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Abstract

Patachitra art form is known for its intricate details, as well as mythological narratives and folktales inscribed in it. It is one of the ancient artworks of Odisha, originally created for ritual use and as souvenirs for pilgrims to Puri, as well as other temples in Odisha. At same time Patachitras are a component of an ancient Bengali narrative art, originally serving as a visual device during the performance of a song. The Bengal Patachitra is divided into several different aspects, such as Durga Pot, Chalchitra, Tribal Patachitra, Medinipur Patachitra, and Kalighat Patachitra. The subject matter of Bengal Patachitra primarily consists of mythological and religious stories, folklore, and social themes. The song of Patua is an important part of our culture in Bengal. However, looking at its past history, it can be seen that the main period for the circulation of this art form was before the time of King Harshavardhan. The existence of this form is mainly noticed today in the Medinipur, Murshidabad, and Birbhum districts in West Bengal and different parts of Odisha. This suggests that there may have been a literary connection between Odisha and West Bengal. In this article, I want to discuss a patachitra artist, Kalam Patua, and his life stories, art, and journey. Although my main goal in this discussion is Patua's music and its present existence. Similarly, Kalam Patua has developed a new style blended with kalighat patachitra tradition and side by used the contemporary themes in his artistic creation. This history will be discussed in the article.

Keywords: Tradition, culture, Patachitra, orality, new techniques, history.

Introduction

Patua music is a form of “folk” music. There are many people who do not know how to draw. But potters and gays all belong to the painter community. Rhythm and rhymes are mixed together with the voice to create a harmonious atmosphere with the image. Patuasangit is basically Patua life-music. The term “Patachitra” is derived from two Sanskrit words: “pata,” meaning cloth or canvas, and “chitra,” meaning picture or painting. We know that a colourful tradition of folk life and art has developed around the Patachitra of Bengal. Various pieces of information about this art and the artists have also been revealed in the multi-dimensional exploration of the research. Patachitra is a traditional art form originating from the state of Odisha in India, characterized by its intricate and elaborate narrative paintings. Patachitra paintings use natural colours derived from local sources like plants, minerals, and dyes. Many Patachitra depict stories related to Hindu deities, particularly Lord Jagannath and his manifestations (Mukopadhyay 29). It is interesting to note that Patachitra paintings often depict mythological narratives, folk tales, and religious themes, particularly those related to Hindu deities such as Lord Jagannath, Lord Krishna, and various episodes from the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

The paintings are created using natural colours derived from minerals, vegetables, and other organic materials. Nowadays, they depend on market-based colours. Artisans use a fine brush made from animal hair to achieve detailed and intricate designs. It is said that traditionally, Patachitra was painted on cloth, but it can also be found on paper and other surfaces today. The cloth is typically prepared with a mixture of tamarind seed paste and chalk to create a smooth surface for painting. Cultural significance lies in its cultural activities and literary reception (Ghosh108-109). We should keep in mind that Patachitra is not just an art form but also an important aspect of the cultural heritage of Odisha and West Bengal, often associated with

storytelling and performance arts. It plays a vital role in religious ceremonies and festivals.

In West Bengal, there is a long history of changing trends and socio-political backgrounds, particularly concerning the printing press and the critical situation of Kalighat Patachitra in society at that time. Contemporary adaptations address relevant historical shifts and various aspects of the lifestyle of Patachitra artists in West Bengal. Historically, these paintings were used for ritualistic purposes. The paintings are often arranged in a sequential manner, with scenes from a story depicted in frames. In the early stages of this tradition, artists traditionally used natural pigments, handmade brushes, and specific methods for preparing the cloth base. The most important thing is that while it retains its traditional roots, modern artists have begun to explore new themes and styles within the Patachitra framework, blending contemporary issues with traditional techniques.

History of patachitra tradition in India

The territory extending from Vaitarani to Godavari was known as Kalinga. Mahapadmananda occupied Kalinga in the fourth century BC. Kalinga was captured by Ashoka in the third century BC. The Dravidians did not want too much admixture. The fire of the dawn of Indian civilization, the radiance of the sun, fled to this place long before King Ashoka. They did not want to accept Arya Dhara; this region was a pasture of Charvaka thought. As a result of the emergence of Charvaka, Buddhism was propagated. Fa Hien (401-410), who arrived at Tamralipta to study Buddhism, described Tamralipta as a port city situated on the seashore. There were twenty-two Buddhist monasteries here, and more than a hundred monks lived in each vihara. He sat here for two years, copied many Buddhist scriptures, and even took painting lessons while sitting here. It is understood that painting had a deep connection with Buddhism, which was not present in Aryan civilization. Fa-Hien's little comment is memorable—he learned art from these

potters. However, about two hundred twenty five years later came Hiuen Tsang (629-645). From his account, it is found that Buddhists and people of other sects live here side by side. There are more than ten Bihars in this country. Besides, there are about fifty temples. (Chakravarti, 270)

