CHAPTER-II

EARLY PHASE OF SATIRICAL ART IN BENGAL

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the research deals with some essential quarries of origin of satirical impulse in art and activities in the 19th century Calcutta, as the market for art started expanding, thanks to the processes of urbanization, the rural folk traditions of *pat* painting transformed in the hands of the migrant artists to produce water-colours (they used gouache and tempera) of Hindu gods and goddesses as well as to address the unprecedented diversity of urban life. As a result, many of these Kalighat paintings (as the art-practice came to be known) described, using their signature bold lines and colorations, some of the city's most popular scandals. Most importantly, they took satirical pot-shots at the sanctimoniousness of the city's middle-classes. One can, in fact, trace the obsession with the dandyish and dissolute *Babu* figure in the early 20th century art to many of the searing images produced by these *patuas*. The *Bat-tala* prints and wood-cuts also explored the same themes, targeting the lascivious courtesan and the effeminate *Babu* with equal ardour. (Sardesai:2003) The historical study of the evolution of satirical images cannot be done without including the *patachitras,* an art that had an exclusive position in the world of art in Bengal. While speaking of *patachitras* what instantly comes to our mind is the school of kalighat *patachitras.*

Satire has been a part of traditional culture in Bengal since a long time. The various traditional practises like *bolan* in rahr Bengal, *gombhir*a of north Bengal, *jhumur* incorporated in their performances an element of satire. Composing ballads and rhymes based on contemporary events and incidents and presenting them in a satirical manner was a common practice. The tradition of *patachitras* has a long history. Like the older manuscripts it too has a legacy. The artisits who painted the patachitras are called *'poto*' or '*potuas*.' One of the best examples of their art can be visible in the backdrop or the frame which supports the *Durga* idol (*chalchitra*). This tradition of art has a

long past and was often used in rural areas to convey messages in public interest or make people aware about various issues. The artists used to roam around through villages carrying their rolled up with them. On request form villagers they used open them up, and narrate the stories which were accompanied by songs. The artists hailed from both Hindu as well as Muslim families. There are various genres of the *patachitras* that can be found in Bengal, these are basically dependent on the locality and the region where they are found like – (a) Tamluk-kalighat-tribeni (b) Birbhum-Kandi-Katoa (c)Baharampur- Murshidabad. In eastern part of Bengal Faridpur, Barishal and Kumillya saw flourishing of such pats. These were called *Gajir pats*. (Gangopadhya: 1420)

There is debate on the beginning of the age of diverse range of art which we commonly call 'Modern Art'. The debate lies on the varied opinion of nature and definition of modernity. Those having faith in the consciousness of nationalism and tradition consider Abanindranath as the fountainhead of modern art. According to them the beginning of individual artistic freedom in modern art started from Abanindranath. Again those who consider the inherent conflict and dichotomy of modern life as the yardstick of modernity, tend to go further back. They consider Rabindranath Tagore as the vanguard of modern art. Some even goes further ahead in the 1940s to mark the beginning of modern art. They think that the concept of modernity has been fully expressed for the first time in the works of the artists of 'Calcutta Group' in Bengal and those in the 'Progressive Artists Group' in Mumbai, those which create a fusion between the oriental and occidental styles of art. Some others go back to the middle part of the 19th century. The time that marked the beginning of art education in our country under the patronage of the British, is considered by them as beginning of modern art in India. The flourish of the traditionally national art or the middle age art patronized by the kings and their courts got hindered with the expansion of colonization. There was for a time being a vacuum in the art practice. Out of this vacuum the British tried to create some artists and craftsmen for their own benefit. With that end in mind the British started art education and founded some art schools in the major cities of India. This marked the beginning of British academically familiar style.

The flourish of this academic familiarity in Indian art at the second half of 19th century is called by art historian Partha Mitter in his book, 'Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922', as 'Age of Optimism'. (Ghosh: 2005)

Debating on the beginning of modernity in Indian art is not relevant in the present context. Here we will try to understand the pre-modern era of Indian art. Our aim will be to observe how the parallel strands of *Bat-tala* and Kalighat traditions existed in that age and how the traditional group of *patuas*/artists transformed their art into a folk painting genre. Kalighat paintings are significantly relevant in the perception of modern art. In Kalighat an individual style has emerged, one that is synchronized with the contemporary time period. It happened in the beginning of the 19th century and flourished till 1920s or 1930s.The old city of Calcutta saw numerous fairs especially during the *Durga puja*. The road alongside the *Ganga* at that point of time had no settlements and it was in these stretch of roads fairs were held which attracted a significant crowd. These fairs sold a host of objects from utensils and vessels of daily use to woven *saris*, ornaments and gilded jewellery for women to objects of handicrafts like wicker baskets, figurines made out of bamboo, and even painted *patchitras*. *Pat* Artists from near and distant districts like Bankura, Bardhaman, Birbhum, Medinipur started to come to these fairs around the temple compound and began to earn a little sum of money by selling their art works. As a temple Kalighat was considered to be very sacred and attracted a great number of pilgrims. These people on their way back from visit to the temple often used to buy these *pats* that had images of gods and goddesses drawn on them. These groups of artists realized this as a prospective opportunity to sell their artworks and came down, settling around the temple premises permanently. Once they had settled themselves in the city, their technique of painting saw a gradual change. Many of the English officials who came to Calcutta during that time used to paint and draw in their pastime. They were often seen on holidays, lazing around the bank of the Ganges and painting landscape. They mostly painted in water colours employing the 'wash' technique. This was something new. The *patachitra* artists by keenly observing the artists readily picked up the new technique of painting and employed it in drawing their *patas.* In spite

of following a sophisticated technique thee paintings had a certain rough edge which gave them a uniqueness. Most unlikely it was the famous English litterateur Rudyard Kipling who noticed this quality in the kalighat *patas* and took back in his travel back to England, making it popular in there. Much later celebrated artist Jamini Roy being inspired by Kalighat paintings developed a new stylistic in painting. Now while going through these one might as well very pertinently ask what the Kalighat paintings have got to do with the development of satirical images?

The *patuas*, apart from drawing the usual images of gods and goddesses at times also painted images depicting various social events or occurrences in a satirical manner. These were mainly intended for the English buyers, who would it was thought be attracted by the satirical representations of various regular events like the fight between two woman over a man, women being beaten up by her mother in law or the other way round (Plate 2.41) (Plate 2.46) and (Plate 2.51). Events which often occurred regularly like a drunkard *babu* being beaten up by a prostitute featured in their drawings. These drawings were not drawn merely in a realistic manner rather it was a hint of satire, a dig was attempted at the various incidents and scandals that were at rife in the contemporary social order. The English found these quite enjoyable and often bought these. This encouraged the artists and they started regularly to paint such satirical images. Ordinary people could easily understand the subjects and the contents of these paintings. Some paintings portrayed a woman beating up a man, while some showed some man trying to get behind a well dressed woman. Some lampooned the impostors showing them being beaten up by women. Irresponsible *babus* being thrashed by the prostitutes were often drawn in *patachitras.* Images of women's lifestyle (Plate 2.35) and their singing were also quite a common subject drawn by the artisans. The artisans picked up and painted various such characters which were visible in the contemporary. At that point of time the artisans did not have access to synthetic colors hence they used colours made from natural substances. Expert in folk studies Dinesh Chandra Sen opined that these kinds of paintings did not cost much and hence were popular among the lower rungs of the society. These pictures attributed with satire were used as a

strong tool for moral up liftment of the society. (Gangopadhya: 1420) During 1860 and 1870 another impressionist style of painting developed in the *Bat-tala* area of Kolkata. A folk style coupled with an urbane intellect got reflected in the art, giving it a unique essence. Importance of this art in the study of pre-modern art is also highly significant. The style of satiric expression in modern art emerged from these 19th century art traditions. Chandi Lahiri writes: 'The beginning of nationalism in art practice started with the popularity of *Bat-tala* print in the Chitpur area of Kolkata during the 19th century. Before this the only nationalistic style that existed is the one found in Kalighat painting tradition. In addition to the portraits of deities the Kalighat painters also painted the contemporary social imagery in order to impress the British. To mark the beginning of satirical art by Indian artists we can consider the evolution of Kalighat paintings as the starting point. (Lahiri: 1995) So it can well be said that in our search for the origin or beginning of modern Indian art we have to revert back to Kalighat / *Bat-tala* painting traditions.

2.2 KALIGHAT PAINTING TRADITIONS

From the last part of the 18th till the entire 19th century the Kalighat painting traditions were in vogue. Kolkata became a thriving place due to the expansion of the East India Company and also due to the flourish of the trading and merchant community. The population of the city also exploded in leaps and bounds. Kolkata evolved both in mind and spirit once there was a collective development of entire Bengal centering it. Initially when Kolkata started flourishing as a city as a result of lucrative trade, the other parts of Bengal, which are mostly rural, remained backward. The rural Bengal was rather depraved due to the oppression of the landlords and the British and also due to lack of development in the agricultural sector. Many left their homes in villages and came to the cities for security. Most among them settled here eventually contributing to Kolkata's population. From the first decade of the 18th century to the first decade of the 19th century the population of Kolkata increased almost 17 times. The influx of huge number of rural communities infiltrated their rustic culture and lifestyle into Kolkata's cultural fabric. The traditional side, the serenity, and the grace of lifestyle of the rural communities drew the urban people of Kolkata towards a more

intense life. This shift in the reality increasingly became evident in Kolkata's lifestyle, and also in her art and culture. Literature and music of this period are eloquent with this reality. In case of art, Kalighat Painting first unveiled this realism. The Kalighat artists came and settled in Kolkata from rural areas of Bengal. The sense of heritage and traditions were imprinted in their cultural understandings. The artists came and settled in the busy and sheer reality of the urban life in Kolkata. The twin realities of the artists, one they left back in their rural life and the one they got settled into, were reflected in the Kalighat paintings. The paintings have subjects like religious practices and also the daily life of the people of Kolkata and its suburbs. The paintings included the different local incidents and local proverbs. This is why the painting tradition has fused the folk and urban approach to life very successfully. The first art tradition of Bengal was thus formed with a deep understanding of reality and social consciousness. (Ghosh: 2003) This has in future influenced many modern artists.

Ashok Bhattacharya writes- As the self-dependent rural economy collapsed with the oppression of the British officials, the traditional *Patuas* (artists) of the villages started getting deprived from earning their age old livelihood. Consequently, the artists of the adjoining areas of Kolkata like 24 Parganas, Howrah and Medinipur came and settled in the Kalighat area with the hope of a living by drawing portraits of deities for the pilgrims /devotees who came to the temple. (Bhattacharya: 1991) Ashok Mitra has also written in the same context- The best examples of folk and rural traditions are found in the Kalighat and *Bat-tala* paintings. The Kalighat painters are *Patuas* and had the title *Sutradhar* as their first names. Initially their forefathers were wood carvers or carpenters and were engaged in building temples, later they started making clay idols. There were specific times for idol making. During the off season the artists used to make Patachitra paintings, toys, and earthen and wooden dolls. Hence the understanding of plastic form was in their blood or in their lineage. Their practice of idol making brought in the resemblance of clay-modeling and fore shorting, and also the weight and quality of the earthen idols together with their lack of finesse in their painting. This affects the sublime look of the idols. (Mitra: 1996)

However, not only the traditional *Patuas* but painters from various other communities also settled in Kalighat- a fact documented by researchers in their studies. In this way the Kalighat painting tradition was born through an assimilation and exchange of artists of various communities. We come to know from Ashok Bhattacharya's writings the role of the British rulers behind the skill of the artists in using British Transparent Water Color. The artists gradually started applying color transparently instead of their age old practice of using solid colours. In this way eventually the home made colours were replaced with foreign made chemical colours and the foreign made papers took the place of homemade ones. Due to the difference in medium the tradition of Kalighat paintings also deviated from the age old ones. Especially the brightness that appeared in the use of transparent colour on white papers was unthinkable in the traditional painting tradition. It is because of the use of British water colour that William Archer has found a strong influence of British water colour stylization in the Kalighat tradition. (Archer: 1972). He has also found an inclination among the artists in following the western painting standards especially in the spherical or overlaying/studding created by them with the help of shading or shadowing in the formation of Kalighat paintings. Ashok Bhattacharya thinks that Archer's point is not acceptable for two reasons. Firstly, the tradition of shading and outlining figures can be seen in Indian art since the Ajanta period. Secondly, the 18th and 19th century art traditions of India including fresco of Kerala, scroll *Patas* in Nathdwar of Rajasthan, and in the fresco paintings of Punjab's Amritsar, have the practice of bringing in a rounded look in the forms by using spherical motifs. This is why researcher Ashok Bhattacharya in spite of believing in the influence of British water colour on the Kalighat painting, feels that the paintings solely thrived on the path of Indian tradition. (Bhattacharya: 1994) In this connection writer and researcher Sripantha says- Tracing the origin of Kalighat paintings will take one to the Ajanta cave paintings, similarity will also be noticed in the manuscripts of Pal Dynasty, and even in the Mughal-Rajput miniature paintings. Though mainly an individual art tradition of Bengal one cannot deny the fact that the tradition was influenced by the period art of the country. The art tradition has been sustained flourished by the urban atmosphere of Kolkata. And since the 18th and 19th century Kolkata is replete with western

culture, its influence on the art tradition was ineluctable. A statement and a conclusion made by W. G. Archer in this connection is imperative. His conclusion is – 'The result is an art in which, though the ultimate product is a fusion of two techniques- one British, the other indigenous- the vital element is Bengali.' (Sripantha: 2013)

Hence we can come to the conclusion that in spite of being a fusion of mixed techniques the Kalighat painting tradition is the champion of Bengali culture, more so because Kalighat paintings talk of contemporary Bengal. The paintings bear umpteenth number of testimonies to the theme of urban life, though the primary theme of the paintings remains to be religious or mythological. Some paintings are about animals and other lives on earth while others are on historic incidents (contemporary ones). This includes, Rani Lakshmibai, Shaymakanta's fight with tiger, a Bengali girl floating in the sky on a balloon, the incident of *Elokeshi* and *Mohanta* and also the Tarakeswar scandal (Plate 2.54) and (Plate 2.36). The artists have also painted portraits including the gentility of Kolkata, notch girls, lovers, et al. The artist's brush has also included the foreigners and their lifestyle. These include the painting of a foreigner on elephant back going to shoot a tiger(Plate 2.48), horses running in the race course, a *Sepoy* keeping guard etc(Plate 2.72). Other than these there are some more paintings which are satirical. These are mostly a sharp derision of the rich and urban Bengali who imitated the British and their lifestyle at the hands of the rural artists. The satirical *Patas* have also jeered at the so called saints and the fake religious leaders or Gurus. Kalighat painting is not only about a particular period it is a mirror an age. (Sripantha: 2013) Researcher Ashok Bhattacharya says- the character of the Kalighat paintings changed from the middle of the 19th century. The social reality mentioned by Kaliprasanna Singha in his book, Hatum Pyachar Naksha, finds a parallel in the field of art in the Kalighat paintings. The expressions of social happenings were regularly found in the Kalighat paintings which put this tradition of paintings apart by its individuality and uniqueness. Researcher Bhattacharya also asks a question- there is a vigorous spontaneity in the creative formation of Kalighat paintings, a certain simplistic and unceremonious style is noticed in its pattern which thoroughly impresses even

the modern art lovers. This is why Kalighat paintings have received vivid admiration and recognition in the modern art sphere globally. But it is surprising to find that the then Bengali elite society of Kolkata which was educated in British education, found the art to be of low standards. (Bhattacharya: 1991)

In this connection Sumanta Bandopadhyay writes- The spontaneous way in which the contemporary Bengali society got reflected in their paintings, speaks of the sharp understanding of the social reality by the artists. The entire paintings have a distinct mood and approach. The tone of pungent satire is vividly felt. This is why the social awareness of the Kalighat painters is of significance. If the artists received the patronage of the contemporary social reformers and intelligentsia then the evaluation of Kalighat *Pata* would have got a different reality. Researcher Bandopadhyay feels- There was hardly any connection between the 19th century urban Bengali writers and intellectuals and the folk culture of the region. Hence it is unjust to expect a proper evaluation of the abstract rhythmic Kalighat *Pata* from the educated art admirers of that time. It is true that the contemporary art lovers were getting interested in oil paintings, miniature paintings, but there remained a superstition and neglect about the rural folk culture of the country. Though this is a sad reality this was inevitable feels the researcher. (Bandopadhyay:2013) However, while discussing Indian art, Ashok Mitra has written- 'The best examples of folk and rural traditions are found in the Kalighat and *Bat-tala* paintings.' (Mitra: 1956-96). He was right in saying this as in no other folk art tradition of India one can find such an individuality and reflection of the contemporary social system. In that sense Kalighat paintings were a tradition of exceptional art practice which was at the same time lively and plentiful. This is why the modern art practitioners have carried forward the expressive patterns of this tradition in developing a new art language.

