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Civil Ritual, NGOs, and Rural Mobilization in Medinipur District, West Bengal

This article seeks to investigate the effectiveness of non-governmental organizations in their dealings with rural populations in West Bengal, India. It focuses specifically on one case study having to do with a group of itinerant scroll painters, known as Patuas, and their interactions with a variety of organizations who have sought their assistance in disseminating information in a traditional manner concerning numerous topics pertaining to health and hygiene, ecological matters, gender equality, as well as a host of other social issues. The tentative conclusion reached is that however well intentioned such schemes for development might be, they have only a limited impact on engaging people to act collectively to bring about developmental change. The goal of modernity, however conceived, is not something that can be achieved overnight. To be more successful, long-term engagement is therefore necessary to bring about the desired consequences.

KEYWORDS: India—West Bengal—NGOs—development—Patuas—folk art—storytelling—modernity

A FAIR BIT has been written about the relative success or failure of the work conducted by non-governmental organizations around the world. The general consensus seems to be that however well intentioned such interventions may be, NGOs do not always achieve the lofty goals they set out to accomplish, and some even question whether their long-term sustainability is even a possibility.¹ In this brief article, I cannot delve into that controversy, but limit myself to the more modest goal of presenting one case study situated in the Medinipur District of West Bengal, India. More specifically, I focus on a community of scroll painting bards residing in the village of Naya, where I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork since 2001 (KOROM 2006). Naya has attained somewhat of a celebrity status in recent years due to the attention that the place has received from anthropologists and filmmakers, not to mention a variety of NGOs that have used it as a base to spread their messages to rural Bengali audiences.²

The Patuas (*paṭuṣṣā*), also known by the surname Chitrakar (“picture maker”), are a caste-based artisan community of Bengalis specializing in the production of painted narrative scrolls (*paṭ*) and the performance of songs to accompany the unraveling of such scrolls. These indigenous bards traditionally painted lengthy vertical canvasses divided into demarcated frames and sang songs about the narrative contents of the scrolls in exchange for remuneration.³ In other words, the rolled-up paintings served as props for the performance, not as objects of commercial sale. Singing and painting has been the group’s caste occupation since its origin, according to oral history. Functioning as both entertainers and educators, they wandered from village to village during festive times of the year seeking out patrons to support their craft. As they entered into the cash economy during the British colonial period, however, they began gradually to incorporate new themes and motifs of a social nature into their largely mythological repertoires, adding journalism to their multi-talented skill set. But it was not until the 1970s that the Patuas began to collaborate prominently with various outside agencies to propagate particular messages associated with modernity and development.⁴

The first workshops held in Naya were in 1986 and 1991, during which the Handicrafts Board of West Bengal attempted to infuse new life into what was perceived by urban elites to be a dying tradition of folk art. According to one observer, women, who previously had no formal role in the performance tradition, attended and wel-

came the opportunity to learn the trade of their husbands and fathers (HAUSER 2002, 114–18; see also SINGH 2011, 64–72). Then, in 1992, the non-governmental Crafts Council of West Bengal organized a one-month workshop at a university museum located in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) to train the impoverished artisans in new techniques, with the aim of revitalizing the tradition. Out of such ongoing interactions, new forms of the tradition emerged, such as painting non-narrative motifs and patterns on pots, lampshades, T-shirts, and other alternative materials for commercial purposes.

From the time of the workshops onward collaborations with outside groups have been a steady and ongoing phenomenon, introducing the bardic community to new and innovative ways to utilize their traditional skills to earn an income. Indeed, many scroll painters were hired to paint scrolls and compose songs on such diverse topics as forest planning; literacy; population control; gender equality; prevention of diseases and illnesses such as diarrhea, malaria, and polio; the negative effects of drug and alcohol abuse; and even, more recently, the AIDS epidemic (PANDA et al. 2004). Such external stimulus had the benefit of allowing the Patuas to think more broadly about the world outside of their immediate environment, which led to newer compositions in recent years on such themes as the bombing of the World Trade Center (CHATTERJEE 2009; MUKHOPADHYAY 2008), the subsequent war in Afghanistan, the 2004 tsunami, and the peasant struggle to regain dispossessed land taken for the construction of an automobile plant in nearby Singur.

