

Folk and Minor Art in India
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Lecture – 35
Individual Expression in Contemporary Collection
of Indian Folk and Minor Art

In this part of our topic, we are going to get a hang of the Individual Expressions in the Contemporary Ventures in Indian Folk Art and we are going to see quite a few art works by the artists which are individual in its characteristic and through the visuals, again we are going to realize how the individualistic approach is coming out with the strong stylistic identity that is already codified for the artists and it is very interesting to see how they are still attached to those traditional instructions and everything and at the same time, the kind of expressions which they are coming up with are looking very individualistic, expressionistic and very clear cut.

So, let us see one example by Niranjan Chithrakar of Murshidabad and it is a scroll that was collected many years back, around 25 years back and in that picture I could see like I am just showing you two or three images from there, just two images maybe from the part and it is a repetitive image. The theme of the art work was very simple, it is the hell scene of what happens to a person after death as we know that they are connected to the existence of Yama who is the god of forgiveness or the god of death and that was part of each and every scroll which was there in the past.

Now, this is done maybe 25 years back and cannot be called as a past because it is a very long and very old tradition that we are addressing right now. So, when Niranjan Chithrakar painted the scroll with the images of those imaginary ghosts who appear after death and they take count of all the scenes and virtues committed by the person when he was, he or she was leaving and then how the ghosts act when they have this weird body language and that is scary and what is important for the picture that I will explain when you view the picture.

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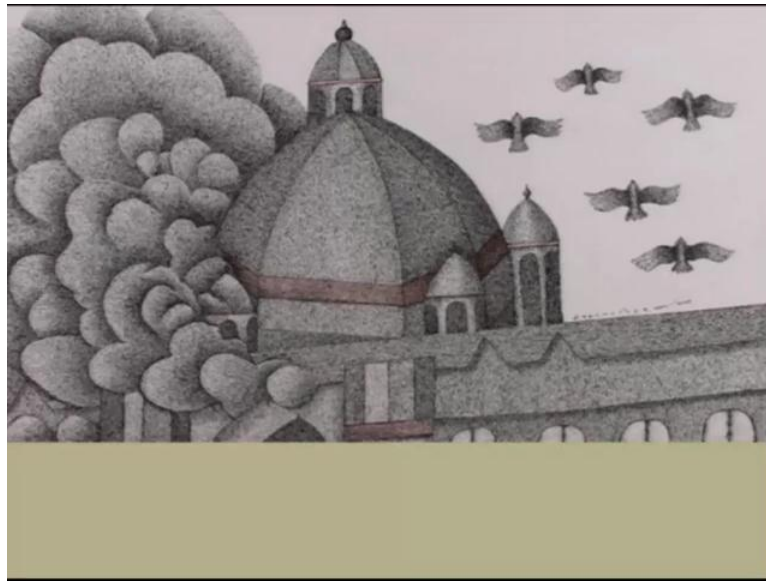
So, the artist has used a very simple and basic means and it is studded on a very basic brown paper that is available for packaging or wrapping things. It has a brownish base and the artist liked that color and what we see in the picture is a few bold black lines, a tint of black, a very diluted transparent kind of a tint on the body to give with some kind of a volume and separate the characters from its background and then to highlight some of the characteristic features. The artist has used an opaque white paint on the eyes and the teeth of the characters and the characters are the ghosts and the person like the existing ghosts and the new ghosts. So, that is how it is and what we generally see in the pictures that you know all these people who have committed sin and getting bad experience after death and they are usually the female figures. The breasts are suggestive of that and otherwise the figures are very simplified, the fingers and other things are highly stylized to make it more expressive.

There is exaggeration in the body parts, the limbs and they are simplified and exaggerated, stretched just to give the sense of the expression which is very fearful and it is a creepy sin that they produced. So, what we see here is very interestingly that the artist is using his own freedom of execution which is a different type of art work which is done in Murshidabad by Niranjana Chitrkar, who was quite acquainted with the Bengal Pattachitra, the traditional one that we have seen from the 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st century things. So, this person he is from Midnapore and he is following this tradition

and what we see in the picture is that the art work has a strong connection with the Santhali part also.

