

# REVIVING TRADITION

## Influence of Patachitra Style in Advertising and Brand Storytelling



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materials

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#Patachitr # Kalighat Patachitra #Kalighat Painting #Pingla Patachitra #Advertising #Branding #Hyperlocal Marketing Strategy

### Abstract

This study tries to explore how the unique visual identity and cultural significance of Patachitra make it an attractive option for brand promotion to connect with prospective buyers. This study also highlights how the narrative style of Patachitra can help brands to tell engaging stories and create an emotional connection with their target audience. Traditional folk styles are still significant for getting people interested in buying things in present times.

Communication is to convey any message to another. What we see and feel, generally we try to communicate to others with the help of various media. Before the birth of language, image was the key to expressing oneself to another. Since the period of cave paintings, pictures have been an important part of communication. Gradually, with the evaluation of language, the image emerged as a communication signifier. The use of this signifier makes the understanding of many complex theories easier.

Patachitra is one of the oldest traditions of image-based storytelling. It has been practiced in the eastern Indian states of Odisha and West Bengal as well as parts of Bangladesh [1]. Patachitra is basically based on stories from Hindu mythology, which were used in Hindu temples and rituals as well as storytelling scrolls. Today, it serves educational, commercial, and global creative purposes. Here, I am going to discuss the patachitra of West Bengal only. The discussion will be focused

on two zones of West Bengal; one is Calcutta, now Kolkata, and the other one is West Medinipur.

The word 'Pat' derived from the Sanskrit word 'Patta' which means cloth, and 'Chitra' means picture [2]. Usually, patachitra was drawn on a piece of cloth that was coated with chalk mixed with earth and clay. Once the coating dried then paintings were made on it. Afterward, in the tradition of Patachitra, paper was pasted over cloth as the base before painting. Broadly, Patachitra can be categorized into two forms: one is the rectangular pat, which is known as a 'Choukas Pat' and another one is Scroll Pat which is also known as 'Jorano Pat' [3]. The artisans of Patachitra are traditionally known as 'Patuas' and more respectfully addressed as 'Chittrakars' [4]. The image of patachitras plays a key role in communication to educate and entertain lower-class people in the rural area of West Bengal, India. The scroll pat is an old traditional method of image-based storytelling where stories are based on mythological



**Fig. 1** Patachitra from Pingla, West Medinipur. Source: <https://art-sandculture.google.com/entity/g113s7wn3s?hl=hi>.

stories like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Purana, Mangal-kabya and others. It is like an infographic that lets you share knowledge with pictures, and everyone can understand it easily.

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, patachitra from Pingla of West Medinipur was known as Pingla Patachitra of West Bengal. In the 19th century, Kalighat Pat emerged as a popular folk art from Calcutta, now Kolkata, in West Bengal. Both patachitras have different styles and techniques.

Pingla, of the West Medinipur district of West Bengal, has been known as 'Pater Gram' (a village of making pat). Traditionally the patuas of Pingla were travelling artists and scroll pat painters. (Fig. 1) They visited place to place, singing songs (Pater Gaan) to narrate stories from the unfolded scroll Pat to the common people. The theme of the stories was mainly religious, mythical, epic, and folk. The main characteristic of this style was bold and linear outlines and a flat application of opaque colour, creating a two-dimensional effect and including a decorative border.

In between the late 19th century and early 20th century, the tradition of Pingla Pat declined due to the loss of rural patronage, mass production of prints, and the emerging market of Kalighat painting. Unfortunately, the Kalighat Pat itself also began to disappear in the early 20th century due to the popularity of the industrial print mar-

ket. With the help of researchers, folklorists, and support of the government, Pingla Pat began to revive in the mid-20th century. Patuas of Pingla gradually started depicting societal issues apart from religious themes. The themes of Pat are like fighting against coronavirus, stopping child marriage, benefits of using sanitary pads, etc. They tried to incorporate urbanized lifestyle as their theme (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2** Pingla village, West Midnapur.