It is within this emerging context that one has to view the participation of the Patuas in the propagation of social messages taught to them by outside parties. It is important to note here that the Patuas have not always done things of their own volition, but, like any good salesperson, they have provided graciously that which their patrons desire. The contractual nature of such enterprises thus needs to be evaluated as transactions occurring between individuals and organizations who engage in dialogue not as equal partners, but rather as parties of unequal status who do not all have the same level of access to knowledge and power.⁵

Given the above concerns, I present two typical scrolls frame by frame that deal with contemporary issues of social concern in the next section, alongside the corresponding lyrics to give the reader a sense of their composition and style. I then move on to analyze the pros and cons of these recent developments in the concluding section.⁶ Typically, these songs are performed as the corresponding scrolls are unraveled one frame at a time. It should be pointed out, though, that there is not a direct one-to-one correspondence between oral verse and visual frame. What I have attempted to do below is to situate each individual frame at roughly the place in the song performance where the bard would point to the picture. Even this is not set in stone, since the performative context is always emergent, suggesting that the individual performer works on the basis of inclination, not habit alone. In some instances he or she might not even point at the frame but simply show it while singing. I have even observed singers smoking cigarettes while performing, making juggling the various objects difficult to coordinate with the singing. The placement of the frames alongside the sung text is therefore an approximation at best.

PLANTING TREES AND CLEAN WATER

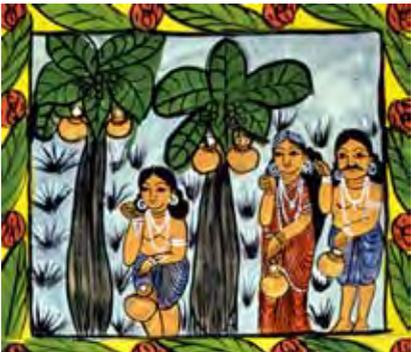
The first song is composed and performed by Gurupada Chitrakar, a middle-aged singer and painter of some repute, who has won both state and national awards for his artistry.⁷ He is also one of the more successful younger Patuas who has received repeated invitations to go abroad for extended periods of time to perform at art exhibitions and cultural expos. His version of the tree planting song goes as follows:



All get together and plant trees!
Oh people, get together and plant trees!
After trees are planted,
[They] benefit human beings.
After trees are planted,
[They] benefit human beings.
[Trees] hold breath (that is, oxygen) in
the wind.
It is the tree's only duty, oh people.
All get together and plant trees!



If trees are there on the edge of ponds,
Fish multiply threefold.
If trees are there on the edge of ponds,
Fish multiply threefold.
It [the tree] holds the soil of the earth
with a tight grasp.
It [the earth] never erodes, oh people.
All get together and plant trees!



From the palmyra tree, we find use.
Palm sugar and crystallized sugar we eat, though.
There is no match to the benefit.
It is to everyone's use, oh people.
All get together and plant trees!
We benefit from the coconut tree.
How many ways do we use coconuts?
Green coconut water is poured on Shiva's head,
As prescribed in the scriptures, oh people.
All get together and plant trees.



If trees are abundant,
 There will be no draught.
 There will be no damage caused by rain and
 storm.
 The production of crops will increase, oh people.
 All get together and plant trees.
 Medicine is born from herbs.
 [They] provide benefits in life and death.
 The intake of Ayurvedic medicine is practiced
 By everyone, oh people.
 All get together and plant trees!



There is no tree in the desert.
 In a country [with a desert] no farming is
 done.
 Human beings are unable to move around.
 Camels constitute the mode of transport.
 All get together and plant trees!

