

Kalam Patua : Becoming of a New Subjectivity from Changing Paradigms of the 'folk'

Amitava Adhikari

*Department of Fine Arts and Music, Rajiv Gandhi University,
Itanagar-791112, Arunachal Pradesh, India
Email: aliamitabha@gmail.com*

The term subjectivity does appear with a meaning which is something slightly different from the term identity, although the two terms have sometimes been used interchangeably. But subjectivity as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree. It is something over which we have any measure of influence or control. Kalam Patua's unique ability to transform the routine everyday of the middle-class life into metaphors derived from Indian mythology makes his work both complex and nuanced. In the post-independence period gradually all other centers of patachitra practice except that of Medinipur have faded away, as patuas in those areas have shifted from their tradition in search for better life. While the success of Kalam Patua is of individualist nature, the success of Medinipur patuas is in contrast bearing a collective nature. Many researcher/writers have inappropriately associated Kalam Patua as 'the last from the Kalighat', whereas the present paper is an attempt to understand a new becoming of an artist. While the Kalighat artists broke away from the pre-modern traditions of Patua repertoire with a modernist approach incorporating influences of the Bazar lithographs, western water colours and targeted the village audience for their patronage. In contrast Kalam Patua's paintings attend to the global audience/patronage. His repertoire is a complex synthesis of the traditional Kalighat, Birbhum/Murshidabad idiom of patachitra, miniature paintings as well as works of Jamini Roy and the world of modern art.

Received : 09-04-2020
Revised : 16-08-2021
Accepted : 27-09-2021

Keywords: Kalam Patua, Patua, Patachitra, pata, Kalighat, folk art, contemporary art, subjectivity

“I want to continue to push the boundaries and constantly create new work” – Kalam Patua

“Art speaks its own language. It does not consist of words and its contents are not ideas, but forms and colours which assume the shape of an inner experience. The language of art is international” – Stella Kramrish

The term subjectivity does appear with a meaning which is something slightly different from the term identity, although the two terms have sometimes been used interchangeably. For our purposes, one’s identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short - or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity, at the same time allowing myriad of limitations and often unknowable, unavoidable constraints on our ability to fully comprehend identity. Subjectivity as a critical concept invites us to consider the question of how and from where identity arises, to what extent it is understandable, and to what degree it is something over which we have any measure of influence or control. In other words, inquiries into subjectivity might ask, “How does our understanding of knowledge relate to, impact, and/or constrain our understanding of our own existence?” Indeed, one question that follows: “Is our social and individual existence determined by the ways that we collectively organize knowledge?” (Hall 2004: 4).

Kalam Patua and his community/tradition

The first census to be held in independent India was conducted in 1951. Sudhangshu Kumar Ray in his section on the “Artisan Castes of West Bengal and their Craft” that formed a part of the Census of West Bengal drew attention to the *Chitrakars* among the nine caste-based guilds practicing their hereditary professions (Ray 1953: 229). While citing the 13th century Brahmavaivarta Purana that stigmatised the Patuas as outcastes, expelled from the recognised *Chitrakar* caste order for painting ‘untraditionally’; Ray equated the *Patuas* with the *Chitrakar* caste. This was indeed a step-up as the *Patuas* reclaimed their place in the caste hierarchy. Ray registered their caste occupation as ‘mostly arts and crafts’, unambiguously qualifying it by stating that the ‘main and most important profession of the *Chitrakars* is to show or exhibit their scroll ... and explain to his audience the painted scroll’ (Ray 1953: 308). Regarding the marginality of their social/religious position Ray stated that ‘those who paint but do not exhibit with sing song commentaries, viz. the *Acharyyas* and *Sutradharas*, continue to be Hindus. It is clear therefore, their profession as exhibitors of scrolls degraded them in the religious and social plane’ (Ray 1953: 307). One camp of scholars claim a post-Aryan origin for this artisan caste, while others conforming to nineteenth century nationalistic approach suggest a tribal source of the *Patua* tradition. In continuation with the later view Bimalendu

Chakraborty (1996) opines in his book *Lokayata Banglar Chitrashilpi O Chitrakala* that Patuas are originally *Bede* or *Bedia*. Sudhir Chakraborty emphasises the fact in his book *Chalchitraer Chitralkha: 'Patuas* are specially an artist community who belongs to lower strata of the social system and they originally belong to the clan of *Jajabar* (Itinerant), *Bede*, *Bagdi* or *Bauri*'. Combined source of myth and oral history provides us some clues about this lower status of *Patuas* as an artist community.

After the independence the traditional audience of the *patua's* performance was fast fading due to various changing conditions. But in the past, 'as soon as he (the *Patua*) enters a village, the children announce his arrival. Usually all the people from one compound gather for a performance: children, women, and others who have been busy around the house. The *Patua* shows about three to four scrolls at each presentation' (Hauser 2002: 108). Gradually growing competition with cinema and newer from audio visual mass media like TV and VCR and then computers and smart phones impacted the world of *patuas* and their profession extremely, which pushed it almost to the verge of extinction. They were the poorest of the low class/caste people to survive from the audiences' alms offered for their performance, sometimes gracefully and sometimes compulsively. Being unable to fight with the new challenges most of them had moved away from their inherited tradition and changed their professions to mostly daily wage labourers. The fall of the *Patuas* was mournfully recorded by the researcher, folklorist and collector Tarapada Santra who travelled widely across rural Bengal from the 1950s onwards, studying, researching and writing on subjects like history, archaeology, and cultural practices of the traditional rural arts and crafts of Bengal (Sethi 2017: 111)

Tarapada Santra critically observes that the establishment of parliamentary democracy in India through mass elections moves towards identifying its people distinctively to bring them into the number game of politics. So the question for confirmation becomes more prevalent than ever before. The clichéd debate arises with more clarity: is the *Patuas* Hindu or Muslim? Prior to the partition of Bengal there did not seem to be any strict sectarian demarcation, yet as religious communalism became a growing problem of colonial and post-colonial India, the lines of identity were gradually drawn, paradoxically within the 'secular' society of independent India. Tarapada Santra informs us: 'shortly after the independence, the Hindu Mahasabha (a Hindu nationalist organisation) made concentrated effort to reconvert Muslim *patuas* through purification rite (*suddhi*). The process started from Kolkata and extended its mission deep into the villages of Bengal. Later on, *Bangiya Chitrakar Unnayan Samity* was founded to organise the newly reconverted communities for the inclusion in the register of schedule castes and tribes. The mission is not yet completed; but the official organisations such as the above guided by specific vision and mission, caused stronger division between Hindu *Patuas* and Muslim *Patuas* (Santra 2001).

But the resistance has not died yet. Tarapada Santra observed: 'But majority of them (*Patuas/ Chitrakars*) at the end, continue to reside in the middle-path. And *Patuas* who prefer the path of harmony actually remained too attached with the profession of *Pata-trade*, whereas, the other *Patua* families beholding distinct Hindu or Muslim identity

mostly have shifted from the *Pata*-trade (*Pata* painting and *Pata* singing)'. Tarapada Santra further observed, 'how the history of some communities among many possesses some indigenous characteristics in West Bengal. In the rise and fall of different kingdom at different historical juncture (*Yugasandhi*) these communities, marginalised by the new society converted their religiosity for the sake of survival. But they continued their own rituals, community faiths and professions. At the present era, their social history is getting more and more importance in the study of humanities. *Chitrakar/Patua* community of west Bengal is one of those' (Santra 2001).

