is unquestionable because it has been accepted almost as an axiomatic truth or that the painters were only interested in punishing the evil-doer personified in Rāvana. The latter explanation seems to be more probable because this helps preparing a better background for introducing the Yama panel and hell scenes which follow the main themes.

As has been noted above, episodes of the Mahābhārata have rarely been depicted in the pata with exceptions of Naramedha-Yajña, the human sacrifice by king Nahuṣa, and the sāvitrī- satyavāna upākhyāna. But it is interesting to note that Naramedha-yajña is not mentioned in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata but is related in the Bengali edition of the Mahābhārata in connection with Nahuṣa and Yayāti. Sāvitrī upākhyāna has also a folk base being connected with Dharma (Yama) - maṅgala and Sāvitrī-vrata or Yama-vrata performed by village women of Bengal.

15 Census, op. cit., p. 311.
16 Ibid., p. 312.
Comparable to the Behulā story of the Manasā-mañgala, this Sāvitri-upākhyāna is more folk than epical.

Mañgalakāvyas have always been an unending source of inspiration and a storehouse for the Patuā artists. Manasā, the snake goddess and Candī, the mother goddess, have been glorified by these artists. The Patuās, whether Muslim or Hindu seem to have known every single detail of Manasā-mañgala and Candīmañgala by heart. The tragedy in the lives of Cānd Sadāgar, Behulā and Laksmindar and ultimate removal of their problems by the grace of Manasā are the key-notes of the Manasā and Behulā-paṭas. The Patuās seem to be delighted in handling the details of the story. The narration of the Manasā-paṭa starts with the forecast of the astrologer about the future of Laksmindar. This is succeeded by marriage of Laksmindar and Behulā, the details giving sequences in bridal chamber, death of Laksmindar due to snake bite. In the next scene Behulā is depicted floating in the water with the corpse and in course of her voyage she is shown meeting Godā, Dhonā, Monā, Apu and Netā and ultimately meets Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva who gave back the life of Laksmindar and other sons of Cānd. The scroll naturally ends with the scene where Cānd is worshipping Manasā.

The narration of the Candī-paṭas start with the family scene of Dhanapati, his wife and son Śrīmanta. Dhanapati then is represented as sailing out in connection with trade. On the way he meets goddess Kamale-Kāminī, and announces it to the King of Ceylon. In the meantime his son died who was
brought back to life by goddess Caṇḍī in guise. Ultimately Śrīmanta is given in marriage to Susīlā and they sail back home happily.

Gaurāṅgalā is another popular subject for these folk painters. Different episodes of Gaurāṅga's (Caitanya's) life including his birth, studies, relationship with his companions, singing of hymns with devotees, renunciation, lamentation of Viṣṇupriyā, shaving of head and distribution of sacraments have been depicted besides final scrolls devoted to Yama, hell and Jagannātha trinity. Romantic overtones of certain episodes like lamentation of Viṣṇupriyā after the renunciation of Gaurāṅga remind us of the contemporary padaśastra literature. Caitanya has also been featured in the Daśavatāra-patas and also in a composite form with Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.

C. MISCELLANEOUS THEMES

The repertory of themes for the folk painters is practically endless. Apart from the social and religious themes already discussed above, the folk painters also picked up subjects varying from conceptual themes to flora and fauna around them. The entire panorama of life finds its pictorial representation through this medium. Of the most important ones in this category, we may mention the subjects which are being presented with pure aesthetic-cum-documentary intention. Interestingly enough these documentary items are all overtoned ethical norms.
The Srṣṭitattva-paṭas of the Santhals are interesting documents of the conceptual themes which purport to show the genesis of mankind. These paṭas depict the huge mass of water with no trace of land anywhere. A small tract of land is created by the earthworm on which a pair of swans prepare their nest, lay eggs from which are born the first man and the woman who being united give birth to the Santhal tribe. On enquiry it has been found that this episode is based on a Santhal folk tale known as Mare-hāprām-ko-rehak-kathā.

