

‘This fascinating and important collection of essays provides a timely corrective to social sciences approaches to the study of Indian culture and society. Any contemporary understanding of Indian modernity – caste, class, gender, intimacies, religiosity, citizenship, etc. – is incomplete without an understanding of how consumer cultures shape everyday lives. Focussing on both the colonial and post-colonial periods, the book’s contributors lucidly outline the multiple publics imagined by advertising as well as how people construct identities through varied acts of consumption’.

*Sanjay Srivastava, British Academy Global Professor,
University College London*

‘This collection of articles, with a well written introduction, is an important contribution to the analysis of the process of growth and working of consumer capitalism in contemporary India. The major strength of this collection is its focus on a deep, as well as immediate, historical perspective behind complex intertwining social fields: production practices, market cultures and consumer choices. Well-informed by western sociological theories, the contributors have underlined the making and transformation of consumer culture from the restricted horizon of colonial environment to the glittering world of mass consumption and mass culture with its necessary predicaments’.

*Gautam Bhadra, Honorary Professor at the Centre for
Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata*

Globalising Everyday Consumption in India

This book brings together historical and ethnographic perspectives on Indian consumer identities.

Through an in-depth analysis of local, regional, and national histories of marketing, regulatory bodies, public and domestic practices, this interdisciplinary volume charts the emergence of Indian consumer society and discusses commodity consumption as a main feature of Indian modernity.

The nationalist discourse was formed by starting with the morality of consumption patterns feeding into middle-class identity; the chapters demonstrate how different strata of society were targeted as markets for everyday commodities associated with global lifestyles early on. A section of the book illustrates how a new group of professionals engaged in advertising trying to create a market shaped tastes and discourses and how campaigns provided a range of consumers with guidance on 'modern lifestyles'. Chapters discussing advertisements for consumables like coffee and cooking oil, show these to be part of new public cultures. The ethnographic chapters focus on contemporary practices and consumption as a main marker of class, caste and community. Throughout the book consumption is shown to determine communal identities, but some chapters also highlight how it reshapes intimate relationships. The chapters explore the middle-class family, microcredit schemes, and metropolitan youth cultures as sites in which consumer citizenship is realised.

The book will be of interest to readers from a range of disciplines, including anthropology, history, geography, sociology, South Asian studies, and visual cultures.

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Globalising Everyday Consumption in India

History and Ethnography

**Edited by Bhaswati Bhattacharya
and Henrike Donner**

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Introduction

Bhaswati Bhattacharya and Henrike Donner

The contributions to this edited volume share a focus on the rise of consumer capitalism in twentieth-century India, and the interdisciplinary nature of the chapters testify to the multiple facets of South Asian consumer cultures. But not only academics, a variety of actors, including multinational companies, the state, social commentators, and media outlets from around the globe have highlighted the immense changes Indian society has undergone in relation to the spread of commodity consumption. Today, India is widely conceived in terms of its potential to become a ‘modern’ consumer society, and the opportunities its ‘markets’ provide for global production chains, sales, and trade, which have transformed citizenship, understandings of the nation and everyday lives.

While much academic and political concern has been directed towards the rapid transformations of the post-liberalisation period, this volume highlights that commodity consumption emerged much earlier as a major marker of and for Indian modernity and that contemporary practices are intimately linked to complex local, regional, and national historical developments. While industrially produced goods ranging from matches to body lotions were often initially introduced in the colonial period by foreign agents, commodities played a major role in nationalist imaginations as striking symbols of the power of the independent nation and figured prominently in moral debates around Indian modernity. After independence, the developmental state pushed industrialisation, and while India remained a largely agrarian economy, private entrepreneurs drew on public sector investment that triggered the expansion of commodity markets through the development of infrastructure focused on the production of essential goods to ‘develop’ the nation (Arnold 2013; Balachandran 1996; Tomlinson 1979). Thus, the production of sugar, cement, fertilisers, and steel was funded by the state in the spirit of Indian self-sufficiency and such efforts also enhanced the spread of wider practices related to these and other commodities (Mukherjee and Mukherjee 1988).