We need to notice that this incredible ability of the *Patuas/Chitrakars* inheriting a *minoritarian* consciousness to adapt their life as well as practice to the changing conditions continuously. What is striking about the *Patuas/Chitrakars* is their resilience, their ability to adapt their art form to current necessity by addressing issues of present interest. It is no wonder that some of them have survived to some degree, even though many *Patuas* have been forced into other occupations. 'Yet capitalism having destroyed at the root of collective way of life or make a position of the same...Folk art can no longer economically sustain in any honorable fashion ... What then is the reason for its survival if not as a political act of resistance against the phenomena of forgetting that capitalism entails' (Dube 1978).

As past records show that *Patuas* of Birbhum and Murshidabad had a very different background and history to those of Medinipur. *Patuas* of Medinipur predominantly use the title *Chitrakar* for their last name, where as we hardly get the surname *Chitrakar* in Murshidabad and Birbhum. Taking into account the census records of both pre-colonial and postcolonial period, it is evident that *Patuas* of Murshidabad and Birbhum belong to the scheduled tribe community namely *Bedia*. According to many concerned scholars like Tarapada Santra and Aditya Mukhopadhyay, *Bedias* most probably had migrated from tribal areas of Chotanagpur to the fertile lands of these districts. *Bedias* are popularly known as *Bede* who catch snakes and play snakes (*saap khelano*), sell tribal medicines and were considered by the upper caste Bengali society as untouchables. They also carried the inheritance of a tribal language which is the generic source of their identity as *Bedia*. Although with the modernisation of the Bengali society and progression of the *Bedias* through education and respectable jobs as teachers and civil services had changed their social status and their language has been gradually forgotten. But the underprivileged *Bedias* are treated as untouchables by the upper casts even in the present days.

'It should be mentioned here that surname Potua should not be the only criterion for fixing one's community identification. Potua seems to be an occupational group. Therefore, all Potuas may not be *Bedias*.' This has been the proposal from Cultural Research Institute, Scheduled Castes and Tribes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, in responding to the issue subjected as 'status of the persons using their surname as Potua/Patua and claiming themselves as *Bedias*', [Ref: His D.O. No. 29/TW dt. 22.7.88 on the above subject], in a circular passed to the Special Officer, of the Department at Behrampore, Murshidabad [Copy forwarded to the Sub-Divisional Officer, Sadar/ Lalbagh/ Jangipore/ Kandi for information and necessary action]. It is clearly mentioned here

about the community in investigation that: 'from their occupational pursuits, social structures documentary evidences and other circumstantial evidences it appears that the subject group belongs to Bedia.'

Following this lineage Kalam Patua belongs to the *patua* culture/ community of Murshidabad-Birbhum by birth as he inherits the Murshidabad tradition from his mother's side. And he was nurtured under Baidyanath Patua of Chandpara Village, who is a prominent master *Patua* of Murshidabad *gharana*/tradition, who was mostly active in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Actually, that was the time when urban educated civilians of the post-colonial big cities, like Kolkata, Madras, Delhi, Mumbai, Cochin, Viskhapattanam, Bhopal and few others started to take second wave of concerned interest in the indigenous traditions, particularly local cultures and art practices. The first wave to understand indigenous culture happened to be during the *swadeshi* movement is well recorded fact by the historians and was aimed for the freedom struggle of Indian subjects against the colonial rule. The second wave in the post-colonial time happened to be initiated by mostly the young intellectuals of that time along with the social scientists and NGOs, and then immediately followed by the state funded academies and institutions such as the *Adibasi and Loksamaskriti Kendra* (Center for Tribal and Folk Culture), Crafts Council, Craft Museum, Bharat Bhavan, Ministry of Textile and Design etc. In this period of renewed participatory interest of the urban civil society in the folk/ traditional culture as the inheritance of the whole society was in rise. With this advent of a new concern indigenous culture like the *Patachitra* achieved a new status as an inheritance of all people of the Bengali culture. People from the cities who had already lost their rural connection would actually identify with the *Patuas* as 'us' - they recall the tradition as '*our Patachitra*', '*our Patuas*', unlike the pre-colonial time when it was mostly cherished by the people of the villages and looked down by the newly modernised urban societies. Hence this was a period of social-cultural change and produced a new opening space for the folk-traditional-tribal cultures as those cultures got a larger audience in the national and international platforms. Selected prominent artists and arts from tribal/traditional/folk communities were celebrated and awarded as well as represented and funded by these national and international platforms.

During this period of changing paradigms few *patuas* like Shrishchandra Chitrakar of Kalighat, Kolkata, Banku Patua of Satpalsa, Birbhum, Dukhusyam Chitrakar and Pulinbirahi Chitrakar of Naya, Medinipur, Suresh Chitrakar of Barghata, Birbhum got early recognitions and the agency of the first three artists reached a legendary mythical status by the end of the last century. Most of the renowned artists added themselves to the list of internationally acclaimed *patuas* will be now coming from the Naya Village of Medinipur. And some exceptional cases, like Kalam Patua from Murshidabad/Birbhum inheritance or Bhaskar Chitrakar of Kalighat inheritance are cases of swimming against the dried up flow of their local traditions. They posit a different subjectivity than the earlier mentioned celebrated artists with respect to the tradition of *patachitra* as a whole.

In this consequence it will be worthwhile to revisit Jytindra Jain's introduction of Klam Patua in the curatorial essay titled *Kalam Patua From the Interstices of the City*:

“It is remarkable that, when in most parts of India comparatively closed and repetitive artistic conventions had brought about a certain degree of stagnancy, for historical reasons in Bengal there was more openness about the adaption and articulation of contemporary visual imagery within the inherited idioms of painting. Besides the Kalighat painters, the rural *patuas* - the traditional scroll painters and reciters of Hindu mythological stories – had already begun, by the mid twentieth century, to bring into their orbit the accounts of contemporary social phenomena such as *After Independence: the coming of cinema to Bengal*. Soon after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, a whole range of painted scrolls depicting the event were produced by the *patuas*. These became popular not only with the *patuas*’ rural audiences, but a new demand for them emerged in the urban centres. The painted scrolls began to shift their location from the rural performative contexts, to urban exhibitory spaces. This change of market has recently encouraged a large number of *patuas* to create narrative scrolls depicting several contemporary events and disasters such as the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the Asian tsunami of 2004. One of the most talented and innovative artists to emerge from the broad new culture of Bengal folk artists’ open response to contemporary ‘visual construction of the social’ is Kalam Patua” (Jain 2011).

Now before entering into the journey to understand the unique achievements of Kalam Patua as a contemporary artist it will be interesting to notice the exceptional success of the Medinipur *patuas*. In the post-independence period gradually all other centers of *patachitra* practice except that of Medinipur have faded away, as *patuas* in those areas have shifted from their tradition in search for better life. Several reasons must have worked behind the success of these *patuas* from Medinipur, particularly from a single village Naya of West Medinipur. Their resilience to continue the tradition and their adoptability to changing conditions, proximity to the city of Kolkata - only three hours journey by local trains; all that made possible their participation in large scale to the fairs and festivals in the city. And more and more researchers also got interested to work with them as the *patuas* of Medinipur were accepting them with a new hope to reach out to the larger audiences in the cities and the international platforms. All these and the visionary aspect of the master *patuas* like Dukhushyam Chitrakar who has worked with Tarapada Santra as well as Suhrud Kumar Bhowmik and many other important researchers and collectors to create a new consciousness about the field. He was also a rebel in his tradition as he trained the women folk of the community to learn the art and the song of the *patachitra* to open up a new possibility for the tradition to grow. Thus for the first time in the whole history of the field women *patuas* were emerging as independent composer, artist, performer of *patachitra*. While the success of Kalam Patua is of individualist nature, the success of Medinipur *patuas* is in contrast bearing a collective nature.