2.2.1 Satirical Social Commentaries in the Kalighat Paintings

The 19th century Kolkata life flowed in two distinct courses. At one end were the foreigners and on the other were the natives. The Kalighat paintings portrayed the life of luxury and opulence of these two classes. The paintings

on the foreigners included the characters of their men and women, a foreigner on elephant back going to shoot a tiger, horse race etc. On the other hand the artists have also painted the concubines and the doting Bengali men who visited them, with bitter satire. Researcher Ashok Bhattacharya feels that the Kalighat painting is characterized not by its perspective but by its idealization of forms. This is why it is seen that the characters of deities or those of common men and women have been portrayed with a certain idealized sense of form (Plate 2.56). Doe eyes, bow shaped brows, short and wavy hair, obese figures- these are the marks of a standard good looking man for them. In case of women a plump figure and a sensuous body language was added. This standard about looks is typically Indian. However, this standardization was manifested among the indigenous community as well, as can be seen from the earthen dolls of Dakshin 24 Parganas. The dolls of Dakshin 24 Parganas replicating the rich Bengali man popularly called 'Babu' and the replication made by the Kalighat painters are strikingly similar. There is no denying of the fact that the idealized form of Kalighat style was recognized by the common Bengali people. As in the case of form composition, in the intention of creating the paintings too, the *Patuas* did not deviate from their traditional belief and purpose. Both the rural and the Kalighat painters stuck to their traditional sense of knowledge, education, happiness and virtue. They achieved virtue through the paintings of the deities while through the satirical presentation of the 'Babudom' they tried to give a lesson in morality. (Bhattacharya: 1994)

Writer Sumit Ghosh feels- 'the satirical paintings by the Kalighat Patuas is an astounding incident in Indian art.' (Ghosh: 2013). But this inclination towards satire and ridicule by the Kalighat artists was not abrupt. Ashok Mitra writes- 'from 1870 to 1900 and some years later the Kalighat paintings became the tool for social satire and ridicule in criticizing the Anglo-Bengali societal decadence.' (Mitra: 1956-96) What is amazing is the process by which the rural artists took up such an art language. Sumanta Bandopadhyay feels Kalighat painting is complimentary to Dinabandhu Mitra's satirical drama, Kaliprasanna Singha's social chronicle and Iswar Gupta's satirical poems. The concubines, and the sages assembled in rituals like Charak (A

traditional Hindu ritual), the characters that crowd the pages of *Hutum Pyachar Naksha* also find their place in the paintings. An oft portrayed motif in the paintings is the 'Babu' of Kolkata; he is a product of 19th century urban Kolkata. The character is conspicuous with its wavy hair, and is often seen wearing a *Dhoti* made of fine cloth with a black border, a stole, and black shoes with a broad bock lace. The character is seen either playing the *Veena*, or is on his way out for escapades, or is seen at the feet of a crying and naked lady. At times he is also seen drinking along with his ladylove. (Bandopadhyay: 2013)

What needs to be studied here is the reason for the character of *Babu* being transformed into a motif both in literature and art. Also interesting is the study to find out its relevance in the contemporary social reality. It is beyond doubt that the contemporary literature attempted to capture the existing social picture through this motif. And the artists tried to ridicule the contemporary society through the motif. Actually the moral decadence of the rich Bengali society was captured by the artists in their satirical portrayal of *Babu*. *Babu* Culture as it became known arose out of the social changes wrought amongst Kolkata's rising urban elite during their interaction with Western ideas and lifestyles. Kalighat *patuas* in the 1870s began to properly lampoon the Kolkata babu. The dandy, or smart fop, was an indicator of the city's nouveaux riches, characterized by fancy western style shoes, umbrella and bag, a pleated *dhoti*, a fashionable hair style and a youthful face. Another image in 'The Muskrats' Music party' depicts the Bengali proverb *Baire konchar patton bhitore chhunchor ketton*, i.e.(while he shows off his expensive pleated dhoti outside, at home musk rats move about at will) (Plate 2.57) and (Plate 2.44). While babu goes out elegantly dressed to meet his lover, his house goes to ruin, by the rats holding a party in his rooms, as shown through the window. (Sinha & Panda: 2011)

In a picture we can see a lady walking with a sheep (Plate 2.34) (Plate 2.52) and (Plate 2.73). The animal here symbolizes a henpecked husband. In the rural Indian society an uxorious husband is called a sheepish lover. The sheepish husband in the painting represents the contemporary *Babu* of Bengali urban society. To the outer world he is extremely powerful and enjoys

huge clout over the general mass but at home he is dominated and controlled his dictating wife. The theme of the painting is also said to be connected with Bengali wedding customs, specifically the phrase in which the bride groom is teased by his mother in law, who compares him to sheep on a rope. 'I have purchased you with cowries. I have tied you with a rope. I have put a spindle in your hand, now bleat like a sheep.' The subject matter is rooted in Bengali society. (Sinha & Panda: 2011) Researcher Jyotindra Jain writes on that matter, a different interpretation of the subject is one that is associated with a popular belief, that some women possessed a magical formula which enabled them to physically turn men into sheep, and back into men again. The woman would hold a rose to the man's nose and then draw the flower away afterwards. (Jain: 1999)

Researcher Sumit Ghosh has mentioned some aspects of the characters of Kalighat painting in his writings. For example he writes that the painters instead of being realistic about the measurements of human bodies and godly figures have religiously followed the process of clay idol (Plate 2.31) and (Plate 2.32).This is why the limbs and arms of the figures in paintings have a spherical dimension, they look rotund and plump, the contours of the mouth extends out of the borders of the face, and in drawing the bosoms the artists have given a look of complacency by making them look heavy. Another characteristic is that the *Patuas* knew the art of exaggeration. This very art is also the main element in western satirical art practice. Even in ancient Bengali literature there are vivid instances of exaggeration in humorous writings. In the painting referred above one can see an example of refined exaggeration. The lady has a flower bouquet in one hand while on the other she holds the end part of her *sari* with which her pet is also tied. The picture portrays the lady's joy at plucking flower with her pet animal in tow. This is an instance of measured or metrical exaggeration. (Ghosh: 2013)

One of the picture entitled 'The jackal Raja's court'(Plate 2.58) a witty illustration of the popular Bengali fables and proverbs *bans bane shial raja* where Jackal Raja is shown twice, first at top of the picture, seated on an Indian-divan style seat in lordly pose, surrounded by attendants holding his parasol and *hookah*. The second half of the painting shows, the Jackal Raja

seated in a western style chair, holding pen and paper, about to pronounce judgment on the two bound captives being held in front of him. The jailer that's holds them is also a Jackal, dressed in a western coat tails and top hat. The proverb signifies that a lesser person will claim self importance given the opportunity. (Sinha & Panda: 2011)

The moral depravity of the rich Bengali society was reflected by the Kalighat artists in their paintings. Not only were the less educated Bengali *Babus* and their sycophants the target of ridicule for the Kalighat painters, the religious persons belonging to their own community were also unabashedly derided in the paintings. The paintings entitled 'Fake Ascetic' with the images of fake sages, their rosaries, shaved heads with a black bird perched on them complete a picture of caustic humour and banter(Plate 2.55). Scandals in religious places must have been common in all times but with the introduction of the print media and the rise of several reform movements in the 19th century Bengal, religious imposters increasingly came under attack. This painting, assigned to the artist Nibaran Chandra Ghosh (1835-1930) ridicules a roly-poly *sadhu* with conspicuous pigtail and a bird perched on his head. (Jain: 1999)

The derision is all the more sharp in another painting entitled 'A cat with a prawn' (Plate 2.61) (Plate 2.62) (Plate 2.63) and (Plate 2.64). In it a cat with a sacred mark in its forehead and a rosary in its neck is looking up with a fish in his mouth. Religious hypocrisy, like the *babu* culture, was often mocked through the medium of *saang* shows and pantomime. This popular form of entertainment for the masses would have been a source of visual reference for the *patuas*, enabling them to translate the same themes into their work. The cat eating animals is an allusion to the false ascetic and hypocrite known as a *biral tapasvi*. The theme came to represent the falseness of certain Brahmin priests, whose religious orders forbade them from eating meat or fish, but who did so nonetheless. (Sinha & Panda: 2011)

Here researcher Bandopadhyay tries to draw a parallel with Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Buro Shaliker Ghar e Rnow*. He also quotes the lines from the contemporary poet and lyricist Antony Phiringi:

‘‘*Tomra poisa pele, hense khele*
Sadai koro kalo.
Tomader gonsai cheya ami boli
Koshai tobu bhalo.’’

(The lines talk about how money makes the people do anything and how the hangman is better than the fake saints.) The Kalighat paintings also depicted the contemporary incidents that created ripples in the society, those that were talked about at gatherings. There are a number of paintings on the subject of Shyama kantha’s fight with the tiger (Plate 2.67) and (Plate 2.50). We see in the painting entitled ‘A man wrestling a tiger’, artist draw a transparent social event of those days. Tigers were, and still are considered the most dangerous wild animals in Bengal. The Bengal government rewarded the hunters who caught them. The hunters became local celebrities and some became well known for their courage and skill. A wrestler named Shyama kantha Banerjee became famous for wrestling with tigers while performing in European style around Kolkata during the 1890s. He worked in circuses displaying his prowess in combating live, often untamed, tigers. He became a popular star in his lifetime and as such was glorified in Kalighat painting. The sheer social awareness and the vivid way of delineating them with severe derision and banter endeared the Kalighat paintings to the common people of that era. In addition to getting portraits of deities in economic prices the buyers also enjoyed the joy of visualizing a known image in humorous tone.

Researcher Bandopadhyay feels that the connection which the paintings created among general mass and the condemnation against the debauchery and decadence of the Bengali elite make the paintings a true chronicle of time that compliments the contemporary erudite art practice which ignored these paintings as lowly. Aberrations have also occurred in the paintings but that were mostly due to lack of education among the artists and their inability to judge new things in the light of reason and logic. It can be noticed that there is a tendency to oppose the western way of thinking in the Kalighat paintings. Many a time the message passed on through the paintings was- everything English is derogatory and is worth ridiculing. Researcher Bandopadhyay feels that, had the painters got the argumentative minds like

that of the educated mass their thinking and their perspective would have been much more transparent. (Bandopadhyay: 2013)

However it is unfair to analyze and judge the logical minds of Kalighat painters. What is worth discussing is the economic condition of the painters who came from a rural social setting. Art writer Ashok Mitra feels that the patrons of Kalighat paintings were not the East India Company or the elite section of the society. Their patrons were the common mass of the Bengali society where at one end there was *Behula Pata* and on the other was *Gazi Pata*. Either the idols of goddesses or the horses of *Pirs* (Muslim religious leader) or pictures of deities were the common elements of their paintings. This is why there was a deep link between the regular Bengali life and the art works of the *Patuas*. This link gave the artists their confidence, symbols and boldness. The paintings emerge as unceremonious, simple but self-sufficient, just like the life of a common Bengali person. Hence, in spite of being ignorant, lazy, superstitious and naïve, the art of the *Patua* community, being integral to the regular day to day living of the contemporary Bengali society, never deviated from being functional, measured and simple. However, lack of education, awareness and learning gradually limited their perspective, blunted their brush strokes, and their imageries became perverted, dull, and cracked. The origin of Kalighat painting is from earthen idols of gods and goddesses and dolls. The lines, shapes, design, and form- all have come from the patterns of the clay idols. Researcher Mitra even thinks that there is a similarity between the two in their coloring, shading, modeling and three dimensional appearances. (Mitra: 1956-96) And it can well be said that the form that Kalighat finally upheld was that of humour. In clay modeling we can see a deconstruction of normal shapes resulting in foreshortening. Same thing happened to the Kalighat paintings. In case of idol making we see that once the image of the idol is in place, the form and design take priority. In case of *Patachitra*, too the effort was to use loud colours dissonantly, which in their sheer crudity highlighted the real form and rhythm of the paintings. This gravity of thought and the tone of ridicule in their paintings were included by the artists much later. Immediately after coming and settling down in Kolkata the rural artists could never have conceived that such diversity could be

incorporated in their painting tradition. Actually they became more sharp and intelligent after they started living in the urban space of the city. Credit to the East India Company, Kolkata was then a modern city and Kalighat which was the safe haven for the gangsters and conmen was gradually becoming a seat of religious worshipping. Purchasing idols of Hindu gods and goddesses from Kalighat was considered sacrosanct at that time. This contributed in the thriving business of the *Patuas* who settled in and around the place and gave birth to a lucrative market for the *Patachitra*. The character of the paintings evolved along with the market demand. At that time people from different parts of Bengal and India congregated at Kalighat for pilgrimage. This increased the sale of *Pata* paintings. Many among the customers were fond of variety who wanted to buy something different. To woo away customers the painters started improvising their art. Sumit Ghosh writes in this connection: *Mangal Kabya* was predominant and vivid in the popular mindset of Bengal. The characters of *Shiva*, *Durga* and *Manasha* as are described in *Mangal Kabya* are extremely real life portrayals. Kalighat *Patachitra* painters too started painting the drunken Shiva, the poor family of *Durga* with *Ganesha* in her lap, *Kartik*'s dandyism etc. The body language of the *Babus* of Kolkata reminded the painters of Kartik. The youngsters from the families of rich village landlords came to Kolkata during this time and enjoyed a huge clout on the contemporary society. They were tagged with the middle class Bengali youth of Kolkata. All these social realities gave the *Patuas* the opportunity to paint the *Babus* with banter, humour and ridicule. (Ghosh: 2013)

