

# Reclaiming the Indigenous Style of Kalighat Paintings

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This essay re-examines the nature of Kalighat painting, a painting style which emerged in India in the early nineteenth century and ended not long after the early twentieth century. Stemming from traditional Indian scroll painting, Kalighat paintings were created by *patuas* who migrated from Bengal villages into Calcutta and set up their “shop-studios” around the Kalighat temple (Guha-Thakurta, *Making* 17; Jain 9). *Patuas* represent a caste of traveling scroll-painters and performers; the earliest mention of this artisan caste appears in *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, a thirteenth-century Sanskrit text (Chatterjee 50). As a result of W. G. Archer’s 1953 *Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta: The Style of Kalighat*, the general consensus of scholarly literature suggests that Kalighat painting reflects a western influence on the *patua* artists. In line with the work of Tapati Guha-Thakurta and B.N. Mukherjee, however, I want to argue that there is not enough evidence to support the claim that this style was shaped by contact with western painting; instead I will argue that it was essentially indigenous in style, medium, and subject matter. Because stating that Kalighat paintings are British-derived diminishes their value and robs these works of their true substance, my aim is to substantiate their indigenous origins and, in so doing, explain how this re-interpretation provides new ways of understanding the innovative style of Kalighat *patuas*.

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In order to understand the true substance of Kalighat paintings, it is necessary to consider the complex social environment in which this new art style developed and to what extent these artists had access to the western world. During the years 1770 to 1785, a formative period of the British regime, British scholars had effectively incorporated India's languages into their systems of governance by way of "Orientalist" scholarship (Cohn 20-21). Sir William Jones and other Orientalist scholars believed that it was necessary to understand Sanskrit, India's most mysterious and complex language (Cohn 25). During the process of deciphering the ancient language, British and Indian scholars discovered similarities between Sanskrit, Latin and Greek. Discovering that Sanskrit shares elements with the Greek language gave rise to theories of an early Indo-Aryan culture, a culture representing the "golden-age" of India's past (Cohn 29-32; Wagoner 784-814). These British "Orientalists" of the early eighteenth century – including William Jones, Jon Z. Howell, William Hastings, and James Ferguson – believed that if they could understand ancient Sanskrit texts, they could then discover a pure source on which to base new Indian laws and philosophies in order to modernize society, and save India from its current state of degeneration (Cohn 26). This belief in a past Indian "golden-age" coincided with Eurocentric views that strongly favored western art over traditional Indian art. Both the British and the elite Indians held these views. This perception, which devalued traditional Indian art and values, coincided with the emergence of the new Kalighat painting style. The Kalighat *patuas* new style emerged of its own will, and did not conform to European artistic preferences.

In British India, the Kalighat artists were estranged from the British and elite Indian society. They lived in slums, practiced Hindu traditions, and did not interact with those at the upper levels of the socio-economic system. Their hand-painted original *pats*, or pictures, were sold in the bazaars of Calcutta. Segregation of Europeans and Indians was strict during the nineteenth-century; wealthy Europeans lived in mansions on large pieces of land outside the city, areas known as "white town," and Indians were only allowed to enter "white town" during certain hours (Banerjee 23; Chatterjee 49). Affluent Indian citizens owned homes near the overpopulated markets of Calcutta, or "black town" (Chatterjee 49). Because the Kalighat painters settled

within the sprawling bazaars of “black town,” they evaded British concern and overt control and retained connections to the traditions and culture of their caste (Banerjee 29; Chatterjee 50). As noted above, *patuas* are a caste of traveling artists and performers. They illustrated their stories with their scroll paintings; their storytelling sessions were usually accompanied by song and music, and as the scroll was unraveled, a new part of the story would be revealed (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 15). Kalighat *patuas* descend from this line of Indian cultural heritage. *Patuas* select their next village to perform by considering where they would be most profitable (Hauser 108).