There is life throbbing within a tree.
 That's why I urge you to plant trees.
 Keep a garden in your own state and abroad.
 This is the appeal, oh people.
 All get together and plant trees!
 If there be gardens at home and abroad,
 Benefits will be accrued.
 If there's a need for cooking on the road,
 Wood is needed, oh people.
 All get together and plant trees!
 If there were no trees,
 The rain and storm would cause damage.
 Insects cause damage.
 Production of crops decrease, oh people.
 All get together and plant trees!
 My home is in Naya, in Pingla block,
 District Medinipur; that's my address.
 The tree-planting song I sing,
 Gurupada Chitrakar, oh people.
 All get together and plant trees!

The second song concerning polluted water was composed and performed by Rani Chitrakar, one of the senior female bards in the village, who was also the first to compose a song and paint a scroll about AIDS at the instigation of a Bengali doctor.



From water diseases are born, oh brother,
which human beings suffer.
From water diseases are born, oh brother,
which human beings suffer.
All of you please think together.
Listen, oh people.
The birth of diseases.
From water diseases are born, oh brother,
which human beings suffer.



If dirty clothes are washed [in a pond],
Then [the water of] that pond breeds poison.
If dirty clothes are washed [in a pond],
Then [the water of] that pond breeds poison.
If human beings drink that water,
He/she contracts a new disease.
The birth of diseases.
Oh brothers, diseases of human beings grow
from water.



Stool, urine, cold, and cough.
Indians throw in ponds.
Stool, urine, cold, and cough.
Indians throw in ponds.
Germs of illness get mixed in water.
Hence, human beings are led to death.
The birth of diseases.
Oh brothers, human beings suffer from
diseases born from water.



If dirty clothes are washed [in a pond],
Then [the water of] that pond breeds
poison.
When human beings drink that water,
When human beings drink that water,
They contract new diseases.
The birth of diseases.
Oh brothers, diseases of human
beings are born from water.
Water from putrid manure seeps under-
ground,
[And] it again comes up in the tube well.
Water from putrid manure seeps under-
ground,
[And] it again comes up in the tube well.



When human beings drink that water,
The doctor warns them.
The birth of diseases.
Oh brother, human beings suffer from
diseases born from water.
The discharge of drained water,
Is thrown in ponds by all Indians.
Discharging drain water in ponds,
Is what Indians do.
The water from the poison of manure
gets mixed in [the pond].
The water from the poison of manure
gets mixed in [the pond].
That's the reason why fish die.
The birth of diseases.
Oh brother, human beings suffer from
diseases born from water.
Hence, the doctor warns not to use
pond water.
The hospital doctors warn.

Brothers, if that water is boiled and drunk,
There's no reason to panic about falling ill.
The birth of diseases.
Oh brother, human beings suffer from
diseases born from water.

DOING GOOD OR JUST DOING?

I have employed “civil ritual” in the title of this article intentionally to draw attention to how the Patuas perform in a highly structured and mechanical way when doing the work of patrons whose intentions are not always clear to the singers but beneficial for the patron and the states and nations on behalf of whom the patron acts.⁸ Doing thus overshadows meaning, as Frits STAAL (1979) would have it. In his magnum opus, RAPPAPORT (1999, 24), largely in agreement with the approach earlier advocated by the aforementioned Staal, broadly defines ritual in a way that encompasses both its sacred and secular dimensions as “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.” His emphasis on doing, without complete knowledge of why it is done, applies aptly to the work of the Patuas when they are employed by NGOs. When I asked Patuas in Naya, for example, about how they came to learn of the positive benefits of things such as polio vaccinations, boiling water, electrolyte therapy for the treatment of diarrhea, and so forth, I often received ambiguous messages. First and foremost, there was usually an uncertainty about the purpose and goal of disseminating certain kinds of information. Secondly, many were also uncertain whether they actually had enough knowledge to perform and inform others competently. Rani, the composer of the clean water song, for example, has a tube well in front of her home, but the residents of the Patua neighborhood regularly bathe in the ponds, and fecal matter, refuse, and offal often find their way into the water supply.

