Music and Intermediality in Trans-Border Performances: Ecological Responses in *Patachitra* and *Manasamangal*

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**ABSTRACT**

Climate crisis has emerged as an important theme in the performances of *patachitra* or scroll painting in West Bengal. Besides depicting contemporary subjects, the scrolls also tell traditional stories, such as that of the *Manasamangal*, through songs and visuals. Across the border, in Bangladesh, the *Manasamangal* narrative finds numerous embodiments in living traditions, thus closely highlighting a human–nature connection. This paper considers several such performance genres and studies them through the intermediality of printed literature, visual depictions, sound recordings and performance practices in curated spaces. In doing so, it challenges the land-centric frameworks of disciplines and instead understands them through a liquescent methodological approach.

**KEYWORDS**

Climate crisis; early print; intermediality; *Manasamangal*; *patachitra*; performance

**Introduction**

The onset of winter in the small southern West Bengal village of Naya (West Midnapore) signals a sudden splurge of local and urban tourists. The beckoning cries of vehicle drivers offer rides to crowds alighting from the train at Balichak station. Amongst the cacophony of vendors’ voices and flurry of activities at the station environs, one might not fail to see overcrowded vehicles making their way to the ‘village of painters’, or Naya in the Pingla block of the district. Naya houses families of village painters who bring out their wares during the popular POT Maya Festival. The festival, which is a 3-day art extravaganza organised by the artist community of Naya, Pingla’, is held annually in the month of November, and bears testimony to heavily infiltrating non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Western tourist clientele and short, local project-based researcher networks in the community practice of *patachitra* (scroll...
painting). The *pata* or *patachitra* is a painted scroll that depicts a narrative—mythological, drawn from the epics or inspired by local lore—that is sung in set tunes by the *patua* (scroll painter). Past and ongoing scholarship has traced the revival of this art/performance practice to the early twentieth century initiatives by folklorists and activists such as Gurusaday Dutt, whose book, *Patausangit (Songs of the Pataus)*, published in 1939, was one of the first textual exercises in bringing visibility to the art form while also raising the penury-stricken marginal (Muslim) *patua* to the stature of a traditional artist; the other identities of the *patua* as agricultural and day labourers, snake charmers, clay modellers and pyrotechnicians were thus overshadowed by their artistic identity, especially visible in the 1951 Census.

The scroll painters are visual and verbal bricoleurs who skilfully switch between traditional scrolls narrating episodes from mythologies and epics and more topical ones concerning socio-cultural issues, such as women’s empowerment, literacy campaigns and climate crisis. In 2019, the theme of the POT Maya Festival in Naya was visibly one of climate change and about initiatives to counter the crisis, such as planting more trees. The *pataus’* lives are intrinsically connected to their ecological surroundings from the way they prepare natural colours for their scrolls to their oft-evaded roles as agricultural labourers, to being among the most vulnerable victims of climatic calamities affecting rural areas. The *patua* translates these lived experiences into the visual and verbal medium through painting and musical compositions, respectively. However, the symbiotic living relationships of rural communities with their natural habitats have a long documented vernacular history in the manuscript, print and oral performative traditions. To this extent, the *patachitra* can be viewed as a revival and continuum of the intermediality of several traditions that relied on the musicality of genres. The *Mangalkavyas* (or epic poems of benediction) in early modern Bengal, the ritual performance practices of *Behular Lachari* or *Padmar Naachon* (revering the snake goddess Manasa) in current Bangladesh (as well as the *Ojapali* performances in Assam and the *Manjusha* art practices of Bhagalpur, Bihar) and the

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3. For literature on the *patachitra*, see Korom, Village of Painters; Pika Ghosh, ‘The Story of a Story-Teller’s Scroll’, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 37 (2000): 165–85; Pika Ghosh, ‘Unrolling a Narrative Scroll: Artistic Practice and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Bengal’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 3 (2010): 835–71; Kavita Singh, ‘Changing the Tune: Bengali Pata Paintings Encounter with the Modern’, *India International Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1996): 60–78; David McCutchion and Suhrid K. Bhowmik, ed., *Pataus and Patua Art in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1999); Sharmila Chandra, *The Pataus of West Bengal and Odisha: An Evaluative Analysis* (Mumbai: Himalaya Publishing House, 2017).

4. See Gurusaday Dutt, *Patausangit* (Calcutta: Calcutta University, 1939). Dutt’s contribution to *patachitra* has been discussed extensively by scholars, especially in Frank Korom’s essay on his role in the folk culture revival in colonial Bengal: see Frank J. Korom, ‘Gurusaday Dutt: Vernacular Nationalism, and the Folk Culture Revival in Colonial Bengal’, in *Folklore in Context: Essays in Honour of Shamsuzzaman Khan*, ed. Fiaz Mahmud and Sharani Zaman (Dhaka: The University Press Ltd): 257–73.

5. See Beatrix Hauser, ‘From Oral Tradition to “Folk Art”: Reevaluating Bengali Scroll Paintings’, *Asian Folklore Studies* 61, no. 1 (2002): 105–22.

6. See Klaus Bruhn Jensen, ‘*Intermediality*,’ in *The International Encyclopaedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*, ed. Klaus Bruhn Jensen and Robert T. Craig (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

7. See Debajit Bora, ‘Politics of Performance and the Creation of Darangi Identity: Looking at the Ojapali Performance of Assam’, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 21, no. 4 (2016): 465–70.

8. See Jyotishchandra Sharma, *Manjusha Loka Kala* (Brief Sketch of Manjusha Folk Art) (Varanasi: Bharati Prakashan, 2010).
adaptive retellings of mythologies in patachitra are all indicative of a shared socio-cultural history that underlines the vitality of nature, symbiosis and catastrophes.9

