JCP JOURNAL OF CREATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Babu in the Bazaar: Popular Culture, Satire and Social Identity in Kalighat Paintings

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Abstract

Kalighat painting offers a distinctive visual record of the social and cultural transformations that accompanied the growth of nineteenth-century Kolkata. Produced within an urban environment shaped by pilgrimage, commerce and changing patterns of consumption, these paintings transformed familiar people, practices and social types into vivid images of everyday life. This paper places Kalighat painting at the centre of its enquiry, focusing particularly on the representation of the *babu* and the mannerisms through which his social identity was constructed. His dress, bodily gestures, posture, leisure practices, consumption habits and interactions with women and other social figures become important visual devices through which Kalighat artists observed and commented upon contemporary society. Rather than reading these characteristics simply as comic embellishments, the paper interprets them as a visual vocabulary of social commentary. The exaggerated gestures and behavioural traits associated with the babu reveal tensions surrounding class mobility, Westernisation, masculinity, morality and the performance of modernity in colonial Bengal. Kalighat's accessible and commercially circulated images therefore emerge as more than popular souvenirs, they function as a form of visual satire that rendered social anxieties intelligible through humour, exaggeration and recognisable urban characters. By tracing the babu's representation within this visual tradition and considering its reception and continuing presence in contemporary popular culture, the paper argues that Kalighat painting provides an important lens for understanding how nineteenth-century Bengali society negotiated changing identities and cultural values. The babu, through his mannerisms, ultimately becomes both the subject of the painting and a mirror of its society.

Keywords: Kalighat Paintings, Babu, Popular Art, Satire, Colonial Bengal, Social Identity

1. Introduction

The nineteenth century colonial Bengal saw an emergence of the "Bhadralok" ('gentleman')[1] class. They were the Bengali elites or the "babus" who brought about different changes in the cultural landscape of Bengal. The term "babu" was a prefix or suffix that was given to the rich wealthy individuals who were usually associated with their services to the British for establishing their rule in India. The babus were identified with their unique sense of dressing which was a mixture of both Indian and Western style showcasing a genteel and sophisticated way of mannerisms.

Raja Naba Krishna Deb of Sobha Bazaar Rajbari is identified as the first known babu of Kolkata[2]. He was close to Lord Clive and was conversant in both Persian and Urdu. The bhadralok babus became an intrinsic part of the socio-cultural aspect of Bengal. Their style reflected a particular kind of charm and their aesthetic demeanor made them stand out from the common masses in a manner to create social demarcation. For this reason, the babus got depicted not only in the nineteenth century literature but also in the different art forms like visual arts, photographs as well as in cinema. Slowly with time, they were drawn differently in popular culture, usually caricatured and mocked. Therefore, the phrase "babu culture" came to be commonly associated with Kolkata's rising urban elite and their interaction with Western ideas and lifestyle. The babus became the city's nouveaux rich who used western fashion like fancy shoes, bags and umbrellas. They beautifully pleated their dhoti ('traditional Bengali male lower garment') which was usually considered as a symbol of loose morals. They cut their hair in the fashionable "Prince Albert" hairstyle and had a youthful face. The babu's haircut was called the "Albert-cut" because it resembled Prince Albert's hairstyle, the consort of Queen Victoria.

Kalighat painting offers a fascinating visual record of the changing social life of nineteenth-century Kolkata. Earlier it drew heavily on mythological and religious subjects surrounding the Kalighat temple. The painters increasingly turned their attention to everyday scenes, domestic life, urban characters and social types that surrounded them in the rapidly expanding colonial city. Among these figures, the babu stands out as one of the most memorable creations of the Kalighat artists**.** He appears not simply because he belonged to a particular social class, but because his appearance and behaviour provided the painters with a rich vocabulary of social observation. His carefully arranged clothes, fashionable accessories, exaggerated gestures, relaxed posture and often theatrical mannerisms made him immediately recognisable. Through such details, the Kalighat artists could communicate much more than the babu's physical appearance.