Kalighat *patuas* saw opportunities in the urban developments in Calcutta and decided to move there. Although they brought their artistic traditions with them, the new urban scene also influenced their work. While traditional *patuas* traveled from place to place, the Kalighat *patuas* settled in Calcutta and took advantage of the picture trade market. Usually painted on cloth, traditional *pats* were either square shaped or in scroll form and were used as visual aids in performance (Banerjee 130). (See Figure 1.) Kalighat *pats*, on the other hand, were made of paper and were sold as souvenirs to pilgrims and other travelers near the Kali temple. Both Kalighat *pats* and traditional *pats* used water-based pigments as paint (Mukherjee 9). While Kalighat *patuas* made a living by selling their paintings, traditional *patuas* did not sell their *pats*; they earned a living by receiving gifts at the end of their performance and were usually paid in rice or would sometimes be served a meal, given old clothes, or receive a small amount of money (Hauser 108). Kalighat *patuas*' art is the art of the streets, the visual expression of outcaste Calcutta, an art rich and faithful to the cultural values it promotes (Guha-Thakurta, *Making* 23). Kalighat art promotes cultural values that uphold Hindu tradition, and condemn religious hypocrisy. During the nineteenth century, Kalighat artists' clientele consisted primarily of lower class citizens, mostly pilgrims traveling to the nearby Kali temple, and they were quite successful at producing and selling large volumes of original paintings. They were able to maintain a steady income year-round, enabling them to stay in Calcutta (Hauser 108).

The success experienced by the Kalighat painters owes much to the efficient and skillful manner in which their paintings were produc-

**Figure 1. Ramayana Scroll,  
Birbhum: Lakshmana Nursing Rama**



19<sup>th</sup> century, pigment on paper. Collection of Gurusaday  
Museum.

ed. *Pats* were not created by a single artist; the process entailed a collaborative effort. Beginning as a blank sheet of paper, the traditional *pat* comes to life as a principal artist paints the sweeping outlines of a figure. After the outlines were completed by the designated artist, a group of four to five women painted color within the figure (Banerjee 133). In assembly line form, each woman was responsible for painting a specific color; and in this method, 200 to 300 paintings could be produced in one hour. These expedient techniques created original works of exceptional quality. The line work and coloration is fluid, dynamic and lacks hesitancy. Analysis of a Kalighat painting such as *Krishna and Balarama* reveals thoughtful figural placement combined with vivid color, strong outlines and shallow space; clearly, mimicking

nature is not the goal for Kalighat artists (Figure 2). These works are about rhythm, balance, and impact (Banerjee 133). The figures are round and simple; the primary colors are bold and strong. These painters spoke through their lines, not only in the visual elements but also in the formal content.

**Figure 2. Kalighat Painting: Krishna and Balarama**



c. 1870, watercolor on paper.

Innovative use of line, color, forms, and pictorial space isn't Kalighat artist's only achievement; their selective content is also what makes this style so interesting. Kalighat paintings feature subject matter drawn from Hindu mythology or contemporary life. As many people who purchased Kalighat *pats* were illiterate, the painters sought to reinforce traditional values by painting images of deities, or they painted

scenes which portrayed a general dissatisfaction with modernization, a dissatisfaction that was attributed to British presence. Rather than written words, the images in Kalighat paintings communicated with other members of non-elite Calcutta society (Banerjee 133). The Kalighat *pats* are the first works to be recognized as truly urban art of Calcutta. In 1917, when Rudyard Kipling presented the Victoria and Albert Museum with a collection of Kalighat paintings, Indian scholars such as Ajit Ghose, Mukul Dey, and other art critics commended these paintings, and immediately recognized them as a new and unique Indian art form with indigenous roots (Archer 5; Guha-Thakurta, *Making* 18; Jain 11). Only later, in 1953, did Kalighat *patuas'* painting heritage become misinterpreted by claims of western influence.

As previously mentioned, W.G Archer is the main proponent of the notion that Kalighat paintings are western influenced. Archer attributes British influences to Kalighat paintings in the following ways: their use of watercolor and a blank background, which, he indicates, stem from British natural history paintings; their use of folio-sized sheets of paper instead of cloth; and their use of shading (6-10). He furthermore detects British influence in the themes and subjects of Kalighat paintings (Archer 5). Archer goes so far as to claim that Kalighat artists signed their own work in imitation of Western artistic practices (Mukherjee 8-9). Yet there are only few examples of Kalighat paintings with artist's signatures, and the majority of this body of work is completely anonymous. Archer may have said this because he himself collected Kalighat *pats* and met many *patuas* and their families. In fact, the only names of Kalighat artists known today are those Archer purchased from directly (Guha-Thakurta, *Making* 24).

