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Songs of Climate and Caution: Human and Non-Human Entanglements in Contemporary Scroll Paintings (*Patachitra*) from Bengal

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Patachitra or scroll-paintings is an audio-visual performance genre found in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal and in Bangladesh. The *patachitra* can also be found in slightly different formats in other eastern states such as Odisha and in Nepal, thus making it a ubiquitous intermedial presence in South Asia. In this talk, I focus on contemporary *Patachitra* from the village of Naya (West Bengal, India). In the art form of *Patachitra*, the scroll-painter and singer (known as *Patua* or *Chitrakar*) unfurls the long-painted scrolls accompanied by a song- much in the form of a film strip that has often accorded the *Patachitra* the epithet of 'precursors to the bioscope'. The lives of the scrolls and the scroll-painters are embedded in the ecological shifts around them. Naturally, these have gone into becoming the subjects of the paintings and the songs. Based on a recent fieldwork in the village of Naya, this talk focusses on how contemporary scroll-painters are refurbishing older ecological themes in their scrolls as well as creating new ones out of their lived perceptions of the climate crisis. Subjects such as global warming, earthquakes, the need to plant trees, the COVID-19 pandemic and so on have often been depicted in fusion with more traditional mythological and folkloric narratives. More importantly, the human and non-human entanglements in the *Patachitra* have manifested through narratives of syncretism, caution, lament and collective existence. Bringing some examples from the rich and diverse varieties of the scrolls (such as *Joraano Pat*, *Jadu Pat*, *Jam Pat* and *Gazir Pat*), this talk underlines the scroll-painter as a resilient 'precariat' (Zanatta & Gera Roy, 2021). It, therefore, asks why a close look at this art form offers us a lens for 'pivoting between de- and recentring humans where needed' (Buscher, 2021) in their entanglement with the non-human.



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