Generally, people of the village do not always practice what they preach, so to speak, and when it comes to adhering to the same instructions they urge others to follow in the social activist songs inspired by the promptings of their patrons. They sing about family planning, for example, but continue to have large families, despite easy access to either free or subsidized contraception.⁹ This has to do mostly with poverty and lack of choice. As one male painter told me in response to his involvement with one NGO propagating better hygiene, “What am I to do? I am poor and have no plumbing. I only sing what I am told to sing.” Acting out of desperation was a common sight during my frequent periods of fieldwork. I would observe women regularly washing pots with synthetic soap after meals in the many ponds that dot the landscape. Another common sight was mothers making baby formula with untreated water sometimes obtained from those same contaminated ponds that are ubiquitous in the neighborhood of the painters. The idea of boiling water or purchasing bottled water was not practical for most, nor did many seem to be aware of the dangers inherent in consuming contaminated water.¹⁰

Lack of education also plays a significant factor, since most Patuas either voluntarily drop out of school or are pulled out of the educational system to be married off at a young age, especially girls, despite one NGO initiative to promote literacy by recruiting Patuas to sing about the benefits of completing one’s secondary education prior to marriage.¹¹ The same woman who promoted literacy by composing a song in which she endorses leaving girls in school pulled her own daughter out

at the tender age of sixteen and married her off to a boy from a neighboring village who was a few years older than the girl in question. When I asked about this some years later, after the first grandchild was born, the father of the teenage girl stated that he thought he was losing a mouth to feed when he arranged her dowry but ended up gaining an extra one, since the son-in-law was not supporting his new wife and child.¹²

Next, because of the dire need for employment at any cost, many simply agree to do the work without reflecting extensively on the pragmatics of the situation. One scroll painter who has done outreach work for various agencies sent by the state of West Bengal said “we do not ask more than is necessary, for fear of losing the work.” But the blame does not rest solely in the hands and throats of the singers. Quite often, the initiating party does not take the time or care to explain systematically what it is the Patuas are supposed to say or do, or how they should respond when asked a question. In essence, they are most often given insufficient training to achieve the lofty goals of their urban patrons who hire them to sing about causes that become “projects of interest” for intervening parties.¹³

The conspicuous lack of training is most apparent in the case of the HIV/AIDS scroll incident, during which a few women were employed by an urban Bengali doctor to propagate condom usage. This the women did, but they, and the others that followed them, were not given enough epidemiological information about the disease, which resulted in an incredible amount of disinformation being disseminated to the peasantry. In fact, while on sabbatical in Kolkata, one American AIDS activist was appalled when he attended a seminar at which some women Patuas were performing their AIDS songs. After having had the lyrics translated for him, he was shocked to learn that the women were propagating the kinds of phobias and stereotypes about the disease that were in popular circulation through the channels of mass media and rumor, such as that it is a foreigner’s disease (*bideser rog*) or that it was brought to India by Africans, a view that the nation endorsed as late as 1990, when I was personally forced to undergo a blood test before being able to conduct fieldwork in the Birbhum district of West Bengal. The activist’s outrage at the Patuas’ lack of knowledge about the condition led to a lengthy campaign to re-educate the singers with more accurate assessments about what is known and not known concerning the disease. Signs that such forms of reeducation are paying off are beginning to emerge (for example, PANDA et al. 2004). Other signs of “progress” and “development” have also been evidenced visibly in the material culture of the Patuas, many of whom now have built latrines and replaced thatched roofs with tin ones as a result of newfound prosperity that has been trickling in due to the efforts of one new NGO that has been collaborating with Patuas in West Bengal and other artisan communities throughout India with the financial contributions of the European Union.¹⁴

In summary, the Patuas are creative, innovative individuals who have been able to continue their traditional mode of livelihood, despite the negative predictions of many urban romanticists, such as folk revivalist Gurusaday Dutt. The cost, however, has been that they often compose and paint out of fantasy rather than fact,

which sometimes leads to irony, as when a youthful bard composed a song in 2001 called “oil trade center,” after repeatedly mishearing “world trade center” on the radio (KOROM 2006). All of these ambiguous examples notwithstanding, it would be unfair to paint a completely negative picture of recent developments, for there are certain signs that the collaborations are becoming deeper and more meaningful.