The importance of the earlier expansion of commodity consumption as a political project cannot be overstated, as it was during the late colonial period that commodities (in India as elsewhere) came into their own as markers of a global notion of what it meant to be modern (Arnold 2013),

and that markets in India were reshaped in line with the demand for self-determination (*swaraj*) and campaigns to produce and consume locally (*swadeshi*). Much of the investment into the production of such goods was small scale and local, with workshops and factories in big cities and small towns creating a host of consumer durables. Such units were after independence often transferred into the ownership of well-known Indian conglomerates like ICI and Tata. Brands created in this way became household names across the nation and often successfully adapted to the rapidly changing post-liberalisation landscape. Godrej, widely known for its appliances, and Britannia, a favourite biscuit brand, are both examples of these complex capital circuits which were created as both companies emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and today they still meet the demands of customers across India. In the post-Independence era, the successful introduction of Amul dairy products in the aftermath of the white revolution through agricultural cooperatives can be read as a success story of state-sponsored consumption, resulting from by a combination of government subsidies, entrepreneurial acumen, and national distribution networks. The success of this range of dairy products coincided with the first taste of televised marketing of everyday lifestyle goods for the middle-class home. From the 70s onwards, such items were increasingly produced by multinationals, for example Maggi noodles, produced by Nestlé, cleaning agents belonging to Unilever owned brands, and a wide range of toiletries as well as soft drinks, all of which were advertised and distributed nationwide and often promoted in the course of extensive multi-media campaigns. The 1980s saw powerful advertising campaigns related to domestic and aspirational commodities with TV jingles so well-known that children would sing them in the playground (Baviskar 2018). This later phase of consumer capitalism, though not the latest, established a new circuit, namely the direct link between state investment, commodity consumption and middle-class taste. Crucially, these products were branded products, often understood by customers to be 'foreign', and were pushed by multinational companies which had earlier struggled against bans, protests, and legal and economic state interventions, among them the notorious case that forced Coca Cola to withdraw from the Indian market in 1977. Not only did the 1980s and 1990s provide room for the introduction of many globally recognisable commodities, but urban sections of the Indian population were also increasingly able to invest in non-essential consumption practices. In the aftermath of legal reforms, which liberalised Indian markets and opened the country to foreign investment, a mass consumer culture based on global commodity forms and aggressive advertising developed India into a mature and sophisticated global market. This development also led to the by now familiar moral panic around 'consumerism' (allegedly excessive consumption), commentators linked to the rise of malls and coffee shops, of gated communities and fashion shows all of which were cast as sites of global consumption patterns indicative of the rise of a 'new' middle class (Heiman et al. 2012; Liechty 2002).

In the course of the post-liberalisation period consumption came to be the main signifier of being middle-class – an emic category – locally, and while attempts to ‘evaluate the sociological adequacy of speaking about the middle class in contemporary India ... can best be left to psephologists and marketing professionals’, this volume shows that in order to think through the middle class as an analytical category the history of commodities and the study of contemporary practices can help us ‘to attempt to understand how the concept structures and enables a certain set of “imagined Indias” – both utopian and dystopian – to be articulated’ (Mazzarella 2004:3).

The contributions chart some of these ‘imagined Indias’ through discourses related to a wide range of commodities which are entangled in such imaginaries. Clearly, when, how and where mass consumption of industrially produced commodities for everyday use emerged, and what kind of technologies and publics played a role in creating and maintaining meaningful ways of thinking about commodities, showcases larger political developments. Furthermore, what consumption practices achieve – often group formation, but at the same time also exclusions and marginalisations – how they are embedded in moral debates, and what links mass consumption to questions of governance, of politics, and of the global economy – is explored in the chapters presented. Marketing plays a major role in this story, as it is through such ‘technologies of enchantment’ (Gell 1998), or more mundanely, advertising campaigns, that customers turn into consumers, desires turn into needs, and tastes into group-based identities. Part of our concern is to demonstrate how the larger story of the economy enabled specific practices of consumption and how state initiatives paved the way for certain commodities to become commonplace within a developmentalist paradigm in the past. This model has subsequently been substituted with a set of neoliberal policies and access to global markets which reproduce notions of consumer citizenship.