The babu's figure became a means of expressing ideas about status, masculinity, leisure, aspiration and social pretension. The babu's fascination with fashion, entertainment and the pleasures of urban life also reflected the cultural tensions produced by colonial modernity, particularly among sections of the newly emerging urban middle class. Yet the paintings do not simply condemn or ridicule him. The humour lies in the tension between the identity the babu attempts to perform and the behaviour through which that performance becomes excessive or comic. His gestures, therefore, are central to understanding the paintings and acts as a commentary on contemporary society. Kalighat painting, thus made the babu into a visual type, through which the complexities of nineteenth-century Bengali society could be observed, exaggerated and questioned. This paper therefore explores how the Kalighat artists transformed

[1] The meaning of the Bengali terms has been given in brackets.

[2] Kolkata was then known as Calcutta.

everyday mannerisms into visual satire and how through the babu's figure and behaviour pattern a popular painting got engaged with the changing ideas of class, identity, masculinity and modern urban life.

2. Research Method and Analytical Approach

This study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary visual-analytical approach to examine the representation of the "babu" in Kalighat painting. Instead of treating the paintings merely as illustrations of nineteenth-century Bengali life, the study considers them as visual texts that construct, negotiate and critique contemporary social identities. The eight selective Kalighat visual representations of the babu constitute a purposive visual corpus. They were chosen on the basis of their direct relevance to the paper's central concern with the "babu" as a distinctive figure of urban popular culture and social satire. The selection was guided by recurring representational features, including the babu's dress and bodily appearance, gestures and mannerisms, leisure practices, relationships and domestic interactions, patterns of consumption and the display or imitation of changing urban and colonial lifestyles. The images selected does not claim to constitute an exhaustive sample of all "babu" representations in Kalighat painting, but moves beyond treating the babu simply as a comic figure. They help to examine the different visual codes through which the babu's social identity gets constructed.

The images are analysed through qualitative visual analysis, combining formal, iconographic and socio-cultural approaches. Attention is given to costume, colour, line, posture, gesture, facial expression, props, spatial arrangement and interactions between figures. These visual features are then interpreted in relation to the social and cultural context of nineteenth-century Bengal, particularly the emergence of an urban "babu culture" and its associated forms of aspiration, consumption, gender relations and social performance. The study also employs a satirical reading of the images, examining how exaggeration, comic juxtaposition, bodily gestures and the construction of recognisable social types produce humour while simultaneously inviting critical reflection.

The selected eight paintings function as interconnected pieces of primary visual evidence rather than isolated examples. Their comparison makes it possible to identify recurring patterns in the construction of the "babu" and to examine how Kalighat artists transformed contemporary social behaviour into accessible forms of popular visual commentary. The analysis consequently moves from individual visual details to broader questions of popular culture, satire and social identity. In this framework, the "babu" emerges not simply as a comic character but as a culturally charged figure through whom Kalighat painting registered the aspirations, contradictions and changing social practices of nineteenth-century urban Bengal.

3. Kalighat Painting as Urban Popular Art

3.1. From Sacred Narratives to the Urban Image: Myth, Calcutta and the making of Kalighat Painting

The story behind how Kalighat painting got its name goes back to Indian mythology. God Shiva was in deep meditation on mount Kailash when he got the news of Sati's (an avatar of Goddess Kali) death. He took her dead body on his shoulders and wandered for days. His grief was so inconsolable that it would destroy earth. Seeing this, God Vishnu, the Preserver in order to save earth and relieve God Shiva from his uncontrolled grief, tore apart Sati's body into fifty-

one pieces. It is said that the right toe of Sati fell at the banks of the river Hoogly (Bhaghirati) from which started the region's association with Goddess Kali.