In this paper, I focus on printed and performed resources on texts that embody the ritual communitarian belief systems surrounding ecological stabilities and imbalances. The deep-seated and current concerns about the climate crisis, especially after the recently concluded United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, have gone on to unfold more closely the colossal exploitations of the Anthropocene. Moreover, one of the oft-circulated perceptions of the global COVID-19 pandemic has been that of a necessary halt and healing that the planet has subjected its inhabitants to—an involuntary choice that emphasises ecological impacts on human lives. Such impacts, historically, have invoked reverence, fear, lament and hope in literary and performative responses in the Bengal region.10 This is particularly evident in the reactions in colonial print cultures—pamphlets, advertisements, song booklets, chapbooks, farces—in Bengal with the advent of colonial modernity and technological advancements, such as the railways. These responses amount to scathing satiric digs at the urban mode of living precipitating from an emulation of Western manners, as well as apprehensions ensuing from nature’s admonitions through catastrophes such as floods, cyclones and earthquakes. A close look at the available archival resources from early modern and colonial Bengal, as well as the current living traditions in the southern West Bengal and Bangladesh regions, reveal how ritual communitarian existence has always been enmeshed in nature and natural phenomena. In the following sections of this paper, I will discuss (1) how climate change and the climate crisis are represented by the scroll painters through music and the visual medium in a pre-pandemic set-up; (2) how visual depictions and retellings of the Manasamangal (poem of the serpent goddess) offer intermedial and transborder continuities in understanding ecological issues; and (3) how we can understand ecologies of cross-border performances by challenging land-centric frameworks of periodisation and use an intermedial approach instead. I begin with a discussion of the climate change scrolls and songs as documented at the 2019 POT Maya Festival in Naya.

Documenting climate crisis through scrolls and songs: POT Maya Festival 2019 as a pre-pandemic space

On any uneventful day in the village of Naya, a stray passer-by or a purposeful visitor would locate the scroll painters silently going about their daily domestic chores as well as painting new scrolls or finishing up older ones. On an ordinary day, Naya would earlier speak little to those uninitiated to this venue of cultural tourism and rural creative industry, which has now become popular by virtue of its presence in several media. The POT Maya Festival, however, is an altogether different affair where the scroll painters paint, sell, sing, explain and follow the structured course of a curated

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9. It is important to mention here that the patuas are Muslims who equally paint on Hindu themes and also sing songs and paint scrolls based on Muslim saints’ hagiographies. Moreover, the patuas traditionally use two names signifying their fluid identity—a Hindu name (such as Ajay or Karuna) to go along with the generic ‘Chitrakar’ surname and their real Muslim names (such as Azizul or Kohinoor).
10. For nineteenth-century Bengali responses in cheap print to natural disasters and a ‘decaying society’, see Aritra Chakrabarti, ‘The End of the World as They Knew It’, in Early Indian Printed Books, accessed December 3, 2021, The British Library, https://www.bl.uk/early-indian-printed-books/articles/the-end-of-the-world-as-they-knew-it.
The festival offers a veritable buffet of workshops, one-on-one engagements and showcases with the *patuas*. In November 2019, a couple of months before the COVID-19 pandemic changed the course of human lives globally, the scroll painters of Naya were well prepared with their displays, especially pertaining to the theme of ‘climate change’. A long-term enthusiast and visitor to the village could easily discern the recycling of older *pata*s and songs on subjects such as ‘the need to plant trees’, ‘the devastations of Tsunami’, ‘global warming’, and so on. At the festival space, a short workshop with *patua* women showed the techniques of extracting natural colours from flower petals, leaves, whole turmeric and other organic ingredients. Conversations with practising women and men *patuas* such as Putul Chitrakar, Monu Chitrakar and Ajay Chitrakar revealed the multiple adaptations and representations of the theme of climate change in the visual medium of the scrolls and their accompanying songs.

Walking past the newly-built research centre in the village, one finds Putul Chitrakar intently painting scrolls seated in her stall. POT Maya 2019 had as many as 29 stalls indicating a sharp shift of the medium of scrolls to apparel, home décor, umbrellas and kitchenware. Longer scrolls were fewer in number but were brought out on demand and even accompanied by full-length songs. Putul Chitrakar unfurled her colourful scroll on ‘Brikkhoropon’ (the need for planting trees) and sang her own composition on the effects of deforestation (Figure 1):

I urge you to plant more trees, people, I urge you  
The planting of trees benefits humankind  
There’s more oxygen in the air, it’s the nature of trees  
People, I urge you to plant more trees  
Planting trees by the pond boosts the fish in the river three times  
Plants have stronger grip over the soil, there’s no erosion  
People, I urge you to plant more trees  
We make medicines from trees, they are life-saving drugs  
So many people are saved by Ayurvedic medicines  
People, I urge you to plant more trees  
More and more trees prevent the chances of drought  
Trees ensure good rainfall and increase harvest  
People, I urge you to plant more trees  
There are no trees in the desert, there’s no harvest there  
People do not walk there, and use camels instead  
People, I urge you to plant more trees  
My house is in Naya, block Pingla, district Medinipur is my address

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11. BanglanatokDotCom, an NGO, has been involved with the *patuas* since 2004–05. With support from the Ministry of Rural Development, they have been involved in promoting the crafts of the *patuas*. One of the ongoing projects of BanglanatokDotCom include ‘Project Ethno-Magic Going Global’ (EGG) (supported by the European Union), which facilitates an ongoing collaboration between the *patuas* and European contemporary and new media artists. The theme of the festival is usually decided by BanglanatokDotCom: see ‘Festivals’, *Pot Maya*, accessed July 7, 2022, https://bengalpatachitra.com/festival/; and BanglanatakDotCom, accessed July 7, 2022, https://banglanatak.com/home.

12. Frank Korom, based on his visit to the festival in 2010, which was then first organised by BanglanatokDotCom, describes it ‘as a living, open-air museum of sorts’; see Frank Korom, ‘Civil Ritual, NGOs, and Rural Mobilization in Medinipur District, West Bengal’, *Asian Ethnology* 70, no. 2 (2011): 181–95; 190.

13. During my fieldwork, I spoke to six women *patuas* (Putul Chitrakar, Nurjahan Chitrakar, Jaba Chitrakar, Moushumi Chitrakar, Swarna Chitrakar and Lutfa Chitrakar) and four *patua* men (Ajay Chitrakar, Anwar Chitrakar, Monu Chitrakar and Bahadur Chitrakar). For the scope of discussion in this paper, I have included individual song references from Putul, Ajay and Monu Chitrakar’s performances.
I sing the song of the *pata* to you, I am Putul Chitrakar.  

*Brikkhoropon* or afforestation has been a common and running theme for a number of decades among the *patuas* and almost all the households in the village have their own visual depiction and song composition on the subject. There is a noticeable NGO-isation here too, as *patuas* end up replicating similar themes again and again, such as the innumerable 9/11 and tsunami scrolls that Frank Korom refers to in relation to NGO investment in the village. There are other running themes such as global warming and

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14. I heard and recorded this performance by Putul Chitrakar at the POT Maya Festival on November 16, 2019. The translation is my own, as are all translations in this paper, unless otherwise mentioned.