The present volume provides detailed accounts how commodities relate to community, locality, and personhood. The narratives around commodities are shown to form part of creative imaginings which are constrained structurally by caste, ethnic community and class, but such group-based identities are also reimagined in the course of technological innovation, larger infrastructural and distribution changes, emerging legal frameworks and capitalist expansion. Those circuits often started as vernacular subcultures but became increasingly unified in the course of nationalist agitation, post-Independence state interventions and the emphasis on consumer citizenship from the 1980s onwards.

The immense diversity of Indian publics, differentiated by language, region, caste, and religious affiliation, even where they are united by class-based dispositions and social institutions, was and still is a challenge for those creating mass commodities. Such larger themes emerge as histories of consumption and the making of the Indian consumer, simultaneously contextualised within the history of commodity consumption globally and the rise of middle-class hegemonies (Heiman et al. 2012). Furthermore, the chapters in this volume show how various publics deal with discourses on

consumption as a matter of public morality, of politics, of citizenship, which are productive of class-based identities but are based on often very localised ethnic, religious, caste, and regional subcultures and their boundary making practices. Clearly, consumption is not limited to the Indian middle class, but the histories presented show how the ‘common man’ becomes a trope for consumer citizenship modelled on middle-class lifestyles (Baviskar and Ray 2011a: 3) aspired to across regional and class divides.

Theories of consumption

The study of consumption, in particular in relation to commodities, has developed into a flourishing field since Appadurai advocated a sociology of consumption (Appadurai 1986).

The social and economic importance of everyday consumption in any society has led to a whole range of approaches to the study of material culture, theories about subject–object relationships, and the study of specific practices across time and space.

Within social theorising material objects are understood as products and active agents of history (Auslander 2005) and their consumption constitutes an essential part of human existence across time and space (Douglas and Isherwood 1978). Crucially, concerns with consumption and about moralities are not new and ideas about appropriate consumption and ‘excess’ can be found in different historical contexts. Thus, as Davidson (1998) notes, early Greek writings reflect concerns with food and its relationship to politics, and Bray’s (1997) work on Imperial China demonstrates that technological innovations that transformed material culture also produced new moral regimes. Such concerns often reflect the discursive domain of elites, for example where the Mughal Emperor Akbar uses luxury goods as a marker of social status (Cohn 1997). Debates about the moral status of consumption practices clearly pre-date the ‘vestimentary revolution’ as Weatherill’s (1996) study of domestic space in seventeenth-century Britain and Roche’s (1994) work on clothing and body adornment in France in the same period demonstrate. All of these studies focus on ways in which consumption of everyday goods enables and indicates social status and hierarchical relationships, be that between generations, genders, or those belonging to different classes.

Taking the example of food practices, Zwart (2000) shows how ancient Greece was concerned about food preparations and their effect, and Bynum (2013) showcases concerns about gendered moralities and non-consumption in her work on fasting among women in medieval Europe. With reference to South Asian consumption practices, Cohn (1997) discusses the wearing of physical symbols as part of Sikh identity as a community concern, Banerji (2010) provides rich insights into the way fish and its consumption demarcate the boundaries of a Bengali regional culture, and Beck (1969) as well as Osella (2014) speak about the use of coloured garments as a matter of

collective inheritance across centuries. Guha-Thakurta (2017), on the other hand charts the move from crafts to the production of commodities and the making of national art. Such complex relationships between consumption and morality are often reflected in rich ‘indigenous’ theories – enshrined in proverbs, stories, customary codes, and artefacts of various kinds. With the great transformation following the industrial revolution and the democratisation of mass-produced consumables (marketed also in the colonies and circulated more or less exclusively in the course of monetary exchanges), commodity consumption became part of everyday life. It is therefore not surprising that the most encompassing theories concerned with this transformation focus on consumption as a set of abstract principles, anchored in one specific time and place.