Source: [https://www.tripadvisor.com/AttractionProductReview-g1024713-d20432340-Pingla\\_Village\\_of\\_the\\_scroll\\_painters-Kharagpur\\_West\\_Midnapore\\_District\\_West\\_Beng.html#/media/20432340/?type=ALL\\_INCLUDING\\_RESTRICTED&albumid=-150&category=-150](https://www.tripadvisor.com/AttractionProductReview-g1024713-d20432340-Pingla_Village_of_the_scroll_painters-Kharagpur_West_Midnapore_District_West_Beng.html#/media/20432340/?type=ALL_INCLUDING_RESTRICTED&albumid=-150&category=-150)

Kalighat Pat, Kalighat Patachitra, or Kalighat Painting emerged on the riverbank of Buriganga (a canal diverging from the Ganges River) near Kalighat Temple [5]. A group of migrated Patuas from Medinipur and 24 Parganas of Bengal settled down here for their survival. Initially, they began performing vocal renditions of their long scroll painting to earn money, similar to what they did in their village. Gradually, Calcutta becomes a key destination for economic opportunities due to trading spots established by the British and Europeans. Simultaneously, the rural folk tradition of the pat painting adopted the urbanized environment. Patuas no longer had to travel to see audiences; now pilgrims came to them. At the same time, patuas were sellers, not performers. They began selling single paintings on a page in a vertical square shape.

In the middle of the 1800s, Kalighat pats became more popular as the growing railway network connected Calcutta to cities like Varanasi, Patna, Bombay, and Agra, as well as to the suburbs

and interiors of Bengal. This brought more tourists, traders, and pilgrims to Calcutta [6].

**Kalighat, with its daily hordes of pilgrims, would have provided a perfect opportunity for the local artists to produce and sell small, cheap religious souvenirs. The patuas traditionally painted long narrative stories, often over 20 feet in length. Influenced by the different art forms around them and with a need to work quickly, the patuas abandoned their linear, narrative style in favour of single pictures involving one or two figures. The backgrounds were left plain, all non-essential details were removed, and basic combinations of colours were used. This created the key characteristics of the Kalighat genre. The patuas' productivity was also helped by the import of cheaper readymade paints from Britain and mill-made paper [7].**

Shifting from cloth to paper helps make the Kalighat pat more accessible for all. The artists had also shifted from using gouache and tempera to watercolour. Flowing lines and rhythmic brush-

strokes are the key characteristics of Kalighat pat. In this context, W. G. Archer (a British civil servant and art historian) emphasized Western influences in the Kalighat paintings, which are debatable. The shading of the Kalighat figure is not a European influence. It has been practiced since the Ajanta murals in India. Indian artisans do not follow the European style's single source of light. The shading of the Kalighat figure is not a European influence. It has been practiced since the Ajanta murals in India. The Ajanta Mural, the Rajasthan Mural, the Amritsar Mural, and the Nathdwar Patachitra of Rajasthan all have the same shading style. Transparent watercolours may influence Indian artisans, but they do not adopt the European style's single source of light [8].

The concept of Kalighat pat was based on religious themes such as Kali, Durga, Ganesh, Shiv, Laxmi, Saraswati, Jagatdhatri and others. These are all the gods and goddesses of the Hindu religion. Gradually the social scenario



**Fig. 3** Babu and Bibi.

Source: <https://blogvirasatehind.wordpress.com/2017/11/23/kalighat-patachitra-a-journey/>



**Fig. 4** Babu and Bibi.  
Source: [https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Kalighat\\_Painting](https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Kalighat_Painting)

of 19th-century Calcutta became a part of the subject for Kalighat Pat. The depiction of social themes such as the babu culture of Calcutta gained significant popularity.

Babu was often used in colonial Bengal for educated, urbanised upper-middle-class and emerging middle-class men who were influenced by Western culture. Babu was a symbol of urban hypocrisy and moral decay. The key characteristics of being Babu were putting on European-style attire like coats, trousers, caps and boots; carrying a pocket watch or a walking stick, which are signs of prosperity and modernity; and flirting with women or being with a courtesan (Fig. 3, 4).