Kalam Patua's journey as an artist in his own words

[I was fortunate to meet the artist concerned at his residence and recorded our discussion/interview, he playing an enthusiastic participant in the discourse. The interview/dialogue was recorded on two occasions with the artist in his residency at Rampurhat from two different visits. First time (in 2007) I went with Biswajit Patua who was my batch-mate at Kalabhavana during my BFA course. He introduced me to Kalam Patua. Kalam Patua happens to be an uncle of Biswajit from Biswajit's mother's side and a constant inspiration behind Biswajit's interest in Art in general and Patua tradition in particular. Next (in 2011) I interviewed Kalam Patua while guiding a documentary team as a researcher. The team from an NGO named 'Shaw' was working on the Bedia community and their different professions in practice and video-recorded Kalam Patua's interview as he is the most famous from the community to achieve national and international reputation for his paintings. I have since continued to follow his works and journey as a contemporary artist, who happens to be also very active in the national and international art circuits and in the social media like Facebook and WhatsApp too. Since then communication with the artist through phones and chats/messages are working like a direct push for the present research which is aiming for a PhD thesis and a publication after the thesis, on few contemporary artists inheriting the patua tradition of Bengal, Titled as Changing Paradigms of the 'Folk': Patas and Patuas of West Bengal. This part of the essay is a synthesis of two interviews with the artist by the present writer and a transcribed interview in English with a title: Reborn Kalighat by Yagna Nag Choudhuri, New Delhi, July 2013, collected in Painters, Poets, Performers: The Patuas of Bengal, pp-170-174).

I was born in November 1962 in Jhilli in Murshidabad district of West Bengal into a Patua family. Patuas are known as wandering scroll painters and storytellers. My ancestors thrived under the patronage of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan in 18th century Bengal. My dada or grandfather used to paint scrolls. I learnt the art from my chacha, my father's brother, the late Baidyanath Patua. As my father worked in the fields, it was my mother who encouraged me to paint. I was taught to paint mythological pats. My chacha was a very versatile Patua. He was skilled in making clay murtis or idols - molded and painted images of gods and goddesses, and toys too. He would paint scrolls not only for himself but for others from our community. During good weather, he would travel to surrounding villages narrating stories in exchange for dry rations like rice or for money and while in the village in the off-season, he would make murtis. I often helped him out with the job of idol-making, especially of Goddess Durga. But the patas my uncle did was primarily on folktales, gods and epics, not everyday life.

Although my father Bholanath was a farmer, my mother Susari came from a family of pure patua tradition. Even when I was very young, she used to keep a sharp eye out on whatever I sketched. In my early age I was fascinated by the incredible speed with which one of my brothers, Gopal Chitrakar, used to sketch on mud walls. The patua and Kalighat techniques demand that one be extremely swift.

I completed my secondary education in 1979 and wanted to study in Kala Bhavana, but due to lack of necessary financial support I was unable to do so. I got a permanent job in 1983 at the sub-post office in Chandpara of Murshidabad. I am presently posted at Rampurhat, in Birbhum district. My timings at work in the post office were 9 am from 6.30 pm, but I never left painting. It was after office hours, in the evenings and holidays that I would paint. This job gave me the security to experiment that a Patua's life does not usually have. Then it was in 1986 that I was first invited to a workshop organized by the culture department. It was my first visit to Midnapore and Kolkata. I met several other artists who were also attending the program. At the workshop I was awarded the third prize for my scroll painting and it was also there that I first heard of the artist Jamini Roy.

My life slowly started changing. In 1989, I came to Delhi for the first time as a participating artist and performer in the West Bengal pavilion of the India Trade Fair. In 1990, the Alliance Francoise in Kolkata commissioned me to paint two scrolls based on the theme of the French Revolution after telling me the story. This was the first time I had worked with a theme other than mythological or religious. It was then that I ventured into the area of scroll on social and contemporary issues. In 1995, when on a trip to Kolkata I visited the museum to see Jamini Roy's work, I also spent time at the Gurusaday Museum. It was there that I first saw a Kalighat painting. That inspired me, so I went to the Kalighat area to learn how to paint in the manner of the Kalighat artists. But there was nobody to teach me as the art form was no longer practiced. I decided to teach myself how to draw like the Kalighat artists and would practice for many hours. I was determined to master the art. Learning how to get the brush strokes right and the style took me more than a year to get the command over the basics. I had no guru except books. It was hard work, it required patience and concentration - tapasya and sadhana.

While I continued to paint scrolls, I didn't paint on paper like the other Patuas but on silk. This set me apart. There were always setbacks and jealousies. For instance after the tragedy of 9/11, I painted a pat that depicted the story. This was at a workshop organized by the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre. The officers there were upset with me for painting non-traditional themes. At another time my pats were exhibited at the Lalit Kala Academy in Delhi but my name was not mentioned. Instances like this continued to occur. My patas during this period were very detailed. But I slowly started moving away from that detailed style and was painting more in the Kalighat style as I was looking for more refined taste and addressing new subjects in my works.

It was in 1997 that I met Dr Jyotindra Jain, Director of the Crafts Museum in Delhi. He was writing a book on Kalighat art, and I showed him my Kalighat style works. It was he who advised me to use a thinner variety mill-made newsprint paper instead of the handmade paper I was using, as that would be closer to what the painters in Kalighat had originally used. I immediately got the paper from Chawri Bazaar of Delhi. This paper was perfect for my work. My brush strokes were now unhampered in their movement, and it is a paper that does not allow for mistakes. You cannot get away from the stroke of the brush as there is no way to reverse it.

My Kalighat paintings started selling well. At first I made copies of the traditional Kalighat paintings which were very popular in Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, and sold very well. But soon I started exploring new themes based on my own ideas and developing my thoughts through my art. These were very well received. My paintings were sold to collectors, art galleries and museums. It was in 2004, that I started my connection with Gallery Espace in New Delhi. I continue to work there with Renu Modi.

I was very young when I first saw a plane cruising overhead. I had run up to my parents demanding a ride. They had smiled at the audacity of aspiration of the son of a poor farmer to reach for the moon. I did not make it to the moon but at least I have been up amidst the clouds on a flight.

My paintings were displayed in the joint exhibition of Kalighat paintings organized by the Victoria and Albert Museum, UK, and Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata, in 2011. Recognition has been slow to come even though my paintings are now being collected by private collectors, museums like Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and galleries, and I display my work in many exhibitions across India and abroad.

I want to continue to push the boundaries and constantly create new work.]

Emerge of Kalam Patua as an artist and his community

The art world was jammed on The Victoria & Albert Museum, London, which holds the single largest collection of Kalighat paintings, has acquired and showcased Kalam Patua's work also in its touring exhibition across South Asia in 2011. With folk art yet to get investor-friendly or hit the auction block in India, Kalam Patua is happy with his presence in museum circuits. "When I started, my work used to sell for Rs. 20-25. Today it fetches about Rs 25,000-35, 000," he said few years back. The fact is that prices as well as demands of his paintings are growing up with every new exhibition he is showcased.