Seminal social theorising associated with the works of Marx, Simmel, Veblen, the Frankfurt School, Bourdieu, Baudrillard, and Barthes focuses on consumption as part of disciplinary concerns with social change and society, a concept that emerges with capitalist expansion and the global integration of systems of production in which consumption features as a way of inclusion in an interdependent, unequal and modern world of accumulation, profit, and industrial production. The kind of consumer culture theories that emerged are not speaking of mere goods and exchanges or markets, they are concerned with the process of commodification and the social relations that make it possible but are also produced by circulation of commodities. It is in its abstraction that the relationship between subjects and objects put forward by Hegel gains new salience as a theory of objectification. His work suggests that human labour mediates relationships between the natural and the human world and informed Marx’s thinking on alienation, which sees capitalist production as creating commodities that are remaking social relations. In earlier Marxist frameworks consumption remains analytically subordinated to production and as critics have suggested his excessive emphasis on production implicit in the notion of ‘production for production’s sake’ (Marx [1867] 1990:742) captures ‘the entire history of man in a gigantic simulation model’ (Baudrillard 1975: 33, 1981). Baudrillard also points to the misconception of production as the only site of meaningful engagement with the world and argues that Marx misses the importance of consumption as an equally relevant arena within which use and exchange value co-exist (*ibidem*). Allowing consumption to be interpreted solely in the context of needs, coercion, and structural constraints stemming from relations of production promotes an overtly economistic and narrow-minded view on consumption and on commodities and their social life in capitalist societies as careful ethnography of appropriation and research into consumer behaviours suggests (Miller 1987; Jackson and Holbrook 1995). These limitations are also born out by studies that focus on early examples of ‘fashions’ driven by surging demands for specific goods, such as the material transformations of domesticities found across Northern European in the seventeenth century cited above.

Furthermore, consumption features heavily in social science approaches concerned with group-based identities, and these are not limited to so-called 'traditional' patterns and societies. In an important move, and following on from earlier work that takes consumption as a matter of subject formation and social stratification seriously, including Weber, Veblen, and Simmel, Bourdieu's (1984) seminal discussion of class-based differences in 'taste' shows how consumption practices serve to reproduce privileges of class. He argues that consumption functions as a major site of powerful boundary making and the accumulation of symbolic capital. The notion that different groups have different and often stratified cultures, itself a result of discourses on alterity that emerge in the colonial period, becomes manifest in discourses on 'culture' and is shown to provide a folk mythology of middle-class superiority. Within this context commodities do not act directly as markers of economic standing, but rather as expressions of shared, broader values including beliefs in meritocracy, refinement, cosmopolitanism, and individualism, to name but a few.

Moreover, the analysis of consumption regains a critical edge in studies that link the consumption of specific commodities to modern regimes of production and to an analysis of global circuits. Here, mass consumption becomes a matrix through which the intersections between gender, class, race and ethnicity are shown to arise from, complex systems of exploitation, alienation, and the appropriation of resources across large spatial divides. In the still seminal example of such an analysis, Sidney Mintz (1985) demonstrates how the craze for sugar among broad sections of the Western populace integrated the racialised politics of the colony seamlessly with class and status cultures in the global North's industrial centres. Within this kind of analysis, commodities and associated consumer cultures figure as material expressions of wider politico-economic relationships which link capitalist expansion directly to the signifying and subjectifying properties of commodities in the age of mass consumption. No longer the preserve of only high-status groups, goods turned into commodities retain their relationship with status differentials, and such commodities are often of little direct use value. However, sold at high profits in well-organised and competitive markets, they embody symbolic gains which, in a modern world swamped with mass-produced items available in increasingly democratised exchanges, become a source of distinction and social valour, i.e. art or high-end fashion, but also those little rituals of consumption considered 'common indulgences'.

