Traditional and Modernity of Bengal art: Kalighat Pata

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[Abstract: Kalighat painting has a unique role on the traditional art movements in Bengal. The ancient Indian sub-continent's traditional culture had vital role to develop the Bengal arts. In Bengal, the 'Kalighat' style of paintings was originated at early 19th century. The professional artist progeny came around the Kalighat temple to sell their paintings, because that was the worthy place for earnings. To develop the Bengal's modern arts the role of Kalighat paintings is indisputable. Kalighat Pata creation is a creative and important folk art in parts of Bengal. Even when European realist painting ignored the originality of Indian painting, the Kalighat Pata was able to carry on the trend of its own artistic culture of the people of this country. This popular art became extinct by 1940. This article is an endeavor to the influence of Kalighat Pata in the paintings of traditional and modernity of Bengal art.]

Key words: Kalighat Painting, Bengal Art, Folk Tradition, Modernity, Artistic Culture.

Kalighat Pata is a very important heritage of Indian art. The painting of Kalighat ushered in a new consciousness in the modern Bengal art. The Kalighat Pot or Pata is an important work and creative parts of Bengal art. The role of Gupta period painting in the development of painting in the whole of Bengal is undeniable. The continuity of the traditional ideology of various paintings created in the continuation of this can be seen in the paintings of Kalighat. In the early nineteenth century, Kalighat pata developed around the Kali Temple in the Kalighat area of Kolkata. The painting of Kalighat can be said to be a fundamental contribution of Bengal. When we talk about the original and traditional style of painting in Bengal, we have to mention separately the Pata of Kalighat, which has made its distinct position as a declaration of its own artistic expression. Even when European realist painting ignored the originality of Indian painting, the Kalighat Pata was able to carry on the trend of its own artistic culture of the people of this country. This Pata painting gradually changed the social, political, and economic context day by day and was able to influence the modern painting of Bengal.

'Pata' painting or 'Patachitra' usually means painting on cloth. The origin of Pata painting seems to be very ancient in Indian subcontinent. The word 'Pata' is derived from the Sanskrit word Patta which means 'A piece of cloth' or 'Scroll painting'. Pata or Pot as pronounced in Bengali means a woven surface, a paper or wooden panel on which painting is done. (Rajiv, 2018) The civic character of the

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village can be easily seen in Kalighat. This is one of the cultural traditions of ancient Bengal. In ancient times, when had no formal art existed, this pata was the bearer and carrier of the Bengali art tradition. Those who paint Pata are called patua in one word. The essence of pot painting is to paint the form of the subject by applying color with the help of brush on the pot. The story continues to be told continuously. In Bengal, paintings have been used for thousands of years as a source of joy in public life, as a teaching material and as part of religious practices. The antiquity of the paintings can easily be traced back to the first epoch of Indian history.

Pata Paintings is one of the oldest forms of painting in Bengal. Mainly due to the climate of Bengal, there is no evidence of paintings before the 1500s. However, evidence of the existence of patta in the region from ancient times is found in the religious mythology of the region. From ancient times the innumerable Patuas of Bengal have been associated with *Patachitra* and have been made a living for generations. Among them Acharya, Kumbhukar, Malakar and Musabbir communities are notable. The Acharyas used to take out paintings, Kumbhakar or the potter caste, also known as Kumars in West Bengal is a traditional professional group engaged in clay modeling and making earthen wares, various household items and toys from clay, The Malakars used to paint pictures and the Musabbir used to paint miniature paintings on with the subject of Eid and Muharram etc. Professor Nisar Hossain can be seen in the writing, according to the biography of Jain Tirthankar, the founder of the Ajibak sect, a contemporary of Buddha and Mahavira (6th century BC), was a monk from Nalanda village who used to sing and beg. The use of the word pot in the sense of image could also be seen in the Mahabharata and Katyayana sutra written in the 5th century BC. The information that Chanakya, the minister of Chandragupta, was employed as a spy for Patua and snake charmer in the 4th century BC, is found in the coin of Visakha datta's coined in the 8th century. The Jampata seller is known from the Harshacharitra of Banabhatta in the first quarter of the seventh century. Since ancient times of Pata Paintings has been trend in the tribal societies of Bengal and Bihar. Many people consider those pata's of the tribal society as the source of Bengali paintings.