The word 'Bibi' means 'women.' In a deeper sense it denotes Bibi as a courtesan, mistress, or fashionable lady who believes in Western culture. She was often shown in European-influenced clothing or exquisite sarees with mirrors and jewellery, sometimes shown smoking a hookah, and sometimes shown with Babu (Fig. 5, 6). Parichand Mitra (Tekchand Thakur) in *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1857), Kaliprassanna Singha in *Hutum Pechar Naksha* (1861) satirised the Babu culture of the 19th century in Calcutta in their Bengali writings. Both the writers did important work on social satire, where they depicted the middle class who wanted to be like British people but forgot about Indian values.



←  
**Fig. 5** Bibi fixing her hair, Kalighat Pat.



→  
**Fig. 6** A woman, probably a courtesan, smoking a hookah.

Source:  
[https://www.wikiwand.com/en/articles/Kalighat\\_painting#/media/File:Kalighat\\_picture\\_sep\\_sheets\\_7.jpg](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/articles/Kalighat_painting#/media/File:Kalighat_picture_sep_sheets_7.jpg)

The satirical representation of babu culture becomes a visual documentation of the socio-cultural situation of 19th-century Bengal. It can be called the realism of Bengal. Kalighat pat portrays the westernized, urbanized society of Calcutta life in a tangible way. The portrayal of Babu and Bibi in a variable serves as a powerful tool to boost Kalighat’s popularity. The popularity of Babu and Bibi is still in vogue.

Kalighat painting is being done in rural West Bengal today. Medinipur and Birbhum are two places where modern painters have kept the tradition of Kalighat painting alive. They focus on secular themes and current events, as well as a blend of religious depictions, all done in a modern style [9]. Today, Pingla patuas also paint issues like health, gender equality, and social awareness, as well as global events.

Differences between Pingla and Kalighat Patachitra styles are shown in table (Tab. 1).

Kalighat paintings always play a catalyst to make a new horizon in colonial Bengal. It has multiple different layers to portray the identity of Bengal. The satirical version of Babu-Bibi presents two perspectives: the first highlights how we shifted away from our own values and formed a hybrid Bengali upper class by imitating Western lifestyles, mainly British. The second one is how the upper class was trying to create a new national identity by following and taking on parts of British culture.

The Kalighat painters remained anonymous. This art form came from the local village community of Patuas. The few names of Kalighat patuas that have been preserved – Nibaran Chandra Ghosh, Kali Charan Ghosh, and Kanai Lal Ghosh – are known mainly because W.G. Archer purchased work directly from these artists or their immediate descendants [10]. Many artists were inspired by the Kalighat pat style; one well-known

**Tab. 1** Differences between Pingla and Kalighat Patachitra styles.

Aspect	Pingla Patachitra	Kalighat Patachitra
Origin	Rural tradition situated in Pingla ( <b>West Medinipur, West Bengal</b> ).	Urban tradition, situated in <b>Kalighat (Kolkata, 19th century)</b> near the famous Kali temple, Calcutta now Kolkata, West Bengal.
Medium	Scrolls (Pat) made of cloth with paper pasted, coated with Khari-mati (kind of clay), gum etc. Basically, Scroll Pat and later on include rectangular, Square Pat also.	Vertical Square Paper, with water colour and sometimes pencil outlines.
Colour	Natural pigments from organic/mineral sources. But now using synthetic colour also.	Water-based colours, sometimes imported pigments.
Style	Bold outlines, flat colours, multiple panels in narrative sequence.	Smooth, flowing brushwork, shading for volume, more individual figures than panels.
Theme	Religious epics (Ramayana, Mahabharata), folk tales, later on social messages, contemporary issues.	Religious images (Kali, Durga, Krishna), later also satirical depictions of Babu culture, social life, and colonial urban life of Calcutta now Kolkata.
Function	Used for storytelling with songs (Pater Gaan) in villages, Performing art. Now Made for urban patrons and pilgrims as souvenirs.	Made for urban patrons and pilgrims as souvenirs, affordable art.
Evolution	In between the late 19th century and early 20th century, it declined and revive gradually mid-20th century. Still performed as a living tradition, blending heritage with modern issues.	Declined by early 20th century, now studied as a historic folk-modern style from museums.