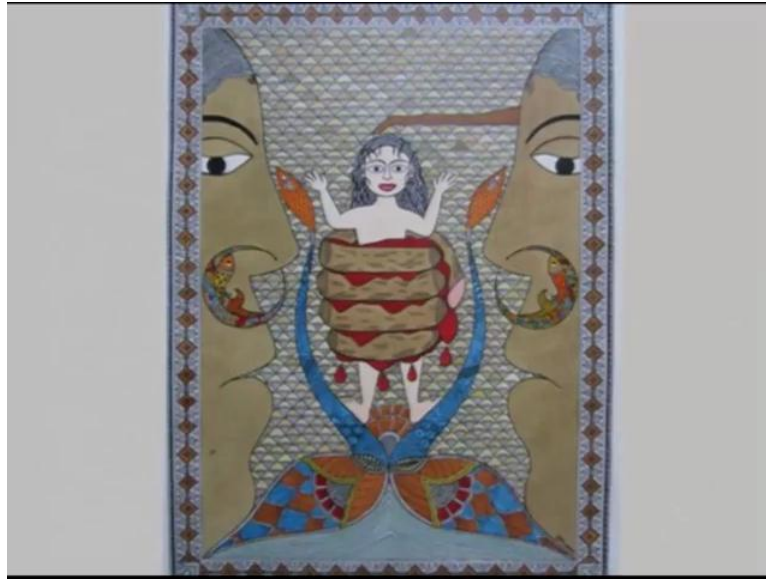
We have seen it earlier also that you know painters from Murshidabad and Midnapore had this tendency of using of flat background and making the figure moving into the picture. This is just one example that I am using as clue to understand how the individual freedom can be achieved through individual expressions.

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Now, what we see in this image is something which is of a very recent example that I have picked up. This is painted by Venkat Raman Singh who is a Gond painter and the title of the painting is the smoked Taj. So, we can make out it is best on the recent incident where the terrorist attack took place in the Taj Hotel in Mumbai and the style of execution is very typical of the Gond painting tradition that we have studied earlier, but the subject matter is picked up. So, the theme is contemporarized and the theme is based on a current happening and all this things are also very simplified, there are birds which have to be the symbols of peace, the pigeons but their wings are also affected by the smoke. So, everything is getting blackened and that is shown with an even texture very typical of Gond painting, but then it is shifting from the traditional Gond and coming up with its own expression.

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This is another image taken from a recent website done by Pushpa Kumari which is on the female feticide and again the feminist subject matters are getting prominent and it is also giving a very strong social message throughout which is very effective and nothing could have been more effective than this to spread awareness in such a way.

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Another painting that shows a very recent happening which is connected to the investment scandal in West Bengal by the Shardha investment company and it shows how they have vandalized and the kind of you know it is like how they multiplied the

money and they promised the common people to show some better luck and finally they betrayed. So, there are many eyes and faces that is a symbol of corruption, misuse and then the victims are there in the four rounds. So, these are some of the very recent expressions of the current affairs which makes it all the more interesting that picking up one event that is happening around us, it is no Ramayan Mahabharat or something, but the epics, the sagas of today's time. We are constantly encountering new stories, new resources that can really inspire the painters of today's time.

So, it is not that the folk painters are still strongly holding their age old believes and old traditions but they are just picking up the most important thing from there that is the stylistic identity and they are choosing their subject matters with a lot of freedom as per their wishes and I will show you some art works by another very eminent artist of our time, he is Kalam Patua, it is like when we see his work and interact with him, we find him to be doing something very significant as he has consciously revived a very important urban folk tradition which is known as Kalighat pat painting and we are going to discuss the significance of Kalighat pat as a urban folk art tradition in our coming module. It is very important to know how that tradition got lost and before that we are going that see Kalam Patua in today's context who taught himself in the manner. So, the style that he picked for his artist expression is the style of Kalighat painting.

Then he is using his artistic freedom to come up with new images and he is responding to the social happenings of today's time with the same kind of executions and let us watch its works and talk about it.

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So, this is a painting by Kalam Patua made in 2013, the title of the art work is exhibition, water color on paper and it was displayed in gallery is space New Delhi and what we see in the picture is the scene from a recent art exhibition where the paintings are in display, but the viewers and the visitors who were present were busy in socializing, they are talking to each other and are indulged into drinking, clicking photographs and the paintings are not getting the kind of attention it deserves. So, it has a satiric aspect to how the modern life and the sensibilities of the modern life are shown in the execution to it.