Pertinently, the artists have painted a picture showing a *Babu* going for a night of revelry along with his concubine. The *Babu*'s feature has similarity with Kartik and he is shown wearing a *Dhoti* and a *Panjabi*. The *Babu* is followed by his wife. The dedicated wife is shown carrying the husband's stick in one hand and the bag of the concubine on the other. The message passed through this painting is that the wife's job is to obey the orders of the husband. From the literature of that period we come to know that the *Babus* used to get up after mid-noon, and then carried on with the ritual of *Ahnik* for two three hours (a Hindu ritual of worshipping the Sun god) and then he indulged in oil massage for another three-four hours. It was during this massage session that

he would take care of his estate, do the necessary paper work and after he finished his lunch, evening would set in. *Babu* used to spend the night at the concubine's place (Plate 2.29). The Kalighat paintings on the *Babu's* routine depict the contemporary social picture through satire and scorn. The paintings of mockery and derision were not only limited to the upper class but included people from various strata of life. Sumit Ghosh writes: 'the comic miniatures include with élan the Pundit of a temple, the facilitator there, the devout man and woman, businessmen, moneylenders and the negotiators. These characters are potential targets for ridicule. The *Patuas* have observed them from close quarters.' (Ghosh: 2013)

Researcher Sumanta Bandopadhyay has unveiled another quarter of Kalighat paintings, the obese nature of the leading female characters. This carries a funny connotation. Researcher Bandopadhyay feels that the ladies bear resemblance to the heavy and intimidating women figures in ancient Indian Sculpture. The insertion of plump and rotund limbs and arms in the male figures were directed at being ridiculous while the same drawing style in case of the female forms was intended towards ascribing beauty. The way of draping a *Sari* on the female lead is also note worthy (Plate 2.47). Keeping the white surface of the paper the unclothed parts of the female character were painted in red. After this the white portion was given the appearance of a *Sari*. At places black borders were made and with deft brush strokes folds were created in the *Sari*. The use of curve lines in Kalighat painting surprises us. It is difficult to find from the brush lines the exact spot from where the artist started his painting. The pattern of the lines got lost in the swift and deft brush movement. The conspicuous use of curve lines in Kalighat paintings is due to their penchant for chubby figures. The angles of the lines are largely obscure. Eventually this method became a formula. This is because in Kalighat painting there was definite rule for drawing figures and their limbs. In case of drawing a hand the artists first drew a round for the first and then maneuvered the shape by drawing five lines for fingers. In case of drawing women figures a black line was drawn over the bosom to give the effect of an *anchal* (the end part of a *sari*). In case of drawing the hair of a male figure there were distinct rules. The forehead was centrally parted into two halves and black colour was used to

mark the parts in a curved manner giving the effect of hair. Some more brush strokes were also given behind the ears to give the effect of wavy hair. (Bandopadhyay: 2013) This is how a simple and uncomplicated pattern developed, based on which the human figures emerged as dynamic and expressive (Plate 2.33). The Kalighat paintings in addition to satirizing the social reality also brought in a sense of comicality in their technique. It can well be said that it is this merger of the satirical theme and the comic drawing technique that makes Kalighat art unique in essence.

Other than this, another important point emerged from Kalighat Painting. It is the making of documentation by the artists. These paintings successfully chronicle the social reality of the contemporary period. The artists used to paint the important incidents that took place during their time and they took those paintings to the fairs where they got sold like hot cakes. The common mass took interest in these types of paintings. A case in instance is the incident of 1873. In the incident an illicit love affair between Madhab Chandra Giri, the *Mahanta* or chief of Tarakeswar Temple and *Elokeshi*, wife of a gentleman named Nabin Chandra's led to the murder of the latter at the hands of her husband. Madhab Giri and Nabin chandra were kept in jail custody (Plate 2.43). The news of this murder spread like bonfire all over the country. The Kalighat artists drew a number of paintings on this. The paintings were eagerly sought after by the common people. The painting entitled 'Elokeshi at the Tarakeshwar shrine' shows Mahanta Madhab Giri seated on a raised platform with one of his minions (Plate 2.53). To bring in a dramatic element in the picture *Elokeshi* is seen standing on the courtyard with her cantankerous aunt and a lady servant. *Elokeshi* is wrap in her romantic escapade; her body language exposes her frivolous nature. Researcher Sumit Ghosh feels that the target of ridicule is obscure in this painting. However, he again says that one tends to stop at a point while viewing the painting. Between Mahanta Madhab Giri and *Elokeshi* he/she can see the idol of the temple. The painting attempts to portray a frivolous act in front of the temple god. When seen in this light one understands the direction of the satire in the painting. (Ghosh: 2013) Another image entitled 'The Mahanta Offers the Child birth Medicine to Elokeshi'(Plate 2.68) , where *Elokeshi* with a view to

drugging or intoxicating her before committing rape, occurs in several plays written/staged on the theme and therefore its depiction in the paintings opens up the possibility of some influence from theatrical imagery on the paintings relating to the Tarakeshwar affair.(jain:1999)

Many paintings were made by the Kalighat artists on the Tarakeshwar affair. Among them the Mahanta of Tarakeshwar rides out on the elephant, The *Mahanta* and *Elokeshi* share a *hookah* and *paan*, *Elokeshi*'s confession to Nabin, *Elokeshi* falls at Nabin's feet, The fatal blow, after the Murder, Mahanta is arrested by the prison governor, The Mahanta is accused before the judge, The Mahanta turns an oil press, The Mahanta works as a prison gardener are the popular ones (Plate 2.42) (Plate 2.45) (Plate 2.49) (Plate 2.68). The paintings are based on a contemporary incident with a satirical approach which also criticizes the society. This was the unique element of Kalighat paintings. Kalighat were not just the product of a particular era, but they held up a mirror to the times (Plate 2.69) (Plate 2.71) (Plate 2.70) (Plate 2.37) (Plate 2.38) (Plate 2.39) and (Plate 2.40). The satirical representation of the socio-cultural set up of nineteenth century Bengal makes an acute visual statement. The most appealing aspects of the style of Kalighat painting are the wonderful gestures, flawless rhythmic strokes and quality of brush work. The technique is quite simple, but the final outcome is bold and extremely attractive. Kalighat paintings were appreciated and remained popular because of their strong social content. In many cases, they reflected the sentiments of the lower socio-economic classes of the times. (Sinha & Panda: 2011) It can be said that the guts that the painters showed in painting on the themes based on contemporary social reality that too in a caricature style was quite path-breaking and revolutionary. How the rural painters conceived such an idea is something strange to understand. In no other Indian folk painting tradition this style is noticed.

2.3 BATTALA PRINTS AND ITS SATIRICAL APPROACHES

Nationalistic thinking in art practice started in last half of 19th century with the popularity of wood-cut prints in Chitpur area of Kolkata. Earlier there used to be only the Kalighat *Pata* with jingoistic consciousness. Though

mostly gods and goddesses were painted in the art, motifs ridiculing the contemporary society were also drawn to make them interesting for the British. This period of improvising Kalighat Painting can be marked as the beginning of satiric art in India. Chitpur was then the cultural nucleus of Kolkata. The ironsmiths and goldsmiths of Garanhata in North Kolkata were then engaged in making subtly designed wood-cut paintings. These painting are still found in the old almanacs. (Lahiri: 1995) The pictures never carried the signature of an artist. There was another striking feature of these painting about which Subhendu Dasmunshi has written. With time the artists unwittingly painted characters belonging to colonized India in the paintings hitherto dominated by mythological characters. It was found that while painting 'Kailashpuri', the artist has drawn a palace with its top in Gothic architectural pattern at the corner of the page, and made huge columns as is the norm in Victorian architecture. Soon in the paintings *Sepoy* or police wearing British uniform found place at the doors of houses holding *Jagadhatri Puja*. The most awe-striking experiment was the one by artist Nrityalal Dutta in his painting, 'Draupadi's Bastraharan'(Plate 2.17) . Here the offender Dushashan is portrayed as wearing gumboots and sporting a different kind of attire which has a close resemblance with the rulers of the then India. What can this are called? Re-writing of the *Puranas* or a distinguished style of satirical painting by Bengali artists in earlier times? (Biswas &Acharya: 2013)

Again from the writings of Biswadeb Gangopadhyay we come to know that though initially the Battala paintings and books became quite popular with the art and literature patrons, with the advent of modern publishing technology they lost relevance easily due to their lack of sophistication and smartness. But at one point of time the Bengali households were incomplete without these *Bat-tala* books with wood-cut prints in them. Not only in Bengal, if one aims to write the publishing history of India, mentioning the name of Panchanan Karmakar becomes indispensable. With the support and patronage of the missionaries, Panchanan first made the Bengali alphabet from a wooden block. The Bengali typing foundry formed by him in 1798, was the first typing foundry not only in Bengal but also in India. At that time the printing machine was wooden which was frail and used to make more sound

than that of a moving horse carriage, while working. The books were printed in handmade dull papers. According to Reverend James Long there were four press owned by the natives in Kolkata. In 1818 the first printing press of Battala category was established by Biswanath Deb who used to publish porn literature initially. But eventually the contemporary publishers started printing mythological books and religious texts like *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, *Prahlad Charit*, *Krittibashi Ramayana*, Kashiram Das' *Mahabharata*, and different folk lore or theatre scripts. At the same time the French company published Bharat chandra's *Annadamangal*, the first *Bat-tala* literature with pictures. Pictures were not painted in the *Bat-tala* books, rather developed. The carving artists used to draw the pictures on wood and then transform them into blocks with their deft hands (Plate 2.25) and (Plate 2.28). Pictures made by those nameless and fameless poor artists have found place in the pages of the first book by Paricharan Sarkar and in the famous *Barna Porichoy* by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Many researchers were awestruck by the artistry of the paintings on wooden blocks by Panchanan Sarkar's talented student Manohar Mishtri and his son Krishna Mishtri. Binay Ghosh has referred to these artists in his book named, 'Kalo Pnachar Naksha'.

The *Bat-tala* print had successfully advanced the satirical art practice of Bengal. These printing houses have published many satirical pieces in addition to those based on gods, goddesses, animals etc. In this connection one must make special mention to the pictures printed in the almanacs at that time (Plate 2.19). Those pictures were mostly printed along with the advertisements. The pictures like a body builder lifting an elephant or fighting with a lion after having the 'Mahashakti Salsa' (a potion that builds strength), or a bald headed man getting back his hair after applying a certain brand of oil, or that of a huge cabbage or turnip grown after using a special kind of manure, have been the source of fun and amusement for people of that era. (Gangopadhyay: 1420) The potential of these pictures made in the 19th century to amuse and humor us even today is really surprising. Many of the modern and contemporary artists have been influenced by the *Bat-tala* print. Mrinal Ghosh has also written that during the 60s and 80s of the 19th century which was the time of Kalighat painting, another school of painting was

practiced in North Kolkata. This is better known as the 19th century wood-cut painting or *Bat-tala* painting. The pictures had a combination of the folk and urban style of painting. Both from the subject and perspective this style of painting has similarity with Kalighat paintings. The advent of this style has close connection with the introduction of printing press. In this style one can make many copies of a picture by first drawing it on a wooden block and then taking its impression as many times as one wants. The pictures were mostly in mono-coloured drawn in black and white (Plate 2.13) and (Plate 2.25). At times colors were applied over the primary black and white picture. Kalighat paintings bear the testimony of a technical and aesthetic excellence and balance. On the other hand the wood-cut paintings were rather unrefined in taste and outlook. Though a number of European elements got included in these paintings they failed to assimilate with the traditional style. The wood carving process was also much under-developed and the artists were not very skillful in using the technology. This is why the subjects of these paintings were mostly simple ones and nothing grave and serious could be portrayed in them. However, the picture of contemporary Kolkata has been sarcastically and absurdly reflected through the paintings of this style. (Ghosh: 2003) Writer Ghosh also feels that the picture that emerges through these paintings is only the outer reality of contemporary Kolkata. They fail to capture the deeper truth of the society as is done by the Kalighat paintings, because of their flat style of drawing. (Ghosh: 2003). In another article Ghosh has written, during 1860 and 1870 another style of wood-cut painting evolved in the *Bat-tala* area of Kolkata along with the Kalighat painting. Printing press started coming up in the Shovabazar, Darjitola, Ahiritola, Goranhata, Simulai, Bagbazar areas of north Kolkata from 1830. Many printing artisans got attached with these printing presses. They used to carve wood to make blocks for pictures. They also made several impressions of the picture from the blocks. The wood carving paintings of *Bat-tala* is recognized as an individual style of painting. As these paintings were very economical, they got sold easily that those of Kalighat traditions. Eventually the *Bat-tala* style outdid the Kalighat paintings at one point of time. Though the Battala paintings at times created the impression of weight and volume most of them were two-dimensional, ornamented, and made on a single plane. However, the *Bat-tala*

paintings get a distinguished feature by blending the folk style with urban perspective. This has significance in the pre-modern art practice. (Ghosh: 2003)

Although the *Bat-tala* art is mostly printed, it has its unique significance as per stylization is concerned. Ashok Bhattacharya says, the wood-cut print has immense importance in making the art of painting popular among the people of Kolkata. Thomas and William Daniel published their book named 'Twelve Views of Calcutta' (1766-88) from the city of Calcutta towards the end of eighteenth century. From then on both books and paintings started getting printed from the city. The Bengali artisans learnt the technique of engraving from their British colleagues at these printing presses. The name of the first Bengali engraver that has been traced is that of Ramchandra Roy. Published by Gangakishor Bhattacharya, 'Annadamangal' a book by Bharat chandra Roy carrying engraved pictures by Ramchandra Roy was the first book to have a series of engraved pictures in it in 1816. Two years later the book named 'Sangeet Taranga' which contained pictures etched out from metal plates was published. The book has illustrations of different *Raagas* done by engraving artist Madhabchandra Das. From the second half of 19th century the area named Sutanati, popularly known as *Bat-tala*, became the hub of Calcutta's wood-cut printing with active patronage and encouragement of the local people residing there. The contribution of *Bat-tala* located in the Chitpur-Garanhata area of North Kolkata is indispensable in the printing history of Bengal. The printers of *Bat-tala* were successful in popularizing the tradition of mass education in mother tongue by printing low cost books for common people which included picture books on religious texts, epics like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Puranas*, Bengali *Mangal Kabya* written in the middle ages, and classics based on religious reformer Sri Chaitanya, books catering to the taste of 19th century mindset like *Panchali Gaan*, stories, novels, together with children's book like *Sishu Path*, *Barna Porichoy*, *Dharapat* et al. To make the books popular among the general mass the printers used pictures in the books. The pictures were made mostly by engraving them on wood or metal blocks or plates. The *Bat-tala* printing tradition has been successful in entertaining the Bengali readers from the middle of 19th century to the early

years of the 20th century. The engraving work for making pictures was not only done by the artists employed in the printing presses but also by many who got trained at the Govt. Art College. The shift in perspective in the art of painting especially from the Kalighat style towards a more real and academic one can be traced in the paintings published by *Bat-tala* prints. (Bhattacharya: 1991)

It can be said that the wood-cut print of *Bat-tala* was influenced by Kalighat paintings. Writer Sripantha is of the opinion that Kalighat paintings do not belong to a particular period but reflects the contemporary time frame. A parallel of this can be found in the *Bat-tala* literature. The time period depicted in the literature has been painted by the Kalighat painters. Same is true with the wood carving of *Bat-tala*. From the perspective of printing it belongs to a very primitive period in the history of printing but from aesthetic aspects it is very close to the Kalighat paintings. In other words *Bat-tala* wood-cut paintings are a variation of Kalighat art. Primarily the same thing has been presented in different ways to the common people from the two directions. (Sripantha: 2013) Researcher Sukumar Sen has opined regarding the direct link between Kalighat and wood-cut paintings. He says, “It can be said that there is no direct link in the origin of wood-cut painting with that of Kalighat ones as the tradition of the former has originated directly from rural Pat and *Chal-chitra*.” (Sen: 1989) He also says that there perhaps is a relation in the sense that Kalighat Pat which is the age old tradition of the *Patuas*, has indirectly influenced the painting. (Sen: 1989). However, there is no denying the fact that both traditions enriched each other. The Kalighat painterly gestures and the *Bat-tala* literary gestures have been mutually enriched.