The paṭas depicting subjects of aesthetic-cum-documentary interest are mostly found in the square variety of paṭas painted mainly at Kāligat. Local plants, animals, fishes, insects and also human figures like women in toilet or playing musical instruments are best examples of this type. The documentary variety of scroll paintings with ethical overtones is represented by depiction of some law suites and contemporary local events. Of these Pitā-kartrik-putra-badh or father slaying the son is a typical example. Our survey reveals that the Saṃakāl and Kaliyug paṭas have increasingly gained popularity and coupled with the documentary ones are gradually overshadowing the popularity of religious paṭas. (See Appendix I). Some news of local importance, e.g. steamer accident at Kakdwip or bus accident at Narayangarh or floods of 1978 have also found their place. In this connection we should also

17 Ghosh Binoy, Paṭuā, Gāngeya Patra, VII, 1979, p. 32.
mention that the government agencies have taken advantage of this mass medium to propagate their point of view which gave birth to paṭas related to subjects like agriculture or family planning.

**Role of Paṭuā Songs**:

In narrating the themes of the paintings, Paṭuā songs have a major role to play. The artists have attempted to explain and elucidate the inner significances of pictorial sequences through their songs. At times even the missing part of the story in the painting is sung in absentia. At the same time, it is also found that some portions of the story untold by the songs are covered by paintings. These songs help to create a proper perspective for the paintings and explain the mental attitude of the painters towards their subjects and to voice their protest against the general social crisis that the rural Bengal was suffering from.

**CĀLACITRA, SARĀ AND PLAYING CARDS**

Scope of thematic variations in the cālacitras, sarās or even in the playing cards is very narrow. The main reason for such limited number of themes is obviously the lack of space available for such paintings. Besides these paintings either supply accessory or accompanying figures to the main deity, or represent images in elementary form by painted lines, or paint figured objects as sorts of motif and have indeed very limited
functions. The semi-circular panel or the cālacitra fixed around the main deity as a form of members is used for depiction of themes connected with the deity. Such depiction either gives the perspective of the story of the image installed or narrate themes highlighting some events connected with the installed image.

Usually in the case of the cālacitras fixed behind the Mahiṣāsura-mardini images, Śiva is shown seated in Kailāśa accompanied with Nandī. He is being surrounded by animals of which lion is also one. At times Devī is also painted launching an attack on the army of Mahiṣāsura. Apart from Śiva-Durgā, figures of Rādhākrṣṇa, Rāmasītā, Anantasayana-Viṣṇu, Bhīṣma, Kālī, Mahākāli confronting the Asuras, and also Vaiṣṇava devotees and sometimes purely decorative figures like kathak dancers etc are painted.

Paintings on sarās are pictorial representations usually of cult images, sometimes with their typical emblems. These are essentially meant for Pūjās and sometimes connected with Vratas. There are various types of sarā paintings, the most popular of these are those dedicated to Lakṣmī, Durgā and Rādhākrṣṇa. In the compositional scheme it is found that the central square of the convex side is occupied by the main deity, either by Lakṣmī or Durgā or Rādhākrṣṇa. Below the main deity are painted the vāhanas and the symbols of the respective deity.

Of all these sarās the Lakṣmī-sarās seem to have been most widely circulated in Bengal. These sarās in large numbers are manufactured all over Bengal. These are made usually thrice a year, during the time of Durgā and Lakṣmīpūjā and also on the
occasions of jhulan pūrṇimā. In sarās usually made during Durgā- pūjā, Durgā is depicted along with her family. In the Rādhākṛṣṇa-sarā the central square is occupied by Rādhākṛṣṇa. The depiction of gopinis around Rādhākṛṣṇa is also seen in some saras.

The playing cards of Visnupur known as Daśavatāra-tūsa represent ten avatāras of Lord Viṣṇu which include Matsya, Kurma, Varāha, Nṛsiṁha, Vāmana, Viṣṇurāma, Rāma, Balarāma, Jagannātha and Kalki. Apart from the emblems like śaṅkha (Varāha), cakra (Nṛsiṁha), gada (Balarāma) and padma (Jagannātha), fish (Matsya), tortoise (Kurma), jug or Kamandalu (Vāmana), axe (Viṣṇurāma), arrow (Rāma) and khaḍga (Kalki) are painted on the cards. These emblems are painted to symbolise the avatāras themselves.