Kalam Patua's ancestors were ideal makers and not scroll painters of Kalighat, but entice of the market brought them to Kalighat and those who prospered settled down in the purlieu of the Kalighat temple in Kolkata to drill and continue with the newly formed urban John Drey.

Kalam Patua impressed by the expressive boldness and the potential of this popular Kalighat style made a conscious effort to master the art from under the tutelage of his uncle Vaidyanath Patua and adopted this style for his artistic expression as narrated to me by Kalam Patua. He adds the Kalighat pat belongs to a temple tradition that thrived in 19th century Kolkata.

The painting initially depicted images of deities and picture scrolls depicting Ramayan, Krishnaleela and Chaithanyaleela among many other themes. Eventually, the narrative

extended to secular and social themes satirizing the high middle class group of people known as Baboos who ridiculously where into superficial emulation of the European cultural values leading to cultural disasters and the Patua expression of this time embodies the nonsense of that predicament which evoked in simplicity of style and expression.

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Kalam Patua's art goes beyond his ancestry to evoke the same social intelligence in a contemporary situate and he is moderately vocal and his language of ridiculing the obsessed consumerism of the new urban middle class, a post master by profession in the postal department government of India, his words range from modest portrayals of childhood memories of pastoral life to caricaturing the sudden raise of urban middle class and their decideful change to blatant physicality absorbing the Patua tradition of Kalighat painting of row burst lines and tones, he includes his range with the unique harmonious blend of the traditional and contemporary. Kalam's paintings branch out from the obsolete Kalighat Patachithra once painted profusely and he was included in the retrospective show of Kalighat painting at the national gallery of modern art NGMA from the collection of the Victoria and the Albert museum in 1990, Kalam was commissioned to paint a scroll illustrating the story of French revolution by Alias Force in Calcutta.

Later, explode communal violence and dowry deaths at themes of his paintings. The Victoria and Albert museum London has entered and exuviated Kalam's work in its touring exhibition across South Asia and his works are also in the collection of the national museum in Liverpool UK, the museum of civilization in Canada, the Chicago Children's museum and the Lekha and Anupam both their collection.

Kalam Patua works as a post master in Chandpura sub post office in West Bengal with the unchanged presence of sarcasm and humor and it is not the 18th century Baboos smocked by ancestors and his completion is aptly adhere to his proximate surroundings. Kalam's second soul exhibition at gallery s space includes a series of painting based on simple watchfulness towards the trivial live even in the final detail to trace the social sensibility and the tongue and check interpretation of contemporary happenings and tragedies in the current context.

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In all the art works of Kalam Patua, he shows the simple life and daily life scenes all over of the subject matters a very mundane and very simple. So, in this painting what we see is that the kind of line, the volume that is created here and the space division that is very typical of Kalighat paintings. So, it shows his training in Kalighat Patachitra, but the subject matter is very contemporary and upon asking him, I got to know that the subject matter was that, one lady had a ear pain and she is taken to a doctor of a different city for the medical checkup by her husband. Both of them are travelling by train when some

Chalmuriwala or those who sell some snacks which is made out of purged fries, he is selling the thing and offering that to the wife, but she is not much interested in having that and then there is one bowl who is a rowing minstrel who is singing in the train and there are other people who are also moving around.

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Another very interesting subject matter from his childhood memory from the same exhibition where there are people who are crossing a river during the flood and as we can see that one child who is not able to swim and he needs support, he is just putting the stick on the brother's mouth and that way he is getting some support because both the hands of the brothers is occupied.

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Then in the next image, we see something very interesting the lotus temple of New Delhi and at the background two girls are sitting and posing for a photograph, a dog is also waiting for them, it is sitting there very peacefully and there is a photographer with jeans and leather bag clicking their photograph and this girls are posing for him. The figures are typical of Kalighat urban Patachithra, the Sundarees, the beauties that was there. So, he used them in a very interesting manner in this art work.

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This is another very interesting thing from a very secular and common subject matter where it is a tailor shop and there are models sitting there and the person is selling the garment and somebody has ordered for some clothes and they got the delivery and going out and there is a mannequin standing there. There are several mannequins so, he is the tailor who takes order and he is sitting with his typical seizer and supplying the order and there is a fan on top of the things. So, it is like a running business and a very interesting scene.