The *Bat-tala* reliefs may be divided thematically into five categories- iconic representations of *pauranic* divinities, mythological pictures of *pauranic* (Plate 2.21) and syncretic divinities in action, the social pictures, the narrative scenes based on memories of stage productions and finally, the visuals of advertisements. The first category is by far the largest and includes both book illustrations and a large number of single-sheet display prints. These include among others, images of Parvati in her many manifestations, Vishnu's *Dasavatara* (Plate 2.26), the Hindu Trinity, the legends of *Ganga*,

and even, very occasionally, unusual representations of Christian icons such as the Infant Jesus. The second category of mythological pictures is comprised of narratives based on episodes from the epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.The Krishna legends from the *Bhagvatpurana*, the *Devipurana*, the *Kalikapurana,* the *Chandi* and the *Chandimangal* provided the most popular subjects for illustration. The myths concerning Shiva, particularly from the *Shivayana*, were also popular. Other popular subjects of illustration were stories from the *Annadamangal*, the medieval Bengali ballads and the *Durga* legend. The third group of social pictures deals with contemporary social life. They are often satirical comments in a narrative vein on the *babu* and *bibi* culture of the time or visual reports of contemporary social scandals and occurrences such as the *Elokeshi* and *Mahanta* prints (Plate 2.15) and (Plate 2.16). Some are simply straightforward descriptions of contemporary rituals and practices without sarcasm or comment. Others are representative of the mounting friction between the colonial rulers and the native population. Yet others, such as the sophisticated print of a *Hand holding tiger prawns* are subtle comments on the eccentricities and opulent lifestyles of the middle class Bengali. The fourth category of prints came into vogue in the latter half of the 19th century and, in all faithfulness to the theme represented, they are highly dramatic. They represent the academic style of the Art School products which had by now entered the fray of commercial printing activity in Bengal. So the last category of prints which comprise some of the earliest illustrations in advertising. Thematically, particularly in the aforementioned third, fourth and last categories, there was a fair degree of Europeanism visible in the conception of indigenous themes. The influence of the rural pat tradition of Bengal, however, remained much stronger other than in the stage narratives and the advertisement visuals. (Sengupta: 16.2.15)

Writer Sripantha has segregated the Kalighat Pats into different subjects. One such division is satirical paintings. Influenced by foreign art style, the rural painters made caricatures of city-dwelling dandies, criticizing and deriding them strongly in the pictures. The *Pats* have also ridiculed the fake religious *Gurus* and tricksters. As already stated Kalighat paintings do

not belong to a particular period but reflects the contemporary time frame. A parallel of this can be found in the *Bat-tala* literature. While seeing the *Pats* one is repeatedly reminded of books like 'Hutum Pnyachar Naksha', 'Alaler Gharer Dulal', 'Nababubur Bilash', 'Apnar Mukh Apni dekho', etc. They will also remind one about many more publications from *Bat-tala*. While the *Bat-tala* books tried to capture the contemporary society in their writings the Kalighat *Pats* have tried to do the same with colours and brush strokes. (Sripantha: 2013). Subhendu Dasmunshi believes that by *Bat-tala* print we are immediately reminded of different style due to the unique techniques of drawing. *Bat-tala* pictures were created from Kalighat paintings, coupled with an influence of western art perspective and black lining. Researcher Dasmunshi feels that we can see four types of *Bat-tala* paintings. In the first part there are the pictures of Annadamangal, the second part too contains the same wood-cut prints, in the third part there are the pictures made on the blocks made abroad and in the fourth part there are the coloured pictures and half-tone prints. (Biswas & Acharya: 2013)

The title of a picture in Sukumar Sen's book is 'Gajakacchap o Garur'(Plate 2.14) . Sukumar Sen has written that the wood-cut engraving is done in *Patua* style by Nafarchand Banerjee. The painting is both humorous and funny. One can see caricature drawing in the way the beak and body of the bird have been drawn. Similarly, the painter has engraved the elephant and the tortoise in a hilarious way. In tracing the origin of the satirical art of Bengal and Kolkata this picture plays a vital role.

Another picture in the same book is named 'Delhi Tey Bhuter Upadrab' (Delhi Bugged by Ghosts). The artist has created a wonderful ambience in the entire picture. The picture portrays a girl who has swooned after seeing a ghost and her family members are providing her with treatments. At a distance, a couple of skeletons are seen dancing behind a pillar. The image is extremely humorous and shows how spirited the art practice of Bengal was in the 19th century. There is another copy of this wood carving piece. Sukumar Sen writes, "In the book series of Bharat Chandra there is a print depicting the troubles created by ghosts in Delhi. The artist of this version of picture is

Nafarchand Bannerjee (NLD). Another print of this is also found in Biswambhar Laha's edition of the same image (1283)." (Sen: 1989)

Another wood-carving piece mentioned in Sukumar Sen's book is named, '*Janganama-Ghora Khetur O Hanifa*'. (Sen: 1989) The name of the artist is not available but the picture is extremely humorous. The bird in the picture is portrayed as a huge creature which amuses the spectators thoroughly by its size.

Yet another image in Sukumar Sen's book is made entirely in Kalighat style. The name of the picture is 'Lajjatnechha'. (Sen: 1989) The picture is about the rich Babus/gentry of the city and their concubines. Similar humour and satire is noticed in this wood-carve as is found in Kalighat Paintings.

It can be said that Kalighat Pats have not only influenced the wood-carve painters indirectly but also directly in their selection of subjects, and artistic imagination. The influence of Kalighat style can be seen in many of the *Bat-tala* prints which mostly include those with motifs of birds, cats, prawns, green gourds, steamers, dancing duets and also those related to the subject 'Mahanta Elokeshi'. The pictures on *Bhai Phonta* (Plate 2.24), a Hindu ritual, published by *Bat-tala* are also influenced by Kalighat Style. The Kalighat painting titled, 'Ghor Koli' (Plate 2.20), depicts a wife riding on the shoulders of her husband while the mother in law is lagging behind with burden on head and rope tied to her neck. Another image is named after an age old Bengali adage, 'Baire konchar patton bhitore chhunchor ketton'. It portrays a Bengali man dressed up like a dandy to fool the world about his wealth while in reality his financial conditions are extremely poor. Kalighat *Pat* has thoroughly ridiculed these newly rich sections of Bengali society. Same is true with *Bat-tala* wood-carve too. The image of a cat with a lobster in its mouth is also a satirical picture. The sacred mark painted in the cat's forehead is symbolic of the fake saints and preachers in the society. This satirical presentation of the social truths is common in both Kalighat and *Bat-tala* print styles.

On the other side 'Elokeshi-Mahanto' is based on a contemporary issue. The Kalighat painters have made a number of paintings based on this. At the same time *Bat-tala* too has printed numerous pictures on this issue.

Both the styles point out the tendency of artists to ridicule the social truths. (Sripantha: 2013). Writer and researcher Sripantha feels that the city of Kolkata has been beautifully depicted in the wood-carving. The artists have created different imageries while creating and carving the background. The images include that of Doric Ionian Roman architecture, lion and unicorn on top of the buildings, chandeliers, gas lamps etc. The coloured wood-carving by artists Nrityalal Dutta entitled 'Circus' is replete with satire and ridicule (Plate 2.27). The woman in the picture is portrayed as participating in a game, and is made to look courageous, decent and beautiful, one who can fight with tigers and lions, bare-handedly. The image shows the lion with a royal crown. The wood-carved lion is symbolic of British lion. (Sripantha: 2013) The artist has tried to portray the disparate battle between the British Raj and the 19th century Bengali women. The satirical approach of the entire piece creates fun in the spectators mind.

Another coloured wood-carving mentioned by Sripantha in his book is named, 'Chingri Mach, Songe Lau O Anyo Mach' (prawn with green gourd and other fish) (Plate 2.24). The title itself is extremely humorous. Lau-chingri (green gourd and with prawn) is a popular Bengali dish. What is funny in the picture is that the hand holding the food is clad in a coat which is foreign made. Sripantha is of the opinion that the incidents that created ripple in the general mind of the people of that era have found their place in *Bat-tala* prints. These works are called Urban Folk Art. Both the literature and paintings printed by *Bat-tala* press can be called popular literature/art. It is a common art meant for the common people. (Sripantha: 2013) Another colourful wood-cut is worth mentioning here. The title of the piece is '*Mach Jawl-e Snatar Katche, Pashe Fyatna*' (Plate 2.23). The entire piece creates humour for the onlookers and presents the contemporary social reality in a comical scale.

Social references have often been portrayed in *Bat-tala* art and the tendency to ridicule those references is also very common (Plate 2.22). But in spite of that the wood-carve painting style of Kolkata did not last long. Its duration was limited. Researcher Sripantha thinks that the life of wood-carve style is short in comparison to that of Kalighat, as the latter is deep-rooted in time and is elementary in style. On the other hand *Bat-tala* art is just an

imitation on Kalighat or Rajasthan. However it is not without fun and energy. What is most interesting about *Bat-tala* prints is that the artists portray their thoughts in simple strokes. It is because of this that *Bat-tala* art in its raw, robust and vividly humourous form steals the heart of its spectators. So it can well be said that as the expression of satire and humour is Bengali art was being revealed in *Bat-tala* art the day to day incidents were also making its place in it. Hence, there is no denying the fact that the importance of *Bat-tala* art is colossal in the history of Bengal's art practice. But the satirical angle of this art gives it a completely different dimension. This is why the *Bat-tala* art with its unique and individual features makes the art practice of Bengal as well as India during pre-modern period, a great deal more important. The potential of these pictures made in the 19th century to amuse and humor us even today is really surprising. Many of the modern and contemporary artists have been influenced by the *Bat-tala* print.

2.3.1 Basantak (A Collection of Bengali Cartoon Journals)

'Basantak' is the first journal on satirical art. The role of Basantak as a publication on caricature art can be compared to that of a milestone. Not only did it find its way in the pages of contemporary media but also successfully parodied the prevalent socio-political conditions of the contemporary 19th century society. Basantak was published in January, 1974 by Prananath Dutta (1840-1888). Though Prananath Dutta started Basantak, his name did not appear as the editor or the publisher. The layout used to read, 'designed with a sophisticated machine by Sri. Chandrakumar Mukhopadhyay of 336 Chitpur Road and published by Sri. Hari Sinha.' What is interesting is that Hari Sinha was Prananath's servant who used to clean his toilet. The annual subscription fee of the publication was rupees three and six *anas*. Prananath Dutta was a meritorious student of Hindu College, an author and a painter. In his later life he joined the 'School of Industrial Art' as a student. The institution provided lessons in architecture, design, metal sculpting in addition to painting. As a student of that school, Prananath acquired all the above mentioned skills. During his days at the 'School of Industrial Art', his classmate was Annadaprasad Bagchi, who later gained fame as a painter. (Gangopadhyay: 1420)

In this context it is important to remember that it was at the initiative of ‘Shilpobidyotsahini Sabha’ that the ‘Society for the Promotion of Industrial Art’ was first established. This society worked towards the establishment of the Calcutta School of Industrial Art, which later became the Government Art College. While for the position of teacher, a famous engraver named T.F.Fouler was brought in from Europe. (Ghosh: 1988)

According to linguist, Sukumar Sen, the founder of Basantak is Girindrakumar Dutta. Girindra was an active partner of Prananath and both were from Haatkhola. (Gangopadhyay: 1420)

From the data available to us, it can be said that among the publications of Eastern India, *Amritabazar* was the first to publish satirical art. (28 February, 1872). But it was very irregular in doing so. The main problem then was to make the wooden blocks, required to publish the pictures. However, the Dutta brothers came forward to compete with the Englishmen in publishing satirical art. It was at this time that Prananath and Girindranath Dutta published ‘Basantak’. ‘Basantak’ has published satirical art that tersely scathed the contemporary (1874) political and administrative authorities (Plate 2.3).

The Missionaries of Sreerampore contributed a lot in making wooden blocks popular among the countrymen. They not only taught the art of making papers, but one of the missionaries, Mr. Wilkinson, also shared the knowledge of making wooden alphabets with Panchanan Karmakar. When efforts were being taken in our country to carve wood in order to make wooden blocks, beautiful blocks etched out in copper plates, have already been made in England and Germany. In Europe the artist himself produced the print of his painting by etching it out of copper plate and sent it to the media for publishing. The situation was different here as those who carved the wood were artisans and not artists. However, with the development in engraving, pictures started being made from wood carving in no time.

Family relationship was established with the Shisir Kumar Ghosh of *Amritabazar Patrika* and the publisher of Basantak, Girindrakumar Dutta. During their friendship the Dutta brothers of Basantak gifted many wooden

blocks to *Amritabazar Patrika*. The blocks contained many satirical pieces on modern society. Basantak was published in 1874 while under the pressure of Vernacular Press Act *Amritabazar Patrika* changed from Bengali to English around 1878. Due to this many of the pictures got re-published in *Amritabazar Patrika*. (Lahiri: 1995). Some are of the opinion that the publication was brought out to strengthen the Municipal Movement, as some caricature pictures portraying the Calcutta Municipality was published in Basantak. In addition to caricature pictures, Basantak also published parodies in poetry and plays. It is important to understand the character of the time period when Basantak got published. It was the time when Queen Victoria had just taken charge of ruling India on her own hands. Due to the proliferation of rail roads during that time, the capital city of Calcutta was gradually becoming the hub of India. English Medium education was also getting popularized all over the country at that time. Though the Indian National Congress has not been found till then, in the minds of some people were getting liberated from narrow regional boundaries. It was the time when the middle class in Bengal were trying to think big. Though it was not a time of full bloomed revolt, sporadic instances of intolerance were also taking place here and there. The play named 'Neeldarpan' by the new found National Theatre from *Chitpur*, was creating ripples in the city. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay was then busy in publishing his famous book Bangadarshan, which according to Tagore, '*bangalir hridoy luth koria loilo*' (stole the hearts of the Bengalis). It was at this moment that a new kind of national publication was published to deride the British and British sympathizing Indians. However, as satirical art or caricature was foreign in origin, the common mass was not much concerned about it being published. However, the fact that it is possible to ridicule the behavior of their countrymen and also that a complete publication can be brought out to do so, was an experience of its kind for the people of the country. First to come forward in the endeavor was the *Jaminder* brothers of *Haatkhola*- Prananath and Girindranath. This is how Basantak was published. (Ghosh: 2013)

The tradition of documenting art was never there in our country. However, it is known that though most of the caricatures published in