Later scholars generally describe Kalighat paintings as Anglo-Indian, but their assessment seems based more on Archer rather than on new research or analysis. In *Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta: The Style of Kalighat*, Archer begins by referring to a 1926 article published in *Rupa*, an Indian art journal, by Ajit Ghose, who commended the indigenous excellence of the Kalighat style (5). Archer then undermines Ghose's interpretation, calling the Kalighat style a "by-product" of British colonial influence (Archer 5). Archer states, "Such a school, at once so Indian and yet so modern, compels us to face some unexpected facts for, despite its marked dissimilarity from British art of the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries, the style was actually a by-product of the British connection and can only be understood against that background (6).” If anything was a by-product of British presence in Calcutta it certainly was not the *style* of Kalighat paintings. You could consider the availability of manufactured paper a “by-product” of British presence which affected the Kalighat artists, but not the Kalighat style. The most troublesome label arising from Archer’s writings about Kalighat painting is “Anglo-Indian,” forms of which are still used today (Archer 9). Even Partha Mitter, a highly regarded scholar, author, and research professor at University of Sussex, considers Kalighat *pats* “Indo-English” and agrees with Archer’s other statements about the extent of British influence on the style (Mitter *Art and Nationalism* 14). Mitter states that the “pictorial experience” of Kalighat paintings was gained from readily available English prints (*Art and Nationalism* 15). Because of minimal research on Kalighat paintings, many scholars simply use Archer’s outdated scholarship rather than question the validity of his claims. Indeed, W.G. Archer pioneered scholarship on Kalighat paintings. He was one of the first to study the Kalighat painting style, and strove to attain a thorough understanding of this innovative art form (Jain 11). However, his description of Kalighat paintings as “Anglo-Indian” or “Indo-English” inaccurately privilege western influence. There is much evidence to prove otherwise.

So, how would the *patuas*, who were completely isolated from the upper classes, be exposed to western artistic practices and styles? Archer said it was through contact with European painting in the Calcutta bazaars. “By the end of the eighteenth century,” he claims, Calcutta “had become the most important clearing house in India for British pictures,” including oil paintings, watercolors, engravings, and aquatints (7). Because “the high British death-rate and constant movement of British personnel resulted in the frequent sales of gentlemen’s effects,” European art went for sale and eventually found its way to the Calcutta bazaar (Archer 7). According to Archer, only after the European art made it to the bazaar did the *patuas* begin using watercolors, Renaissance shading, and blank backgrounds (7). But the idea that these devices derive from western painting are purely speculative. Archer does not provide adequate evidence that Kalighat paintings’ style emerges from European art in the bazaars. Nor does it

seem believable that this minimal exposure to western art would have had such a profound effect on the Kalighat *patuas'* work.

Most traditional scroll paintings have detailed, or colored, backgrounds while Kalighat paintings have plain, unpainted backgrounds; this is a difference between traditional *pats* and Kalighat *pats*, even those painted during the same period. (Compare Figures 1 and 2). Archer claims this move towards blank backgrounds in Kalighat *pats* is adopted from British natural history paintings. He states the Wellesley folios of plant and animal studies, in which “the subject is depicted on a blank sheet and there is no attempt to fill in the space with either a background or wash of color,” must have had an impact on the indigenous classes, but he does not prove that plain backgrounds in Kalighat painting stem from this British model (Archer 8). It is ironic that Archer chooses the Wellesley plant and animal folios to prove his case, since many of those paintings were done by Indian artists. He assumes, perhaps correctly, that the British patrons of those works specified the use of Western conventions of natural history painting (Archer 5-10). In comparing the two Wellesley paintings in Archer’s *Style of Kalighat*, *Crawfish* and the *Hoopoe*, with the Kalighat painting, *Cat Eating a Prawn*, Archer emphasizes that all three have color only in the images themselves. But the similarity does not explain the likely source of motivation for Kalighat *patuas'* plain pictorial backdrops. It seems more likely that Kalighat painters use plain backdrops because they were easier for production. Guha-Thakurta notes that the Kalighat *patuas'* adaptations to their new environment led to changes in format of their *pats* (Guha-Thakurta, *Making* 19). The growing need to produce large numbers of paintings quickly and cheaply facilitated the switch to paper rather than cloth as well as the switch from a scroll-narrative formula to a single page format (Guha-Thakurta, *Making* 19). The need to keep up with the market demands similarly explains why the *patuas* use color only in the image itself.