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Again, a picture where the husband takes the photograph of the wife who is dressed up like the traditional sundari and his son is other background and of course, he is not part of the pictures. So, he is not very formally dressed and the husband is clicking the photograph with his mobile phone, it is not a camera but also a camera with the mobile phone. So, what we see in the picture is the use of line which is very flowy and voluminous, it is rendered and the kind of tone that is produced there is not as flat as the rural folk paintings. So, it has that urban quality into the paintings.

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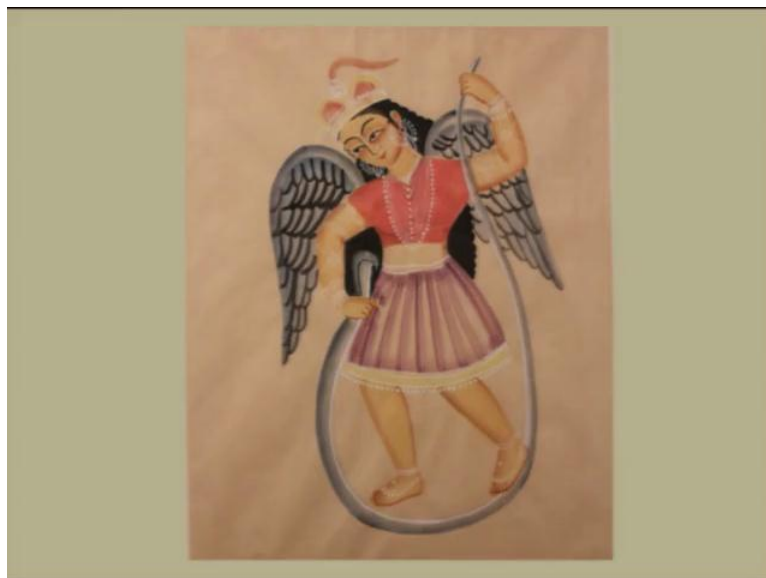
Again, the very cellular image that he produced through two of his pictures, one is where the fairy which is otherwise located on top of Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata and it used to rotate earlier and now it does not rotate any more. So, according to Kalam Patua, he imagined that the fairy is on the sky and moving around in the imagination of the photographer who is quite baffled to see her there and he is wondering whether it is reality or it is the fact. He is wondering and he just lifted his camera down and he is watching the beauty on the sky. It is a dream-like image with lots of fantasies and facts there and the next one is getting the furniture made so, the dream room and the dream furniture. So, a carpenter is making furniture out of plywood and the person who has commissioned the work to the carpenter is dreaming of his dream bed where he is going to lie down and that has some realistic aspect to it.

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There are images what we see in the torso and the other parts that there are images of like it are just a dual identity of the breasts and the eyes of an owl. So, the mystery of the body and also the transparency of the drapery which is done with the simple mean of brush line and some color tings are amazing here. So, there the lady is waiting all beds and waiting for somebody and the person whom she is imagining is there in the picture frame.

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Then, a depiction of the traditional Kalighat painting style in the hand of the expert painter Kalam Patua of our time.

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Another image very survival where it is more like the character is playing a flute and the bird is listening to it. It is all about the hypnotized condition where it is almost like a semi survival image and it is highly ambiguous as the formation of the animal, the human figure and everything is placed there. So, it is highly imaginative and beautiful.

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There are two typical Ganesha from Kalighat tradition very expressive and the volume is created in a very different manner and is not as flat as the other folk and minor art examples that we have gone through. So, everywhere they try to maintain a volume which is very roundish and if not exactly anatomical and it was to realize the potential of the styles which is all ready there prevailing in the traditional folk and minor art of India and they are varied and there are lots of technical possibilities and there are potential of expressionistic possibilities also and many artists in today's time whether they belong to that tradition or not they are picking up all the stylistic sensibilities which are established long back with a lot of convection and it is wise to pick up the sensibilities that they are prevailing in the folk and minor art the traditional paintings of our country and when we talk about the survival, this is also for sure that it can only survive through change.

So, if we pick up all this art works as the creative expressions of today's time, we see that the tradition is surviving through them and that is indicating the sustainability aspect of a traditional visual culture in our country.