Basantak were made by Girindranath, quite a few of them were also sketched by Prananath also(Plate 2.1) (Plate 2.2) (Plate 2.10) and (Plate 2.11). Another artist who also contributed to the publication was Gopal Chandra Dutta, the nephew of Parananath. Girindranath was very much culturally blessed. Sukumar Sen, in his book "Bangla Sahityer Itihash (vol. 2)" (History of Bengali Literature) said, "The three plays named 'Madhab Mohini' (1873), 'Chandrarohini (1875), and 'Hiralal' (1877)' were written by one Gajapati Roy. The real name of the writer was Girindra Kumar Dutta (1841-1909). Following the English publication named 'Punch', he published Basantak. Girindranath could paint. There are instances of line drawings by him in 'Alaler Ghore Dulal' and also in Basantak. He has also painted some colour paintings for the publication of books like 'Tilottama Sambhab', 'Meghnadbadh', and 'Birangana', which were then being re-published along with pictures. He also wrote a book on the art of painting and a musical drama on *Brajaleela*. However, these were never published." (Gangopadhyay: 1420) In this context, Sumit Ghosh has written, "Both the brothers were deft in the art of painting. But the elder brother, Prananath was more inclined to literature. He has left his mark He has left his mark in translating plays and in writing other romantic writings. Girindra nath on the other hand, was a painter of high acumen, though he failed to make a permanent place in the history of fine arts. But the art lovers of Bengal can recall his strong penchant for painting. He had organized a movement in order to popularize art among common people. He was also involved in the municipal politics. It can be said that he got disillusioned eventually and moved away from fine arts to take up caricature as his tool of protest against the administration." (Ghosh: 2013)

On the other hand Prana Nath Dutta, though a skilled writer, also excelled painter. He was also a resourceful person. He was the owner of an iron factory in Salkia of Howrah and a silk cottage at Radhabazar. Besides, he also exported Indian goods in European market. In addition to this he regularly contributed to Indian publications like, 'Rahashya Sandarbha', 'Bibidhartha Sangraha', 'Bharati, 'Tattabodhini' et al. he too participated in municipal elections and won the same. Prana nath and Girindra are also known for their initiative in publishing the royal edition of collection of works by

Michael Madhusudan Dutta. On the cover of this edition Girindra painted a beautiful imagery- A drunken person wearing western outfit has slept off resting his head on a table, while Goddess Saraswati, the deity of learning, is providing her with divine light. Other than 'Alaler Ghare Dulal', he also made a series of drawings on another significant book named 'Bongadeep Porajoy', written by Pratap Chandra Ghosh. (Gangopadhyay: 1420)

The importance of the satirical art produced through wooden blocks and published in Basantak is still relevant. Other than its importance as a Bengali journal, it also pioneered the path of ridiculing the society through art in contemporary India. In the west caricature was in vogue for long but in India and in Kolkata, not only was it a new concept but a bold one at that. The contents of Basantak included criticizing the immoral acts of the British Raj, upholding the inequality prevalent in the society and deriding the unjust ways of distinguished people of the society. Among the notable picture were- *Kolkatar Boraho Avatar*, *Chatar natun Byabahar*, *Municipal Bhojbaji*, *Bhot bhikkha*, *Porer Dhon-e Dhobar Naat*, *Kolkatar Barodin* etc. Sukumar Sen has written, "The satirical picture of Basantak is very poignant. The distinguished Bengali leaders and British administrators were portrayed through their attire and body language. For example the character of Krishnadas Pal was made by making the skin color dark like that of a servant while a mike was attached to the ear of a character to make it replicate Rajendralal Mitra." The skin color of Krishnadas Pal was extremely dark and he was the general secretary of British Indian committee. In many cases Krishnadas used to raise questions in favor of the Government rather than on behalf of his fellow people. To ridicule him, Basantak published a painting of him where he was portrayed as the pet dog of Richard Temple, the Government Secretary. The dog has a dark skin color in the picture (Plate 2.7). What is interesting is that Krishnadas was a dear friend of the publisher of Basantak, Prananath Dutta and their friendship was unaffected even after the picture got published. Seeing the picture, Krishnadas jokingly told his friend, "Hey you! Have you put all the ink of your ink pot on me?" (Gangopadhyay: 1420) One of the picture published in Basantak was named, 'The Bull and the Frog' (Plate 2.4). The picture portrays a bull grazing at the side of a pond. An old frog is seen in the pond who is

saying to his friends, “Look I put so much venom on him, but still nothing has happened. Friends! Let me get puffed up to his size…….” At this a fellow small frog says, “A little more, a little more and you are done”. (Lahiri: *Year and Date missing*) The bull in the picture is portraying the character of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar while the old frog is replicating Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Basantak ridiculed Bankimchandra as a ‘Frog Living in a Well’ which means one with a narrow mind and limited exposure, for not supporting Vidyasagar in his movement to stop polygamy.

Another picture was named, ‘Ashlilata Nibaroni Sabha Kortik Kalipuja’ (The worship of Goddess Kali by the society against obscenity) (Plate 2.8). Here Goddess Kali is shown wearing a sari and carrying a ladies bag, instead of flowing hairs as is the tradition, her hairs are tied in a bun. Even the most striking feature of the goddess, i.e. her tongue sticking out from her mouth is missing in the picture. This mockery of the Hindu deity at that time of history is rather unthinkable! The sober Bengali society is replete with arguments and counter views regarding the image of Goddess Kali. The main point of argument is the very possibility of such a blood thirsty goddess sporting a garland of skulls becoming the worshipping idol of such a modest community. Even Rabindranath Tagore has criticized the goddess’s image. (Ghosh: 2013) However, doing it by making a caricature of the goddess one hundred and forty years ago was not easy task.

Yet another picture was named, ‘Mosha Marite Kaman’ (shooting the canon to kill mosquito) (Plate 2.5). The content of the image criticized the Government’s passing of the Dramatic Performance Act to stop staging public plays as a measure against the performances of anti British plays. Plays like ‘Neel Darpan’ and many such were being staged at that time which raised voices against the British Raj. The Government got perturbed by it and passed the act to stop all public performances of plays. The picture depicts a small building which resembles the office of National Theatre and a mosquito is shown sitting at the top of the house. The mosquito is actually the producer of the theatre team. The British officer Northbrook is present there to shoot the canon aimed at the mosquito. He is the one who was going to pass the Dramatic Performance Act. At his side is his junior officer who has his hands

in his ear. He is apprehensive as he knows that the Bengali society will not accept the act and he will be the one who will have to handle all the turmoil. (Lahiri: *Year and Date missing*) The ambience created in the image along with the dramatic moment is extremely amusing. The picture showed how a caricature of the society can be a potential tool for criticizing it.

Another image was named, 'Kolikatar Boraho Avataar'. (Lahiri: *Year and Date missing*) (Plate 2.9The image portrays Mr. Hog as 'Boraho' (One of the nine incarnations according to Hindu mythology). The tramways, drainage, bazaar and tax system of Calcutta is placed on his two teeth in the picture. He is carrying *Sankha* (conch), *Chakra* (wheel), *Gada* (weapon), *Padma* (Lotus) as is carried by the *Boraho* incarnation in his four hands; here the four things represent the police force. Surrounding him are the sycophants and the British officers. The common people of Calcutta are seen trampled under his feet. The image is a scathing representation of the contemporary society through caricature.

Another image has the title- 'A peep show for a sovereign.Only for a sovereign' (Plate 2.6). Below that is written in Bengali 'Finally the Hindu girl comes out in public. (Lahiri: *Year and Date missing*). Biswadeb Gangopadhyay has written in his description of this picture, "When Prince VII came to India in 1875, Jagadananda Mukhopadhyay, the government lawyer of Calcutta High Court invited him in his house and the prince honored it. As the prince visited his house the women members of his family greeted him by blowing the conch and by following other traditions of greeting a guest as was prevalent during those days. Many criticized this act by Jagadananda as a way to woo the British for gaining professional favors, more so as his family was extremely conservative and was against the education of women. The women members of his family never came out in public before that incident." Hemchandra wrote the famous poem 'Bajimaat' on this incident and a satirical image was published in Basantak on it. (Gangopadhyay: Bengali 1420)

Describing this picture, Sumit Ghosh has written, "We get some supple description of gossip in Kaliprasanna Sinha's 'Hutum Pnachar Naksha'. Queen Victoria's son, The Prince of Wales, was then in his India visit. The

prince got tired seeing the veiled women of the country. He wanted to be face to face with the Indian dames- it was his royal wish. The British officials in India were in a fix hearing the prince's wish. But it was not the dark Middle Ages and the white skinned British were considered as divine incarnations. Hence, the wish of his highness did get realized. The wife of *Ray Bahadur* Jagadananda Mukhopadhyay came forward to fulfill it. The picture published in Basantak portrays the prince on the left. And at the right is the *Ray Bahadur* himself. He is shown in the posture of unveiling the peep show and is depicted as a peddler. The wife of *Ray Bahadur* is shown looking at the prince by putting aside her veil. The prince too is leaning towards her with amorous eyes. His right hand is in his pocket, possibly in a gesture to reward the lady for the favor. The image expresses deep satire. It is one of the best pieces published in Basantak. The painting launched a serious attack on the Babu culture of the then Bengali society and the satirical poem written on the same incident by Hemchandra Bandopadhyay named, 'Bajimaat', created ripples in the society. The practice of ridiculing Ray Bahadur Jagadananda was in vogue for a long time after that in the Bengali society. " (Ghosh: 2013)

Whatever was discussed, debated or carried political connotations, became the subject of Basantak. That way the paintings published in Basantak could be called a document of contemporary social life. The then Kalighat portraits too reflected the social conditions, but they were highly stylized. But those in Basantak had no such air. And the only interest of the publication was to create fun and humor through the pictures. The most striking feature of the publication was putting forth the fact that satirical art can be a potential tool to create a true picture of the contemporary society and to criticize the people living in it. Basantak was published only for two years. Bringing out a publication of satirical pictures and satirical writings was a bold step in that period. We all know how the wooden block popularized *'Bat-tala Sahityo'* (trash/pulp literature) and trash/pulp art. But the view point of Basantak was entirely different and unique. It can be said that once Prananath and Girindranath gave up their ownership of Basantak, the scope of publishing caricature art and satirical literature was lost. But the pictures that did get published in Basantak are of immense importance. It is a living

record of a society that was and also of its perspective, which in itself is of exemplary significance. This paved the way for a new school of art practice and there lies the success of Basantak.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

The second chapter analysis the early phase of satirical art in Bengal. While discussing the early phase of satirical art in Bengal, diverse points have come up. The intension was to capture the origin of this kind of art approach. This art has influenced the artists of a much later period. The influence of Kalighat paintings on the modern painters is very deep rooted. We have seen the influence of Kalighat paintings on Jamini Roy, the celebrated painter of our times. William Archer has added two more painters in this connection, Gaganendranath Tagore and Gopal Ghosh. Researcher Archer has also found the influence of Kalighat tradition on Europe's modern art in French artist Fernand Leger's works. (Archer: 1953) Connecting the Kalighat paintings with modern art, many have claimed it as the early practice of Cubism or called it the parallel of Leger's paintings. Sumanta Bandopadhyay feels that there could be some similarity between Kalighat and Leger's works. The angle centric Cubist art is more comfortable in still art portrayal than that of portrait or figure drawing, while the curve lines of Kalighat paintings are more at ease in portrait or figure drawing that that of landscape painting. The figures made by Leger are like still dolls. On the other hand in the play of lines in Kalighat paintings there is a strange rhythm. Besides, it is also important to keep in mind that in selection of mediums, Leger and the Cubists were backed by scientific outlook and reason based perspective. Their intention was to give the subjects of industrial age a place in painting while syncing them with contemporary scientific discovery. On the other hand the Kalighat paintings were made by the sheer imagination of the artists, and were influenced by the age old tradition of their forefathers and the social ambience of 19th century Kolkata. (Bandopadhyay: 2013) Sovon Som writes this art form anticipated quite a few experiments in modern European art. One can at a random recall Pablo Picasso, Fernand Leger and Henri Matisse for the treatment and the rearrangement of planes, looking at the form simultaneously from different angles forged the two dimensional quality of the

pictorial space. The volumes, curves, colours and linear tensions are all attuned to a visual music. Fernand Leger's *Le siphon*, showing an extended arm holding of soda-water bottle parallels a Kalighat paintings and a *Bat-tala* wood-cut print. Though Leger replaced the prawns by a soda-water bottle, the likeness was neither accidental nor coincidental. (Som: 2001)

However, the potential of Kalighat paintings is still there to be further explored. A number of artists in present day Bengal and India are indebted to the Kalighat artists for their artistic style. The Kalighat paintings have influenced the drawing and composition of many stalwarts like Dharmanarayan Dasgupta, Parthapratim Deb, Jogen Chowdhury, Paritosh Sen et al. Hence it can be said that Kalight tradition has the potential to be further extended and expanded, the satire and banter ingrained in the art can be a potential tool for modern artists in presenting the modern Bengali society. It will be apt to follow the bold style of Kalighat tradition in ridiculing the kitsch culture, and the philistine business class with their brazen complacency and conceit. A new satiric art can be created by improvising and expanding Kalighat art. This is because satire and ridicule can be a potential tool for critical analysis of the contemporary society.

There are innumerable instances of urbanity in Kalighat paintings. The subject of the paintings also included mythological tales, animals and living beings, historic events etc. But in the present context the paintings depicting urban life are more important to us. The paintings which have ridiculed *Elokeshi* and *Mahanta*'s illicit love affair, *Babu* and *Bibi*, Lovers, concubines, and the fake saints. Hence it can be said that Kalighat paintings are not a chronicle of a particular time but is universally relevant. The incidents that took place during their time and created uproar were painted by the artists of Kalighat who took them to the fairs and sold them easily. The spontaneity with which the contemporary social reality got depicted in the paintings, speak of the sharp social understanding of the Kalighat artists. It should be kept in mind that the Kalighat paintings do not lack in diversity of descriptions; rather there is a certain mood and a distinct perspective in them. The tone of sharp ridicule and mockery is very palpable. Not only the *Babus* but other fake social characters are also severely ridiculed by the artists. This shows the

sheer social consciousness of the Kalighat painters. *Bat-tala* prints run parallel to the Kalighat tradition. In viewing them one will be reminded of the books like 'Hutum Pnachar Naksha', 'Aalaler Ghar-e Dulal', 'Nababbabu Bilash', 'Nababibi Bilash', and 'Aapnar Mukh Aapni Dekhun'. The hundreds of other short satirical pieces popularly called 'Prahasan' published by *Bat-tala* prints also come to the mind. At a time when *Bat-tala* was trying to uphold the social perversion through their books, Kalighat was engaged in doing the same through their paintings. (Sripantha: 2013)

The chapter studies that Kalighat painting is not only an indirect inspiration to the *Bat-tala* wood-cut tradition; the engravers of *Bat-tala* tradition are indebted to the Kalighat artists for their subject selection and imagination as well. This is why at one point some researchers, including William Archer, have thought that the outline of Lithograph painting and the wood-cut print of *Bat-tala* have come from Kalighat. Researcher Biswadeb Gangopadhyay is of the opinion that the *Bat-tala* print has put the art of Bengal much ahead of time. All their creations have provided fun and humor to us. (Gangopadhyay: 1420). Just like the Kalighat paintings, in *Bat-tala* prints too one finds a portrayal of daily life. The different paintings of *Bat-tala* inexorably remind us of 19th century Bengal or the sizzling incidents of that time. A main part of the Battala print is illustration. The illustration at some place is done for the story or rhymes while at times it is used for decorating the pages of the prints. Besides, there were images solely based on current social incidents. Hence it can be said that the satirical *Bat-tala* art have also enriched Bengal's art history. Hence we can come to the conclusion that the wood-cut tradition of *Bat-tala* is the product of a certain period of a certain age. Though the age has witnessed many more variety of art practice, only the *Bat-tala* wood-cut and the Kalighat paintings succeeded in becoming the art for contemporary common mass. It is not only the nostalgia that attracts us to these art traditions even today, coupled with that is the sheer democratic and egalitarian mindset of the artists of that era. The artists wanted their art not to be restricted to a limited circle but to reach the hands of common mass. (Sripantha: 2013)

It was in the same time period that the Bengali journal Basantak came into being as an extension of satirical painting tradition. Basantak successfully started the tradition of attracting the attention of people by establishing caricature in the pages of existing journals and also by ridiculing the political and social disparities. The way in which Basantak attacked the unjust and immoral ways of the British, the different social discrepancies, together with the decadent acts of certain distinguished persons of the contemporary society, highly speaks of the gumption of the artists and writers of the journal. In case of its style the works of Basantak are close to that of *Bat-tala* and Kalighat. But in developing the compositions Basantak has shown uniqueness. The specialty of Basantak is in upholding the subject of the image on all over the surface and thereby lampooning it. Kalighat, *Bat-tala* and Basantak have enormous significance in the study of the origin of satirical art of Bengal.