Banabhata's *Atmchari* is said to have demonstrated the power of Harshvardhan. Banabhata's *The Atmcharita* was composed in the first half of the seventh century. Notably, Pattikar is referred to as a businessman, not a beggar. That is, it is associated with a profession, not deported. The *Mudrarakshasa* drama, written in the eighth century, mentions that two patrikas suddenly enter a room to show their pots, introduce themselves, and exchange news. In other words, intelligence work was ongoing in the Pattika Sage. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* speaks of the need for this intelligence. Two identities of potrikars were found in these two parts: they are businessmen, and they also engage in espionage. However, the profession they are involved in and their identity date back to ancient times. One can trace back to even more ancient works, such as Kalidasa's *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* or *Malvikāgnimitram*, which have special references to pictorial composition and its display. (Chakravarti, 269) When King Ashoka was busy with the Kalinga War in the third century BC, the roads of Kalinga were covered with blood. At that time, today's Medinipur, or the copper-clad city of those days, was a busy port city. From here, it was connected to South India by river and sea routes. In other words, the inhabitants of this city had an affinity with the Dravidians. As a result, the customs introduced by the Aryans were learned here. In the distant past, several parts of Medinipur and Baleshwar districts, between the Kansai River (Kapila) and the Baitarani River (near Jajpur), were called Utkal.

Subject matter and Theme of patachitra

The theme deals with various subjects. Therefore, we can easily connect the subject matter

of patachitra with other literary traditions. Stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other Hindu epics depict deities like Jagannath, Krishna, and Ganesha, as well as folklore and local myths. They also address social and environmental issues. The Durga pot, or Durga sara, is recognized as the worshiped patachitra. It is venerated in the Hatsarandi Sutradhar society of the Birbhum district during Durga Puja. This type of patachitra is also worshiped in Katwa. The Durga pot features a hemispherical patachitra, with the image of Durga in the central position. Ram, Sita, Shiva, Nandi-Vringi, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shumbha-Nishumbha are painted on this kind of chalachitra. The Krishnanagar Rajrajeshwari Durga is uniquely noted. In the centre of the chalachitra, there is Panchanan Shiva, with Parvati beside him. On one side, there is Dasha-Mahavidya, and on the other side, there is Dashavatara (Ghosh 335).

A look at the social and religious practices of the Bengali painters or Patua community suggests that these semi-Hindu, semi-Muslim artists belong to a community similar to the painters of other provinces of India. In this case, they believe that they are children of Vishwakarma. This joint process of pot drawing and pot song—visual-audio—is also essential from an anthropological perspective. The exquisite use of colour as a narrative and the melodious voice of the image is a secular tradition of mass communication. Attempts have been made to portray mythological, social, religious, and historical narratives through colour and line since ancient times in India. Examples of this can be found in the hymns of the Charyapad, in the form of Sri Krishna Kirtan, in the Padavali of Jayadeva, in Manasamangal, Dharmamangal, and Chandimangal songs.

Life and work: a brief overview

Kalam Patua was born on November 1, 1962, in Jhilli village in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. His artistic sensibilities were shaped by his paternal grandfather, the late

Baidyanath Patua, and his maternal uncle, Gopal Chitrakar, from a very early age. The artist easily learned the skill of art at the age of twelve and began to help his maternal uncle, who made clay idols and was a famous patachitra artist from Ayas village in the Birbhum district. Kalam Patua is a prominent artist in the practice of patachitra in present times. The artist's skill is well known for his unique characteristics in images and music. His style of painting, along with the uniqueness of his musical voice, deserves special attention. What is significant about his style and his paintings is the storytelling process, which is very unique. This process differentiates his paintings from those of other artists. He has successfully blended the style of Kalighat painting with contemporary themes and events in society. During the training of kalighat painting he was immensely encouraged and guided by two great personalities, Dr. Asish kumar Chakraborty and Jyotindra Jain. His notable paintings are My Post Office, India Gate, Kartik, Fish Seller, Lakshmi, Motshogondha, Sheepish Lover.