Kalam Patua's works are now part of the permanent collection in various national and international art institutions and galleries such as National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi; National Museums, Liverpool, UK; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK and QAGOMA, Brisbane, Australia. In 2003, Jyotindra Jain curated a solo show by Kalam Patua at Gallery Espace, New Delhi. Since then his works have been part of shows across India and abroad. Jain had showcased Kalam Patua's works in relation to the famous project known as 'Other Masters: Five Contemporary Folk and Tribal Artists of India' from the Crafts Museum and The Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Corporation of India Ltd., New Delhi in 1998. Works of the five selected artists with folk/tribal backgrounds were showcased and articulated by different authors in the book with the above title. The collection of essays was edited by Jyotindra Jain, then director of the Crafts Museum. This is considered as one of the most significant initiative on the field of folk/tribal art and culture. 'The Other Masters' produced a way of looking back into the traditional repertoire and the subjectivity of the selected artists with a new insight. The discourse, thus, available through various contributions on the diversified field of folk-traditional artists of special acclaim, gives a sensible critique of

the earlier modernist takes, precisely speaking, of J. Swaminathan and K.G. Subramanyan. 'Although both Swaminathan and Subramanyan were involved with tribal art in ways that allowed the emergence of third world resistance to the cultural hegemony of the west, invigorating and diversifying modern art practice in India, their universalist frame of reference and unproblematic espousal of "high" art foreclosed the analysis of tribal expression within the realm of nation' (Panikkar *et al.* 2003). Going with this line the discourse thus available through 'Other Masters' created a new space for the emergence of folk /traditional subjectivity in the national and international art scene of post-independence/post-colonial time. The discourse attributes equal need to emphasize on the subjectivity of the artists from folk/tribal origin and accommodates them in the larger discourse on art as the *Other Masters*. In this context it would be relevant to remember Jyotindra Jain's curatorial project '*Kalam Patua from the interstices of the city*' where he in association with the earlier project '*Other Masters*' places Kalam Patua in the "*newly emergent liminal space*" of modernist paradigm where: "a few individual folk and tribal artists walked a different path evolving new symbolic strategies and tactically re-interpreting cultural traits from their own past to emulate in their work their contemporary personal and social predicament" (Jain 1998).

Thus the new value added to the artistic subjectivity of folk origin brings newer aspirants from the community and established a competitive but invigorated atmosphere into their dried up tradition. So, Kalam Patua becomes one amongst 'The Other Masters'; as he becomes the exception in the backdrop of his community (*Patua* community) which has been homogeneously constructed undermining the differences of various natures, all through the modernist art historiography as an ahistorical category. In this context it would be worthwhile for the present discourse to remember Foucault: 'Discipline constitutes itself only through limiting the field and it functions through politics of inclusion and exclusion.' Hence the project seems to be self contradictory or incomprehensible if we view it from the other end, i.e. the world of the 'folk'. It will be worthwhile to ponder upon the valuable critique thus provided on the project of *The Other Masters* by *Towards a New Art History*: 'On the other hand, Jyotindra Jain has worked within the framework of "high" art to overturn conventional hierarchies that leave no room for individuality or excellence of artistic expression to rural/tribal crafts persons. By means of art historical methodology of appointing and legitimizing individual "masters" he constructs an alternative history of contemporary Indian art. Despite the fact that he successfully makes a case for delineation of tribal and folk artists as creative geniuses equal to the artists of the elite sphere, the glaring disparity of the social and material conditions of their lives gets overlooked. His more recent work does take note of the historical shifts in patronage, and the influence of modernity in the works of these "timeless" artists, yet the project of appointing "master" in line with the artists of "high" art bypass the implications of plucking them out of their communitarian and historical contexts.' (Panikkar *et al.* 2003).

As Kalam Patua informed that he had learnt to paint scrolls from his uncle Baidyanath Patua who was one amongst the few distinguished artists in their community. Baidyanath

Patua primarily depended on the profession of the image (clay idol) maker and tried different other professions when in demand. Among which he would paint *patas* also for his fellow community people who were poor and had only option to play *patas*, i.e. showings picture scrolls with singing the story of the scroll, which is one of the many professions of the *Bedia* people. 'By the time that Kalam entered adulthood, the tradition of the picture show was on the wane.' (Jain 2011) At an early age Kalam Patua painted a scroll titled *goru-pat* which was popular in Murshidabad and Birbhum, for a professional picture showman called Jafar Chitrakar. The scroll was about a didactic Hindu legend connected with cow worship, and the fate of a wicked house wife who mishandled the cows of her in-laws family. Jain writes, 'This brought Kalam the much-coveted recognition as a talented artist within his own community. Subsequently, he painted and sold scrolls depicting Krishnalila, Hara-Gauri, Manasa and Chaitanya to village storytellers. A major transition occurred in his painterly life in 1990 when the Alliance Francaise, the French Cultural Centre in Kolkata, commissioned two scrolls based on the theme of the French Revolution, for which they supplied script. He immensely enjoyed interpreting new themes from history and went on to paint several scrolls related to contemporary issues such as dowry deaths and communal violence within the format and conventions of scroll paintings. This phase of his work opened up new possibilities of pictorial expression related to contemporary social issues' (Jain 2011: 29).

At this time he started to delve into the dreams and realities of contemporary life: A bureaucrat took him to Jamini Roy's home to show how the celebrated artist was inspired by Kalighat. In 1995, Kalam wandered into the Gurusaday Museum in Behala Bratachary Village, Kokata, where he saw original Kalighat paintings for the first time. He was deeply enchanted by its simple but more expressive rendering, and its treatment of contemporary urban themes. The museum curator allowed him to study original Kalighat paintings in his collection to understand colouring techniques. In 1997 Kalam Patua met Dr. Jyotindra Jain who was then the director at the Craft Museum in New Delhi and showed Jain his Kalighat drawing exercise done on handmade papers and asked for his feedback. Jain reports that 'I could see that though he had acquired a high level of proficiency in the Kalighat idiom, the surface of handmade paper was obstructing the flow of his line. I was then working on a book on Kalighat painting and had seen more than a thousand paintings in international collections. I told Kalam that the mil-made paper used by his ancestors came close to the present-day newsprint paper available in the paper market of Delhi. On account of its absorptive quality, the paper allowed full control over the swift application of pigment as required by the genre. Kalam acquired a large stock of this paper and found it to be the most suitable surface to work upon' (Jain 2011: 29-30).

Kalam Patua affirmed: "I began to practice Kalighat drawing for hours and months until I could delineate a requisite line or a curve in an unfaltering, single brush strike as was done in that idiom. I was so fascinated by the scenes of urban life in Calcutta in these paintings, as rendered by my ancestors, that I thought of further pursuing the direction to depict the contemporary social life around me through this very effective medium"

(Jain 2011: 29). From copying works of masters, he started to depict everyday life of the middleclass, such as the subject like a tailor at work or a man brushing his teeth. Gradually, his themes started to reflect urban angst, politics, consumerism, sexuality.

What does success mean to him? "It means doing something the way I want to," he says. Success also means carving out a trajectory that attracts more talent to the field. "The genre died as children of artists took to other ways of living. But it is abuzz again." And each success story makes the road ahead that much smoother. Kalam Patua recalls that paint was used to be made at home, painstakingly, from stones, shells or lamp black. Today, he uses brands like Winsor & Newton. Instead of cheap papers now he uses durable acid-free and waterproof paper. 'But what hasn't really changed is the scant respect with which folk artists are treated by sponsors. International attention can only be good thing' (Datta 2012).

In the earlier post when he was the only employee in the Chandpara sub-post office of Murshidabad district his job was quite difficult. Every day, by 9.30 a.m. he will attend the counter, alone, sorting mail and parcels, selling stamps and savings certificates and would be up there till closing time at 6.30 p.m. As the artist told the present researcher and many other researchers that he would get restless and yearn to get back to his painting. Eventually after returning home he gets his chance late at night, once everyone is in bed. 'With the glow of fireflies outside his window and rumble of highway trucks for company, the gentle postmaster unleashes a storm of brush strokes and vivid colours on his canvas, to create what is now being celebrated as New Kalighat paintings' (Datta 2012).