The 19th century rural artists have shows us how contemporary social episodes can be expressed in art. Not only have they portrayed the happenings but also articulated an innovative way of analyzing and deriding them through it. We can see that a number of artists in the subsequent ages have followed this path and created a new art language. Hence it can be concluded that the 19th century art tradition of Bengal has played a significant role in the evolution of modern Bengali art practice. This successfully emphasizes the importance of early satirical art tradition of Bengal.

Plate-2.1 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.2 : Satirical Journal Basantak, century .

Plate-2.3 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

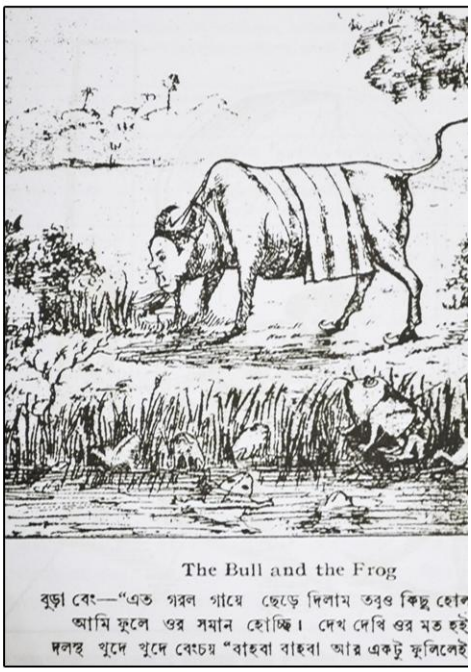

Plate-2.4 : Satirical Journal Basantak, century .

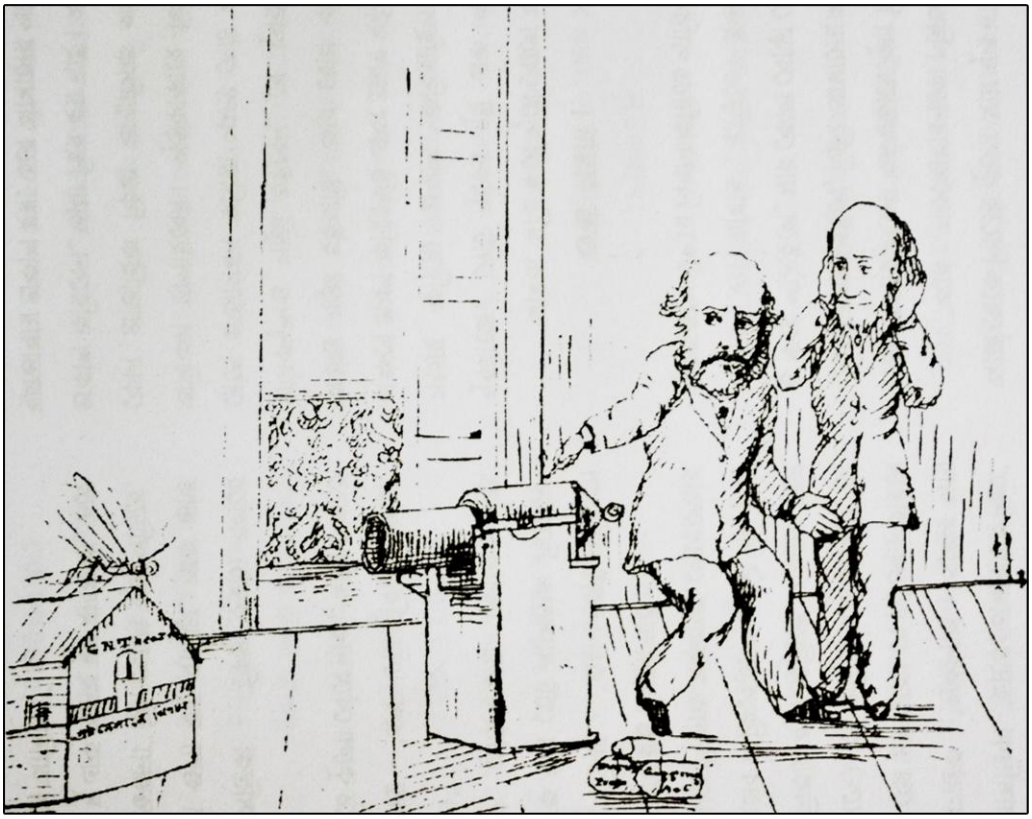

Plate-2.5 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.6 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.7 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.8 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.9 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.10 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.11 : Satirical Journal Basantak, Late 19th century .

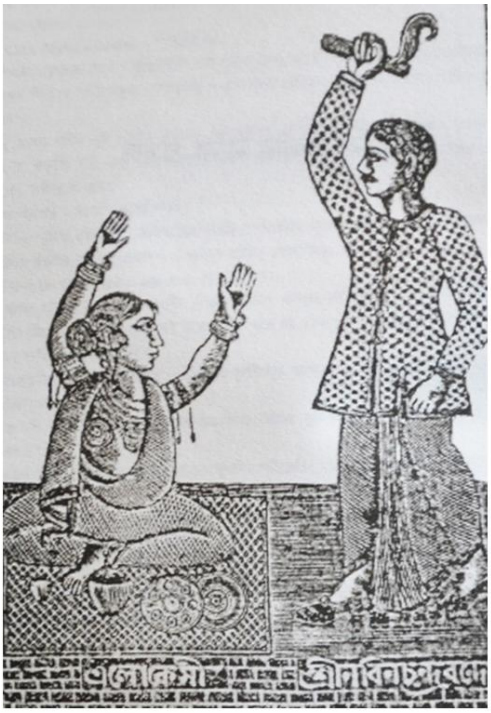

Plate-2.12 : Nabin Strikes Elokeshi with a fish-knife, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.13 : Rajkannya Sandhyabati or Leila, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.14 : Gaja kachap & Gadura, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.15 : Mahant & Elokeshi, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.16 : Nabin Strikes Elokeshi with a fish-knife, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.17 : Draupadir Bastraharan , Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century

Plate-2.18 : Rasaraj & Rasamanjari, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century

Plate-2.19 : satirical Puja Souvenir from Battala, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.20 : Modern Bahu & pampered wife , Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.21 : Ravana & Hanuman, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century

Plate-2.22 : A cat with a prawn, Battala wood cut Print, Late 19th century .

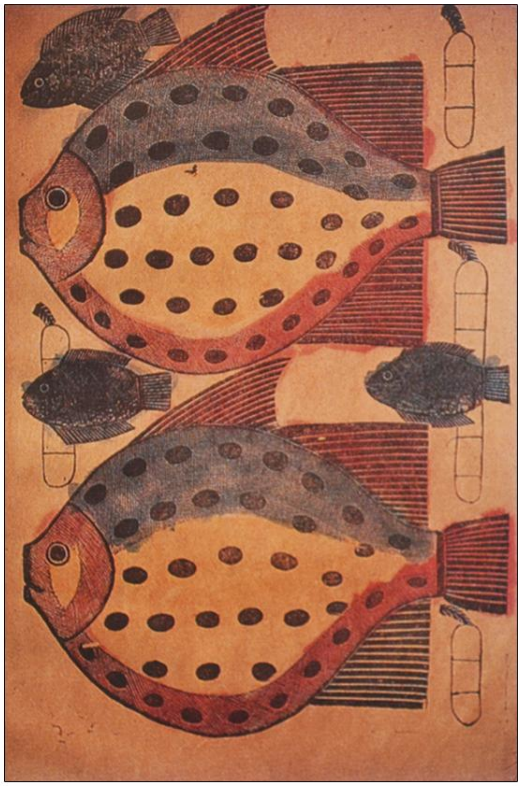

Plate-2.23 : Fish in the water, Battala wood cut Print, Late 19th century

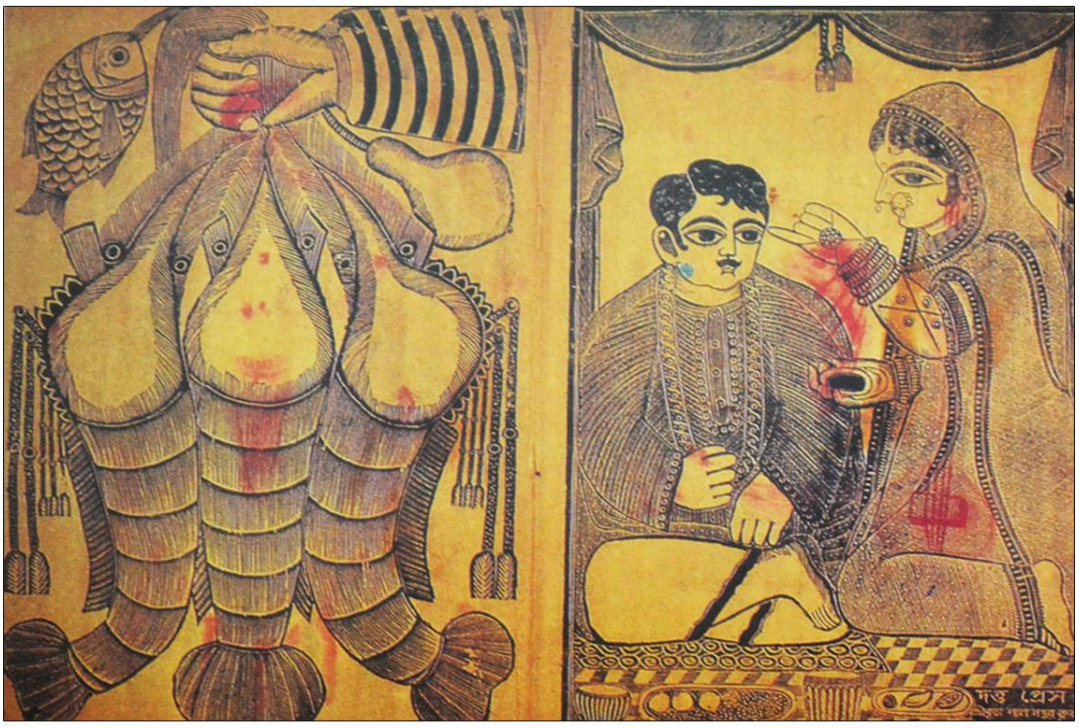

Plate-2.24 : Fish & Bhai phota, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century

Plate-2.25 : Maina Bird, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century .

Plate-2.26 : Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century .

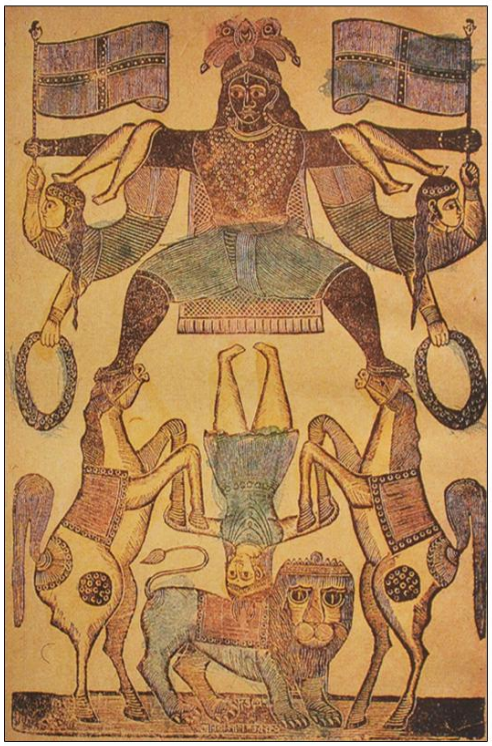

Plate-2.27 : Circus, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century

Plate-2.28 : Dancer, Battala woodcut Print, Late 19th century

Plate-2.29 : Babu and his mistress, Water-colour on paper, last quarter of 19th century .

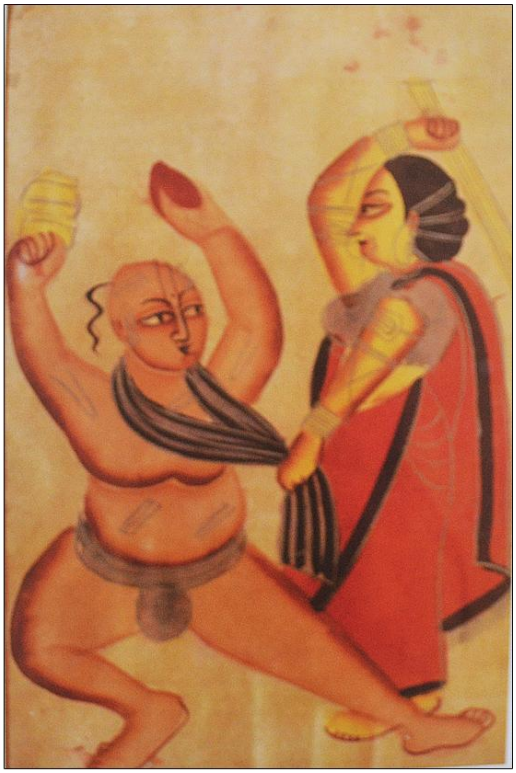

Plate-2.30 : Woman beating an Ascetic, Kali -ghat, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

Plate-2.31 : Kartika, Kalighat,Painted clay,18 cm high, early or mid 20th century .

Plate-2.32 : A cat with a fish, Kalighat,Paint -ed clay,19cm high, early or mid 20th century

Plate-2.33 : Barber cleaning a woman's ear, Kalighat, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

Plate-2.34 : Victim of a charmer, Kalighat, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

Plate-2.35 : Maid assisting lady in her make -up, Kalighat, Water colour on paper, 19th cen -tury .

Plate-2.36 : Elokeshi falls at Nabin's feet, Water colour on paper, c.1875 .

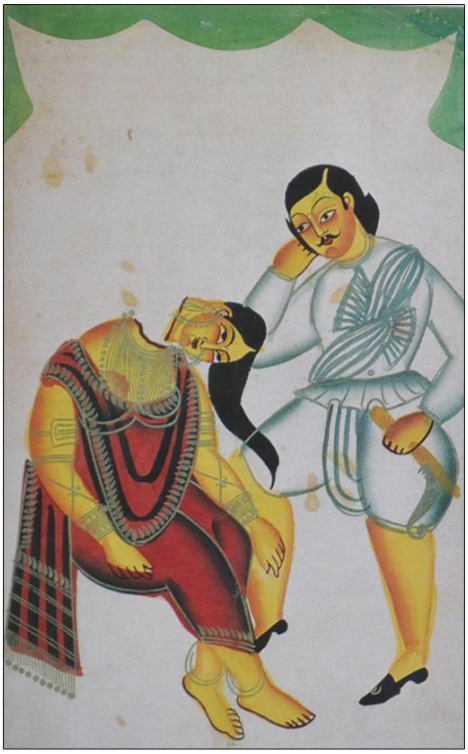

Plate-2.37 : After the Murder, Water -colour on paper, c.1875-1890 .