15. Frank Korom documents one of the earliest examples of a *Brikkhoropon* scroll and song by Rani Chitrakar in 2001 as illustrating the *patua’s* role in speaking about social justice: see Frank J. Korom, ‘Songs of Social Justice: Bengali Patuas Speak Out’, *Shuddhashar (Public Art Magazine)*, no. 27 (2022), accessed July 7, 2022, shuddhashar.com.

16. Korom, ‘Civil Ritual’, 191.
earthquakes which the *patua* composes with their artistic agency. Consider, for example, a scroll by Ajay Chitrakar on the Maharashtra earthquake in 1993 (Figure 2):

That earthquake in Maharashtra was a shocking event, it was a shocking event
How many innocent lives were lost is beyond our comprehension,
It was a shocking event, a shocking event.
Journalists came running as soon as they heard the news
They took photographs and in turn pacified the affected
Some feared even worse as the earthquake killed many
It was a shocking event, a shocking event.17

Figure 2. Ajay Chitrakar singing the ‘Maharashtra Earthquake’ scroll inside his home. Photo: Author.

17. Ajay Chitrakar sang several scrolls in my one-to-one conversation with him in his hut. This was a song he partly remembered in relation to the earthquake *pata* painted by his deceased wife, Karuna Chitrakar: Ajay Chitrakar, interview with author, Naya, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, November 16, 2019.
Like several other scrolls on climatic catastrophes, Ajay Chitrakar’s visual narrative begins with the representation of the earthquake as a demon, an abstraction transformed into the superhuman, much like the scroll on the Medinipur flood of 1978 that Gurupada Chitrakar performed for Frank Korom,18 or the scroll based on a popular song in Medinipur about a steamer accident in 1935.19 The ‘earthquake scroll’ proceeds with human and animal figures (fish is used as a common motif) in bright hues, eventually ending in a frame that is dotted with teeming black circles and a couple of human heads, possibly signifying the disproportionate ratio of living and dead owing to the catastrophe.20

Beyond the awareness drives of brikkhoropon scrolls and reminders of magnanimous disasters, patuas also sing cautionary songs about the ongoing effects of global warming. Meandering through the festival space, one could also locate deterrent images of global warming painted on the walls of patua households (Figure 3).

At the entrance of his home, an enthusiastic Monu Chitrakar unrolled his global warming scroll—his song explained the phenomenon and its impacts (Figure 4):

Hear you all, the story of global warming
Scientists spend their days thinking about the Earth
Hear, hear you all,
Hear you all, the story of global warming
Some say a day will come when the Earth turns unbearably hot
The Sun shall descend from the sky and rest below our heads.
The icebergs at sea will melt away
The Earth will be filled with water
Hear, hear you all,
Hear you all, the story of global warming.
See how we cut off trees for our own purposes
We clear away forests to urbanise and build big cities.
We forget to plant trees and nurture them truly.
Hear, hear you all,
Hear you all, the story of global warming.
Behold, O! brother, the fast-growing factories by the river,
Their waste flows into the river, O! brother, they flow into the river water
Black smoke envelops the skies—the reason behind our fears.
Hear, hear you all,
Hear you all, the story of global warming.
Try to use less vehicles for your travels, O! brothers,
There is no need for so many cars in every household.
If we use bicycles, it will prevent pollution.
Hear, hear you all,
Hear, you all, the story of global warming.21

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18. Frank Korom, ‘The Medinipur Flood of 1978: An Emic Perspective’, Man in India 99, nos. 3–4 (2019): 177–81; 177.
19. McCutchion and Bhowmik, Patuas and Patua Art, 91–93.
20. The first earthquake song was composed by the veteran Dukhushyam Chitrakar. Dukhushyam passed on in 2022. Several other patuas have passed on in the past two years of the pandemic, including Gurupada Chitrakar and Bahadur Chitrakar (with whom I had spoken during fieldwork in November 2019).
21. This song was performed by Monu Chitrakar in Naya on November 16, 2019, in my one-to-one conversation with him regarding climate change scrolls.
The global warming scroll is not a new entrant into the subjects of contemporary scrolls and exhibits a significant visual and musical intertextuality with that of the ‘Brikhhoropon’ or the ‘Titanic’ scroll. The last frame of the scroll bears testimony to the Titanic story with visual and song references to icebergs and drowning humans in the sea. The refrain-like indicator to water bodies (seas, rivers and ponds), flora and fauna reveal the references to agrarian and natural worlds that still form the basis of many scrolls—Santhal life-worlds, mythologies and oral epic poems.

Conversations with individual patuas further reinstate that they have kept the scrolls rolling with equal dexterity in traditional and contemporised subjects. The older epic and mythological scrolls on the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Chandimangal, Manasamangal and others do have stylistic and lyrical overtones in the modern patas.
This stylistic and musical continuity also signals the interconnectedness of genres—written, printed and performed—within the once-connected geographies of West Bengal and Bangladesh. If we take nature veneration and personification of flora and fauna as a continued motif in the scrolls, we do need to acknowledge in the process the re-performance of similar motifs in several related genres. At the POT Maya Festival, a quick impromptu group performance by a few women patuas briefly narrated the story of Manasamangal (or a poem of benediction to the one-eyed serpent goddess, Manasa) (Figure 5).

‘Why did you come to this sea, beautiful Behula?’ sang Swarna Chitrakar mellifluously, thus leading the performance, which was accompanied by a women’s chorus. Narratives on Manasa, as we will see in the subsequent sections of this paper, put a significant emphasis on the story/river journey of the widowed Behula, whom the women patuas metaphorically refer to as ‘floating on the cruel sea of fate’. The truncated performance of Manasamangal at the POT Maya Festival indicated a curatorial intent too (possibly by the organisers), as one of the accompanying patua men spliced the lyrics of the modern Bengali song, ‘Dingaa Bhashao Shaagorey Saathi Re’ by Pratul Mukhopadhyay (a Bengali songwriter known for his ‘mass songs’) with the Behula song.22 The valiant journey of Behula has passed into the cultural memory of the Bengali literary and performative worlds in numerous ways;23 Bengali songwriter Kabir Suman’s love paean, ‘Jaatiswar (Reincarnation)’ provokes this cultural memory: ‘Kaal keuter phonaa e nachchhe Lakhindarer smriti/Behula kokhono bidhoba hoy na eta

Figure 4. Monu Chitrakar sings the ‘Global Warming’ scroll outside his house. Photo: Author.