Thus the artist continued his hard work to master the medium and unique style and was able to enhance his achievements with considerably visible refinements within the idiom of Kalighat style. He was open to explore contemporary themes and subjects as he himself is a man very much attached to the socio-political changes in the society. 'Nevertheless, his desire to explore the language of simple but expressive forms, over which he had acquired mastery and to address new themes from the changing urban environment persisted. Kolkata was the epicenter for the traditional myths and legends of the *patua* tradition, but the city had also embraced the transforming social norms of contemporary India' (Jain 2011:30).

Damayanti Datta in her article/report published in India Today, titled *Artist of a Lost Art: Kalighat paintings have been recreated with a contemporary twist*, tried to locate Kalam patua's subjectivity as a revivalist of the lost Kalighat tradition. Many other researchers and art critics hold to the view comfortably and consider the artist as a resurrected genius from the repertoire of Kalighat style paintings; which are presumably the most looked after and shouted after art from Indian Modernism by the international and national art collectors and the galleries. Damayanti Dutta writes: 'Kalam Patua is one of the few remaining Kalighat painters of today and has taken upon himself the task of reviving and promoting Kalighat painting. When Kalam Patua began making Kalighat paintings, the tradition had all but died out, replaced successively by cheaper wood-prints and then machine printed images. He began by learning from existing

works, painstakingly copying the pieces till he mastered the art. It was not easy as he had a full-time job in the post-office but soon, reviving Kalighat art became a passion' (Datta 2012).

Damayanti Datta evaluates: '(Kalam) Patua creates the same art that his ancestors practiced for 300 years, but with twist in style, it is Kalighat painting, a genre that evolved as popular bazaar art in 19th century Kolkata and all but disappeared before independence. In content, he has gone beyond the pull of lineage to create his own art. His work is strictly here and now, if the original genre poked fun at the westernized Bengali, it is middle class double standards in Patua's frames: A couple sipping tea nonchalantly as they watch the 9/11 tragedy on TV or a middle-aged man with a spreading midriff and receding hair appears repeatedly in his frames. "You can say it's me," he says, tongue-in-cheek ... He is one of India's few Kalighat painters remaining; he has single-handedly worked towards reviving Kalighat art... He is being credited with reinventing the lost art of Kalighat of 19th century Kolkata' (Datta 2012).

But here is again a disparity and serious epistemological dispute while attributing the artist the identity such as the '*revivalist of Kalighat*' or '*Kalam Patua: The Last of Kalighat.*' Of course with his regenerated subjectivity and the engagement with the Kalighat style is a revisit by the artist but that does not confine Kalam Patua's identity as attributed above. Kalam Patua's approach to Kalighat is more understandable as a *post-modern* artist's looking back into the tradition. He took the selective and would be helpful elements for his own ideas and approach to his highly personal expressions about the society in general. More over the aspect of the patronage also differ from the 19th century Kalighat repertoire. While the Kalighat artists broke away from the pre-modern traditions of *Patua* repertoire with a *modernist* approach to achieve a new language which was an outcome of various influences such as the Bazar lithographs, western water colours on the tradition of *patachitra* and targeted the village audience for their patronage. In contrast Kalam Patua's paintings attend to the *global* audience/patronage. His repertoire is a complex synthesis of the traditional Kalighat, Birbhum/Murshidabad idiom of *patachitra*, miniature paintings as well as works of Jamini Roy and the world of modern art and also evolved with an elevated economic value. General village audiences have not much to do with Kalam Patua's achievement as an artist— his refined language or idiom of painting, rather whoever knows him apart from his immediate community they are more astonished by his commercial success as an artist. As they have turned away long back from the tradition of *patachitra* with the advent of modern and post-modern mass media and the painting from the high art field also has never targeted to reach them. Hence the village audience is under the curtain of double *distantiation*. By attributing the above mentioned identity of a resurrected Kalighat artist to Kalam Patua all these complexities about the present discourse gets blurred and that consequently fails to justify the very unique subjective position of the artist like Kalam Patua.

To understand the uniqueness of Kalam Patua's compositions if one focuses deeper, one can observe that the background and the space he creates in his composition is rather realistic and contributes to the layered meaning of his subjects.

If compared to the 19th century Kalighat paintings, where the space was mostly blank with occasional input of some objects made very suggestively and the whole importance is placed on the human character/body had a different approach for image making. The source of Kalam Patua's realistic space formation and more individualized character shades in his composition has its root in the Murshidabad tradition of *patachitra* as the *gharana* showed renewed interest to incorporate naturalism as well as individualistic character study from its connection to Murshidabad School of miniature painting and later day company school paintings. In this context, it would be interesting to note what Kavita Singh with detailed observation established about the unique characteristic of Birbhum-Murshidabad *gharana*. Kavita Singh compared the repertoire of the Birbhum *patas* with that of Medinipur and comes with some very interesting and generic variants: 'If Medinipur *patas* offer varied subjects in an unvarying style, the scrolls of Birbhum seem to retain the traditional, *paورانic* and epic themes. Yet, the *patuas* of Birbhum seem to have been extremely receptive to European or company style pictorial influence brought to them probably by woodcuts, oleographs, newspaper illustration, possibly by contemporary theatre, and other sources of popular imagery ... With the absorption of western influence, there comes a greater interest in mimesis; in the attempt to establish not just the type of 'a king', but a particular king, recognizable as he recurs in the scroll; and to mediate between the constants of his character and his changing emotional states in the face of unfolding events. The iconographic range is much larger here; where Medinipur offers us the schematized figure of a 'man', it is here differentiable into old or young, happy or sad man' (Singh 1995). Thus, the lineage of Birbhum-Murshidabad *gharana* from those master *patuas* of past, some of whose works were collected by earlier researchers like Guru Saday Dutta which are in view at present in the Museum named after him in Behala, Kolkata; then followed by *patuas* of the post-independence time such as Banku Patua and Baidyanath Patua, has its flow in Kalam Patua and Biswajit Patua's works too. So analysing Kalam Patua's works following this lineage one must note that his sources are many and he achieved the mastery to synthesize those sources into a refined individualistic idiom for his works. Hence confining his identity only with the Kalighat genre where the characters are more like patterns and placed in a suggestive background is not justified or as attributing him the identity like 'the last from Kalighat' is not appropriate for the multifaceted subjectivity the artist like Kalam Patua moulds for himself.

Here it will be worthwhile to recall Jain's evaluation of Kalam Patua's works: 'Not only by imaginatively reusing the language of Kalighat painting but also by expanding the boundaries of the medium and the genre, both in their formal and conceptual aspects, Kalam has created a body of work that is at once contemporary, individualistic and reflective of the ironies of life in an Indian mega-city. His unique ability to transform the routine everyday of the middle-class life into metaphors derived from Indian mythology makes his work both complex and nuanced' (Jain 2011:33).

Analysis and interpretation of some works of Kalam Patua

It will be an interesting journey at this juncture to see some of the works by Kalam Patua and how his works are received and interpreted by connoisseurs and critics and what are the further possibilities to engage with his works. So far and so forth the most renowned authority on Kalam Patua's paintings remained to be Jytindra Jain, who actually brought his works to the mainstream art field, first in Delhi then to the larger world of arts. Here, I present a synthetic study of Jain's interpretation and reading of some of the artist's well known works along with further possibilities of reading (the spaces between the lines).