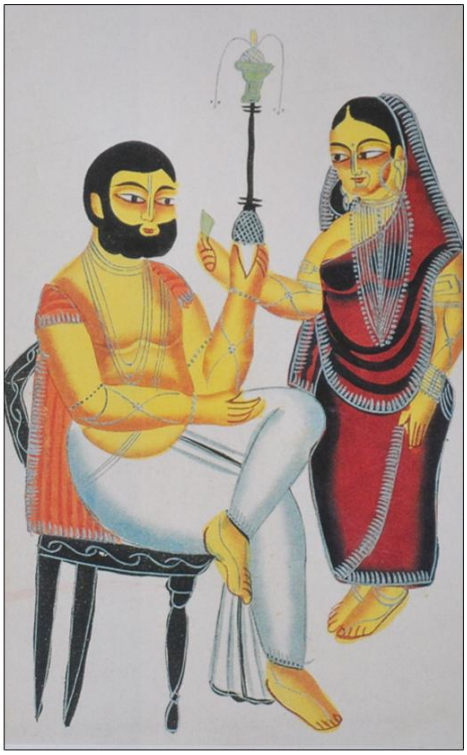

Plate-2.38 : Elokeshi offers a Betel leaf to the Mahant, Water colour on paper, c. 1875-80

Plate-2.39 : The Mahant Fans Elokeshi, Water colour on paper, c.1875-80 .

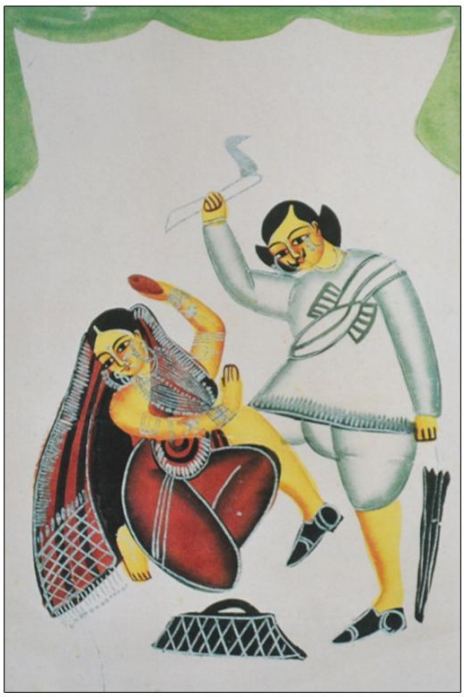

Plate-2.40 : The fatal blow, Water colour on paper, c.1875-1890 .

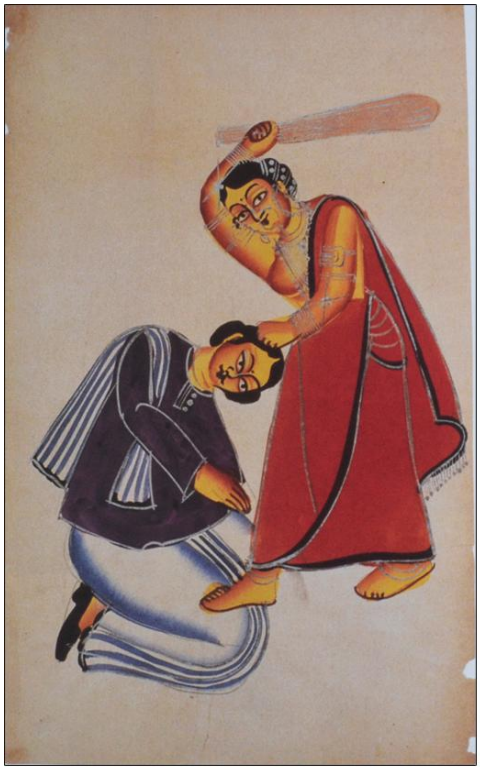

Plate-2.41 : The fatal blow, Water colour on paper, c.1875-1890 .

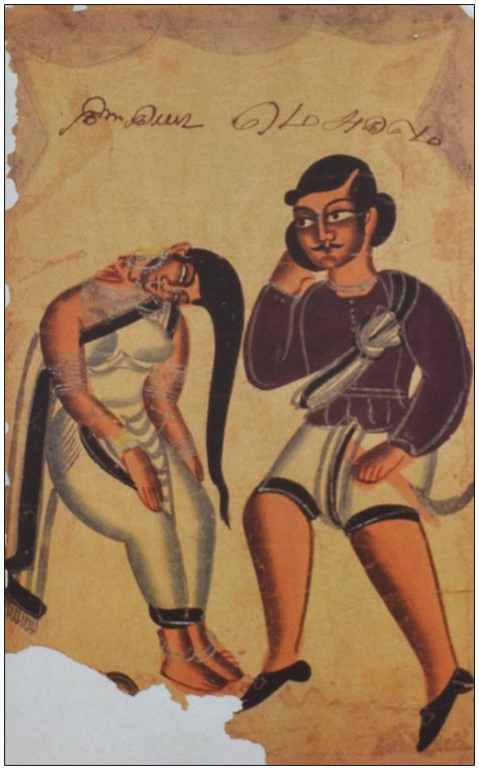

Plate-2.42 : Nabin kills Elokeshi, Water colour on paper, last quarter of 19th cent -ury .

Plate-2.43 : The Mahant is accused before the judge, Water colour on paper, c.1875 .

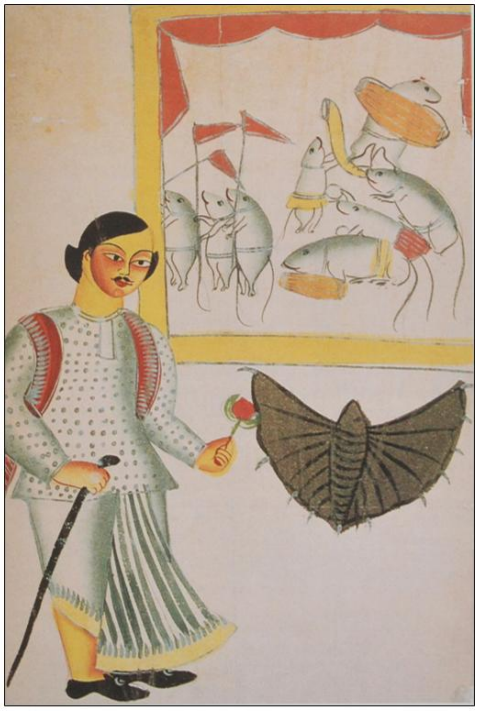

Plate-2.44 : The Muskrats' music party, Water colour on paper, c.1870 .

Plate-2.45 : The Mahant working as a prison gardener, Water colour on paper, c.1875-80

Plate-2.46 : Woman beating a Man with a broom, Kalighat, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

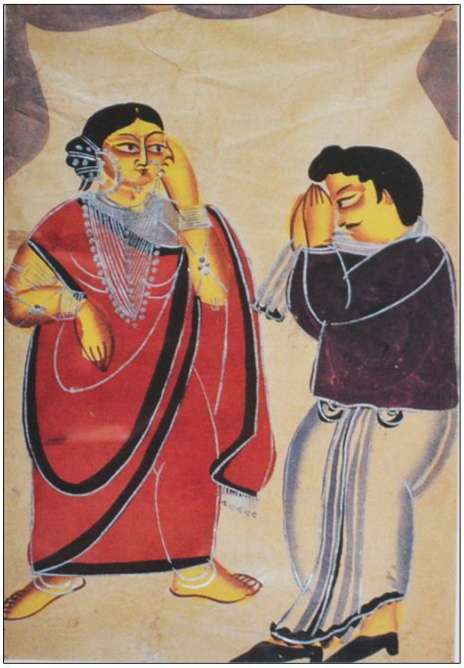

Plate-2.47 : Woman reigns supreme, Kali -ghat, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

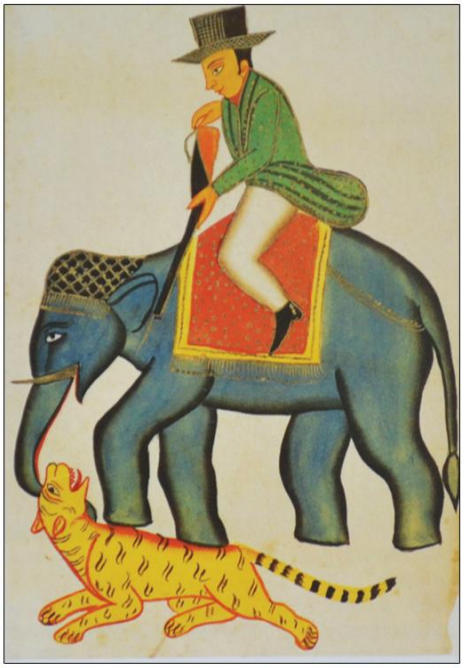

Plate-2.48 Englishman on an Elephant shooting a Tiger, Kalighat, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

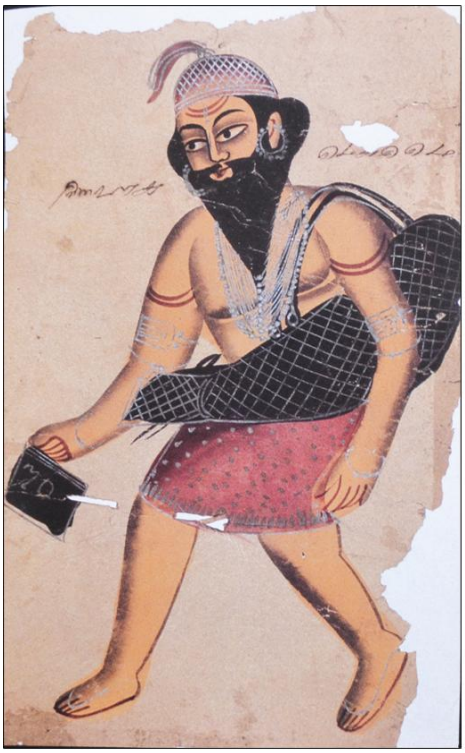

Plate-2.49 : Mahant of Tarakeshwar or Bhishti, Water colour on paper, last quarter of 19th century .

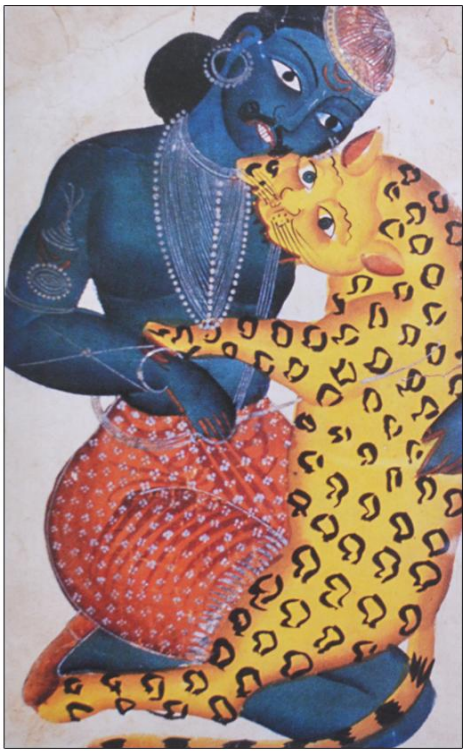

Plate-2.50 : Shyamakanta fighting a Tiger, Kalighat, Water colour on paper, 19th cen -tury .

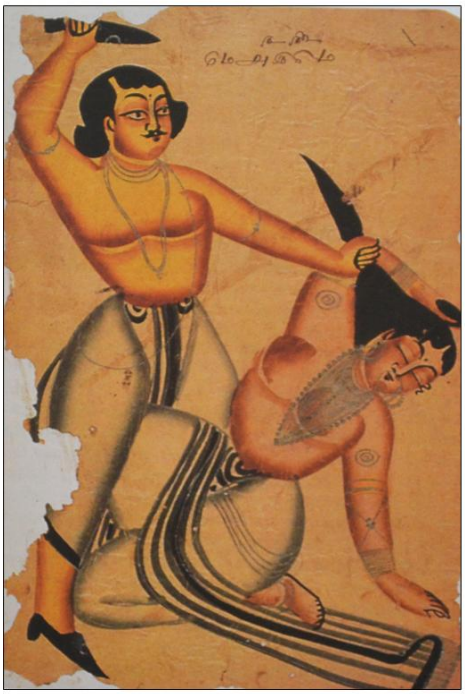

Plate-2.51 : Man beating a woman with a shoe, Kalighat, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

Plate-2.52 : Victim of a charmer, Kalighat , Water colour on paper, 19th century

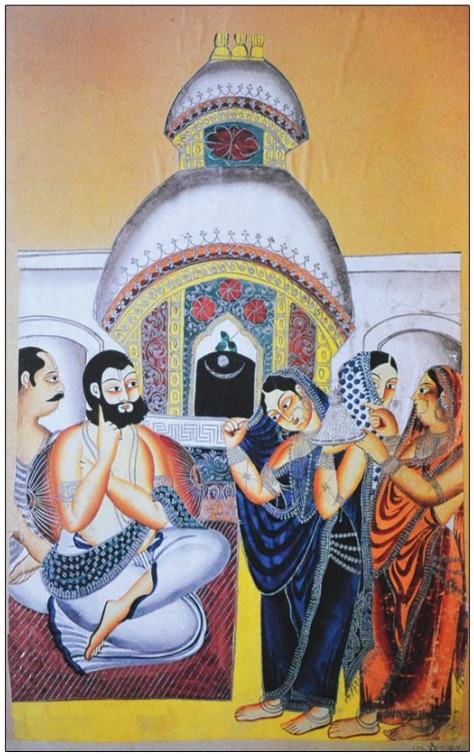

Plate-2.53 : Elokeshi at the Tarakeshwar shrine, Water colour on paper, c.1875-80 .

Plate-2.54 : Reconciliation of Elokeshi and Nabin, Water colour on paper, last quarter of 19th century

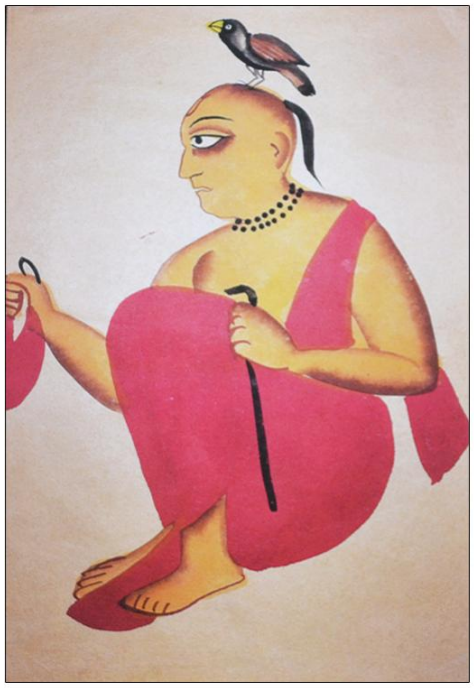

Plate-2.55 : Fake Ascetic, Kalighat, Water colour on paper, late 19th century .