As a result of the British rule, the stability of rural society in India was ruined and the traditional rural patuas gradually lost their jobs. As a result, Patuas from the vicinity of Calcutta and the 24 Pargana, Howrah, Medinipur etc, flocked to the Kalighat temple in search of livelihood. Here they started supplying paintings of gods and goddesses for worshipers and devotees at nominal prices, which gained immense popularity. On the other site its believe that those artists came to Calcutta from south-west Bengal. Among those, the surnames of Patuas and Chitrakar suggest that the original abode of the Patuas of Kalighat was in the South 24 Parganas and Medinipur. The painters of Kalighat were originally named Sutradhar and Patuas. As the bandits increased in the Chitteshwari temple area of Chitpur, the Patuas moved to Kalighat and same time later the artists of the Sutradhar community also moved here. Traditional ideals were maintained in the paintings of Sutradhar artists in Bengal. This style can be seen in various Bengali manuscripts,

paintings, terracotta and wooden dolls or statues. Due to this, the traditional ideologies of the two classes have been exchanged at Kalighat. Many researchers have important comments about the arrival of those artists in Kalighat:

> Over the flat colour this highly prominent bold black contour creates a contrast feeling in the composition Kalighat painting. This emerged in 19th century, centered around the Kali Temple of Kalighat. Earlier sources may be traced back to Ajanta, illuminated manuscript of Pala era, Mughal, Rajput style. Basically small decorative motifs shown on the trees and figure and repetitions of lines of the dress and ornaments remind the miniature painting of medieval India. The patuas of Kalighat mainly came from different districts of Bengal such as Bardhaman, Birbhum, Nadia, Bankura, Medinipur. (Sayantani and Mythili, 2017: p. 8)

Over the time, this painting became a distinct genre of Indian painting. Religious deities and other mythological characters and contemporary events are the subject of this painting. The rhythm and flow of the lines in the figure show the shape of the form. Although it originates from the current trend of traditional indigenous art, it is able to create a new image with its own expression, uninterrupted flow of lines, size and shape, and a strong color line. (Md. humayon Kabir, 2018: 106) Kalighat Pata and wood carving in North Battola region those two art forms were formed mainly inspired by the folklore and sculptural tradition of Bengal. (Abul Mansur, 2019: 18) Dr. Ankita Singh Rao mentioned the meterial and technique of Kalighat Pata:

> Kalighat painting represents the Chaukosh pata or the vertical square formats painting. The standard size was 11 × 17 or 28 × 43 cm. cheap quality paper and cheap ready-made pigments were used. Brushes were made from squirrel and calf hair. The pigments were applied in translucent tones in contrast to traditional Indian tempera or opaque colours. The brushwork was of four types. One, the tip of a thick brush loaded with water was dipped into black ink or colour to achieve shaded contours, plastic feeling, and tubular mass in a single sweeping stroke. Two, brisk, thin short strokes in black or in a dark colour were used to demarcate figures and the eyes, noses, and fingers, or to denote folds and partings in drapery. (Ankita, 2019: 143)

At that time there was a great demand for paintings of Kalighat among the common people of town and village. Patuas used to paint pictures considering the needs and tastes of all these poor common buyers. At first time they was paint only by drawing in black ink, but later on the painting of Kalighat made colorful painting using western watercolors. Mainly due to the medium difference, the paintings of Kalighat take a slightly different feature from the traditional style of pata painting in Bengal. Although at first they painted on local paper and colors, but when they came in contact with civic life, the artists became proficient in the use of foreign colors and paper and also gained skill in changing the content. (Abul Mansur, 2019: 16) However, it is true that despite the use of British transparent watercolors, the pata of Kalighat developed in the tradition of Indian art. Its

evidence also found in the opinions of many researchers on this subject, First, shading, especially following the outline, has been a prominent feature of Indian painting since the days of Ajanta. This shading or shadow does not follow the European custom of following the light emitted from a particular place. This shading or circulation is determined by the condition of the shape rather than the external light. Second, similar circularity can be seen in other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings of India, such as the foundations of Kerala, the hanging of Nathdwara in Rajasthan, and even the mural of Amritsar in the Punjab. So while the British acknowledged the influence of clear watercolors, there is no doubt that the pot of Kalighat developed in the tradition of Indian painting. (Ashok, 1994: 100-101)