By 1690s, the region became a part of Kolkata and came to be known as "Kalikshetra" or 'the sacred realm of Kali.' The river bank of Hoogly thus turned into a pilgrimage spot and it was called Kalighat. There was a temple at that location during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The present temple was built in 1809 by one of the members of the wealthy Sabarna Chaudhuri family of Barisa. It was built in the fashion of the "athchala" ('the eight-roofed design'). With time and clearing of the forests, settlements grew which made access to the temple easier for the pilgrims. By the early nineteenth century, the temple became a popular destination for pilgrims and visitors.

Kolkata became an industrial harbour city and people mostly craftsmen, artisans and painters from different parts of the country started to arrive looking for new opportunities. The potters and carpenters were the first to benefit from the new market followed by the "patuas" ('artist painters') who migrated from the villages of West Bengal. These patuas categorized themselves with the "chitrakar" ('artist') caste. Traditionally, the patuas painted long narrative stories on handmade paper which was usually more than twenty feet in length. This type of painting came to be called "Patachitra." They are basically water-colour drawings and paintings ("pat" in Bengali) including line drawings and hand-coloured lithographs. The joined-up sections on which painting was done came to be known as "pattas" that gave rise to the name "patua". Each section of the patta told a part of the story. The patuas roamed from village to village singing the stories while unrolling the scroll one section at a time.

3.2. Brush, Line and Colour: The Visual Language and Style of Kalighat Painting

In Kolkata, the patuas left their linear narrative style in favour of single pictures with one or two figures. They chose this style of art because they needed to work quickly for the transient demands of the urban audiences of Kalighat. This created a unique characteristic of the Kalighat genre where all unimportant details were left out, the background was left plain and the combination of colours was very basic. This further led to its rapid increase in productivity. These paintings popularly came to be known as "Kalighat patta".

Apart from the simplicity in the style of painting, the patuas made use of the cheap British factory-made water-colours that got imported into Kolkata from Britain. They started to use it for the first time instead of the laborious process of making colours from natural products which was their earlier practice. They also made use of the mill-made paper which allowed them to create multiple works within a shorter period of time. The patuas at Kalighat adapted and altered their art according to the changing environment.

Kalighat painting made use of a variety of water-based opaque colours on paper. The paintings were made by the patuas for mass sale to pilgrims and visitors who visited the Kali temple in Kolkata. "The paintings are characterized by bold often simplified forms, with curving lines and large areas of unmixed colour" (Sinha & Panda, 2011). Similarities can also be found with other art forms like the narrative scroll paintings produced in rural Bengal that used paper and water-based media. Kalighat painting was also influenced by the "pratimas" ('clay images') made by the potters of Kumortoli during festive time which was painted in a similar fashion. "The tradition of image-making in two and three dimensions was indigenous, and grew, quite independently, out of the European influx into Kolkata in the nineteenth century" (ibid.).

The Kalighat style originated in rural Bengal, but the genre grew out of a need for rapidly produced images that could be easily purchased by an urban mass market, which meant cheap and readily available paints and colours. Before 1850, such paints were not available in India and the Europeans brought it with them. The artists and painters of rural Bengal made paints from natural pigments or dyes that were available locally. These included many vegetable dyes and plant extracts that were mixed with a variety of different binding media. The binding material for such organic paints was made from "bel" fruit ('Aegle marmelos') or tamarind seed (Sinha & Panda, 2011).

The red paint was made from dried leaves of the teakwood tree. The leaves were first dried in the sun and mixed with the binding material. Saffron seeds were also used to prepare an orange-red colour paint. The saffron seeds were rubbed by hand and the colour then collected in dried coconut shell. The colour was again dried in the sun and the binding material was added to it. Another natural ingredient was the betel leaves that were used to make the red colour. The blue paint was made from the petals of a commonly found plant in Bengal. The flower petals were directly rubbed on to the paper or crushed and collected in a dried coconut shell and mixed with the binding material. The white paint was made with clay to which was added the binding medium to form a paste. The green paint was made from the leaves of ivy gourd which were crushed into a paste. The colour was squeezed out and mixed with the binding medium in a coconut shell. The colour yellow was prepared from turmeric root. The longer the juice extract was exposed to the sun, the darker was its shade. The colour brown was made from matured and crushed leaves of the teakwood tree. The use of these vegetable colours produced crystal clear tones and distinct clarity in the different strokes of the portraits' postures as well as in painting the shaded contours. The paint brushes were made from the hair of animals like squirrel and calf. "Somewhere in this eclectic cultural scenario, and with the introduction of new translucent water-colours and the exposure to western academic shading, the Kalighat artists evolved the illusion of the three dimensional that led the contour itself to become a simplified and compact-version of elaborate chiaroscuro- the hallmark of the Kalighat idiom" (Sinha & Panda, 2011).