One of the most famous themes in his repertoire is about the mockery of the contemporary middle class male, his hidden desires, sexual fantasy and exploitative promiscuousness of his attendant female subject. The lousy-drowsy, good-looking *babus* with long curly hairs, trampled by their kept or mistresses were the most vociferous themes of 19th century, Kalighat artists. But they were not alone in this critical role to the society. Batatla literature and popular theatre as any many other folk practice like *Kabigan* and *Letogan* also took the critical role to mock the newly formed *babu*-class and their immoral pompous life style and fashion. In Kalam Patua's compositions they are replaced

by the potbellied, balding, and funny-looking middle-aged man blind in desiring sexual pleasure belonging to middleclass or upper middleclass male subjects of the present time. The identity of the woman who is shown nude and is desired by the male subject is bit ambiguous — she might be his lover or mistress or wife. In one such works titled '*Nectar of her Body*', 2003 (Fig. 1) he reinterprets a traditional subject mostly seen in terracotta temple reliefs illustrating the theme of a *nayika* (heroine) who is drying his hair after a bath and a *hamsa* (goose) catches in its beak and drinks the drops of water falling from the wet hair. According to Sanskrit literary source the myth is that, *hamsa* nourishes on a diet of pearls, hence, the *hamsa* here catches the water drops mistaking it as a rain of pearls. The mythical theme represents the purity and divine beauty of the lady. Jain writes: 'Kalam turns the popular myth into

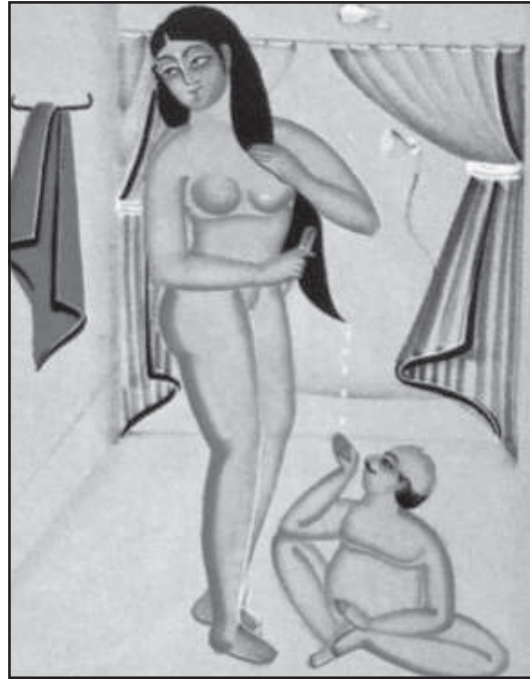


Fig. 1: Nectar of her body, 2003, water colour on paper, 40 × 58 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Sinha and Panda 2011)

a metaphor relocating it in the modern urban space suffused with references to the male gaze, body and sexuality. In *Nectar of her Body*, the standing figure of the woman combing her hair, imitating the mythical *nayika*, is located in an urban bathroom fitted with a shower, towel-rod and curtains. A bald, pot-bellied, middle-aged man is shown squatting on the floor, lustily receiving in his palm in the manner of drinking, the drops of water falling from her long hair. While re-staging the ancient myth in a contemporary middle-class urban space, Kalam evokes mixed iconic references of gender, voyeurism and sexuality emanating from the city's visual culture, and typical of the traditional Kalighat idiom—folded theatre-like curtains; bold and candid women; and meek, diminutive and lascivious men engaged in

stalking women—combined with the technique of graded tones of color that enhance volume and rotundity and, thereby, sensuality.’ (Jain 2011:30)

The iconographic and thematic concept of this painting is repeatedly visited by the artists in many variations. In one such work titled ‘*Enchantress*’, 2004 (Fig. 2), Kalam showed a meek and tamed man looking like a sheep, leashed like an enchanted dog drawn to a woman who is playing a *Dotara* like musical instrument. She being an enchantress is draped in bright red sari and adorned with ornaments from hair to toe, looking like a goddess of desire. It is reinterpretation of the mythical Kalighat theme with the same title where the lady ‘through her magical powers, converts a man into a sheep during the day and a bull during the night, for her pleasure. Kalam transports the enchantress on to his canvas, from the Kalighat painting, here as



Fig. 2: Enchantress, 2004, water colour on paper, 38 × 30 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Sinha and Panda 2011)

a musician, to lure a lustful, old, balding, spectacled, consumerist man with a body of an ithyphallic bull, a mobile phone dangling from his neck’ (Jain 2011: 30). The dominance of ‘heightened sense of tangible sensuality’ particularly in the female subjects as goddess or divine consort or courtesan or actress in traditional Kalighat paintings is its characteristic appeal as a unique visual treat achieved by bright graded color scheme and swirling swift calligraphic lines. It has no precedence in the indigenous painting traditions. This embodied sensuality of traditional Kalighat women is represented with a bit of refinement in the personality of the women represented. Now the women represented in paintings, seen in the daily life of the consumerist culture is not just a pattern or motif like in the traditional Kalighat. She carries a new personality with a hidden intellect, although in her participation

to the consumerist culture she is very much part and parcel of this culture too. The interplay of male gaze and the objectified female subject's reluctance to react is interestingly played in another work titled '*Ladies' Tailor*', 2004. (Fig. 3) The piercing gaze of the tailor taking measurements and other tailors working in the shop are also taking a lustful look to her body, whereas she is standing firm 'but resigned to her predicament, used to such unceasing transgressions in the daily life of the city' (Jain 2011:



Fig. 3: Ladies' Tailor, 2004, water colour on paper, 54 × 44 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Sinha and Panda 2011)

31). Kalam Patua portrays a middleclass woman replacing the goddess or courtesan of the traditional Kalighat paintings. She is drawn to herself, not reciprocating the gaze, as most of them choose to be so to deal with the ever growing sexist male gaze in the society — bypassing what she has to go for her daily scores, be it going to schools, colleges, universities, or markets or work places.

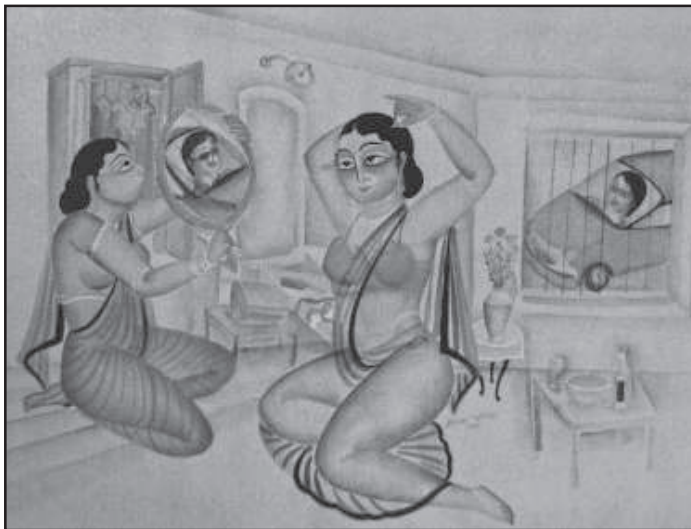


Fig. 4: Krishna came too early, 2003, water colour on paper, 37 × 50 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Sinha and Panda 2011)

This daily-drama is recreated with a different sensibility and more complexity in the painting titled '*Krishna Comes too Early*', 2003. (Fig. 4) The theme is taken from traditional Rajasthani miniature repertoire where Radha is waiting and preparing herself to meet Krishna. While looking into the mirror held by her maid Radha sees Krishna reflected in the mirror, as Krishna arrived already and hidden in the grooves looking at Radha getting ready. There happens

interplay of gazes through the mirror. Kalam in his painting transports Radah and Krishna to a modern day setup in a Kolkata home and the street outside. 'He shows a middle-class woman dressed in a sleeveless blouse and a sensuously draped sari, engaged in her make-up, when she notices in the mirror her boyfriend, wearing shades over his eyes, and waiting in a fancy red car outside the window. Interestingly, there are several references in the folk literature of nineteenth-century Bengal about pleasure trips of the rich, in boats on the River Hooghly, in which girls were taken along. Sexual liberties taken with girls are narrated in terms of Radha - Krishna amour. The perennial theme of Radha and Krishna acts as popular metaphor in Indian cinema too, enacted through dozens of songs, operating on a dual axis of the Radha - Krishana liaison and the present-day urban love affair between a man and a woman'(Jain 2011:31). The well planed composition with realistic interior and exterior spaces is also a means to the contemporary image Kalam Patua creates in his works.