22. ‘Dingaa Bhashao Shaagorey Saathi Re (Float Your Dinghy on the Sea, My Friend)’ by Pratul Mukhopadhyay is deemed as a people’s song and often sung at protests and activist rallies. The ‘dingaa bhasha’ refrain has also been present in the refrains of patuas songs for some decades now.

23. The most recent adaptation of the Manasamangal story into fiction is perhaps Amitava Ghosh’s recent novel, Gun Island (2020). For a fascinating insight into the way Manasamangal features in Ghosh’s narrative, see Swati Moitra, ‘The Return of the Goddess: Amitava Ghosh’s Gun Island and the Manasamangal’, in Religion in South Asian Anglophone Literature: Traversing Margins, Resistance and Extremism, ed. Sk. Sagir Ali, Goutam Karmakar and Nasima Islam (London: Routledge, 2021): 47–59.
Banglar reeti (The dancing serpent enlivens the memory of Lakhindar/Behula is never widowed in Bengal’s tradition).

How does Behula’s story offer an ecological understanding of the performance traditions of Bengal and Bangladesh? Does it allow us to challenge the ‘dry form’ methodologies of reading texts and performances in the humanities and to bring a perception of pluvial time/wet form to our critical understanding? To address these questions, I first turn, in the following section of this paper, to the textual and performed versions of Manasamangal to show its different manifestations over time, especially in depicting Behula’s long river journey criss-crossing southern Bengal’s deltaic landscape. In doing so, I take recourse to different available sources such as the early printed vernacular texts of Manasar Bhashan, the performances of Behular Lachari and Padmar Naachon in Bangladesh, and the audio-recordings of Padma Puraan performances in Sylhet, to show their intermedial links with the scroll-paintings of Manasamangal.

The many lives of the Manasamangal: Ecological overtones, print and performance in Bengal and Bangladesh

As early as in the Mangalkavyas (epic poems of benediction) of early modern Bengal, daily and seasonal rituals found expression in the worship of local deities, which included elements of reverence and apprehension towards the omnipotence of nature. Shipwrecks, cyclones, famines, floods and other natural calamities made their way into printed literature following a trajectory from these poetic/narrative literary traditions. Most often, these narratives would be read or sung (in a not-so-ornate and repetitious

23. See Sarah Nutall, ‘Pluvial Time/Wet Form’, New Literary History 51, no. 2 (2020): 455–72.
24. The cult of Manasa and other local deities, as Kumkum Chatterjee discusses, was ‘associated with the poor, marginal people who inhabited the forested and swampy areas of lower deltaic Bengal’: see Kumkum Chatterjee, ‘The Persianization of “Itihasa”: Performance Narratives and Mughal Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Bengal’, The Journal of Asian Studies 67, no. 2 (May 2008): 513–43.
tune), a quality that continued in the visual traditions of the patachitra (scroll paintings) in Bengal.\(^{26}\) The Mangalkavyas introduced a curious synthesis between Vedic Hinduism and local folk deities and remain emblematic of an oral-literary genre. Not only do these texts hint at the complexities of social change in pre-colonial Bengal (as has been argued by David Curley),\(^{27}\) but they also achieve this by bringing to the fore the symbiotic relationships among nature, humans and animals. Music and performance remain a central characteristic of the vernacular Bengali poetic Mangalkavya tradition as offered by Curley in defining and delineating the genre:

They are religious and didactic narratives; they justify and teach the worship of one or another deity. They were meant to be recited or performed as a part of ritual designed to produce some good. They were recited to musical accompaniment, and sometimes even with staging, characters and costumes, or at least with puppets or narrative scrolls. They usually were quite long, being recited for several hours at a time, over the course of several consecutive days and nights.\(^ {28}\)

The Mangalkavyas stand at the curious crossroads of natural phenomena and supernatural resolutions as the narrative ‘leans toward the magical, in contrast to the more intellectual and rationalised preoccupations of orthodox or developed bhakti doctrines’.\(^ {29}\) Perhaps the blurring of the natural and supernatural boundaries of the genre makes it more viable as narratives with multiple performative possibilities, especially focussing on women. The very epithet of ‘mangal’ (benediction) in the Mangalkavya along with their performative qualities underline how the songs (e.g. mangalgaan) have been ritualistically sung by women, or men cross-dressing as women. Hiteshranjan Sanyal emphasises the Mangalkavya in relation to the popularity of the term mangal for this medieval genre of poetry: ‘But mangal was very popular because the performance of the singing of the kavyas was supposed to bring mangal (welfare) to all the people concerned’.\(^ {30}\)

The women goddesses of the Mangalkavyas—Manasa and Chandi—remain much closer to the women characters (Behula, Sanaka, Phullara, Khullana) in the narratives in allowing us to think about a patriarchal society, segregated gender roles and suppression of female sexuality in early modern Bengal.\(^ {31}\) On the other hand, they also show the assertive agencies of these low-caste women of the Mangalkavyas who assist their spouses in their trade or ‘give excellent counsel to their headstrong or unsubtle husbands’.\(^ {32}\) However, it is undoubtedly the resilience and subversive assertiveness of Behula (from Manasamangal) that has remained in the cultural memory of the Bengal region by virtue of the perilous river journey she undertakes with her husband’s corpse.

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\(^{26}\) For an extensive analysis of Mangalkavyas and patua songs, see Frank J. Korom, ‘Vernacular Religious Movements’, in History of Bangladesh: Sultanate and Mughal Periods (c. 1200–1800 CE), Vol. 2, ed. Abdul Momim Chowdhury (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2020): 287–320.

\(^{27}\) See David Curley, Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal (Bellingham, WA: Western CEDAR, Western Washington University, 2008).

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 10–11.

\(^{29}\) Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal’, in Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 503–566; 516.

\(^{30}\) Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal, ‘Literary Sources of Medieval Bengal: A Study of Few Mangalkavya Texts’, Occasional Paper no. 52 (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1982): 2.

\(^{31}\) See Swarnali Biswas, ‘Representation of Women in Mangalkavyas’, in An Earthly Paradise: Trade, Politics and Culture in Early Modern Bengal, ed. Raziuddin Aquil and Tilottama Mukherjee (Oxford: Routledge, 2020): 435–72.