3.3. Beyond Mythology: Features, Themes and the turn towards Everyday Life

The essential features of the Kalighat style of painting include "large figures, bold lines, blank backgrounds, bright colours, use of layering to show volume, metallic decoration on clothes and jewellery" (Sinha & Panda, 2011). Sinha and Panda (2011) draw a chronological span of the Kalighat painting into three broad phases. Firstly, the period dating from 1800 to 1850 is when the genre originated and the formation of Kalighat style of painting took place. Religious and mythological themes are predominant during this phase. Secondly, the period dating between 1850 and 1890 show different variations of composition, style and colour. Thirdly, the period dating from 1900 to 1930 portrays a minimal look, a move towards the end of the tradition and an attempt to keep the tradition alive through diversification of products. Secular themes like depiction of courtesans, social satires and portrayal of city life in Kolkata, are common subjects in the second and third phases.

The subject matter of these paintings though limited in content and repeated several times, included religious and mythological themes ranging from Hindu gods and goddesses, scenes from Hindu epics, contemporary social events, local scandals, Kalighat courtesans etc. The paintings found favour with the rich and affluent members of the society. However, opinion is divided regarding the art form of Kalighat painting among scholars. Some consider it to be greatly influenced by the "eighteenth century British paintings of natural history" and according to others, the artworks were "created in their own style of pat painting" (Sinha & Panda, 2011).

Some well-known artists whose works on Kalighat painting are found in the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum in London and in the collection at Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata are painters Kanai Lal Ghosh, Nibaran Chandra Ghosh and Kali Charan Ghosh. Their works are still on display and considered a valuable archival source of the then times. Kanai Lal Ghosh was a relative of the Ghosh brothers and all three were active around 1900. They had migrated from 24 Parganas of West Bengal to Kalighat in Kolkata, for setting up their shops next to the Kalighat temple. Their drawings share common characteristics, particularly in the facial features and the decisiveness of line. They primarily focused on patachitra art rather than other art forms like modeling or clay images. Nibaran Chandra and Kali Charan were active till 1930s.

In recent times, painter Ranjit Chitrakar, who is a traditional scroll painter, is also associated with contemporary Kalighat painting. His paintings are based on the traditional composition of a babu and bibi, but he has added new colours to the form like pale lilac and pinks. These colours are made from seasonal flowers. Ranjit Chitrakar and his sons paint on religious, secular and historical themes. They make use of organic colours in their work. Painter Anwar Chitrakar, is a modern Kalighat patua who paints on modern subjects. He started painting from a young age of eleven and he continues to do so till this day. He makes use of similar methods of painting like his ancestors did. He begins a work by initially drawing an outline and then the black and white areas are marked out and filled in. His paintings are characterised by finer details of facial features, shaded garments and decoration. Painter Kalam Patua's work provides "an insight into the process that the modern patua goes through to create contemporary works" (Sinha & Panda, 2011).

3.4. From Temple Souvenir to Urban Commentary: The Cultural Impact and Popular Legacy of Kalighat Painting

The influence of Kalighat painting continued to make its presence felt on later modern artists from Asia and Europe even after the tradition died out in Kolkata. The famous artist Jamini Roy (1887-1972) was inspired by this form of painting so much, that he created his own adaptations. The French artist, Fernand Leger (1881-1955), whose name is associated with the Cubism Movement was also inspired from Kalighat painting. He may have come in contact with the paintings that were taken to France by the missionaries working in Bengal.