Source: own study.



**Fig. 7** Patachitra from Pingla, West Medinipur.  
Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patachitra>



**Fig. 8** Patachitra from Kalighat.  
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalighat\\_painting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalighat_painting)

**Fig. 9** Mother and Child by Jamini Roy.  
Source: <https://trinityarts.co/product/jamini-roy-mother-and-child/>



**Fig. 10** Woman by Fernard Leger.  
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=13146216566893896&set=a.427791088910295>

artist was Jamini Roy from West Bengal. Jamini Roy's style promoted the use of folk art in cities, focusing on the idea of a single, elite creator. Jamini Roy adopted the bold outlines, flat colours and two-dimensional forms of patachitra (Fig. 9). He did this by making a modern but clearly Indian style of art based on folk traditions. Later on, the art of Jamini Roy, influenced and inspired by Kalighat Patachitra, was popularized as Jamini Art among the people of Bengal. On the other hand, Kalighat patuas were mostly nameless and developed as a group, moving away from direct folk influence. These nameless artists have not been tagged as professional artists or as individuals. This contrast highlights the tension between the authority of an individual artist and the collaborative innovation of a group.

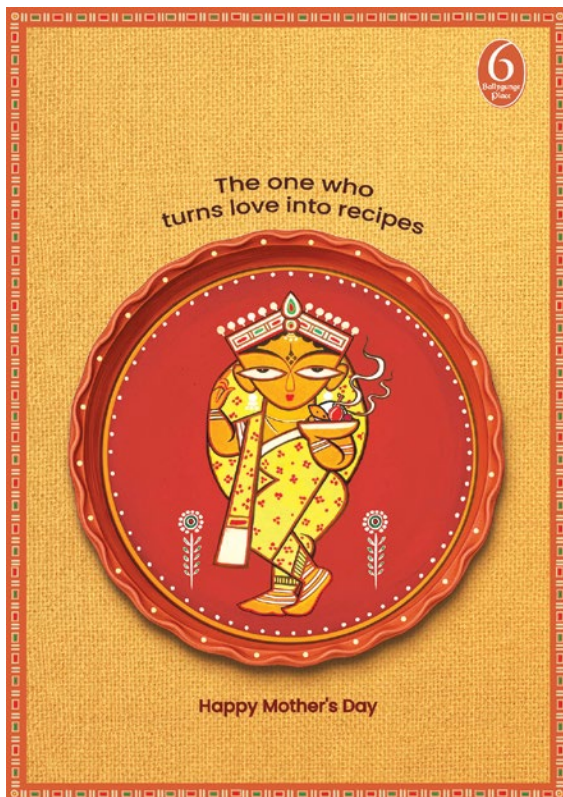
Another artist named Fernand Léger from France got inspiration from Kalighat pat. In 1931 he encountered the collection of Kalighat pat while he visited the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in the United States. His style of painting evolved gradually as he included the organic and flowing lines of Kalighat pat (Fig. 10).

The Kalighat pat's visual linguistics had a big impact not only on Jamini Roy and Léger. As it did with modern Bengal individualist artists like Sunayani Devi in the 1930s and 1940s, Nandalal

Bose in the Haripura Congress posters, Abanindranath in his Chandimangal and Krishnamangal series, Nirode Mazumder, and Paritosh Sen etc. The artists took parts of the Kalighat Pat heritage and changed them to make their own art, which was not based on Euro-genetic Modernist painting. This led to a resurgence of Indian art [11]. Kalighat paintings gradually depicted the transition from folk culture to popular culture in 19th-century Bengal.