\(^{32}\) Kaviraj, Two Histories, 518.
in the narrative. Since the range and versions of the Mangalkavya genre as well as the Manasamangal texts are quite vast, I will focus on a few examples of Manasamangal performances in early colonial printed literature, embodied practices, audio recordings and visual depictions.33

Bengali folklorist and literary historian Dinesh Chandra Sen, in his discussion of the Manasamangal in 1907, mentions as many as 40 textual renditions of the narrative, of which the ballads of Hari Datta are deemed to be the earliest. Despite recounting and translating the story of Manasamangal, which is ultimately the story of Manasa (the snake goddess), Sen accords primacy to Behula in the title of his essay.34 Moreover, Sen highlights the emotionally evocative abilities of Behula’s journey as he writes about how it moves the readers—‘very few of them will be able to read it with dry eyes’.35 That these audiences were largely formed of women who also listened to Manasamangal being read aloud is recounted in the memoirs, Amaar Jeebon, of the nineteenth century poet, Nabin Chandra Sen: ‘Nabin Sen remembered how his own father, reading out the Manasa punthi (manuscript), was able to move the audience to tears, especially the women’.36

The spread of print, especially cheap prints, in nineteenth-century Bengal undoubtedly produced numerous retellings of the Manasamangal. These publications, much in the structural vein of the chapbooks on natural disasters mentioned earlier as well as other printed performance texts during this time, include musical references (tune and rhythm) in which the episodes were meant to be read or sung. Two extant texts, Manasamangal by Kushdeb Pal (1869) and Manasar Bhashan (1869) (Figures 6a and 6b) are representative of the narrative as performative continuities from earlier manuscript traditions of the Manasamangal by Ketakadas-Khemananda (mid seventeenth century).37

Manasar Bhashan is relatively shorter in length from Kushdeb Pal’s version as it focuses mostly on the river journey of Behula and her travel back to earth with her husband, Lakhindar, brought back to life by the snake goddess. Both texts also highlight their performative continuities, especially in the living traditions of Bangladesh (Sylhet, Tangail and Kushtia). Syed Jamil Ahmed lists as many as 12 regional variations of the performance of Manasamangal spread across Bangladesh.38 For the purpose of the connection between chosen printed texts, audio-recordings and performances in this discussion, however, I will focus on the performances of Padmar Naachon and Padma Puraan songs.

Chand Sadagar, a sea merchant from Champaknagar and an ardent devotee of Shiva, refuses to worship the serpent goddess Manasa. Manasa’s wrath kills Chand’s six

33. While space constraints restrict me from discussing the folk performances of Manasamangal, it is worthwhile to mention Bengali playwright Shombhu Mitra’s adaptation of the narrative as a twentieth-century theatrical production, Chand Banker Pala. For a discussion on this performance, see Milinda Banerjee, ‘Gods in a Democracy: State of Nature, Postcolonial Politics and Bengali Mangalkabyas’, in The Postcolonial World, ed. Jyotsna G. Singh and David D. Kim (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017): 184–205.
34. Dineshchandra Sen, Behula: A Myth of the Snake-Goddess (Allahabad: Indian Press, 1907).
35. Ibid., 1.
36. Anindita Ghosh, ‘An Uncertain “Coming of the Book”: Early Print Cultures in Colonial India’, Book History 6 (2003): 23–55.
37. See Kushdeb Pal, Manasamangal (Calcutta: Kabitaratnakar Press, 1869); Ketakananda Das, Manasar Bhashan (Calcutta: N.L. Seal Press, 1869).
38. Syed Jamil Ahmed, Acinpakhi Infinity: Indigenous Theatre of Bangladesh (Dhaka: The University Press Ltd, 2000): 111–53.
sons and sinks his ships. All efforts to protect Chand’s youngest son and Behula’s husband, Lakhindar, fail and he succumbs to a snake bite on his wedding night. This leads to a graphic portrayal of a river journey that Behula, the woman protagonist of *Manasamangal*, undertakes to save her husband. At the outset, this riverine journey tells the story of Behula’s resilience in enduring her perilous voyage. She travels with the corpse of her deceased husband, Lakhindar, on a rickety boat to bring him back to life. The onset of the monsoon and heavy rain make this death-defying journey even more difficult to undertake. Socio-culturally and geographically, however, the journey maps a geographical landscape of south-western Bengal where river water is not only the facilitator of maritime relations, agrarian economy and communitarian livelihoods, but also manifests itself in cataclysmic forms such as floods while also housing deadly serpents. Despite the written forms of the *Mangalkavya* texts, they remind the readers of the embedded performative elements and musicality that explain the continuity of the text’s journey in the print and visual media well into nineteenth-century colonial Bengal, and more recently in contemporary narrative scrolls. The text of *Manasamangal* exhibits several layers especially in the way the multi-episodic narrative is introduced each time through a song, crucially underlining a generic woman’s voice in introducing Behula’s journey. The lament and effort at dissuading Behula is palpable in the text of Kushdeb Pal’s version: ‘Do not float, do not float/come back to this
house ... Kushdeb laments thus/and the heart breaks on thinking/of the deadly animals
that live on the shores.39

The lament is a performative feature in several folk genres in West Bengal and
Bangladesh, especially manifested through the voices of women. In asserting a feminine
quality to the text of Manasamangal, it also accords a sensory appeal to Behula’s ordeal
as recounted by Dineshchandra Sen and Nabinchandra Sen. The group performance
by women patuas in Naya, as indicated in the previous section, also seem to oscillate
between Behula’s individual lament (‘What has befallen me, my husband died on our
wedding night’) to a more generic feminine choric grieving. It is this viscerality that, in
turn, finds a link between the Manasamangal text and its multiple versions, for
example, in the audio recordings of the Padma Puraan in the early 2000s from the
Sylhet region of Bangladesh:

Bid me farewell, I leave with my husband
Prepare the boat for me
Mother, I shall bring back your son alive
I embark on a journey towards Padma
Do not cry and tie my boat tight.40