Furthermore, the plain, unprimed backgrounds in Kalighat paintings are seen in Indian sources including the *Bhāgavata* manuscript from the seventeenth century, the *Rāmācharitamānasa* manuscript from the eighteenth century, as well as many other scroll paintings that predate colonial rule (Mukherjee 10). Another manuscript containing

plain backgrounds that Ratnabali Chatterjee believes the Kalighat artists would have had access to in Bengal is the *Ram Charita Manasa* (c. 1772), which, along with the *Bhagavata Purana*, is now preserved in the Ashutosh Museum in Calcutta (56). Likewise, similar unprimed backgrounds are occasionally seen in Rajput art works, one of which is *Kakubha Ragini*, a miniature Rajput painting from c. 1690. It is also important to note that not all Kalighat paintings have blank backgrounds, as in *Woman Playing Music*, yet the backdrop remains simple blocked-in areas of color. There are many instances where Indian artists used solid color backgrounds without details, as in *Bhairava Enthroned* (c.1680). *Bhairava Enthroned* consists of a single deity image as the focal point with the background as one flat area of color, and this shares many similarities with a Kalighat *pat*, including the watercolor medium.

Watercolor was not a new medium for the Kalighat *patuas* as Archer claims. He states, “Their most significant innovation – the use of water colour – is clearly a carry-over from the British technique, for in this respect the break with the former traditions of Indian artists is complete” (8). Kalighat artists made their own paint with indigenous ingredients, such as soot to make black, and used a gum substance as a binder, and water to dilute and mix color (Mukherjee 8-9). As B. N. Mukherjee’s article notes, forms of watercolor were used for centuries among Indian artists (9). The paints used by Kalighat *patuas* were not the same as those used by the British, or by Indians painting for the British. Kalighat artists never purchased European readymade watercolor cakes, and even prided themselves on making their own homemade goat-hair brushes (Mukherjee 9). The colors of Kalighat paintings are recognized for their vibrancy, and they never appear as transparent as what you would find in a British natural history painting, a European engraving, or a Company painting. (“Company paintings” were commissioned by and for members of the British East India Company, done by Indian artists using European techniques of perspective and realistic shading. They were usually images of Indian people, the countryside, or plants and animals [Heston]). That is, the palette and pigment of Kalighat painting has more in common with earlier traditions of Indian painting than with European or even Company painting. Company paintings were created by male Indian

artists of high socio-economic castes while directly studying western artistic practices and following British instruction. Because of their low social status, Kalighat *patuas* never received any European artistic training.

Though British presence in Calcutta was unavoidable at all levels of society, the lack of contact between British and *patua* society casts further doubt on Archer's thesis. Even the new elite Indian class enjoyed limited social acceptance by the British. The wealth of this new class of parvenus was fostered by employment within the British regime as deputy magistrates, teachers, doctors, and lawyers, all careers in which Eurocentric values were embraced. But these Indians were never permitted in the upper realms of control (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 235-36; Metcalf 68). Lower classes in Calcutta, such as the Kalighat *patuas*, had very limited contact with the ruling classes. Most received no direct benefits from colonial rule and were not permitted into even the most inferior levels of employment. Indeed, whether the result of rejection from British or "Bhadralok" [affluent westernized Indian] society, folk culture disapproved of many reformations which Eurocentric values called for – such as permitting the remarriage of widows and female education – as these reforms threatened their traditional society (Mitter 23, 169-70). Westernization meant modernization, and modernization threatened the Kalighat *patua's* traditional way of life. One painting indicating disapproval of westernization is *Nabin Kills Elokeshi* (c. 1875). The Elokeshi scandal, also known as the "Tarakeshwar Affair" was depicted many times in Kalighat painting; it refers to an actual event which involved the seduction of a married woman, Elokeshi, by a holy man, Mahanta. Once Elokeshi's husband, Nabin, learned of the affair, he cut off her head (Guha Thakurta, *Making* 21; Jain 128). Elokeshi's relationship with the Mahanta symbolized the loose morals and perverse sexuality Kalighat artists witnessed in their environment, and they blamed these problems on westernized society. In *Nabin Kills Elokeshi*, there are two figures. The female figure, Elokeshi, is shown with her head detached from her bleeding neck as the second figure, Nabin, appears to be adjusting his "Prince Albert" hairstyle and is dressed in a European manner complete with buckled shoes. The particular image of a beheaded Elokeshi was to serve as a warning which indicates difficult

times are coming should traditional values continue to be abandoned (Guha-Thakurta, *Making* 21-22).