Apart from visual art, patachitra has become an inspiration in the field of advertising also. Advertising is a means to tell people about goods or services in order to get them to buy or utilize them. The main objectives of advertising are to inform, to persuade, and to remind. In this paper, I have analysed the journey of Patachitra in bridging folk culture and popular culture in Bengal. Now I would like to evaluate the journey of Patachitra as a part of popular culture in the advertising world. In advertising, patachitra is used as an aspirational association to gain the attention of the people they want to reach. Meanwhile, Jamini Roy's artwork, which is primarily based on patachitra, is also chosen for promotion in the field of advertising. Occasionally, the crafted image, the main visual element for advertisement, becomes an amalgamation of Kalighat Pat, Pingla Pat, and the art of Jamini Roy. As a whole, it becomes a tribute to our age-old traditional art practice of Bengal (Fig. 11).

Branding is an important part of promoting goods and services. The choice of any brand is based on an algorithm that helps us make decisions. Marketers use this algorithm to enhance the credibility of their brand story for potential buyers. To set a brand apart and gain a competitive edge, effective brand positioning plays a major role. The basic approach of positioning is not to create something new and different. Instead, positioning involves enhancing what already exists in the consumer's mind. The goal is to strengthen the existing connections. Positioning is not something you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the targeted consumer you want to sell to. Interestingly, the product itself re-



**Fig. 11** Mother's Day Advertising of 6 Ballygunge Place (Restaurant of traditional Bengali Cuisine). Source: <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/mother-s-day-0994096c-457d-4add-acf1-b581d8a0719d>

mains unchanged; only the name, price, packaging, and other aspects are modified [12]. Hyperlocal marketing strategy has been used to get deeply connected in the consumer’s mind. In this strategy, the target audience has been chosen in a very specific and geographically limited area. It is all about sending messages that are relevant to local audiences and are customized and time-sensitive.

For that reason, patachitra style becomes a popular option for variable products or services to retie connections between their prospective buyers in Bengal. The way the planes were drawn in patachitra made the graphic space two-dimensional. The tubular shapes, random shading along the edges, very simple shapes, and rearrangement of the planes, with figures taking up the whole picture area without any further decorations or props the strong lines, wide planes, bright colours, linear tensions, and rhythmic curves all work together to make a form of visual melody [13]. This simplification of forms, shapes, and colours helps to establish a pattern that would help people understand the subject without having to think about it. That’s why patachitra becomes a popular choice of branding for any products, goods, and services.

Now I am going to discuss some advertisements where the patachitra style has been incorporated.

### Star Ananda: Star Ananda now ABP Ananda is a Bengali news station organizing Sera Bangali event

Event Advertisement, Year of Making: 2012, Agency: Bates Asia, Kolkata, India

The award ceremony was organized by Bengali news channel ABP Ananda to honour and celebrate remarkable people from all around Bengal and beyond in various fields. It was a series of event advertisements. Here we find that the babu is holding a cricket bat in an advertisement, and another one, Bibi, is playing a harmonium (musical instrument). The caption of this series is ‘The award for the excellence of distinguished Bengalis.’ (Fig. 12, 13).



Bates Asia, Kolkata

Fig. 12 Star Ananda Event Advertisement. Source: Published in Srijon Samman 2012 by Pratidin Prakashani Pvt.Ltd. P - 48.



Bates Asia, Kolkata

Fig. 13 Star Ananda Event Advertisement. Source: Published in Srijon Samman 2012 by Pratidin Prakashani Pvt.Ltd. P - 48.

### Bodyline: Leisure Sports & Fitness Retail Brand

Leisure Advertisement, Year of Making: 2013,

Agency: Inner Circle, India

The caption of this advertisement is ‘The fitness choice of Bengalis.’ The entire advertisement is illustrated in a patachitra style, featuring Babu and Bibi exercising at the gym (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14 Bodyline.

Source: Published in Srijon Samman 2013

by Pratidin Prakashani Pvt.Ltd. P – 41.