Plate-2.56 : Woman playing music,Kali -ghat, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

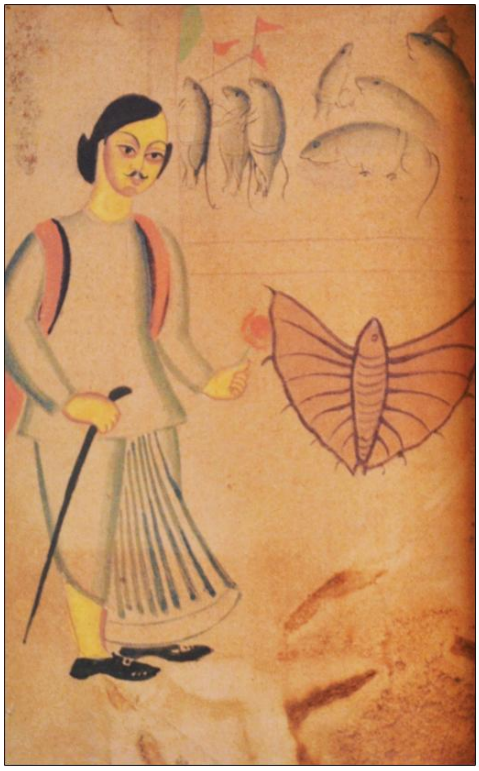

Plate-2.57 : Bengali Babu , Water colour on paper, c.1870-1890 .

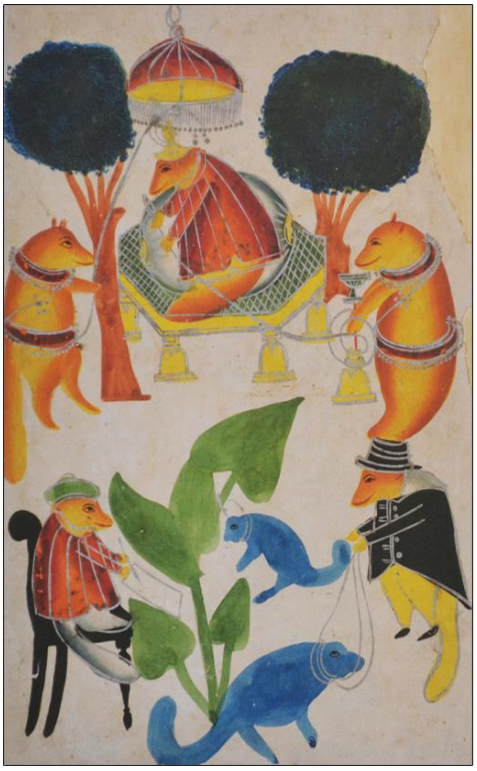

Plate-2.58 : The Jackal Raja's court,Water colour on paper, c.1870-1890 .

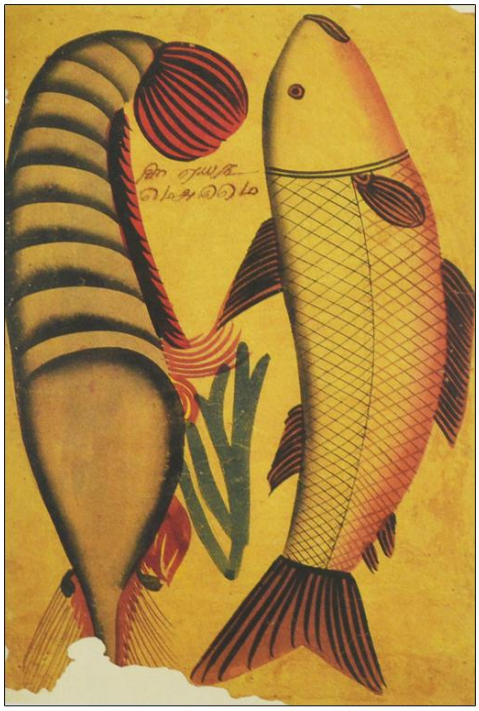

Plate-2.59 : Prawn and Fish, Water colour on paper, last quarter of 19th century .

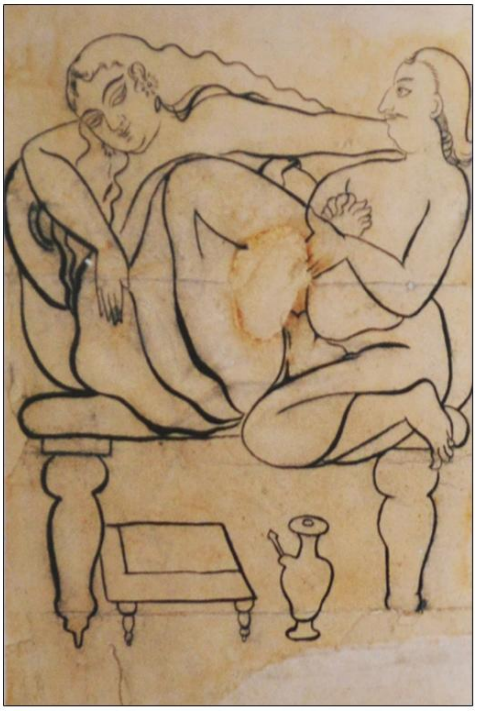

Plate-2.60 : A doting husband, Black paint on paper, c.1870-1890 .

Plate-2.61 : A cat with a prawn,Hand colo -ured print on paper, c.1850-1890 .

Plate-2.62 : A cat with a fish, Water colo -ur on paper, c.1890 .

Plate-2.63 : A cat with a prawn, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

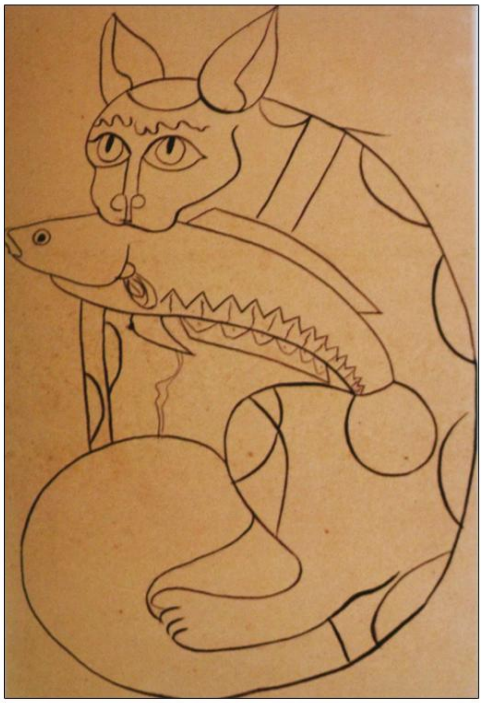

Plate-2.64 : A cat with a fish, Black paint on paper, c.1920 .

Plate-2.65 : A babu holding hookah in the company of a courtesan, Black paint on paper, c.1880 .

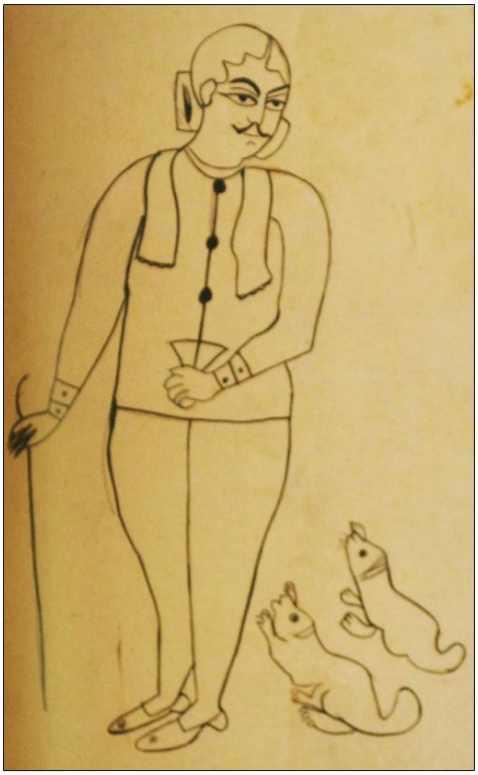

Plate-2.66 : A gentleman with two lap dogs, Black paint on paper, c.1920 .

Plate-2.67 : A man wrestling a tiger, Water colour on paper, c.1830-1850 .

Plate-2.68 : The Mahant piles Elokeshi with liquer, Water colour on paper, c.1880 .

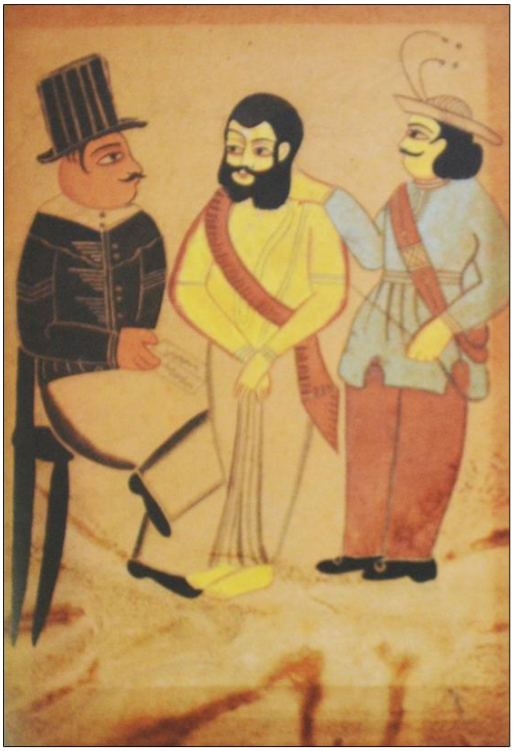

Plate-2.69 : Elokeshi murder trial: The Maha -nt under arrest, Water colour on paper, c.1880 .

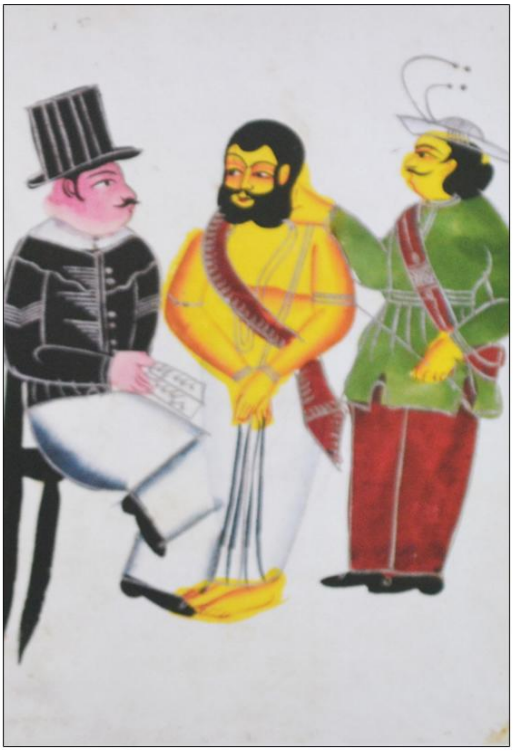

Plate-2.70 : The Mahant is arrested by the prison governer, Water colour on paper, c.1880 .

Plate-2.71 : The Mahant a turns on oil press, Water colour on paper, c.1890 .

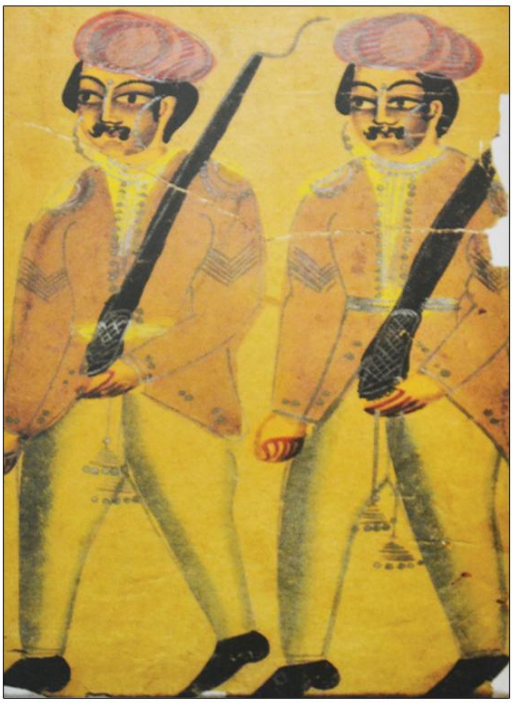

Plate-2.72 : Portuguese soldier, Water colour on paper, 19th century .

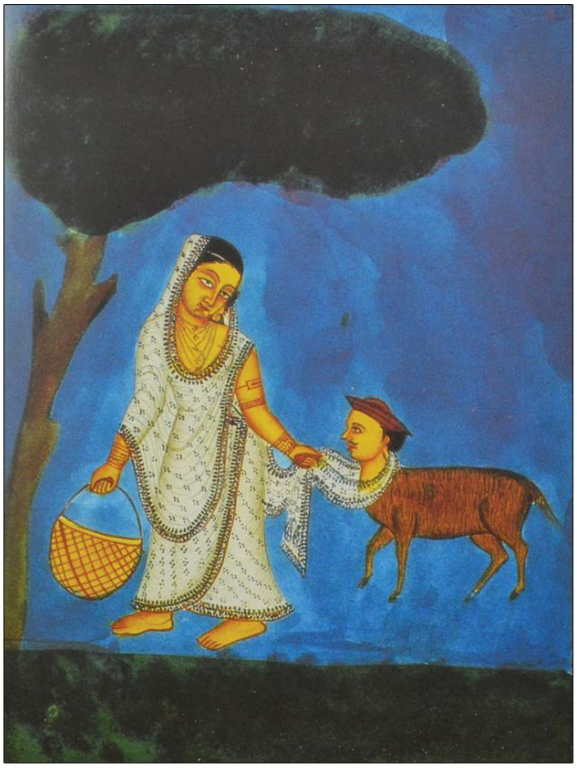

Plate-2.73 : Lady and the Lamb Man, Water colour on paper, c.1900

Plate-2.74 A Woman tramping on her lover, Water colour on paper, c.1900 .

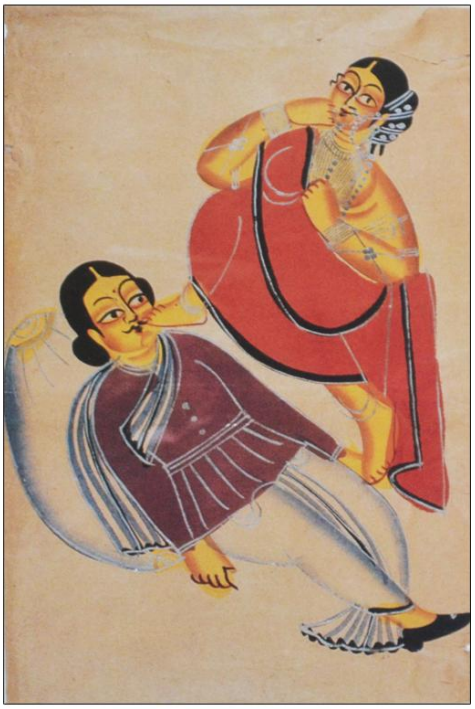

Plate-2.75 : A Woman tramping on her lover,Water colour on paper, c.1900 .