Most recently, the Bengali NGO mentioned above has invested heavily in the village of painters by convincing the community that their neighborhood should be the site of an ambitious project to bring in foreign tourists and Bengali day-trippers. When I returned to Naya for the first annual “scroll festival,” as it was being marketed, in November of 2010, I found the village totally transformed into a living, open-air museum of sorts. My initial impression, based on conversations with residents both during and after the event, was that there was a mixture of opinions about whether this was a positive or negative development. One person opined that everyone was just taking pictures and recording video, but nobody was buying anything. Yet another responded by defending the organizers. In this person’s opinion, the commoditization of the entire neighborhood had the potential of generating revenue in the long run, since news of their work would travel by word of mouth and image of film, eventually bringing in more invitations for Patuas to go abroad, where the “big money” was.¹⁵

Some Patuas, mostly women, continue to sing the social messages that they once were paid to sing for the enlightenment of others, but now they do it mostly for tourists who want an exotic souvenir to take home with them. At the scroll festival, I witnessed numerous women singing songs about malaria, polio, planting trees, drug and alcohol abuse treatment, caring for girls, the evils of dowry and bride murder, and so on. In each instance, there was a curious and admiring audience of mostly urban Bengalis. At the head of the pack of day-trippers was usually someone with a photographic device and zoom lens, eager to capture the moment visually to share with others less fortunate who were not able to attend. Foreigners were also documenting the event to preserve the exotic moment as a curio to share with family and friends back home. But there were also art students there from an art college in England. These students saw it as an opportunity to enrich their own artistic inclinations. In short, the village of painters was packed with visitors who picnicked, gazed, and recorded, leaving behind evidence of their visit in the form of mounds of refuse that had to be hauled off or, minimally, hidden by the inhabitants of the place. Development has its environmental consequences! In an oft-cited review of NGO activities an anthropologist begins his survey with a quote attributed to Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau, that doyen of nature romanticists, writes “if I knew someone was coming over with the expressed intention of doing good, I would flee” (FISHER 1997, 439). The Patuas are not fleeing, but they are realizing that they need to adjust to the demands of the market in order to continue doing what they have done since time immemorial, according to them.

Not surprisingly, in the context of competition that has developed slowly since the introduction of capitalism in rural Bengal during the colonial period, the number of people painting on demand has increased dramatically. The amount

of 9/11 scrolls has increased tremendously over the past decade, as have other scrolls depicting global tragedies, such as the 2004 tsunami, for example.¹⁶ As for the NGOs, they continue working with Patuas to disseminate schemes that are not always as well-conceived as they should be. As long as there are Patuas to sing and compose under contract, however, there will always be those who will continue to utilize their talents for better or for worse. The dilemma of NGO participation in rural development agendas continues paradoxically, but with no signs of abatement.¹⁷ They seem to move forward by looking with one eye open while the other is closing, as LATOUR (1988) puts it. In the long run, what may be needed is a method that will allow us to look at postcolonial developments with both eyes wide open.

NOTES

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1. FISHER (1993, 7), for example, asks “whether NGOs are institutionally and politically sustainable in the long run and whether, therefore, they will be able to make a major contribution to the worldwide crises of poverty, environmental degradation, and population growth.” See FISHER (1997) for a valuable overview of the literature on the topic, as well as CHARLTON (1995) for a more limited review of some important recent studies.