Kalam Patua is an Indian artist who has reinvigorated and, in doing so, reinvented Kalighat painting in India nowadays. His work can be deceptive, seemingly playful and charming. However, Patua is a profound observer, and his paintings are anything but decorative. Like the great paintings of the Kalighat tradition, Patua's efforts are edgy, tantalizing, and subversive. He is provocative and insightful, and his response to the Kalighat tradition is astute. Patua's works have been exhibited in India and abroad, including in London, as well as in private collections in India and around the world. Kalam lives in Rampurhat, West Bengal, and works from his studio at home. What are the new perspectives in his artistic creation? Firstly, he has invented a new style that is a mixture of contemporary brush strokes, keeping in mind the frame of the eighteenth-century theme and socio-economic and political history. Secondly, he has used the colours, strokes, and space within a specific zone through which a reader can easily reach the world of literature and other

arts. Thus, his painting, to a great extent, makes us think that the literary relationships and cultural exchanges are continuously ongoing. Secondly, he has used the colours, strokes, and space within a specific zone through which a reader can easily reach the world of literature and other arts. So, his painting, to a great extent, makes us think that the literary relationships and cultural exchanges are continuously ongoing.

Origin and decline of Kalighat patachitra: a significantly a socio-historic journey in culture and literature

The Kalighat Patachitra, the last tradition of Bengal Patachitra, was developed by Jamini Roy(1887-1972). The artists of Bengal Patachitra are called Patuas. Religious pots encompass the stories of Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, narrating tales of Hindu gods and goddesses like Radha, Krishna, Chaitanya, Kali, and Shiva, as well as the indigenous Bengali folklore of Manasha and Chandī, with Behula and Lakshinder being the most popular. Secular pots depict important news events, scandals, accidents, etc. Patachitra painting has different types of motifs and aspects that unveil Bengali culture. Using mythological epics and natural colours, it is one of the unique characteristics of Bengal Patachitra (Mukopadhyay 31).

It was before 1798 that the Chitrajeevi community started living in the Kalighat region. It is believed that the temple of Kalighat was established in 1798. This temple received a new look in 1801 and many people came to see the Kalighat temple to offer puja to Goddess Kali. Those who came from the village-mafsal mainly bought pictures and posters of Maa Kali to take home. Like Lakshmisara, people around Calcutta used to buy Patachitras of Maa Kali and Maa Durga and worship them at home or keep them in the Thakurstan. As a result, a demand for Patachitra was created from here. Patua painters who emerged from the villages painted and sold these

pictures at prices ranging from one paisa to one anna (Mukopadhyay 76). The Patuas found a market for these cheap paper paintings until about 1930. In the 1930s, when Cheap 'oleographs' came from Germany, the heyday of the Patuas of Kalighat came to an end, and gradually the Patuas of 'Kalighat-Potte' began to take a different path in life. The 'Kalighat-Pot' lost its market. The Patuas of Kalighat also painted square pots and inlaid dighal pots for morphological similarity. However, pictures of gods and goddesses were mostly painted on square or rectangular pots (Mukopadhyay 126).

A new genre called 'Kalighat Pot' emerged. Basically, its main purpose was to sell pictures of deities in square pots at a low price. The artists used to sell everything to get a shop near the temple. From the colour to the design, the character of this pot is different from that of the inlaid pot. Patichitras of those gods and goddesses also sold well. Although it is a painting on tulot paper, ordinary cheap paper came with the change of time. The Patuas of Kalighat used to make idols and also painted pots. Devotees from rural villages who came to see Kali and the temple would buy pictures of the deity and return home. The Patuas also painted pictures of gods and goddesses in watercolours on cheap paper and sold them cheaply around the temples.

The pots that were sold here, called 'Kalighat Pots,' also came from painter families in different parts of Kolkata. The pots were mainly of two types: the inexpensive 'Santa Pot' and the more expensive 'Rajkiya Pot.' Cheap pots are known as 'Rashi Pots.' A quick and easy way to paint on the rough backs of thick, cheap paper involved a black-and-white border of roughly one square foot, which would complete the image with a cheap colour overlay in the middle. Yet, this cheap pot was in high demand and was widely sold in the market. William Archer called them 'Beggar Paintings'; for that reason, their source is Jarano Pot, as well as various folk paintings of Bengal, woodcarving, terracotta, stonework, clay wall painting styles, and earthenware paintings,

all of which are mixed together. In fact, the source of 'Kalighat-pottee' lies in the folk art of the country. This 'Kalighat pot' was painted in a completely indigenous manner using watercolours on mill paper according to size. Like Patuas, carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, sculptors, tinkers, and Bhatta-Brahmins, they come from a distant background.