Schivelbusch's (1992) account of the politics around the consumption of spices and intoxicants in Europe indicates that the broad availability of mass-produced commodities during the colonial period led to public debates that focused more and more on the symbolic value of consumer goods. In fact, the moral panics that marked Puritan concerns about mass consumption emerged from such complex consumer, commodity and global market entanglements.

Thus, after charting the rise of coffee as an antidote to alcoholic beverages, Schivelbusch observes that the once rare good became a common beverage and was domesticated as it turned into a treat for women in bourgeois homes (Schivelbusch 1992).

What may be perceived as a peculiar Victorian concern with public morality related to consumption played out in the colony as a nationalist focus on the distinction between ‘foreign’ and ‘Western’ practices, as work on the *swadeshi* movement and its afterlife in post-Independence middle-class lives shows (Gupta 2012). Tarlo’s account of young women grappling with the ethical choice of home-spun vs industrially produced, fashionable clothing in the late 1980s (Tarlo 1996) raises questions around the deep historical reach of sartorial choices, which precede recent debates on and ethnographies of ethical consumption, as detailed, for example, in work on commodity chains and fair trade (Luechtford et al. 2012). Thus, while earlier discourses relied heavily on a distinction between the periphery and – a mostly Western and urban, core – recent studies increasingly show the geographically dispersed nature of the processes that link communities involved in production and those who become communities of consumers, to span the entire globe (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994; Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986). Rewriting such complex processes challenges ideas about overtly deterministic consumption practices and, as the movements of ‘global forms’ and consumption patterns show, a comparative perspective critiques simplistic narratives of cause and effect. Tarlo’s (2016) work on the multiple sites that create hair as a global commodity with multiple moral discursive formations, and last but not least dispersed sites of production as a commodity, provides a modified and sensitive analysis of such complexities as it interweaves the narratives of flows of goods with those of ideas and those of people.

Often such important layers and the different scales involved are overlooked because consumption is considered to be limited to the domestic sphere. The gendered dimension of theories about consumption have only gradually come to the fore as everyday consumption practices – earlier attributed to the sphere of ‘reproduction’ – are now seen as major sites of decision making. Semiotic approaches – on the other hand – while often reproducing negative discourses on ‘consumerism’ and initially limited to Western elite experiences – provide philosophically inflected work on changing material cultures and charted novel, non-materialist theories of how persons and objects are linked (Benjamin [1935] 2002; Veblen [1899] 1994). Some of this work builds on insights gained from earlier comparative studies of non-Western societies and past entanglements of objects and subjects in religious, magical or enchanted engagements. However, far from being limited to the past or so-called ‘primitive’ societies, Scholars developing the common theme of commodities as powerful agents in consumerist discourses draw our attention to how objects are invested with special, symbolic, and often transformative powers. Just as creativity in any society has been shown to transform things into carriers of complex meanings

(Gell 1998), and objects are often seen as agentive (Auslander 2005) they can be interpreted as inalienable part of their creator's personhood (Malinowski [1922] 1978), whilst as commodities goods come to be understood as markers of their user's identity (Miller 2012). As anthropologists have argued, engagement with objects does not produce linear 'development' towards a common modernity (Strathern 1990; Gell 1986).

If anthropological theory speaks about material culture in terms of the way objects are created and conceived as part of social relations, historical research focuses on the changing nature of consumption in different regions over time, and often demonstrates that what is considered to be a 'traditional' usage or understanding of practices is malleable and open to reinterpretation. Monographs and studies of relatively widespread – if not mass – consumption of specific goods show amazingly elaborate and powerful 'customs' related to practices that pre-date the industrial era. Thus, literature on methods of brewing tea and the rituals accompanying its consumption date back to the seventh century and testify to a widespread culture of beverage consumption in China, the then largest consumer of tea in the world. Similarly, the domestic market for sugar in China remained dominant till at least the nineteenth century (Mazumdar 1998). Other studies document the importance of tea in Persia and specific regions of the African subcontinent, or highlight its role in later debates around the morality of mass consumption (see, for example, Holtzman 2003; Matthee 1994; Sudakov 2005).