A ‘close listening’ to the audio-recordings of Manasamangal and Padma Puraan
from Sylhet ‘alerts the listener to considerable cultural varieties at play’.41 The
Manasamangal is performed primarily in Hindu households in the Sylhet region,
where women and men take turns to perform episodes from the narrative. Audio-
recordings of the five performances in the ‘David Kane Collection’ at the British
Library bear distinctive ‘acoustic tags’ of announcements, disruptions, commentaries,
pauses and audience voices, thus likening the recorded act to the curated performance
of Manasamangal in Naya. I shall come to the question of tracing the intermedial in
the context of audio-recordings in the following section of this paper. Here, however, I
would like to focus on one audio-recording of Manasamangal that was distinctive from
the rest.42 Bokul Malakar’s recorded performance in Maulavibazar, Sylhet, differed
from the rest by virtue of being performed by an ‘ojha’ (or ‘ujha’ in the archival notes),
who is a snake charmer by profession. With an overview of the Manasamangal story,
the recording offers an intricate layering of the audible and the readable (here, the
archival notes by the recordist). Recorded from a live performance space comprising
50–60 people, the performer’s singing here is interspersed with audience noises (a child
crying, audience talking amongst themselves, or the performers speaking amongst
themselves during interludes). The recordist’s notes describe Bokul ‘Ojha’ dressed in a
pink skirt, white shirt, neckpiece, hat and decorative belt, and holding feather dusters.
Listening closely and along the archival grain where the recordist describes him as
kneeling, standing, walking and dancing, it is not impossible to imagine the perform-
ance as representative of the larger rubric of Manasamangal performances in Bangladesh.

39. Pal, Manasamangal, 94.
40. Audio recording of Padma Purana in the ‘David Kane Collection’, May 3, 2005, British Library C1092/17.
41. Anette Hoffman, ‘Introduction: Listening to Sound Archives’, Social Dynamics 41, no. 1 (2015): 73–83; 75.
42. Audio recording of Manasamangal in the ‘David Kane Collection’, June 21, 2005, British Library C1092/21.
The audio recording and descriptive archival notes of Bokul Malakar’s performance of the *Manasamangal* lead us to think closely about its linkages with other living traditions of ‘Behular Lachari (Dance of Behula)’ or ‘Padmar Naachon (Padma’s Dance/Monsoon Ritual)’ in the Tangail/Kushtia regions of Bangladesh. Such performances are much syncretised by Hindus and Muslims and often include male cross-dressers singing and dancing the story of Behula’s journey and her plight. These ritual performances are also reminders of a deltaic landscape infested with snakes, the regular deaths from snake bites that rural inhabitants experience, and how songs become a mediation of reverence and peace between the people and the snake goddess. ‘A snake has bitten Chand’s son/Who’ll bring him to life in this unknown land’, sing the women *patuas* of Naya in telling the story of *Manasamangal*, and the answer to the question perhaps resonates in a *Padmar Naachon* performance by a cross-dressing Sherebul Islam across the border in Bangladesh.43

At the curated space of the Ocean Dance Festival in Cox’s Bazar, Sherebul Islam performs Behula’s lament, cross-dressing in a yellow saree and red blouse and with a face heavily whitened by face powder (Figure 7). Much like the *Bhaashaan Jatra* performances of south-west Bangladesh, Sherebul’s *Padmar Naachon* (from Kushtia) is a music and dance act identified as an inherent healing practice. Quite often, as Sherebul explained in between his short performance, the performance of *Padmar Naachon* is sponsored by a household as a fulfilment of prayer for cure from a snake bite. This fulfilment of prayer rests heavily on both the performers’ and audiences’ belief in the therapeutic quality of music; *Padmar Naachon*, however, includes the tripartite elements of music, dance and acting. The episodic text of *Manasamangal* does include a significant event of Behula appeasing the gods in heaven through her dance—a veritable life-giving performance that brings her husband Lakhindar back to life.

‘*Behular Nrityarombho* (Behula Begins to Dance)’ in the 1869 text of *Manasar Bhashan* offers a vivid description of Behula’s dance set in the Bengali rhythmic metre, *tripadi* (set of three), which has echoes in the *tripadi* performances of women singing the *Padma Purāan* in Sylhet as well as other folk performance genres in Bangladesh (such as *Kobigaan* and *Ashtak*). In *Manasar Bhashan*, Behula is a solo dancer, singing and playing the *mridanga-mandira* (percussion-cymbals). It is a fast-paced dance (*ghono ghono taal raakhe*) in which she moves front and back, with frequent pirouettes that allow her ankle bells to tinkle. She sings as a new cuckoo (*nobin kokil jeno*) and dances like a frenzied peacock (*promotto moyur phire*), enchanting her heavenly audience. A skilful performer with a face as white as the full moon (*mukh jini purnimaar*).

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43. Although not included in the discussion in this paper, Syed Jamil Ahmed notes *Bhashan Gaan* (in the Khulna district of Bangladesh) as the only performance of *Manasamangal* where the performers are all women: see Ahmed, *Acinpakhi Infinity*, 134–38.

44. Usually, the performance of *Padmar Naachon* comprises a team of nine–ten participants. Traditional ritual performances can go on for up to seven days and nights, sponsored performances last two days and nights, and curated acts can last for about an hour: Sherebul Islam, interview with author, Ocean Dance Festival, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, November 24, 2019.

45. Beyond the performance space, Sherebul’s other livelihoods include agricultural labour, driving local vehicles and trading in raw material.

46. Conversation with Sherebul Islam at the Ocean Dance Festival, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, November 24, 2019.

47. Both in the printed and performed references to Behula, she is often called ‘Behula Nachoni’ (Behula, the Dancer).
shoshi) and moving her agile limbs (ronge bhonge hasto naare), the poet of Manasar Bhashan repeatedly refers to Behula as a graceful dancer never losing her rhythm (naahi hoy taal bhongo), one who leaves her divine audience enraptured in music and dance (Behular nrityo-geet e debgon mohe).48

In the spatially limiting performance space of the Ocean Dance Festival, Sherebul Islam moves with intricate footwork in his dance as he sings accompanied by two instrument players (percussions and cymbals). His foot movements alternate between fast-paced criss-crossed stances to a relatively slower-paced rocking forward progression. In between such alternating movements, Sherebul swivels around as Behula, exhibiting pronounced pelvic gyrations. His petite feminine frame appears even shorter as he performs an agile movement going down on his knees, yet never losing his rhythm. In the more verbose moments of his lecture-demonstration, Sherebul underlines his self-mentoring in terms of understanding and embodying the feminine gait in his performance. ‘I was an avid audience to several Padmar Naachon performances myself while growing up’, says Sherebul. His self-mentoring involved sketching the dance movements on paper, replicating the same movements by hand in the courtyard of his home, and practising at night by looking at the shadows of those sketches. Beyond the characterisation of Behula, Sherebul role-plays other popular women characters from mythology, folklore and films—Radha, Rupbaan, Beder Meye Josna—while also speaking about violence against women. Elderly women form the majority of Sherebul’s audiences, he tells me, while at home his wife helps him prepare for performances without any stigma against cross-dressing.49

