

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE KALIGHAT PAINTING

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Abstract

The importance and development of Kalighat painting, a distinctive artistic style that originated in Bengal, India in the 19th century. These vibrant paintings, which have their origins close to Kolkata's Kalighat temple, combine social, political, and religious issues. The study explores the historical background, creative methods, and range of themes found in the Kalighat paintings, emphasizing how these works serve as a window into the shifting social mores of the era. Through an analysis of the cultural, theological, and economic factors that influenced Kalighat painting, this thesis seeks to provide a thorough grasp of this unique art form and its role in Bengali culture throughout the 19th century.

Keywords

Kalighat, Patachitra, color, religious, mythological, cloth, folk, art, tradition.

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Introduction

Indian paintings are primarily categorized as miniatures and murals. Large-scale artworks called murals are painted on the walls of substantial buildings. Paintings created on consumable materials like paper, fabric, etc. on a very tiny size are known as miniature paintings. The Odisha people's folk art features a unique design innovation known as the Patachitra. The hamlet of Raghurajpur is home to skilled craftsmen who have historically painted pattachirtas.

Pata is essentially a type of folk art that is created by a community of craftsmen from the area. These people stay in their own caste, known as the "Chitrakaracaste," and inherit their talents from their forefathers. In some parts of Bengal and its neighbouring territories, pata creations constitute a significant portion of the creative folk products produced. Paintings by Pata appear to have a very ancient origin. Long scrolls with cloth paintings depicting the Buddha's life and teachings were reported to be carried by Buddhist monks in antiquity as they preached the gospel. Numerous pieces of evidence indicate that cloth paintings were popular in Orissa during the 15th and 16th centuries, and even after.

West Bengal's patuas are a very imaginative people. A traditional patua is an excellent performer in addition to being a painter. He typically constructs a storyline around a legendary story while painting the sequences in a succession of frames as if he were painting a roll. He unfolds the scroll frame by frame while his audience listens to his narration with rapt attention. Pata scrolls with several legendary or epic stories drawn and embellished on them. Patuas would carry these scrolls from one town to another, unveiling and displaying them while singing different legendary stories.

The artwork typically features Hindu gods and mythological figures, as well as events, topics, and personalities selected from real-world experiences. The Chaukosh pat, or vertical square form painting, is represented by the Kalighat artwork. The dimensions were either 28 × 43 cm or 11 × 17 cm. Inexpensive ready-made pigments and inexpensive paper of comparable grade were utilized. Hair from cows and squirrels was used to make brushes. Transparent tones were used while applying the pigments, as opposed to opaque or typical Indian tempera hues. There were four forms of brushwork. One method was to create tubular bulk, plastic sensation, and shaded features with a single sweeping stroke by dipping the tip of a large brush laden with water into black ink or another colour.

There are two main types of Kalighat paintings that emerged as a result of the paintings' evolution and influences throughout the British Empire:

1. “Oriental—The Gods and Goddesses and their tales are portrayed in Oriental Kalighat paintings. Ram and Sita, Krishna and Radha, Lakshmi, Durga, Shiv-Parvati, and several more are among them.
2. Occidental: Occidental Kalighat paintings portray people’s daily activities and lifestyles, as well as the tales of warriors and heroes who fought for independence, such as Rani Lakshmi Bai.”



Hanuman fights Ravana, a scene from the epic Ramayana, c. 1880.



Ganesha in the lap of Parvati.

History of the Kalighat Paintings

Since there are no historical records pertaining to the start of the patio activity in Kalighat, it is challenging to pinpoint the precise date when they began. One must rely on specific facts to determine the genre’s beginnings. The material evidence, such as the type of paper and colours employed by the patuas, suggests that the type originated in the early part of the 1800s. The other way to determine the origin is to track the dates that various European collectors acquired these paintings. From this, it can be deduced that the Kalighat paintings were started sometime after the current Kalighat Temple was built, most likely in the first or second quarter of the 1800s.

By the early 1800s, pilgrims, locals, and some international tourists were making frequent trips to the Kalighat Temple. Due to the goddess Kali’s increasing popularity and notoriety, a large number of craftspeople came to the Kalighat region to take advantage of the new market by offering visitors inexpensive religious gifts. Soon after, many talented painters from rural Bengal, particularly from 24 Paraganas and Midnapore, relocated to Kolkata and set up shop outside the Temple.

In the villages, they created what were known as patachitras—scrolls of handmade paper that typically stretched over 20 feet in length and were decorated

with lengthy narrative yarns. Every segment was recognized as a pat, and as a result, the performers were recognized as spatulas. The patuas would move from one hamlet to the next, unfolding a portion of the scroll each time, and telling their listeners the story via song. But the buyers of Kalighat, who knew that painting such lengthy scrolls would take a long time, were not interested in purchasing them. Because of this, the patuas began to paint single images with just one or two characters that could be painted rapidly using basic shapes, leaving the backdrop simple and removing unnecessary features.

Cheap oleographs of various kinds from Germany and Bombay are now dominating the market, some of them being obvious replicas of Kalighat paintings, as Mukul Dey bemoaned. The ability to produce hand-painted artwork and the artistic intuition and creativity of the Kalighat artists have both been virtually eliminated by these low-cost replicas, not being able to compete with the cheaper, machine-made products that resemble hand-drawn and hand-painted artwork images going for two or four dollars apiece, their kids have now moved on to different careers.



Methods used in Kalighat Paintings

Mukul Dey claims that the sketching technique was quite basic and a family relationship. “In the beginning, one artist would copy the outline from an original model sketch in pencil, and another would do the modeling, depicting the flesh and muscles in lighter and darker shades,” the artist explained. Subsequently, a third family member would apply the appropriate colours to various body parts and the backdrop. Finally, a lamp black would be used for the outlines and finishing. Usually, they would combine these hues with gum and water, then use a granite muller to shape them into a round stone. Hence, as a type of cooperative family project, a live image would be made in the simplest and most visible way possible. Simple materials like squirrel or goat hair were utilised to make the brushes that had been used.

Colour Schemes for Kalighat Paintings

Various water-based, opaque pigments were used to create Kalighat paintings on paper. Various hues, including red, green, yellow, blue, indigo, and carbon black, are in the paintings of Kalighat. Using native substances, several of these hues were created. Turmeric roots, for instance, were used to make yellow, Aparajita flower petals were used to make blue, and common shoots were used to make black. with

the use of an oil light beneath a pot. More decoration was done in golden and silvery hues. Colloidal tin¹, a common alternative to silver used by Kalighat artisans to adorn their paintings and mimic the surface appearance of gems and pearly materials. As a binder, crushed tamarind seeds or gum from Bel fruit were used along with the pigments. Later, when British factory-produced water paints were introduced, the patuas made full use of these less expensive supplies and stopped using homemade colours.



Conclusion

A distinctive and colourful period in Indian art history is represented by the paintings of Kalighat. Its progression from representations of religion to social criticism illustrates how society was changing at the time it was created. The lasting history of this ancient art form is ensured by the themes and techniques used by Kalighat artists to attract spectators.

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