From the beginning, the *patuas* despised the British because of British attempts to reform Indian artistic tastes. Though a few Englishmen like William Morris, George Birdwood and Henry Cole led campaigns to preserve Indian folk arts, the majority of the government wanted to westernize the arts in India (Mitter, *Indian Art* 171-73). By the year 1850, Indian rulers had developed Victorian tastes. The westernization project was an official government attempt at artistic reform to which the *patuas* were opposed and by which they were threatened – everything that *patua* culture embodied was a target of these reforms (Chatterjee 47). Since the world presented through the Kalighat *pats* was so far removed from that of the British and viewed as inferior, their work was unacceptable to the British and Bengali elite (Chatterjee 46). The British preferred art modeled on western forms, as did the elite Indians; also, Kalighat artists' paintings were political and made derogatory statements about the changes in society. *Woman Beating an Ascetic*, for example, depicts a man being beaten over the head by a woman; this symbolized a loss of manliness and power to the *patuas* (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 169-170).

The British were in charge, and the middle-class zamindars, or local village rulers, who once supported the *patuas* by providing housing and supplying other benefits, now sought approval from the British. In doing so, they withdrew their support of the *patuas* and other folk cultures, rejected their traditional culture and religion, and began to prefer and collect European paintings. Some even dressed in a European manner, as seen in the Kalighat painting *Kartika* (Chatterjee 47). The *Kartika* is a man, similar to a dandy, or a *babu*, who favors contemporary British style as evidenced by his "Prince Albert" haircut and European buckled shoes (Jain 26). The man, likely a village zamindar, is of higher class than other villagers, with opportunities for an English education and employment within the British administration. The *patuas* expressed their frustration with such practices through satire. The street culture of black town, popular novels, and other printed images all shared this sense of satire and general dissatisfaction with British presence and westernization (Guha-Thakurta, *Making* 19). The Kalighat artists were not invited into the world of the British or even that of the English-

educated Indians, so they watched the British conquer from an outsider standpoint from within their own country. They were always outsiders to the British, but their popular art was one of the first instances where anyone called visual attention to the deteriorating effects of British presence on traditional Indian culture.

Proponents of Archer's views perceive Kalighat paintings as "Anglo-Indian" because they incorporate themes from day-to-day life. I agree with Mukherjee's statement that "an artist, a man of the society, cannot spontaneously ignore social events and contemporary people, and will surely and eagerly use them as subject matters if there is a commercial demand for pictures depicting them" (10). Yet when the Kalighat artists painted themes from their lives, they did so in a manner and style that was absolutely their own. Their work reflected issues they viewed as important, and the British played no part in deciding what contemporary subject matter Kalighat *patuas* painted. The British didn't invent the idea to paint contemporary life. *Patuas* always had their market in mind, and painted scrolls or paintings that were relevant to their audience, or paying customers – even traditional *pats* of religious subjects incorporated contemporary elements. When a significant portion of society began to reject Indian tradition, the *patuas* lost patronage. So, like any other business-focused person, they adapted. They turned away from Hindu deities and turned toward modern life, yet they maintained their traditional style while providing visual commentary of their new globalized world (Banerjee 139).

In a final disagreement with Archer and those who have accepted his theories, I want to argue against the notion that the *patuas* adopted the technique of shading from Renaissance art. Partha Mitter states, "The strength of Kalighat lay in its own peculiar adaptations of Renaissance chiaroscuro and perspective" (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 15). I disagree that Kalighat artists' use of shading is an adaptation of Renaissance chiaroscuro. Kalighat paintings do not appear to have adapted any of the Renaissance illusory techniques of perspective, light, and shadow. Archer acknowledges that Kalighat paintings and Renaissance paintings are different in appearance, though he explains this as the result of the inability of Kalighat artists to fully understand the techniques they saw in European paintings available at the bazaars (Archer 10). Archer does not appreciate how Kalighat artists used

shading to highlight volume and create rhythm rather than to mimic naturalism. As can be seen in *Krishna and Balarama* and also in *Sarasvati*, the shadowing is used to emphasize contours of the figures and is not realistic (Figures 2 and 3). In fact, for Kalighat artists to take time to do realistic light and shadow would be economically counterproductive because of time constraints (Banerjee 133). Their work was in high demand, so they needed to produce pictures quickly and Renaissance shading techniques would have simply taken too much time.