Image-1: Kalighat pata, *Barbilasi Babu*



Image-2: Kalighat pata, *Radha andKrishna*

Bengali artists already knew the use of light and shadow in painting. These features can be seen in the paintings of Bengal in transparent gouache and tempera before the eighteenth century. The basic feature of the Pata style of Kalighat is not in its form but in its appearance. And this is why the forms of gods and goddesses or ordinary human beings have been created in a special idealistic sense of beauty. Dinesh Chandra Sen says about the Pata of Kalighat:

> There is a strange unity between the painters of Potua and Kangara in Kalighat. The painters of both the places have given a feature to the paintings by drawing various narrow and thick, simple, curved and wavy lines in their paintings. Our idea is that the style of Kangara and Kalighat are same. (Dinesh, 2006: 421 [Translated from Bengali to English])

The paintings of Kalighat have the usual rhythmic lines and the skill of embellishing. The thread of the picture has come in the smooth lines of black and white. (humayon, 2018: 109) The artist's construction skills, powers of observation,

perceptions of simplification, and moderation have come together in Kalighat Pata. Those themes are found in all Indian painting traditions and the Patua's also traditionally acquire these qualities from patriarchal education.



Image-3: Kalighat Pata painted by the Patuas of Medinipur in modern times.

The main subjects were religious of paintings in Kalighat Patuas - Durga, Laskmi, Saraswati, Yashoda-Krishna, Jagadhatri, Ganeshjanani, Shiva, Shiva-Parvati, Ganesha, Kartik, Radha-krishna, Krishna Leela, Ram-sita, Hanuman, Chaitanny Deva and many more. At the same time, keeping in mind the needs of the buyers, the environment and various social images of civic life are also paint. Such as- Bilasi Babu, Barbilasi Babu, Bonita's Manbhanjanrato Babu, Krodannita Bonita's and Babu, Chingrimukho Beral, Drama Scenes, Guruthakur, Mechhuni, Dancer, Kamakhya's Purushder Vera banano and Tarekeswar's Mahant and Elokashi etc. The painting of Kalighat was the great importance to the common people of Bengal in that time. Dr. Ankita Singh Rao remarked that:

> As the paintings evolved and got influenced during the time of British Empire, it gained varieties, and highly two kinds of Kalighat Paintings started to exist:
> 1. "Oriental- Oriental Kalighat Paintings depict the Gods and Goddesses and their stories. These include Ram and Sita, Krishna and Radha, Lakshmi, Durga, Shiv-Parvati and many more.
> 2. Occidental- Occidental Kalighat paintings depict the day-to-day chores and lives of people, the stories of the warriors and fighters during the Independence like that of Rani Lakshmi Bai". (Ankita, 2019: 143)

However, in order to keep pace with the European art and culture, the newly educated Bengalis neglected not only the pot paintings of Kalighat but also other Indian art and Culture.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Abanindranath, Gurusaday Dutta, Nandalal Bose, Ajit Ghosh and other prominent artisans were able to understand the value of art which was not valued by the newly educated Bengali intellectuals who were obsessed with colonial thinking in the nineteenth century. Although the tradition of Kalighat Pata was almost extinct by 1930-40 AD, but the influence of Kalighat painting can be seen in the development of modern painting in Bengal. A N Sarkar & C Mackay remarked that:

> The Kalighat School of painting is perhaps the first school of painting in India that is truly modern as well as popular. With their bold simplifications, strong lines, vibrant colors and visual rhythm, these paintings have a surprising affinity to modern art. (Partha, 2013: 2)

Kalighat painting is one of the modern and popular paintings of Bengal. The paintings of artists of this period have a surprising relationship with modern art as well as continuity with tradition in simplification, strong lines, vibrant colors and rhythms. In this article, an attempt has been made to briefly discuss how to influenced and inspired of Kalghat Pata in the paintings of Sunaini Devi and Jamini Roy.