It was made by sticking to the best cloth from the Srirampur mill. They were sometimes ten to twenty cubits long. To make the pot permanent, the Patuas used various arrangements for this pot: rexin or cham-paper below, and fresh, beautiful paper glued on top. When the rural society of Bengal was collapsing due to poverty in the second half of the eighteenth century, and the Patuas were no longer able to earn a living by showing the pot in the village and singing the song of the pot according to tradition, the Patuas from different districts came to the Kalighat temple and its surroundings, as well as to many areas of kolkata. Not everyone could put aside their father's tuli and sign up for public labour that day. Many of those who could not came to different areas of Kolkata and Kalighat (Mukopadhyay 77).

However it easy to make such a simple generalization as 'Kalighat-Pot' being influenced by the English masters. Clay dolls, wooden dolls, and terracotta panels can still be found in many areas of the Kalighat style of pottery. The Kalighat pot has its origins in all these. However, in the interest of presenting society's needs at the time, the Patuas of that day painted pictures of men and women, babu and bibi, strangers, prostitutes, and sexual places, in addition to gods and goddesses on Kalighat canvas. The Patua painters of the 'Kalighat style' who emerged from Birbhum, Medinipur, Burdwan, Twenty-four Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly, and Bankura were spread across different parts of Calcutta. Apart from Kalighat, 'Patuatola', 'Kumortuli', 'Chitrapur or Chitpur', and 'Potopada Lane' of Narkeldanga were found in the early nineteen century (Mukopadhyay 77).

Literary Reception and its relevance the painting of Kalam Patua in the field literature

Patachitra is celebrated for its aesthetic beauty and its ability to convey complex narratives through visual art, making it a significant part of India's artistic legacy. He uses thicker strokes in the early stages of his painting. His Kalighat paintings chronicle the sociological evolution of urban India, showing him sitting cross-legged at the very spectrum of the dying tradition of Patachitra. He has spent a lot of time with his uncle during the 1970s to learn soft skills and brush strokes. Regular practice assured him of becoming a master of this particular tradition and painting. His journey was not very smooth, as he faced challenges which he shared with me during a prolonged conversation on 07/07/2022 and 12/10/2022. Though the process of drawing is changing day by day, what is special about the subject matter of the artist is his unique brush strokes, shading, and prominent lines. At the same time, he juxtaposes literary history with contemporary themes, mixing modern themes with Puranic stories. On another aspect of his art, each patachitra retells a story.

Kalam Patua connects the literary and artistic zones, which is significant in literary history

Kalam Patua is recognized as a key figure in reviving the Kalighat style of painting,. The contemporary Kalighat artist has incorporated modern themes and social commentary with in the traditional art form. His creation also incorporates contemporary subjects, reflecting urban everyday life and social issues which open new horizon to the reader in field of literature and other arts. Most vital approach regarding his painting is that He employs a quick, one-stroke, one-brush technique, a hallmark of the Kalighat style, and utilizes a range of colours to create his unique style. His paintings depict a wide range of subjects, including mythological figures, everyday life

in post offices and social issues like dowry, communal violence, and Nirbhaya case which happened on 2012. Being a postmaster he also illustrated the difficulties of postal employees, specially the life and duties of postal runner. His painting contains autobiographical elements and myth. He has covered the topics of changing nature of our society, specifically dowry death and violence against women. Interestingly, the symbol of snakes represent divinity here. In Manashamangal kavya, the the snake charmer has alternative historical and personal dimension. Generally how he paints is not new but what he is painting is new and thought provoking.

In essence, Kalam Patua's paintings are a blend of traditional Kalighat style and contemporary themes, offering a unique perspective on urban life and social issues through his distinctive style and artistic voice. Sometimes satirical, approach to social issues, reflecting on societal norms and middle-class double standards. Kalam Patua's work has been exhibited internationally, including in museums in the UK, Canada, and the US. He goes against the classic ideas of painting rather he uses the open space of understand in his painting that's why readers can think and find the meaning from different directions.

Conclusion

Patachitra artists depict the picture of society and spread educational consciousness. The retelling of stories gives awareness to the common masses. This protest can be composed only by those who have no Ramayana or Mahabharata. Therefore, they have been busy writing their own Ramayana and Mahabharata for themselves from ancient times to today. Their Ramayana and Mahabharata are their Patachitra and its songs. In the history of Indian art and music, Patuas are not bratyas. So, Patachitra paintings have a rich history and are considered a valuable part of the cultural heritage of west Bengal. Like other traditions of Bengal, this art form has changed its

mode of presentation. This shift marks deep implications for the art form and the life of the artist. Hence, the renowned patachitra artist Kalam Patua is trying to save the patachitra tradition by using some contemporary concepts and techniques. His contribution in this field is remarkable. At the same time, his artistic creations will encourage us to think about the interliterary relationship between literature and other arts.

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