### Great Eastern: Leading Electronics and Home Appliances

Press Advertisement, Year of Making: 2015,

Published in Ananda Bazar Patrika, Kolkata,

12th April, Sunday, India. Agency: Unknown

The advertisement shows a deal for shopping at their store to celebrate the Bengali New Year. Here one babu is carrying a laptop, and another Babu is giving a mixer grinder to Bibi (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15 Great Eastern. Source: Published in Anandabazar Patrika 2015.

## Sufi Sutra 2016: World Peace Music festival organized by Banglanatok.com

Year of Making: 2016, Kolkata, 6th February, Kolkata, India. Agency: Unknown

It was the 6th edition of Sufi Sutra, which was held from 6th to 7th February for celebrating in Rabindra Sadan and Nandan Campus in Kolkata. The goal of the festival is to connect Indian folk performers with people from all over the world through cultural exchange and to promote cultural diversity. In this advertisement all the Babus and Bibis having their hair styled are playing various musical instruments with joyful moods (Fig. 16).

## Nukkad Printer: Printing Company

Printing Service Advertisement,  
Year of Making: 2017, Agency: Monkey Wrench, India

Nukkad Printer is a printing center in Kolkata that provides a wide range of printing services based on client requirements. Kalighat Patachitra is used to illustrate the 'customization' service offered by Nukkad Printer. In April 2017, the campaign titled 'Local Marilyn, Local Monalisa, Local Hitlar' was published in India (Fig. 17).



Fig. 16 Sufi Sutra 2016. Source: Banglanatok.com 2016.

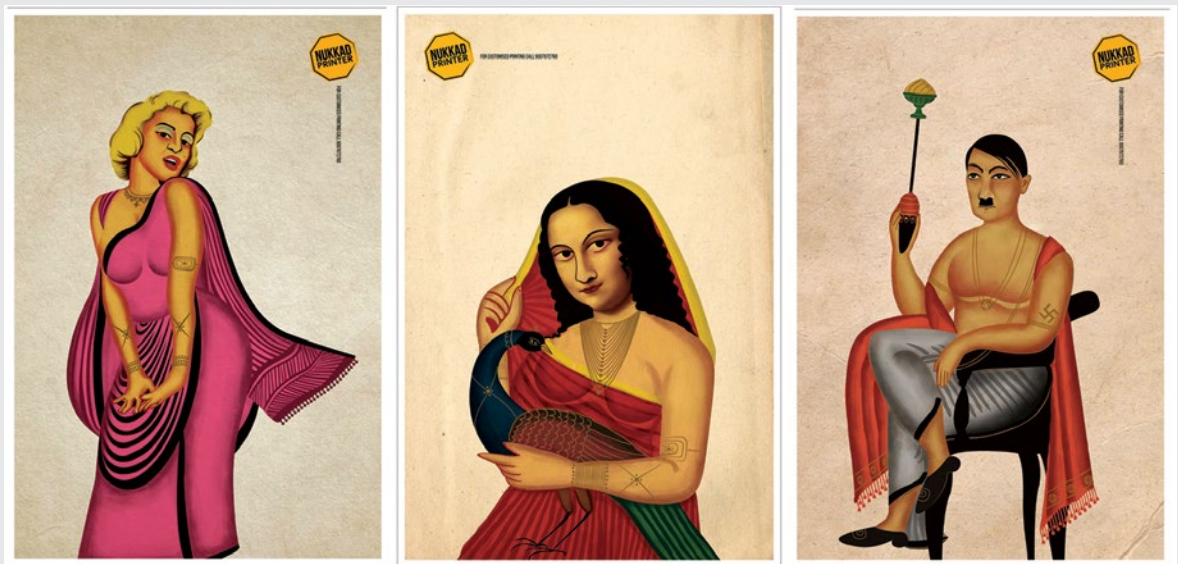


Fig. 17 Nukkad Printer. Source: <https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/local-marilyn>, 2017

## Fortune's Hilsa Special Pack Kachi Ghani Oil (Mustard Oil)

Mustard Oil Advertisements, Year of Making: 2024,  
Agency: Unknown, India

The recipe for Ilish/Hilsa is one of the popular cuisines among Bengalis. To promote their oil, Fortune Mustard Oil starts the Ilish Festival 2024 and creates a special packaging titled, 'Hilsa Special Pack.' In one advertisement, Babu is carrying a Hilsa fish, while in another, Bibi is cooking Hilsa while Babu helps her add some spices (Fig. 18).