Artist Sunayani Devi (1875-1962)

Sunayani Devi was the first female artist in Bengal. She is Abanindranath Tagore's younger sister and Gaganendranath Tagore's elder sister. Artist Sunayani Devi has expressed her thoughts through rhythmic lines in presenting a very simple subject. The purpose and way of his picture is folklore. Through which the pure representation of form has been revealed. However, while wandering in the same realm, the artist's paintings are more or less influenced by the Abanindra-Wash-method, but the uniqueness can be noticed in the choice of subject and thought-consciousness. She painted following the neo-Indian style. The Influenced by the folk and traditional art of Bengal in Sunaini's paintings are the rhythmic lines, the use of flat colors, divine pursuits, etc. have been created. Religious and indigenous folk and family issues are predominant in his paintings. Her names are unforgettable in the renaissance of Bengali culture, politics, literature and social consciousness.

Various subjects surrounding the Family of Jorasanko Thakurbari have come up in his paintings, sometimes in mythological characters or in her own character. As a result, the presence of people in her paintings was strong but the background of the paintings has almost monochromatic or very simple due to the easy and simple creativity. It would not be a mistake to call Sunayani Devi's paintings on successor of folk art and Kalighat painting. From 1923 to 1940, Sunayani Devi's paintings were inspired by art tradition of ancient Indian, folk art of Bengal and Kalighat Pata. The point is clear from the writings of researcher Farida Zaman:

> Folk feeling and thought are the motives and ways of his paintings that are expressed in the pure representation of the shape. The expression of Sunayani's painting is very simple, rhythmic, as if wandering in comfort in her own world. She has created new melodies in the artwork, presenting ancient Indian art. The limited color brings depth to her paintings. (Farida, 1998: 34 [Translated from Bengali to English])

Her paintings have become simple and smooth due to the dominance of lines and fine ornamentation under the influence of Bengali folk art. Apart from religious gods and goddesses, figure of old men and women of Bengal and their families have also appeared in her paintings. We find a general spontaneity in her paintings, which is significantly similar to the folk art of Bengal. Her paintings have been

introduced in the concept of Bengali folk through, rhythmic lines, use of flat colors, divine pursuits and folk thinking. So it can be said that, her paintings represent a revolutionary abstraction of Bengali folk art. This is reflected in the paintings of Sadhika and Radha-Krishna.

Sadhika

In the watercolor Tempera style of painting, the general expression of a Bengali woman is highlighted. A simple spontaneity is revealed in this picture of her painted in the style of a painting. Pata has created a melody of modernity in the artist's paintings with the concept of smooth lines, structure and layout from the traditional approach of painting. The charm and vigor of traditional Bengali folk art and kalighat pata had an influence on a number of Indian painters, as can be seen in the work of Sunayani Debi.

Radha and Krishna

Radha and Krishna is triangular composition made by watercolor painting. Here the black Krishna and Radha are painted in bright colors. Krishna is the ancient Indian prince and king who led the establishment of a religious state among the Hindus. Radha-Krishna is a divine love story from mythological. The anecdotes about Krishna are mainly written in Mahabharata, Harivamma, Bhagavata Purana and Vishnu Purana. In Hinduism, Radha and Krishna see their adored Radha-Krishna as a loving couple. The Kalighat Pata, ancient Indian tradition and folk art inspired by picturesque has presented its own activism.



Image-4: Sunayani Debi, *Shadika*, Watercolour (Opeque).



Image-5: Sunayani Debi, *Radha and Krishna*, watercolour on paper.

Among the notable images of Sunayani Devi are 'Mother Yashodha', 'Lady with fan in hand', 'Gopini of Vrindavan', 'Flute player Krishna', 'Radha', 'Mahadeva-Sati', 'Ardhanarishara', 'Krishnabeshi Balak', 'Baul', 'Wedding Bride surrounded by attendant friends', 'Sadhana', 'Boy' etc. Religious and indigenous folk and family issues are predominant in her paintings. However, judging from the presentation,

the artist did not follow the Indian tradition but was inspired and showed the way to modernity. Sunayani Devi's painting has poetic, spiritual and graceful as well as the rhythmic form of the line.

