

## **Festival of Ramkatha - 12th - 15th March, 2008**

### **Ramayana in pata-Chitra of West Bengal**

Patuas are a community of itinerant scroll painters and singers residing in West Bengal in the districts of Murshidabad, Birbhum, Bankura, Hoogly, Burdwan and Medinipur Districts. A scroll-painter is known in West Bengal as Patua, Chitrakar, Patikar and Patidar. Their scroll paintings (Pata) are made on paper or cloth illustrating scenes from the Ramayana and Bhagvata Purana and other popular Hindu mythological stories – playing an important part in the oral transmission of tradition. Studies of birds, animals, snakes and fishes have also been very common.

The figure of Ram is painted in green, while Sita is red, Laxman is yellow and Ravan is blue. They usually compose the narration before they paint the Pata.

In the past, at fairs, hats (weekly markets) and bazaars, the vendors displayed the Pata arts and sang Pata songs to describe the story depicted in the scroll, to attract buyers. Such a display and the songs entertained the common people many of whom bought Pata arts to hang at home in religious reverence. The practice still continues though the community of these gifted artists is a shrinking one as a result of economic hardship and lack of patronage. Ramayana, as the most popular of the continuing oral traditions, occupies an important part of the repertoire, both in terms of the paintings as well as the performances, regardless of the religious affiliations of the artists.

Ramayana in Pata is sung by displaying the paintings of the characters and singing their stories. Usually one principal singer sings one line and the rest follow by repeating it. Vanavaas and Sita Haran are the most popular among the stories of Ramayana, with Jatayau being portrayed as a close friend of Dasharath.