This contemporary trend in the lives of middle-class where there is a ever-growing aspiration to live like the hero and heroine of the cinema world, namely the world of Bollywood which is mostly influential in the country in almost all aspects of life across all classes. Fashion of Bollywood is emulated and promoted by the consumer market and happily adored by the people of the country, from cities as well as villages. Kalam Patua addresses this filmy aspiration in many of his works. In the painting titled 'Marriage



Fig. 5: Marriage photo, 2004, water colour on paper, 37 × 50 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Sinha and Panda 2011)

Photo' 2004 (Fig. 5), he showed a newly married couple in a photography studio. 'All studio photography tends to be performative on the part of the sitters, and when the subject is a marriage photo, meant to record conjugal togetherness, the enactment of intimacy is often visually amplified. A long-established convention of wedding photos is that of one of the partners posing to demonstrate closeness by gently placing his or her hand over the shoulder or the knee of the other, depending upon the position and posture adopted. Kalam's couple departs from this convention of early Indian photography and performs in Bollywood-like space. The dandyish husband, dressed up in a jacket and tie, has his hair combed in the manner of Bombay cinema heroes of the 1970s, while the wife stands in front of him with a jerky bend at the waist, exposing her left leg bent at the

knee. The husband holds her close to him from behind, with his hands nearly reaching out towards her breasts' (Jain 2011:32). Whereas the marriage photos of previous generation — in the posture of the husband and wife there is a considerable restraint to show anything beyond the simple expression of love, a symbol of conscious decency, the couple of the present generation does not hesitate to pose with physical intimacy. Now the couple happily enjoys the pose with a kind of 'erotic ascertain, consciously cast from the mould of popular Indian cinema. Here, any indication to real or constructed location - say a living room with sofas and chairs as used in early Indian 'happy-couple' photography - are absent. Kalam is expanding the Kalighat idiom to incorporate the contemporary urban Indian dream mediated by the conventions of the cinematic imagery' (Jain 2011: 32-33). In another interesting variation replacing the couple Kalam showed two women intimately hugging while they pose for a young handsome photographer in a studio. In another variation on the theme of photography the setup is a middleclass home where the middle aged balding man seen in earlier works is taking pictures in his mobile phone of his wife with the kid peeping behind. Here again the woman poses self-consciously as an actress. In another variation an ithyphallic anthropomorphic photographer is taking picture of a nude woman decorated with images of tigers all over her body. So the theme of photography and posing for it is a recurring subject with different aims for the artist.

'Woman Power' (Fig. 6) marks an altogether different trajectory of the artist where the body of a young woman is decorated with images of tiger. This is a metaphoric image representing women power, which the artist has used in many of his paintings, sometimes alone, sometimes with a tiger or lion sitting beside her. Successful charm of this complex body where the power of tiger is mixed with the beauty of the woman is clear signifier of the new age where the 'second sex' has come out in their full vigour to acclaim their legitimate place in the society. Kalam accomplished in this image the beloved goddess Durga/Shakti in her new manifestation.

People and streets of Kolkata are recurring themes of Kalam's repertoire. In 'Oh Kolkata', 2008 (Fig. 7) he showed the couple, the middle aged balding man and young beautiful goddess-like woman, seen in his earlier paintings, riding a hand drawn rickshaw and enjoying the view of the city. The urban landscape with cars, skyscrapers, advertising



Fig. 6: Woman power, 2015, water colour on paper, 50 × 30 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Kalam Patua's Facebook post)



Fig. 7: Oh Kolkata, 2008, water colour on paper, 50 × 41 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Sinha and Panda 2011)

banners of coca-cola and political banners with slogans – all are juxtaposed against the hard labor of the rickshaw-puller transporting wealthy passengers through the busy streets. In another composition from the life of the city, Kalam painted a modern restaurant crowded with eating and gossiping people sitting in groups, waiters serving, and the manager taking orders happily. In recent decades there happened to be a rising fashion of roadside restaurants covered with transparent glass walls, so that the customers can see the view of the road while eating. And with that the awkwardness of eating in view of people is also gone, rather the act of eating in public view is celebrated and has become a part of the consumerist culture.

Like his predecessors, the *patuas* of Kalighat, Kalam Patua's approach

to painting is motivated by ideas of social satires and a critical role it plays to the dislocations in the society and its changing values. Jain also portrayed the artist with this role of a social critic; while analyzing the painting titled '*Shopping Spree*' 2003, (Fig. 9) he writes: 'Kalam resorts to representations of the absurdities arising from the sudden influx of new money in the lifestyle of the urban middle-class Kolkata. *Shopping Spree* is one such work, depicting a family in a posh garment showroom, comprising a well-to-do couple accompanied by chubby child, whom Kalam models after mannequins that would typically be displayed in such shops. In fact, Kalam makes all the shoppers in the showroom look like some sort of animated mannequins. He even enhances this effect by placing an actual mannequin in the foreground' (Jain 2011: 33).

Plane crash by Taliban terrorists on the twin towers of World Trade Centre, USA is made popular worldwide by the *Patuas* of Medinipur with the *pata* called *Nine-Eleven* or *9/11* or *Americaner pat*. It shows a series of events pre-conditions and the crash and its fatal effects after the fall of the twin towers. The scroll comes with its song which discloses more information than what is painted. Analysing the *pata* and its genesis as well as its popular reception in the global culture Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay invokes Baudrillard to understand the situation: 'So, when the image of the crumbling Twin Towers, carried by the circuit of global flows in 'touristscape', reaches its local in an

'ethnic' grab, a hermeneutic circle seems to be completed. Yet, as soon as we look closely, this 'recognition', giving rise to what Baudrillard calls a moment of 'ecstasy' arising out of perfect communication characteristic of 'post-modern', 'post-spectacle', 'post-social' systems, seems a little premature. The Baudrillardian vision of late capitalism is a regime of pure homogeneity in which all resistance to instrumental control has disappeared and all heterogeneity has been submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment and exchange: any system can be interfaced with any other. However, I argue that the *Americaner pat*, far from signifying such an imaginary perfection, is emblematic of stress – the privileged pathology affecting the world-system today' (Mukhopadhyay 2008). Kalam Patua dealing with the theme in his painting titled '*Nine-Eleven for Breakfast*', 2002 (Fig. 8) posits a different subjectivity than the Medinipur *Patuas*. He took his favorite satirical stance



Fig. 8: *Nine-Eleven for breakfast*, 2002, water colour on paper, 76 × 53 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Sinha and Panda 2011)