Kalighat painting act as a mirror to the nineteenth century social and cultural aspect of Kolkata as well as rural Bengal. It developed simultaneously with the British Indian Company's paintings of nineteenth century especially the work by Thomas Daniell (1749-1840) and William Daniell (1769-1837), Sir Charles D'Oyly (1781-1845), J.B. Fraser (1783-1856), F.B. Solvyns (1760-1824), S.C. Belnos (1795-1865) and the Bengal School of Art. "From the early years of the twentieth century, the art of Kalighat painting was regarded as an inventive aesthetic movement in the Bengal region and it received tremendous international attention" (Sinha & Panda, 2011). Between 1840s and 1860s, the Kalighat painters adopted very simple style of painting by printing the outline of the figures and then painting it by hand. This method was applied to increase the speed of production. However, the free-hand copying also continued to exist till the beginning of the twentieth century.

4. The Emergence of the Babu Figure in the Nineteenth Century Bengal

The "Bengali Bhadralok" or "Babu" was a member of the elite class with gentle characteristics and Western education. They defined themselves as a social class who delineated their nobility and shaped a new code of acceptance. The title of "babu" was added as a prefix or suffix to a Bengali bhadralok's name because of his wealthy status and the services he rendered

to the British in establishing their commercial and political base in India. It was an honorary title given to them by the British East India Company in lieu of their services. The babus formed a new class of Bengalis who were eager to learn and adopt Western manners. They formed the bulk of the workforce needed in the cosmopolitan enclave of Kolkata. Their attire was a variable mixture of English and Indian, very proud of their English training and always flaunting their status in society. Therefore, the rise of the babu culture in the nineteenth century brought about changes in the nature of Bengali identity and subjectivity.

In Kolkata, Raja Nabakrishna Deb of Shobhabazar, Rajbari was a well-known babu. He helped Robert Clive gain many allies and establish British suzerainty in Bengal. The first Durga Puja was celebrated at his palace in North Calcutta, after the British won against Siraj-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Bengal, at the Battle of Plassey in the year 1757. Many English people and the Bengali aristocracy attended the celebration. From then on started the extravagant celebration of Durga Puja by the babus of Kolkata, among which the most prominent ones were the Tagores of Jorashanko, the Mullicks and the Debs of Shobhabazar.

The Bengali babus rise as a social class during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Bengal is significant because they formed a trading community in the Presidency. They had a prominent role to play as cross-cultural collaborators, interpreters and intermediaries with European merchants. They also entered into joint commercial ventures with the British. As a result, the babus handled all commerce in Bengal, in addition to managing goods, insurance companies, shipping industries, trading houses, mills and running banks and markets. Since the babus managed and governed all commercial affairs of Kolkata they had amassed great wealth. They were extremely rich and influential so much so that they worked as active partners of Western agency houses and also employed Europeans in their companies.

The babus considered themselves far superior from the common people with regard to caste, class, education and status in society. Representing themselves as colonial officials and associates of the British Raj, they remained alienated from the Indian masses. However, they were not completely assimilated as part of the English cohort either. Both at England and at home the babus were ridiculed as an absurd mixture of imperialist culture and indigenous traditions. Post 1857, these Bengali babus were represented in a comic manner in the popular domain. They were presented as a cartoon character and a ridiculous mixture of East and West. There was a figurative mockery of the babu's features. They were drawn wearing a dhoti, coat and hat, wearing a monocle, carrying an umbrella and smoking a cigar. "What began as a gentle mockery of the Anglo-Indian way of life soon became an exercise smack of racism and anti-Indian attitude" (Sinha & Panda, 2011).

