Department of History - Sem 3 Field Visit to Alipore Museum
Painting Exhibition on *The Babu and the Bazar*

The students of Semester 3 Major, Department of History, visited the Alipore Museum, Kolkata, as part of an academic field visit to understand colonial visual culture through museum exhibitions. The visit focused on the *Babu Bazar* exhibition, which highlighted nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Bengali art forms and their social contexts.

The exhibition presented a comparative display of *Pata Chitra* **(**Kalighat *pat* paintings) and oil paintings, reflecting class differences in artistic production and consumption in colonial Bengal. The Kalighat *Pata Chitras*, created by *patua* artists using inexpensive materials, represented an art form meant primarily for the masses. These paintings depicted religious themes, everyday urban life, bazaar scenes, and social satire. Their bold lines, flat colours, and expressive figures made them easily comprehensible and accessible to a wide audience.

In contrast, the oil paintings displayed in the exhibition were largely commissioned by elite patrons. Influenced by European academic realism, these works were executed on canvas using oil paints and required formal training and financial resources. They portrayed religious figures, mythological scenes, and portraits with naturalistic details, depth, and perspective. Such paintings symbolized refinement, social status, and the elite's engagement with Western artistic traditions. The exhibition effectively demonstrated how the *bazaar* functioned as a shared cultural space where popular and elite art traditions coexisted. By juxtaposing *Pata Chitra* and oil paintings, the exhibition revealed how class, patronage, and accessibility shaped artistic expression in colonial Calcutta.

The visit helped the students gain insight into the relationship between art, society, and historical change, making the museum experience both educational and enriching. They also gained a deeper understanding of the principles, layout and significance of museum displays.








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