The introduction of mass-produced commodities challenges existing social relations, and classic social science charts the effects of novel practices without giving in to the kind of methodological individualism that marks studies of marketing and advertising. Such work focuses on complex and broad processes by linking commodity consumption to issues of national integration, global value chains and class formation (i.e. Veblen [1899] 1994) and to debates around 'modernity' and its public cultures. As is evident in Simmel's work on money ([1900] 1978) early twentieth-century theorists discuss commodities in relation to abstract, monetary exchanges which hide their production but also create a need to generate a narrative around these exchanges. In the world Benjamin (2002) and Veblen describe, consumption has long been elevated to a means of modern self-making, a time-consuming and learned pursuit which relies heavily on the mythologies of origin attached to certain goods and the way they become invested with an 'aura'. But contrary to pre-modern notions of the power of things commodities are not goods that contain any magical properties or powers, but are agentive because they create and address shared desires, a broad field of affective as well as social relationships, linking persons and their environments in circuits of value that are subject to capitalist exploitation. As these fields of action become more complex, commodity consumption requires ever more dedication and knowledge, and the processes of objectification at play involve the consumer in the active decontextualisation of goods and the recontextualisation of commodities. More often than

not the utility of an object is reduced to its status-enhancing properties and 'owning' commodities means engagement with the story they are part of. Whilst this kind of theorising builds on Marxist concepts of alienation and was linked by the Frankfurt School to processes of mediated mass consumption (i.e. Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002; Marcuse [1964] 2002), social scientists concerned with the comparative study of commodity consumption developed more nuanced approaches to the resulting projects of conscious self-creation. This work often shows how group-based identity rests on the appropriation and re-embedding of commodities and the ways in which these practices provide voice to marginal groups.

However, such theorising does not naively embrace positive approaches to commodities and the diverse histories of consumerism as a way of life. In capitalist society, as Baudrillard (1975, 1981) among others has argued, consumption becomes a matter investing goods with meaning, but commodities are interchangeable. This distinguishes commodities, often invested with long genealogies of consumption, from goods of the same kind found before the 'great transformation'. Capitalist modernity demands that goods be interpreted within complex systems of signification, often referred to as 'culture', which are products of – and productive of – inequalities. For all the stories of authenticity, heritage, and true origin, goods in their commodified form are cut loose and become mere reflections of desires that are ultimately the result of alienation. Consumption in this context becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, a matter of signs, of dominance and subordination, ideology and imposition, often taking playful forms, but ultimately divisive and deeply invested in gendered, racialised, and classed histories of appropriation.

Consuming publics

Modernity manifesting itself in South Asia through the multiple material practices of public culture including consumption was – as recent scholarship argues – a 'diversely appropriated experience' (Chatterjee, Guha-Thakurta, and Kar 2014: 8). However, in contrast with the West, much of the earlier writings on global modernities portrays South Asia the region as producing commodities destined for the world market rather than as a site of commodity consumption. Not only does this ignore the reality of emerging economies' entanglements in domestic as well as global markets from the colonial period onwards, but it also hampers the development of a theory of consumption reflective of the uneven experience of such developments. As goods and meanings circulate in ever more complex ways within and between localities, nation-states, and regions, notwithstanding interdependencies and structural constraints, this emphasis on unilateral flows has given way to an acknowledgment of a multiplicity of circuits, cultural, material, and ideological, which determine consumption patterns on the ground.

Similarly, studies focused on the production of global commodities for Western consumption during the colonial period are more often than not concerned with the production for export markets and/or the politics of labour around cash crops like cotton, indigo, jute, and tea. Only recently attention has been paid to charting actual consumption practices in the colonies and the way in which pre-colonial practices informed the introduction of commodities. One of the reasons for this imbalance is the fact that while consumption patterns in Europe and the American colonies were widely reflected in the public sphere, South Asian consumption patterns affected communities more selectively and more unevenly (Washbrook 2006). It is mostly through the analysis of class formation that histories of local and regional consumption practices emerge and figure as part of social history beyond labour relations during the colonial period and almost exclusively in work on nationalist mobilisation (e.g. Alter 2000; Ray 1995).