5. The Babu in Kalighat: Visual Representation, Social Commentary and Cultural Legacy

"Amused by the Western affectations of the Bengali nouveau riche and rising middle classes, a satirical caricature emerged from the patua's brush, of a foppish male figure, complete with a mix of Bengali and Western attributes and mannerisms" (Sinha & Panda, 2011). Popular culture parodied the bhadralok babu in the bilingual colonial atmosphere of Kolkata. Not only did the genre of Kalighat painting bring out the colonial undertones to expose the socio-political scenario, but also acted as a means to camouflage the protest against the British rule and expose the pseudo-bourgeoisie babu culture. It parodied the contemporary colonial culture and the deceit in it. Kalighat painting juxtaposes the serious and the trivial where the absurdity and exaggeration serve as a tool for camouflaging the resistance and protest hidden beneath it.

The eight paintings (Figures 1-8) given below are purposively selected rather than randomly chosen. They collectively represent recurring aspects of the "babu" figure, such as: dress and bodily appearance, fashionable Westernised habits, leisure and consumption, relationship with women, domestic and social behaviour, imitation of colonial urban lifestyles, vanity and self-display along with the moral and social tensions that emerged with the babu culture. The paintings are not just illustrations but act as visual evidence of that period. A qualitative visual analysis of the selected eight paintings is done combining firstly, formal analysis of the paintings that looks at composition, line, colour, gesture, posture, costume and visual emphasis. Secondly, iconographic or contextual analysis is done identifying what the recurring objects, gestures, relationships and settings signify within nineteenth century Bengal. Thirdly, social and cultural analysis is carried out by connecting the visual representation of the babu with the emergence of an urban middle-class culture and changing social practices. Lastly, a satirical reading is done by examining the exaggeration, bodily gestures, juxtaposition and comic situations as devices of social commentary.

The painting called *The Musk Rats' Music Party* (c.1870) shows a dandified babu elegantly dressed who is going to woo his lover at night which is demonstrated by the rose in his hand and a nocturnal bat on the wall outside. His house is being ruined by the rats which are shown through the window. In a similar painting titled *Bengali Babu,* a young babu is seen wearing a pleated dhoti, holding a walking stick in one hand and carrying a rose in the other. In the background is seen a theatre of muskrats in a procession with banners and playing music. This particular theme was quite popular with the Kalighat patuas as it clearly captured all the stereotypical characteristics of babu culture (Figure1). The babu's elaborate clothing, patterned upper garment, flowing lower garment, footwear, accessories and confident posture draw attention to his appearance and self-presentation. The figure appears carefully constructed as a socially recognizable type through his dress and bodily mannerism.



Figure 1

In another painting (Figure 2) a babu is seen seated on a chair and playing a sitar ('stringed musical instrument'). Babus were usually portrayed as playing a musical instrument or holding a water pipe (Figure 3) or a wine glass (Figure 4) and sitting on a European four-legged chair, with the right leg crossed over the left, which was a typical babu's posture. The figures are seen seated in a relaxed manner but with a self-conscious pose. The fashionable clothing, hairstyle,

footwear, crossed legs, chair, musical instrument, water pipe, wine glass suggests leisure, refinement and cultivated self-display. Instead of presenting any productive activity, the figures construct masculinity through performance, leisure and aesthetic consumption. These paintings showcase the "babu" as an urban social type associated with new forms of leisure and lifestyle.



