

Kalighat Paintings as a medium of communication in Colonized Bengal province

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Abstract

Kalighat 's paintings originated in West Bengal , India in the 19th century, near Kalighat Kali Temple, in Calcutta, India, and and from being souvenir pieces taken by visitors to the Kali Temple, the paintings developed over a period of time as a distinct Indian form of painting and art . The Kalighat Paintings developed to depict a range of themes ranging from mythological characters to depictions of the social scene. The paintings served as a kind of mirror of the society in which they worked. Under the influence of an increasingly growing European society, they underwent a transformation. They were able to rapidly adapt the interests of then popular interest and reflect different contemporary themes. , and to represent different contemporary themes. The charm of the Kalighat paintings lies in the fact that they captured the essence of everyday life and have inspired contemporary artists like the late Jamini Roy even to this day. Experts find the brushwork on these paintings to be precise, flawless, elegant and one of India's smoothest art types..

Keywords: Kalighat Paintings, Calcutta , European Culture , Society

INTRODUCTION

ORIGIN AND HISTORY

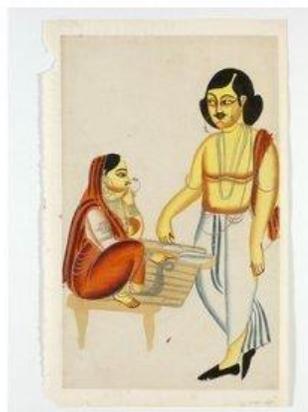
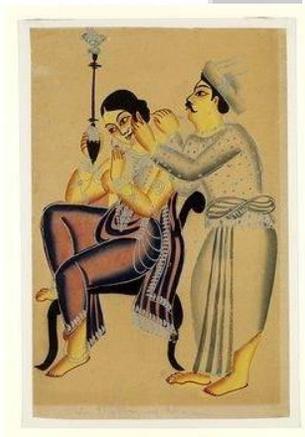
Kalighat painting can be dated roughly between 19th century and 20th century first quarter. Kalighat, a ghat (steps leading to the holy river), is considered sacred to Kali and is located on the banks of the river Bhagirathi (the source stream of the Ganges). The temple dedicated to Kali attracted locals, pilgrims and foreign visitors, thus becoming an important center of pilgrimage.

The Goddess' popularity made the artisans and craftsmen flock to Kalighat by selling souvenirs to visitors and capitalizing on the emerging markets. The Patuas' long narrative scrolls (the group of artists who painted on pats / scrolls / canvas) now reduced by removing non-essential information to simple forms, and the Patuas were ready to conquer the cosmopolitan market made available to them. In parallel, the migration of the potters(kumor) from Kumor Thuli, Patuas or chitrakaars (scroll painters) from Midnapore, Bhirbhum, Murshidabad and Sutradhars(carpenters) to the Kalighat region created a painting style that incorporated the influence of their stylistic features into the paintings and then blended beautifully with the European style to create Kalighat paintings. The potters still continue to make life size straw and clay images of the divinities for the Hindu rituals (Durga pooja) in Kolkata. These paintings were rapidly produced by the artists, for him to make a living and to meet the endless, low-priced demand. It was almost like a mass production. Maybe the novice was made to do the less demanding parts of the painting, and the stylistic parts were handled by the master.

A bird's eye view of themes that were popular among the artists.

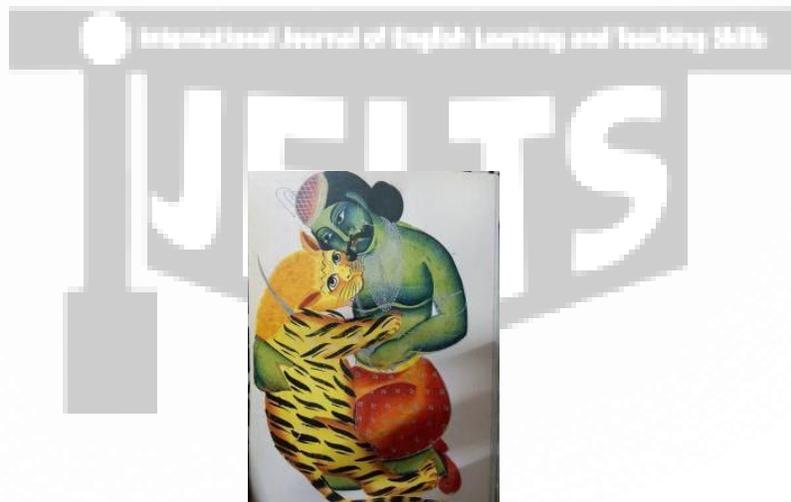
Social Life

Evils of modernism, fashion at that time (nagra shoes, European furniture), many pampered housewives' activities, people's lethargy, babus embracing concubines, rich men dancing to the courtesans' tunes, henpecked husbands, loving couples, courtesans smoking hookahs, theater personalities etc. had become a prominent topic for the artists. These added a touch of excitement, and fun. It also provided a satirical view of the rich and their habits, especially those families that by acquiring sudden wealth had become prominent in society, some of those have alluded to debauchery.