Attention to commodity consumption as a matter of self- and group-based creation beyond the nation is relatively new. Furthermore, where commodities are concerned, apart from few exceptions (i.e. Gell 1986), most of the available literature is concerned with urban spaces and middle-class lifestyles (see Donner (2011) and Baviskar and Ray (2011b) for a detailed discussion of class formation and middle-class subcultures in India). Ethnographies of the global middle classes suggest that looking at class formation in the contemporary period shows that the related projects should not be seen through the lens of economic determinism but from a comparative and processual perspective. Clearly, commodity consumption plays a major role in promoting the related hegemonies (see Heiman et al. 2012; Banerjee and Duflo 2008; Krishnan and Hatekar 2017).

Discourses on consumption precede the great transformation, but as work on eighteenth-century European and North American consumer society shows these emerge in tandem with colonialism (see for example Flanders 2014; McKendrick et al. 1982; Mintz 1985). It is through earlier trade links that many commodities arrive in South Asia long before colonialism (Keay 2005), but these are mostly available to elites. Colonial domination in fact initially hampered the development of bourgeois publics ready for shared consumption practices while it was the concern with the public–private divide that made commodity consumption a matter of nationalist mobilisation (Chatterjee 1983).

It is in the course of nationalist movements, and due to the uneven industrialisation of a largely agrarian and extremely diverse society that the domestic sphere of middle-class citizens gains overarching importance in debates around nationhood and morality. The current rise in studies of consumption in South Asia has also furthered the historiography of such practices. Where colonial regimes enabled the introduction of novel commodities in the colonies, brokers promoting goods and identifying ‘customers’ created desires that only specific products could meet. New markets emerged in the colony

and consumers located in the West were no longer the sole targets for the promotion of commodities, though marketing and distribution as well as usage differed significantly. The tensions that such novel relationships produced are in the South Asian context visible early on when anti-colonial, nationalist politics focused quite explicitly on the social life of commodities, their production, but also their consumption. While actual patterns of consumption are much more difficult to measure and ascertain in hindsight, nationalist propaganda was largely successful in presenting India as a country with specific, ‘traditional’ and distinctly non-Western consumption practices and ‘needs’. It is in this context that Gandhi and his own everyday practice become essential to nationalist narratives about appropriate consumption (Alter 2000; Fischer-Tiné and Tschurennev 2014). These gained global attention during the *swadeshi* campaign and linked images of the nation to appropriate forms of consumption. Following Barthes (Barthes 2008), even the most innocuous sartorial choices became an intensely political challenge after this intervention and played out across a range of scales, from very local to global (Tarlo 1996; Trivedi 2007), and patterns adopted first by Indian elites gradually fed into mass cultures of commodity consumption. With reference to clothing, the integration of producers with circulations of specific consumption patterns and the stratification associated with everyday as well as luxury items is particularly pertinent (Kuldova 2016; Liechty 2002).

Genealogies detailing continuities and ruptures within today’s cultures of consumption also link local discourses to global processes. Many accounts that allow historians to trace such engagements are available, with the most well-documented examples the spread of cash-crop-based commodities introduced under colonial rule. Studies exploring the advertising and marketing networks that made the spread of mundane articles possible include work on soap, tea, coffee, and tobacco, but also work on life insurance, healthcare products, and commodities dependent on substantial infrastructures like gas and kerosine. While scholarship focuses on how advertising increased the popularity and saleability of commodities, and promoted consumption (see for example, Bhadra 2014; Lutgendorf 2012; Venkatachalapathy 2006; Bhattacharya 2017), the relationship between the way consumers were ‘made’ and ‘imagined’ and the way demand on the ground increased for numerous other commodities needs to be explored in much more detail.