**Figure 3. Kalighat Painting: Sarasvati**



watercolor on paper.

First mentioned by Sumanta Banerjee in *Parlour and the Streets*, scholars have linked Kalighat shading style from their practice of painting *kumors*, small clay figures of deities (133). In *Kalighat Painting: Images from a Changing World* (1999), Jyotindra Jain also makes the interesting point that the shading used by the Kalighat artists suggests a technique carried over from earlier clay modeling practices (34). Jain

argues that Kalighat *patuas* also fashioned clay figures, so they already had an understanding of three dimensional forms, and this practice was transferred onto paper at Kalighat (Dallapiccola 258; Jain 24). While fashioning clay figures might have played a role in the Kalighat artists' use of shading, it seems that their true style of shading more closely resembles shading seen in traditional scrolls, Rajput paintings, or manuscript paintings. In *Kakubha Ragini*, c. 1690, you see the same shading techniques as seen in Kalighat *pats*; the artist conveys three dimensional figures against a flat backdrop, with no clear light source and flattened pictorial space, very similar to the Kalighat painting *Sarasvati* (Figure 3). Even in the Ramayana scroll from Birbhum you see sweeps of color within the human form to accentuate roundness, but no light source or shadows are indicated (Figure 1).

Many scholars continue to insist that Kalighat *pats* are derivative of western art, and use words such as "Anglo-Indian" and "Indo-English" to describe them. This perspective has serious implications for how Kalighat paintings are understood. The trend to view the Kalighat style as Anglo-Indian has been around for many years, but, Archer, who largely initiated it, misinterpreted this indigenous style, as becomes clear with evidence that proves otherwise. Kalighat *patuas'* paintings should be celebrated as authentically Indian works that represent

a specific reaction to colonial rule from an indigenous view. These artists thrived in a colonial urban setting all the while maintaining traditional imagery and culture, operating under aesthetics inherited from their forbears and modified by themselves (Guha-Thakurta *Making* 18). While the colonial British were teaching academic art to elite Indians in government-funded art schools, Kalighat paintings emerged as traditionally Indian in artistic style.

Significantly, the traditional materials and subject matter of Kalighat painting attracted well-known nationalist artists like Jamini Roy to the Kalighat style (Chatterjee 18). Jamini Roy is important because he studied at the Government School of Art in Calcutta during the early twentieth century where he studied western painting techniques. But, later, Roy rejected academic technique and turned to indigenous sources such as Kalighat paintings and traditional Bengali scrolls to develop his

distinct style (Perkins). In comparing Roy's *Krishna and his Mother* with the Kalighat painting *Sarasvati* (Figure 3), it is evident that Roy uses the same simplified, yet dynamic forms, bold linear strokes, and flattened areas of color as in the Kalighat *pats*. The traditional village peasant as a symbol of India's identity became very important in India's struggle for independence, and the work of the Kalighat artists offered excellent resources for nationalist artists. In *The Parlour and the Streets*, Banerjee refers to the work of Frantz Fanon to consider how anti-imperial struggles revitalize the culture and traditions of the indigenous classes (9). Fanon describes how it is common for traditional folk culture to develop in a colonial setting:

The oral tradition – stories, epics, and songs of the people – which formerly were filed away as set pieces are now beginning to change. The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring the conflicts up to date and to modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons. (qtd. in Banerjee 10)

During India's struggle to constitute a national identity, indigenous cultural artifacts such as the Kalighat *pats* served as a model of authentically Indian art forms. For influential writers and artists, folk culture provided an abundant resource of Indian tradition which they modified and updated to express shared sentiments of alienation, nationalist pride, and often an idealized past (Guha-Thakurta, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and the Reconstruction" 47).

While Jamini Roy's works are considered to be priceless Indian national treasures, Kalighat paintings hardly receive credit in scholarly writings, even though these artists represent a primary source for Roy (Chatterjee 118-36). It is unsettling that these great paintings are often neglected, especially when you consider the cultural significance of Kalighat style. Instead of viewing these works as mere products of westernization, I suggest they are indigenous, and reflect a culture adapting to new challenges and circumstances in a colonized environment. Kalighat paintings relied on traditional Indian art forms as they developed a unique and vivacious body of work.

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