2. Within the last decade and a half, two books (HAUSER 1998; KOROM 2006) and five films (BHATTACHARYYA 2004; BHAUMIK 2005; ÖSTÖR et al. 2005, 2009; PARENTE and PINHEIRO 2010), not to mention a host of museum exhibitions in a number of countries in Europe and North America, have catapulted the place to stardom.

3. The term *paṭuṅā* is etymologically related to the word *paṭ* (painting). Some scholars (for example, MOOKERJEE 1946, 24) erroneously believe that it is further derived from the Bengali word for jute, the idea being that the paintings were originally done on coarse cloth woven from jute fiber. Today, however, the paintings are done on sheets of paper sewn together and pasted onto lengths of old sari fabric, making them durable for months or even years of rough handling in inclement weather. Other researchers, such as CHAKRABORTY (1973, 85), question the jute etymology on the grounds that the tradition existed prior to the Sanskrit tradition in eastern India, and because it does not consider that the word might be a loan into Sanskrit from another linguistic source. Two camps of interpretation have thus emerged. One camp, based on the aforementioned etymology, claims a post-Aryan origin for this artisan caste, while another, perhaps influenced by nineteenth-century nationalistic-cum-romantic tendencies, posits a pre-Aryan (read “tribal”) source for the tradition. The romanticization of the tradition began with the pioneering work of Gurusaday Dutt, who was the first to mount an exhibition of Patua paintings in Kolkata during the 1930s, but had conducted research on them and collected their scrolls for years prior to the aforementioned event. See KOROM 2010.

4. Such recent developments are discussed in more detail in KOROM 2006. They will be further scrutinized in the author’s forthcoming book tentatively titled *Singing Modernity*. PARMAR (1975) discusses the more general way that folk media had been incorporated into rural development schemes in India during the 1970s.

5. This became most apparent to me as I witnessed the Patuas' attempts to seek assistance to go abroad, which always requires a long stream of paperwork for securing visas, airline tickets, airport pickups, correspondence with foreign patrons, and so on. To this end numerous Anglophonic Bengalis from urban centers acted as middlemen (and women) in securing the necessary documents and making travel arrangements. In some cases, they also accompanied the painters on their journeys, but not without a significant price tag attached. Patuas have often noted that their own profits are seriously diminished because of the high percentages demanded by their urban mediators.

6. Both songs, as well as other examples included herein, were recorded in Bengali in the summer of 2002, then transcribed and translated by the author. I wish to thank Mandira Bhaduri for assistance in the transcription of the texts included herein as well as a vast corpus recorded by the author. The scrolls are part of the collection of the Museum of International Folk Art for which the author purchased a number of scrolls during the course of fieldwork. All images are reproduced by permission of the Museum of International Folk Art.

7. Songs in this sub-genre show some variation from singer to singer, and although the basic plot remains the same, each individual artist often offers his or her own creative touch to the composition. The social scrolls therefore show more multiple variation than the mythological scrolls that remain fairly constant from one singer to the next, due to the use of rote memorization to commit the latter to memory.

8. In stating this, however, I do not see the Patuas as lacking agency. On the contrary, the very fact that they can exploit such opportunities as vehicles for achieving economic self-sufficiency alone should suggest that they are not merely passive beings manipulated by larger forces. Indeed, the manipulation works both ways in a dialogical fashion.

9. A song composed by Ajay Chitrakar titled *Mother and Child's Care* states the following:

*Oh people, all of you together be aware.
Let me tell you the policy of the current era.
The number of children should be limited to two, not three.
Let me tell you the policy of the current era.
The number of children should be limited to two, not three.
Do the operation immediately, oh people!
All of you together be aware.
Mothers and sisters, all of you gather together and be aware.*

His message has gone unheeded more or less.

10. Bottled water, now readily available just about everywhere in India at a relatively low cost, was still not easily purchased in Naya during the years I worked there. The only place to purchase it was from the local pharmacist, who kept a few bottles on hand to sell as "medicine" to villagers when they had alimentary ailments. Some even felt that it tasted strange because it was medicine. The nearest place to purchase bottled water was the railhead town of Balichak, approximately nine kilometers away. The Patuas by and large prefer well water.