How do these multiple lives of the Manasamangal texts help us understand the intermedial connections between print and performance? Moreover, in their curated and truncated documentations, the performances discussed so far allow us to rethink available methodologies of reading them through an ecological perspective. Can we,

48. Das, *Manasar Bhashan*, 52–53.
49. I am grateful to Shamim Akhter (of Chittagong University) for sharing his insights on Sherebul as a performer, and Lubna Marium for choosing me as an interlocutor for his performance at the Ocean Dance Festival.
therefore, think about a performative universe that can be studied through pluritopicality? 'To think pluritopically, instead, is to dwell in the border'.\(^{50}\) In the penultimate section of the paper, I discuss what dwelling in the border means for those who form a much larger ecology of performance across borders—national borders, borders of disciplines as well as borders of the Anthropocene demarcating the privileged and the disenfranchised.

**Understanding print and performance through intermediality: An ecological perspective**

In another *Mangalkavya*, the *Chandimangal* (the benediction of goddess Chandi), a woman’s voice narrates her penury-stricken ordeals, while her complaints find expression in the genre of the *baromaashya* (song of twelve months). Phullara, the wife of Kalketu (one of the main characters in *Chandimangal* and a hunter by profession), narrates to the goddess Chandi the difficulties of surviving in impoverishment through the year. The *baromaashya* is visibly a musical genre\(^{51}\) and its identity as a folk song has been variously interpreted, especially by scholars such as Francesca Orsini.\(^{52}\) Orsini explores the north Indian genre called the *barahmasa* to show it as an oral literate genre where a lone woman pines for her lover ‘against the backdrop of seasonal changes and ritual events’. The *barahmasa* permeated multiple cultural worlds (e.g. religious/Brajbhasha/Urdu) and impacted literary styles through cultural exchange. The *baromaashya* of Phullara in *Chandimangal* is culturally specific to the Bengali natural landscape, offering insights into the social worlds of inhabitants in the margins of early modern society and how the genre itself symbolises women’s rituals and performative worlds. Moreover, the flexibility of such pre-colonial oral-literate genres, as well as their continuities in colonial print and existing living traditions, helps us to challenge the colonial clock-time and land-bound (dry form) methodologies of reading texts; instead, it compels us to understand texts and embodiments through liquescency, plural time and intermediality as their performative and sonorous worlds signify.

‘Discursive intermediality’, as Klaus Bruhn Jensen stresses, resides ‘in the interstices of two or more media forms’, thus bringing out the innovativeness or transgressive potential of artworks’ (installations, events or performances).\(^{53}\) In terms of methodology, discursive intermediality follows the course of ‘vertical intertextuality’, in which shorter time frames and formats allow us to critically think about the human (audience) involvement in intermediality. The choice of curated or truncated performances in this paper ensues from these rationales of vertical intertextuality and discursive intermediality. The different forms of texts in discursive intermediality—primary performance, extra-performative resources, audience voices—also correlate to the

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\(^{50}\) Walter D. Mignolo, ‘Foreword: On Pluriversality and Multipolarity’, in *Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, ed. Bernd Reiter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018): xi.

\(^{51}\) The classic work on Bengali *baromaashya* songs is by the Czech Indologist and scholar of Bengali literature and language, Dusan Zbavitel: see Dusan Zbavitel, ‘The Development of the Baromasi in the Bengali Literature’, *Archiv orientální*, no. 29 (1961): 582–619; and Dusan Zbavitel, ‘Songs of the Twelve Months in Bengal’, *New Orient*, no. 3 (1962): 102–12.

\(^{52}\) Francesca Orsini, ‘Barahmasas in Hindi and Urdu’, in *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, ed. Francesca Orsini (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010): 142–77.

\(^{53}\) Bruhn Jensen, ‘Intermediality’, 1.
pluritopical and liquecent understanding of performance genres; through both pluritopical and liquecent approaches, this paper follows a non-terracentric understanding of texts, performances and the relationship between them. Pluritopical implies being in the border. To be in the border of listening to songs, viewing performances, and documenting and writing about them as an audience is also an act of understanding the fluidity of the ecology of these performances. Pluritopicality enables looking at non-Eurocentric epistemologies and knowledge networks, such as the fluidity between the patachitra and Manasamangal as performance forms in this case. In the broader ambit of Oceanic Studies, this research has methodological resonance with what Sebastian Prange proposes in his study on the interconnections between premodern maritime trade and Islam on the Malabar coast. What he proposes as ‘Monsoon Islam’—a heterogeneous approach of bringing texts, customs, beliefs and rituals of the distant and local together—informs the fluidity of studying print, sound and performance genres elsewhere. Prange’s explorations of the development of Islam through the fluid physical places of the palace, sea, port and mosque guides the understanding of the dialogic nature of genres explored in this paper and their places of performance—curated festivals, catalogue audio recordings and printed texts.

Can this fluidity and dwelling in the border connect the scrolls of Naya to the text of Manasar Bhashan, the printed text to the audio recordings from Sylhet, and the recordings to Sherebul Islam performing Padmar Naachon? Moushumi Bhowmik’s fascinating study of incomplete listening and unfinished writing about marginal lives (recorded by white linguists and ethnomusicologists) asserts the importance of listening in between sound and silence. Excavating the technologies and power structures of grasping and controlling the empire, the archival recording, as Bhowmik finds, connects the seemingly disparate lives of South Asian migrants (in this case, soldiers). The frameworks of connection are, however, not limited by archives:

But outside these frameworks, there are other factors that connect these two lives. That connection comes through the songs, which flow in the waters of the land to which the men belonged. Songs floated on the waters of the haor and filled the lives of those who lived on their shores.

The archival recording as well as the act of recording itself is not different from the way we understand festival-scapes (the POT Maya Festival or the Ocean Dance Festival discussed earlier). Performances, performers and the lives of songs are time-bound and hash-tagged in such environments, and festival hashtags, much like the archival notes, tell a curated story promoting certain agents and anonymising others. Beyond this binding framework, songs and performances connect ecologically, transnationally, and in flowing water-like. Viewing and listening to these songs and performances,
therefore, allow us to imagine their various journeys and the crevices through which they are embodied; imagination opens the limits of proactive archiving to reactive archiving,58 the latter being crucial to connecting the ecologies of performances.