Fig. 9: *Shopping spree*, 2003, water colour on paper, 33 × 41 cm, Kalam Patua (Courtesy: Sinha and Panda 2011)

to show the aspect of indifference to the fatal event in the daily-drama of a middleclass household, where it turned out to be another 'spectacle' to be super shaded by a next one. Re-presenting Jain's reading: 'In *Nine-Eleven for Breakfast*, Kalam flashes the image of a hijacked airplane crashing in to the World Trade Centre in a television, placed next to a framed picture of Kali, the violent,

bloodthirsty goddess. The setting is a living room of a middle-class family, furnished with, among other things, the television set placed on a table covered with a frilled tablecloth and flanked by two souvenir terracotta horses as decoration. The television set is shown disproportionately large, turning the iconic image of 9/11 into a popular performance. For the couple at breakfast, the image of 9/11 is no different from any other. The woman has her back towards the television (watching news being a male prerogative) while the man watches it in a matter-of-fact manner, as he would watch any other news or advertisement. In this painting, Kalam echoes the society of spectacle, where all social life is mere appearance' (Jain 2011: 33).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W. 2007. *The Culture Industry*. New York: Routledge.
- Alliance Francaise (ed.). 1989. *Patua Art: Development of the Scroll Paintings of Bengal Commemorating the Bicentenary of the French Revolution*. Calcutta: Alliance Francoise of Calcutta and Crafts Council of West Bengal.
- Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Archer, W.G. 1971. *Kalighat Painting*. London: H.M.S.O.
- Bathes, R. 1972. *Mythologies*. Great Britain: Vintage.
- Bhattacharjee, B. 1980. *Cultural Oscillation: A Study on Patua Culture*. Calcutta: Naya Prakash.
- Chatterjee, R. 2012. *Speaking with Pictures: Folk Art and Narrative Traditions in India*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- Coomaraswamy, A.K. 1929. Picture Showmen. *Indian Historical Quarterly* 2: 182- 187.
- Dube, A. 1987. *Questions and Dialogue*. Exhibition Catalogue article, Faculty of Fine Arts Gallery, Baroda.
- Datta, D. 2012. *Artist of a Lost Art: Kalighat paintings have been recreated with a contemporary twist*. New Delhi: India Today, October 12, 2012. (<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/artist-kalam-patua-recreates-kalighat-paintings-with-contemporary-twist/1/224532.html>).
- Boundas, V.C. 1993. *The Deleuze Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dey, M. 1932. Drawings and Paintings of Kalighat'. Calcutta: Advance. <http://www.chitralkha.org/articles/mukul-dey/drawings-and-paintings-kalighat>
- Dutt, Guru Saday. 1953. *Introduction to Patua Sangit*, trans. Sudhanshu Kumar Ray as 'The Artisan Castes of West Bengal and Their Craft': *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal, West Bengal Census 1951*, ed. Ashok Mitra. Calcutta: West Bengal Government Press.

- Dutt, Guru Saday. 1990. *Folk Arts and Crafts of Bengal: The Collected Papers*. Calcutta: Seagul Books.
- Friedman, L.M. 1999. *The Horizontal Society*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Guha-Thakurta, T. 2017. An Art History Perspective. In *Painters, Poets, Performers: The Patuas of Bengal*, ed. Ritu Sethi, 166-169. Bangalore: India Foundation for the Arts.
- Hall, E.D. 2004. *Subjectivity*. New York: Routledge.
- Hauser, B. 2002. From Oral Tradition to “Folk Art”: Reevaluating Bengali Scroll Paintings’. *Asian Folklore Studies* 61: 1. Japan: Nanzan University.
- Jain, Jyotindra. 2011. ‘Kalam Patua From the Interstices of the City, Kalighat Paintings’. In *Kalighat Paintings: from the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London and Victoria Memorial Hall*, eds. Suhashini Sinha and C. Panda. Kolkata, Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing and V. & A. Publishing, London.
- Jain, Jyotindra. 1999. *Kalighat Painting: Images from a Changing World*. Ahmadabad: Mapin Publishing.
- Jain, Jyotindra (ed.) 1998. *Other Masters: Five Contemporary Folk and Tribal Artists of India*. New Delhi: The Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Corporation of India Ltd.
- Jain, Jyotindra (ed.) 1998. Picture Showmen: Insights into the Narrative Tradition in Indian Art. *Marg* 49: 3. Mumbai: Marg Publications.
- Kaiser, Thomas. 2012. *Painted Songs: Continuity and Change in an Indian Folk Art*. Stuttgart: ARNOLDSCHE Art Publishers.
- Korom, Frank. 2006. *The Village of Painters: Narrative Scrolls from West Bengal*. Santa Fe: Museum of International Folk Art.
- Majumder, Kamalkumar. (1405 Bengali era). *Bangio Shilpadhara O Annanya Prabandha: Selected Essays on Art*, (Bengali), com. & eds. Dayamoyee Majumder and Sandipan Bhattacharya. Kolkata: Dipayan.
- McCutchion, David J. and Suhrid Bhowmik. 1999. *Patuas and Patua Art in Bengal*. Calcutta: Firma KLM.
- Mukherjee, Benodebehari. 2006. *Art Quest’ (Shilpa Jignasa)*. In *Chitrakar*, trans. K.G. Subramanyan, Kolkata: Seagull Books.
- Mukhopadhyay, Aditya. 2017. *Banglar Pot O Potua* (in Bengali). Kolkata: Balaka.
- Mukhopadhyay, Bhaskar, 2008. Dream Kitsch Folka Art, Indigenous Media and ‘9/11’: The Work of Pat in the Era of Electronic Transmission. *Journal of Material Culture* 13: 5, <http://mcs.sagepub.com/chi/content/abstract/13/1/5>.
- Panikkar, Sivaji K., Parul Dave Mukherji and Deeptha Achar (eds.) 2003. *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld.
- Ray, Sudhangshu Kumar. 1953. *The Artisan Castes of West Bengal and Their Craft: The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal, West Bengal Census 1951*, ed. Ashok Mitra. Calcutta: Land and Land Revenue Department, West Bengal Government Press.
- Risley, H.H. 1981. *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd.

- Santra, Tarapada. 2001. *Patua o Patachitra, Medinipur, Hawrah o Chchobbish Porgana*. In *Paschimbanger Patachitra - An Anthology of Essays* (in Bengali), ed. Ashok Bhattacharya. Kolkata: Loksamaskriti o Adibasi Samaskriti Kendra, Department of Information and Culture, Govt. of West Bengal.
- Santra, Tarapada. 2011. *Paschimbanger Lokshilpa O Shilpisamaj*, (Bengali Publication in 2000), trans. Shankar Sen, *Folk Arts of West Bengal and the Artist Community*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books.
- Sengupta, Amitabh. 2012. *Scroll Paintings of Bengal: Art in the Village*. UK: Author House.
- Sethi, Ritu. 2017. *Painters, Poets, Performers: The Patuas of Bengal: The Patuas of Bengal*. Bangalore: India Foundation for the Arts.
- Singh, Kavita. 1995. *Stylistic Differences and Narrative Choices in Bengal Pata Painting*. *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 27-28.
- Sinha, Suhashini and C. Panda (eds.) 2011. *Kalighat Paintings: from the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum London and Victoria Memorial Hall*. Kolkata, Ahmadabad: Mapin Publishing and V&A Publishing, London.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. Can the Subaltern Speak?, In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Subramanyan, K.G. 1987. *The Living Tradition: Perspectives on Modern Indian Art*. Calcutta: Seagull Books.