Figure 2

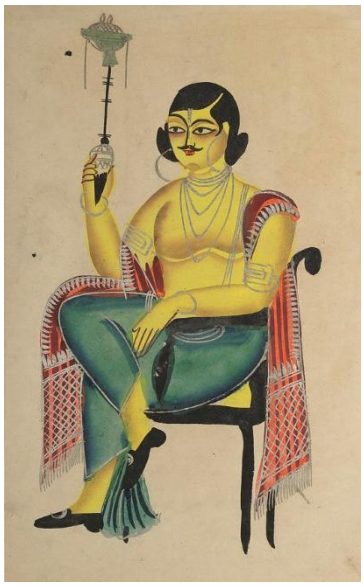


Figure 3

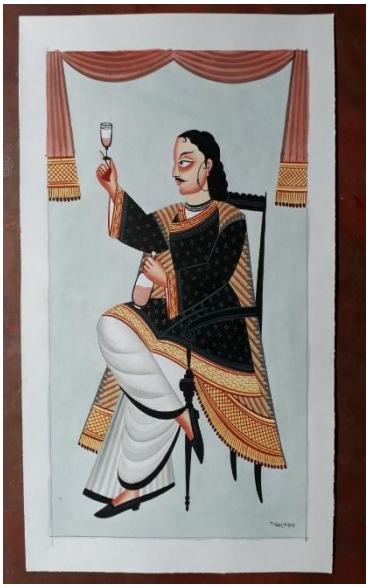


Figure 4

In another painting (Figure 5) a babu is drawn walking with a lapdog (attributed to a painting by painter Kanai Lal Ghosh c.1920), which is a clear indication of the adoption of European customs by the Bengali bhadralok babus and the impact it had on the Kalighat patuas. "The patuas wasted no time in creating a foppish figure dressed in western style" (Sinha & Panda, 2011). The painting combines sartorial display with an apparently Europeanised form of leisure indicating the babu's engagement with new forms of colonial urban lifestyle.



Figure 5

In another painting (Figure 6) a babu is portrayed as holding a hookah in the company of his mistress. In another painting a babu is seen holding a wine glass in the company of a courtesan or a babu is seen sitting in various postures accompanied by his mistress (Figure 7). During

nineteenth century Bengal, the culture of visiting courtesans was very popular among the foppish babus, along with their other idle engagements like playing cards, pigeon race, cats wedding etc. The paintings bring together fashion, gendered interaction and an emblem of cultivated leisure. In both the paintings, the fashionable babu is seen seated closely with his mistress or a courtesan. Their intimate proximity, elaborate clothing, bodily gestures and the decorative setting create a scene of urban leisure and sensuality. The women in these paintings are equally elaborately represented. Their sari, jewellery, hairstyle and ornamentation associate them to a world of entertainment and sensuality rather than an ordinary domestic life. It also brings out male patronage and pleasure where the affluent pleasure-seeking babu spends his leisure and resources in the company of his mistress or courtesan.



Figure 6



Figure 7

In a painting titled *Woman Selling Fish* (c.1800-1830), a woman is seen selling fish. A bhadralok babu is standing in front of her holding a fish in his left hand. The babu is drawn as fashionably dressed in a dhoti and punjabi ('traditional upper garment') adorned with expensive jewellery and carrying a fish (Figure 8). The babu appears self-conscious in his presentation. The fish is a familiar commodity associated with everyday consumption in Bengali household. The bazaar is not simply a physical market but acts as a social space in which class identity is displayed and negotiated. The babu's pose becomes a part of the satire transforming everyday social behaviour humourous.



Figure 8

For the patuas the subject of the babu and his bibi became quite popular from 1800 onwards. The babus with their newly gained status and extravagant life style particularly the expensive parties, lavish meals and variety of entertainments soon turned bankrupt. They were thus scorned and ridiculed which got portrayed in the paintings by the Kalighat patuas. For instance, in one of the paintings, a babu is seen falling at the feet of his mistress. In another, a woman is seen trampling on her lover (a painting by Nibaran Chandra Ghosh dated c.1900). The penniless babus became a rich source of satirical material for the patuas. Kalighat painting therefore, highlights the corrupt and hypocritical elements of babu culture during that time in Bengal.