The many lives of the Manasamangal text, as discussed in the previous section, beckon a hydropoetic understanding of performances that challenges terra-centrism to take into account ‘the lively potential of things, including rivers, to change, adapt, intermingle, decouple, intensify, and diminish’.59 In analysing sound, performance and embodiment, this framework of hydropoetics allows us to read the visual, auditory and embodied practices in conjunction and in their fluid existence beyond curated neatness.60 In an extra-audible moment of the audio recordings of reciting/singing the Padma Puran in Sylhet, one hears the performers uncomfortable in the heat inside the performance space: ‘The room is getting warmer, but you can’t switch on the fan. It’ll ruin the recording’.61 In a one-to-one performance of the Maharashtra earthquake scroll, Ajay Chitrakar pauses to catch a breath and eventually stops singing as he cannot recall the lyrics he had composed.62

Songs and performances are as much about silences, disruptions, adaptations and recycling. The strict demarcations of periodisation and genres limit the understanding of performances as they travel across borders and between media.63 An alternative to this demarcation (or borders of nation-states and disciplines) is to look at the interconnectivity of media in the way that ‘musicking’—borrowing from Christopher Small64—can facilitate imagination, which is ‘crucial for fathoming a different world’.65 There are other borders, as mentioned earlier, that demarcate the privileged from the disenfranchised in the Anthropocene era. How do performers, whose livelihoods, narratives and performances are closely tied to their environmental surroundings, sustain themselves in the heightened precarity of the ongoing global crisis? In their timely and crucial study of the state of the patuas during the pandemic and lockdowns, Maura Zanatta and Anjali Gera Roy discuss the patua as a precariat in the face of COVID-19: ‘Precarity, as an ontological condition experienced by the Patuas for centuries, has become intensified after the

Moorthy and Ashraf Jamal, ed., Indian Ocean Studies: Cultural, Social and Political Perspectives (New York: Routledge, 2010): 13.

58. Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp Fargion, ‘We’re All Archivists Now: Towards a More Equitable Ethnomusicology’, Ethnomusicology Forum 21, no. 2 (2012): 125–40; 137.

59. John Charles Ryan, ‘Hydropoetics: The Rewor(l)ding of Rivers’, Special Issue: ‘Voicing Rivers’, River Research and Applications 38, no. 3 (2022): 1–8.

60. The concept of the trans-local, as Armitage, Bashford and Sivasundaram show, is crucial in understanding this fluidity as it indicates greater affinities between societies than the transnational comparative framework: see David Armitage, Alison Bashford and Sujit Sivasundaram, ed., Oceanic Histories (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 5.

61. Audio-recording of recitation from Padma Puran in the ‘David Kane Collection’, May 3, 2005, British Library C1092/17.

62. Conversation with Ajay Chitrakar, Naya, Paschim Medinipur, November 11, 2019.

63. I am reminded here of Samia Khatun’s analysis of the mis-labelled book of poetry, Kasasol Ambia, and how ‘hearing’ and ‘listening’ (as prescribed in the book) lead one to seeing, being conscious and awakening: see Samia Khatun, Australianama: The South Asian Odyssey in Australia (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2019): 171.

64. Christopher Small, Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998).

65. Juliet Hess, ‘Musicking a Different Possible Future: The Role of Music in Imagination’, Music Education Research 23, no. 2 (2021): 270–85; 271.
onset of COVID-19’. Consequently, the artistic responses of the patuas have been several, ranging from the visual depiction of the coronavirus as a Chinese dragon (Mamoni Chitrakar and Sumona Chitrakar), or a more lamenting appeal to God questioning their ongoing ordeal (Rani Chitrakar and Swarna Chitrakar).

In 2020, southern Bengal and Bangladesh were also devastated by the super cyclone Amphan, which left millions of rural poor homeless and helpless amidst the ongoing lockdown. In the Amphan scrolls of Jharna Chitrakar (East Medinipur), one finds the palpability of the super cyclone. As Jharna sings her experiences of the devastation, she unfurls a scroll showing fleeing people, frightened animals and birds, demolished houses and fallen trees. Such visual depictions and accompanying songs link the disenfranchised folk performers trans-locally and ascertain their precarity in the doubly marginalising contexts of the pandemic and climate crisis. In a sense then, the songs, narratives and gestures that the performers embody (e.g. Behula’s lament, river journey and life-saving act) are rooted in the economic and climatic impact that they face.

Conclusion

Earlier in 2021, the Bangladeshi alternative rock band, Shunno, launched their music video, Behula, which showed the Behula-Lakhindar story in the form of a video-game animation. Shunno’s rationale behind creating animations of Behula, Lakhindar and Manasa was to bring the stories of their country to their audience: ‘This story of ours continues for a thousand years/Love songs shall be sung in ancient tunes’. In this rendition of Behula’s story, she is a fierce warrior (like Aladdin or Prince of Persia) fighting Manasa (the Snake Boss) (Figure 8). The music video garnered an overwhelmingly positive cross-border response, especially from young listeners in Bangladesh and West Bengal, many of whom identified with the Behula story as exemplary resilience in trying times such as the pandemic. This re-imagining of Behula’s river journey in the digital medium, perhaps, induces us to think about the intermediality of genres even further beyond the confines of terracentrism by taking a global ecology into consideration. As Bangladesh faces a fragile future owing to the rising sea levels, floods and cyclones fuelled by the climate crisis, artistic responses adapt and oscillate between the traditional and the contemporary as performing communities set old stories to new themes, or new visuals to traditional ways of singing. This article has, therefore, considered the several traditional, adaptive and innovative responses of texts and performances in understanding how ecology, animistic world-views, agrarian rituals and climatic phenomena inform performance practices. By exploring the intermediality of the printed text, visual depictions, audio recordings and living embodiments trans-locally, this article has tried to provoke a liquescent understanding of genres. In doing so, it also opens the possibilities of understanding what transformations such genres await in a post-pandemic world that has radically upended the collective practices of hearing, seeing and listening.

66. Maura Zanatta and Anjali Gera Roy, ‘Facing the Pandemic: A Perspective on Patachitra Artists of West Bengal’, Arts 10, no. 61 (2021): 1–18.
67. Ibid., 11–13.
68. See Shunno, ‘Behula (Official MV)’, YouTube video, 4:26, uploaded March 20, 2021, accessed December 3, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3-HfoJPzkg.
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