Artist Jamini Roy (1887-1972)

Artist Jamini Roy was born in 1887 AD in the village of Bellatore in Bankura, a suburb of West Bengal. Jamini Roy spent his childhood and adolescence in the village of Bankura. At that time Bankura was famous for making clay sculptures. Infant Jamini used to closely observe the work of sculptors in his village. Jamini Roy studied art in European realistic style. In the first phase of his life, artist Jamini Roy struggled against many obstacles in his desire to become an artist. He used to cover the cost of reading by selling pictures. The price of his pictures was also relatively cheap, as if within the reach of ordinary buyers. By analyzing the history and aesthetics of local and foreign art, he discovered 'folk art', the traditional language of ancient Indian art. From then on, he felt the need to find individuality in his work of art and founded his own shadow within the Bengali paintings.

Inspired by the tradition of Indian art and painting, he uses locally found natural colors and handmade paper in his paintings. Jamini Roy brought the dream of a smooth simple life, modern expression and field-classification style from the folk element to expand the Indian traditional style to the Neo-Bengal school of style. (Mrinal Ghosh, 2006: 15) The simplification of the line is particularly noticeable. Nalan Hawkings said about the influence of Folk-Art on Jamini Roy's paintings:

> There is, however, much more to be said and to be explored. The works of the artist collectives of the mid-20th century, the folk-art inspiration of Jamini Roy, and much, much more art in India has been touched by the influence of Ajanta. (Nolan, 2016: 27)

In his figure, the precise motion of the zero part and the position of the vertical figure are very carefully drawn on canvas. Jamini Roy's folk art shows the development of three genres. Those who study the various paintings will be able to trace the development of the mind of an artist of roy's constantly seeking his own mode of expression.

i. His earlier work done under purely Western influence. Roy began his career as a commissioned portrait painter. Somewhat abruptly in the early 1920s, he gave up commissioned portrait painting in an effort to discover his own. (2013: https://blog.saffronart.com)

ii. consisting largely of small copies of larger works must be regarded as the exercises of one learning to use the tools of his craft competently and never quite at ease with his models. From this phase we see him gradually breaking away to a style of his own. (2017: www.aljazeera.com) Ashoke Nag remark that:

> "In his earliest period, after passing out of art college, Jamini Roy was painting Impressionist landscapes, post-Impressionist portraits, nudes and still life influenced by (Vincent) Van Gogh, (Paul) Gauguin, and other Parisian artists. But while he mastered the styles of these Western greats, his works were original. And India and

> Bengal never left him. Alive in his works were also Indian village scenes, farmers tilling the soil, and Santhal women carrying pitchers," says Dr Prakash Kejariwal, art connoisseur, collector, and founder director of Kolkata's oldest and commercial modern art gallery, Chitrakoot. Jamini Roy also excelled in churning out portraits, both impressionistic and Classical. (Ashoke, 2021: www.firstpost.com)

iii. Roy changed style from his academic and featured a new style based on Bengali folk traditions. (Indranil Banerjie, 2014: https://www.indiatoday.in)

He has tried to draw pictures in a smooth line and style through modern thinking, intellect and awareness from the outline of the homeland of art and world art. Researcher Farida Zaman's statement in this regard:

> He realized that it was not possible to bring perfection to Indian modern painting just by imitating or practicing the Ajanta, Rajput or Mughal style of painting. Just as the Bengali language is the language of the Bengalis, so the Bengali pata is the unique image of the Bengalis. Another language can be mastered but it does not create as much as it does in one's own language- he believed in it with all his heart. (Farida, 1998: 38 [Translated from Bengali to English])

Jamini Roy has made his debut against the institutional culture of the society with the simplicity of folklore. This trend later opened the door to the progress of young artists. For this reason, Jamini Roy's work of art became a Maine source in the development of new trends in Indian modern art both nationally and internationally. Although, though the inspiration for his beauty came from pata, Earthenware, doll, kantha etc. This creativity and modernity created in the continuity of Bengali folk art is his own.

Yashoda and Krishna

The artist painted the picture on the Hindu Krishna (Incarnation). Krishna is depicted in a light brown color with a white cow and blue in the background. In the ordinary life of rural Bengal, a mother is collecting cow's milk. Baby Krishna is keeping his hand on his mother's shoulder and deeply observing this matter. Similarly, the cow is also looking at baby Krishna.

