

PRIYANKA BASU

King's College London

UNFURLING WITH A SONG:

ECOLOGICAL THEMES AND THE QUESTION OF CREATIVE LABOUR IN CONTEMPORARY SCROLL-PAINTINGS

In this talk, Priyanka Basu will focus on contemporary *Patachitra* (scroll-painting) from the village of Naya (West Bengal, India). In the art form of *Patachitra*, the scroll-painter and singer (known as *Patua* or *Chitrakar*) unfurls the long-painted scrolls accompanied by a song—much in the form of a film strip that has often accorded the *Patachitra* the epithet of ‘precursors to the bioscope’. The lives of the scrolls and the scroll-painters are embedded in the ecological shifts around them. Naturally, these have gone into becoming the subjects of the paintings and the songs. Based on a recent fieldwork in the village of Naya, this talk focusses on how contemporary scroll-painters are refurbishing older ecological themes in their scrolls as well as creating new ones out of their lived perceptions of the climate crisis. Subjects such as global warming, earthquakes, the need to plant trees, the COVID-19 pandemic and so on have often been depicted in fusion with more traditional mythological and folkloric narratives. The innovativeness of these new scrolls alongside the shift of their medium—from paper to homeware and apparel—also compel us to acknowledge the complexities of creative labour and patronage that these artists negotiate in sustaining the art form.

Thursday,
Nov 20, 2025,
17:30

Seminar room 1,
Institute of South Asian, Tibetan
and Buddhist Studies,
University Campus,
Spitalgasse 2, Entrance 2.7
1090 Vienna

or join
online:



Photo: Suhsama Chitrakar and her mother, Rani Chitrakar singing the ‘Tsunami’ scroll.
Naya, August 2025. © Priyanka Basu

Dr. Priyanka Basu is a Senior Lecturer in Performing Arts at the Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries, King's College London. Her recent books include *The Poet's Song: 'Folk' and its Cultural Politics in South Asia* (Routledge, 2024) and *'Performing' Nature: Ecology and the Arts in South Asia* (Routledge, 2025; co-edited with Dr. Radha Kapuria). She is currently researching the impact of climate catastrophes on the folk artistic practices of South Asia, such as that of the *Patachitra*.

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