6. Conclusion

By the end of the nineteenth century, the peak period of Kalighat painting was over due to industrial growth. In the face of stiff challenge from low priced prints and cheap lithographs, the patuas needed to branch out and produce new forms and different products in painting in order to survive. They started producing souvenirs like postcard size images and scenes of babus and bibis for their earning. Lockets with miniature portraits of lovers, beloveds and couples were very common in Europe, and the Kolkata babus adopted it as a form of western mannerism. Such miniature portraits of half-length of a young babu and bibi as a pair started to be painted by the Kalighat patuas. They created works meant for the market. Earlier the works were painted on cheap mill-made paper which was not durable for a long time because of the humid Kolkata weather. Later on, the paper used for these paintings were easily rolled into scrolls for storage.

At present, the area surrounding the Kalighat temple are no longer home to the patua communities that earlier earned their livelihood there. Dey (1932), who was one of the first academics to give importance to the artists and their painting style lamented that, “the patuas had almost disappeared from Kalighat [by early twentieth century], driven out by the rapid advancement of the printing press and lithography”. Due to the prevalence of printing, the patuas found the market for Kalighat painting waning, which made them leave the city in search of employment. The patuas faced such economic difficulties as practicing artists that made them look for alternative ways of earning their livelihood.

Nowadays, the shops in vicinity of the temple offer colourful plastic souvenir paintings embellished in gold and silver. Such paintings can be found printed on T-shirts, mugs, greeting cards, photo frames etc. as a form of self-employment. Kalighat painting continues today in the rural areas of Medinipur and Birbhum in West Bengal. At Medinipur, in the village of Naya is a small settlement which is known as the patua village. All the people belong to the patua community or is connected with the tradition that has passed down from one generation to another. The patuas do not identify themselves with any particular religion. They use both Hindu and Muslim first names, celebrate festivals and customs of both the religions. Due to this syncretistic practice, the patuas works are based on secular themes and current scenarios as well as religious depictions.

Kalighat painting being easily portable and concise attracted the foreign travelers who purchased it as "oriental" or "exotic" souvenirs to be taken back home for family and friends. The patuas picked this opportunity at foreign trade and sold large batches of paintings to foreign tourists as well as Missionary schools and art collectors. Later, the paintings were restored at museums and kept in private collections outside India. In Bengal, some of the paintings can still be found in Kolkata, at Victoria Memorial Hall's collection, the Indian Museum, the Birla Academy of Art and Culture, the Asutosh Museum, the Gurusaday Museum and the Kala Bhavan at Shantiniketan, West Bengal. The scope of Kalighat Painting is widening and beginning to permeate the art world internationally, "facilitating an even wider understanding of the life and work of the patua, and through them, the story of Kolkata's most urban art tradition" (Sinha & Panda, 2011). According to Dey (1932), the work of the patuas is "a very important item of Bengal's culture, which is really the pride of our country".

The Kalighat pats were not just a product of a particular age. They up hold a mirror of the then times. "The satirical representation of the socio-cultural set up of the nineteenth century Bengal makes an acute visual statement" (Sinha & Panda, 2011). The fashion-oriented babus became the objects of criticism in the Kalighat pats not only because of their costly attire, Albert-style of combing their hair, their buckled-fitted shoes, their pleated dhoti but also because their main focus centered only around these items rather than their concern on any social responsibilities. The paintings brought out the unfair, dismal and mechanized socio-political situation of the age. The most appealing features of the art style of Kalighat painting are "the wonderful gestures, flawless rhythmic strokes and quality of brushwork. It mocked the false biased pretensions of the bhadralok babus. The technique is quite simple but the final outcome is bold and extremely attractive" (Sinha & Panda, 2011). Kalighat paintings not only depict strong social content but also reflect the sentiments and reactions of the lower socio-economic classes of the time.

Acknowledgement:

All the Figures (1-8) used in this paper have been sourced from publicly available online image through Google images. The original photographs of the paintings housed at the Victoria Memorial Hall and the Indian Museum, Kolkata, could not be obtained, as photography is strictly prohibited within the museum premises.

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Figure 4: https://in.pinterest.com/shubhammaitra/bangaliana/

Figure 5: https://tinyurl.com/3bbfhr8y

Figure 6: https://2shr.ink/aULyDf

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