In the linear rhythm of Bengali folk painting, the subject matter of Hindu and mythological contexts can be seen in the paintings of many artists in second generation. Artists who are confined within the confines of the neo-Bengal style cannot think outside the confines of the neo-Indian style. But Jamini Roy was a modern artist in thought and mind so he did not stand still. As he gradually refined this linear rhythmicity of folk imagery in his paintings, he has been able to enrich the paintings from the perception of nature and worldly life-flow by gradually transcending mythology and religion. The composition and the use of color in this painting have created a rhythm and flow that easily attracts the viewers. This is reflected in the painting of Yashoda and Krishna. Shohif Khan remarked that:

> The school, which rose in response to the competition of cheap coloured lithographs, soon lost the contest and disappeared rapidly. The charm and

> vigour of kalighat painting had an influence on a number of modern Indian painters, as can be seen in the work of Jamini roy. (Shohif, 2015: 02)

Mother and child

This painting was very beloved to Jamini Roy. There are various paintings by the artist in this title, but among them this painting is unique. In the painting the mother is holding the baby in her lap with her left hand and the expression of caress and affection has blossomed in the coin of the right hand. The mother's head is tilted towards the baby and the baby is also holding the mother's chest. The use of red, orange, yellow, green and dark brown colors is noticeable in this painting. In the middle of the painting, the use of bright yellow color in the size of mother and child as if all the light of the world has fallen on the mother and the child playing. That is why the simplicity of folk art, use of primary colors and strong unhesitating lines can be noticed in this painting. He was inspired by the traditional folk art and artists of Bengal such as Kalighat pata, Patua, Kumbhakar etc.

Also 'Krishna and Balarama', 'Crucifixion', 'Christ and Disciples', 'Krishna', 'Mother and Child', 'Ganesha', 'Shiva and Parvati', 'Balakrishna's Dance with Two Gopinis', 'The Last Safar', 'Shrimp and Cats', 'Agniparikkha', 'Ramayana' (series) etc. are notable.

He was inspired by the folk art and artists of Bengal. That is why the simplicity of folk art, use of primary colors, strong and unhesitating lines can be noticed in his paintings. He has been able to take the modern painting of Bengal to a simplification. The composition and use of lines in Jamini Roy's paintings are very strong, the representation of color is seen in the repetition of Indian tradition and the poetic reflection in color and linear arrangement is reflected in the folk ideology. The basic foundation of Jamini Roy's artistic genius has been laid by a deep appreciation of the art of Indian art tradition and Bengal folk art, as well as a deep appreciation of the art of line, style, composition and color.



Image-6: Jamini Ray, *Yashoda and Krishna*, Tempera (Opaque).



Image-7: Jamini Ray, *Mother and Child*, Tempera (Opaque).

In the end it can be said that, as the whole of India was under the control of the British East India Company for almost 190 years, many changes took place in the art and culture of this country. The lifestyle of the people in Bengal is not exempt from this. Since then, Indian art has lost its originality and European realist painting continues to exert influence. After that for a long time continuous flow of native art was not seen in Bengal but Kalighat Pata was able to continue the trend of own art and culture of the people in this country. The Kalighat Pata later played a helpful role in accelerating the Indian Nationalism art movement and Bengal School of Art. In modern times, the paintings of different artists and their effects can be seen. In between, artist Quamrul Hassan (1921-1988), artist Murtaja Baseer (1932-2020), artist Saiyod Fazlur Rahman (1933-2004), Ramananda Bandyopadhyay (born 1936), artist Lalu Prasad Shaw (born 1937), Yogen Chowdhury (born 1939), Artists like Dharmanarayan Dasgupta (1939-1998) etc, contributed to the development of modern painting of Bengal under the influence of Kalighat Pata. Like other branches of art, literature and culture, the tradition of this ideology is applied in various ways with painting, architecture, sculpture, music and drama. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the practice of Bengali painting in the national consciousness gradually took the form of economic, social and political liberation movement. Presently the practice of Kalighat patas still continues in the villages of Bengal where the rich traditions are proudly being carried out by the patuas which are being handed down through the generations. As the contribution of Kalighat Pata in the development of modern painting in Bengal is indisputable, so it is our responsibility to help the artists of this style.

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