Historical portraits

The gallant Rani Lakshmibai was a widow of Jhansi Raja (currently an Uttar Pradesh district). She died fighting against the Brit. This made her a nationalist movement heroine. In the portraits her crown has a distinct Imperial shape. The versions of Shyamakanta Banerjee 's picture (1858-1918)wrestling a tiger set an example of fearlessness to Kolkata 's youth, and he thus became a nationalist figure.



Christianity and Islamic influence

The Christian missionaries handed down access to European art through prints in bazaars, sculptures etc. to the artists. It was then that Divine flying beings became common. One of the tragic images of Islamic art is the steed belonging to Prophet Muhammad 's grandson, depicted with a saddle devoid of the driver and body riddled with wounds. Many gods and goddesses' head gears have a striking resemblance to British Mughal art and the use of crowns. The Gazir pat reflects the valour, highly regarded by both Hindus and Muslims, of legendary figure Gazi Pir.



Nature

The British employed Indian artists who were trained in the European water colour techniques, to record the Indian flora and fauna for documentation and research. Portfolios of the fauna were commissioned by the East India Company. The Indian artists adapted these skills learnt from the Europeans to also illustrate the wit and wisdom of proverbs prevalent at that time.



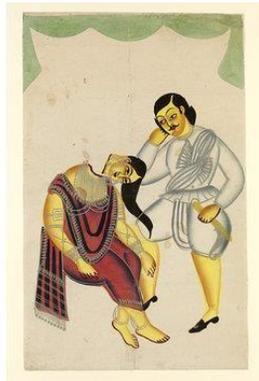
Literature

The books published in the contemporary period included a thorough account of society at that time, in particular a satirical view of the education and habits of the wealthy. The Kalighat paintings remind us of the books of Bhabani Charan Bandhyopadhyay such as "Naba babu bilash" (amusements of the modern babu), "Naba bibi bilash (habits of the wealthy men's wives)," Hutom Pyanchar Naksha "(literally sketches by a watching owl) Kalighat 's paintings became a vehicle for interpreting popular proverbs and sayings. Cat hermit illustrations / false vaishnava etc. stand proof of this.



EVENTS

Some events that occurred at the time had gained popularity and social importance, such as the "Tarakeshwar Murder Scandal" or the "Mahant-Elokeshi Affair" which rocked Kolkata in 1873. The hypocritical and corrupt ways of religious and social establishments were widely reported and brought to open. These were painted as a film in a series and the theme of the paintings shifted slowly from mythology to life today.



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MATERIALS USED

Although it is obvious that the first sketch and outline and eventually the filling of the motif would have occurred, it is interesting to learn about the unconventional tools used to make these paintings. Squirrel and goat hair were used to make the brush which was used for drawing sketches. The black ink used for this purpose was made from soot that was produced by burning an oil lamp below a pot. The other vibrant colors used to fill the painting were mainly homemade in the form of either vegetable dyes or powdered fragments of various colors. The dry colors would be mixed either with gum or water to create paint fit for paper and textile use.

Present Day and Global Influence

Kalighat paintings are now on display worldwide, right from the UK to Prague to Philadelphia. It is one of the most well-recognized forms of modern Indian art seen globally. Besides being an art form it is also used in the creation of fashionable ethnic Indian garments as a modern motif. Indian designers were inspired by this art genre to create some of the most unusual motifs ever to be spotted on a saree. However, this has played a major role in broadening its reception scope and bringing it to younger people whose interest lies more in unique fashion than in modern art forms.

Innovations

Kalighat paintings have also seen a diversification of their paintings in the motifs or subjects. In a string of Kalighat paintings pets and other animals like cats, fish, lobsters, prawns, birds etc. were also used as primary subjects. Experts say that this shift in theme could have been influenced by interest in modern themes either by the Mughal fascination with fauna or British, and by Western extension.

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