The advertisement is set against a bright yellow background with decorative wavy lines and a scalloped border. In the top left corner, the Fortune logo is displayed with the text 'premium kachi ghani pure mustard oil'. The main text reads: 'Step 1 Use Fortune's Hilsa-special pack while preparing your unique Hilsa recipe'. Below this text, an illustration shows a woman in a white and red sari cooking in a blue pot on a stove, while a man in a green and red kurta adds spices. To the right, a large image of the 'Hilsa Special Pack' of Fortune Kachi Ghani oil is shown. The pack is white with red and green accents, featuring the Fortune logo, the text '1 litre (910 g) premium kachi ghani pure mustard oil', and an illustration of a man carrying a fish. The website 'fortunefoods.com' is printed at the bottom of the pack.

Fig. 18 Fortune Kachi Ghani. Source: Banglanatok.com 2024.

As we see, the Babu becomes a cricket player, and the Bibi becomes a singer. Sometimes both are part of a musical band; sometimes they are body fitness freaks. Babu is carrying a laptop, and another babu is giving a mixer grinder to Bibi. Additionally, Babu assists Bibi with cooking, while Bibi is represented as a postmodernist version of either Marilyn Monroe or the Mona Lisa, and Babu is depicted as Hitler.

If we look back, we observe that Kalighat painting lost its glory in the early 20th century due to the advent of chromolithography and its cheap production. These cheap chromolithographs killed the hand-painted production. The themes and styles of Kalighat paintings, the series of Babus and Bibis, have been inspiring artists from various fields until today. The babu was a social category in colonial Bengal, but the patua's portrayal of him was full of irony, exaggeration, and keen social commentary. The 'Babu Bibi' series of Kalighat patachitra remains popular, inspiring designers to create branding that effectively communicates with prospective buyers. We still carry the colonial past with us. The Westernized Bengali Babu and Bibi reflect how colonial influence still shapes our cultural identity, showing both the continuity of the past and the evolution of the present. So, the concept of Babu and Bibi becomes a hybrid figure of two cultures, which has a relevance until today.

In advertising, we have seen the blended version of the Patachitra of Pingla and Kalighat. By incorporating the Patachitra style in advertising, brands can create unique, culturally relevant, and engaging campaigns that resonate with Indian audiences. Brands can develop distinctive, culturally appropriate, and captivating advertising campaigns that appeal to Indian consumers by adopting the Patachitra style. Companies are leveraging India's regional art to promote their products. In Bengal, many businesses try to sell their goods by giving them a Patachitra-style

makeover. The optimal use of patachitra for promoting brands may be called the strategy of hyperlocal marketing. It helps your brand receive more attention and interaction from individuals in a certain area. This familiarity with the practice of patachitra among the people of Bengal enhances its effectiveness.

The patachitra style has been popular for a long time. This is due to its ability to convey information in a straightforward and visually appealing manner. Patachitra's journey continues, evolving from narrative tools to souvenirs and from home decor to marketing tools for advertising. Images can sometimes say more than words. It will be considered a unique style that showcases the cultural richness of Bengal to the world. The Kalighat Pat declined over time, but it continued to influence others. The Kalighat patachitra style seems like a phoenix, a bird that rises from the ashes. The Kalighat patachitra style is preserved in the museum, yet it serves as inspiration for various branding and promotional efforts. It becomes a recurring motif for positioning the identity of Bengal. It highlights how things have changed over time and how they are still the same. ■

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