

***Patachitra***

Naya is a quaint little village in West Bengal's Midnapore district. However, it is not an ordinary village. Around 250 patuas or chitrakaars or artists live there. These folk artists are painters, lyricists, singers and performers all rolled into one. They practise an ancient folk art called Pata Chitra. This is a type of storytelling using painted scrolls. The scrolls have stories painted on them and the artists sing the story as they unroll the scroll. This art has been practised since the 13th century.

Traditionally, such story tellers took their painted scrolls from village to village. In every village they unrolled the scrolls frame by frame and sang pater gaan or the story songs. In return for their performance, the villagers gave them rice, vegetables and money. Their stories included mythological stories and tribal folklore. Nowadays the artists sing of social messages and contemporary events as well.

Over time, however, people lost interest in this art form and there were few artists and fewer listeners. To keep their art alive in the modern world, the patuas adapted their skills and themes to the times. An innovative step, they took to do this was to establish a patachitra village at Naya. Slowly, the efforts to revive their artistic heritage started paying off. Today, the patachitra art is flourishing again in the village, with village youngsters taking up the traditional art form as a passion and profession.