11. On the issue of contraception, for example, women are heard saying in one film mentioned above that their religion (Islam) forbids them to use contraception. Out of fear that they would be denied a proper burial after death, some women say that is the reason why they refuse to use birth control, even though it is available to them. Another then responds that it is only superstition, and that if we could read, we could decide for ourselves. See ÖSTÖR et al. 2005.

12. Yet a song composed by a woman about treating one's girl children equally and fairly states the following: "Oh, they don't learn to read and write, only cooking. Girls also endure blows given by their husbands. She returns home again and does all of the work. Oh my, a girl's lot is this kind of fate. If the husband goes to beat her again, she has to be calm. In a girl's life, brother, there is no peace and quiet." Similarly, in a song concerning the benefits of literacy, the singer suggests the following:

*People who are educated can help people.
 But without any learning, people become bad.
 They torture women, become thieves, drink alcohol.
 When a person is illiterate, he cannot keep his land.
 Rich people take everything away from us.*

The songs, as they were instructed to be sung, advocate female empowerment and literacy for all, yet very few people in the Patuapara of Naya follow these same prescriptions, simply because their impoverished economic status does not allow them to do so.

13. Politicians have also exploited them on occasion, especially around election time, to sing against or in favor of this or that person in an effort to drum up support for one person seeking office at the expense of another. This is quite apparent in some of the “tragedy” songs that recount natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, and typhoons. Again, money is most often the motivation for a position taken by the participating Patua, despite claims that they always speak the truth, as professed in the song titled *Patua’s Creed* by its author, Nanigopal Chitrakar.

14. The group is called *banglanatak dot com*. In their brochure titled “Cultural Heritage Tourism Trails,” they describe themselves as “a social enterprise working with a mission to foster pro-poor growth.” In Bengal alone, they work with 3,200 artists in 150 villages spread across six districts. The overall project is called *Ethnomagic Going Global*, and has the support of the European Union. Accredited by UNESCO, it has the permission to provide advice to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee.

15. The event was saturated with media coverage, both in the printed press and electronic media. Evaluations were generally positive, but with an air of ambiguity. One reporter ends his article in *The Times of India* by writing that “even this shining lamp has an underbelly,” after which he describes the medical plight of one talented young Patua who is destined to die because his family cannot afford his medical treatment. The young painter named Raju states to him the following, with a sigh of resignation: “As long as I live, I’ll live.” The reporter concludes ambiguously by asking if mind can win over matter. His tentative conclusion is perhaps, “with some help from friends and well-wishers.” See Shoumak Ghosal, “New wave of ‘pot’ culture makes Naya a global village,” *The Times of India*, 27 November 2010, 4.

16. In 2004, I was asked by two of my Patua associates to translate for them during a seminar organized in Kolkata for Scandinavian art students who were in the city on a learning expedition. Among the many scrolls they brought with them from Naya to display and sell, it was the 9/11 scrolls that sold the most. As a result, both artists returned home with more than a typical year’s salary in their possession.

17. The very existence of NGOs relies on the continued suffering of disempowered populations that periodically suffer incredibly large tragedies. In a talk given by Dennis McGilvray at Boston University, who led a project sponsored by the National Science Foundation, he recently stated in the conclusion of his lecture on tsunami relief in Sri Lanka that the one noticeable consequence of NGO presence in Sri Lanka after the tsunami was the abundance of them. NGOs were everywhere in the island nation in 2005 and 2006, bringing with them a glutton of unnecessary goods that were rerouted to black markets, from where they were sold as commodities to anyone who could afford them, resulting in an economic boom. The irony is, of course, that calamity leads to periodic moments of economic vitality. How the environment fares as a result of these interventions still remains to be determined on a case-by-case basis. On the findings of McGilvray’s team, see MCGILVRAY and GAMBURD 2010.

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