The lack of work on the period after independence until the policies of economic liberalisation changed the landscape of commodity consumption in India beyond recognition is particularly apparent. The scarcity of studies related to this era can be explained by emphasis on the developmentalist state and redistribution in an economy marked by widespread poverty and a rigidly controlled ‘licence raj’. The existing volumes devoted to this period – especially Breckenridge (1995), Dwyer and Pinney (2003), Haynes et al. (2010) and Mathur (2013) – are noteworthy examples of studies that address consumer cultures at the heart of middle-class formations in post-Independence India.

The relationship between class formation and consumption is first addressed in the volume edited by Breckenridge (1995), which shows how cinemas, museums, restaurants, sports, and other now common middle-class leisure practices are main sites of modernity in India. As new forms of ideal careers, families and social relationships emerged, dress codes, eating habits and domesticities, health and beauty care, as well as education and leisure pursuits produced middle-class consumer practices based on caste, region, and religious affiliation in relation to notions of 'modern' lifestyles. These and other publications also show that discourses about the moral side of commodity consumption often drew on earlier, upper-caste debates of appropriately 'Hindu' forms of consumption, which reflected nationalist notions of gendered imagery (Procida 2002; Walsh 2004). The post-Independence period was marked by the extension of such notions into the normative and expert-driven discourses about appropriately 'Indian' lifestyles, outwardly defined against 'foreign' and 'Western' consumerist tendencies, and the integrative power of state-led and austere developmentalism (Khilnani 1997). This changes, as Mazzarella observes, once economic liberalisation policies allow commodity production and marketing to explode (Mazzarella 1997).

Marketing and promotion

It is in this context that advertising and marketing push the development of mass communication, extending the scope of disseminating information about commodities. The process was boosted from the late nineteenth century onwards by the growth of corporate capitalism intent on expanding markets (Williams 1980: 177–8) and the increasing role of localised consumption patterns in the colonies, as part of the growing trans-Atlantic trade between 1890 and 1940. While economists increasingly focused on the study of 'markets', scholars interested in advertising and consumption observed how marketing communicated to the 'potential consumer' about the 'possible emotional satisfaction' promised by the advertised products (Lears 1983, 1994).

Ethnographies focusing on marketing did, however, show that in order to communicate, specific publics needed to be created. As Mazzarella suggests, the deeply held conviction on the opposition of 'India' vs 'the West' in post-Independence India shaped ideas about consumption shared by the newly powerful middle-class (Mazzarella 2003). With economic liberalisation it appeared that the earlier 'idea of India' (Khilnani 1997) promoted by 'old' middle-class proponents of an anti-consumerist culture charted by earlier scholarship (Misra 1961; Varma 2007) was increasingly eclipsed by an understanding of middle-class lifestyles as based on global commodities. This rewriting of nationalist tropes was undertaken by advertising professionals whose expertise of shared moralities had developed from the colonial period onwards. In India, as elsewhere, advertising first depended on the spread of print media across the nation, but practitioners were well aware from the outset that the heterogeneity of histories, customs, and uses of

goods had to be carefully researched in order to create a range of ‘consumption communities’ (Pope 1983). Most obviously, caste and community-based histories of consumption, but also novel discourses on colonial entanglements with ‘foreign’ and commodified practices, fed into the knowledge produced by agencies and experts. Based on distinctions between specific groups, successful marketing and the appropriation of selected commodities provided the base for the making of consumers, and commodities became productive of what Raymond Williams (1980) referred to as ‘structure of feeling’. Rather than merely reference emotional or affective reactions as marketing research suggests (i.e. Khuong and Tram 2015), what is at stake here are barely articulated dispositions that allow for goods to weave into complex assemblages of objects and persons.

More recently the relationship between consumption, identity and self-fashioning has been explored in detailed ethnography that shows that consumers are often not reacting merely to advertising in their decision-making processes (Miller 2012), but that commodities act as signifiers of status and identity in an indirect way. These studies suggest that commodity consumption relates ‘modernity’ to ideas about individualism and modes of self-expression, as commodities come to be associated with processes of imagination and creativity. It is here where advertising and marketing campaigns that went into their making are situated in the process of consumption, as marketing reflects self-images and references complex histories of identification (Mathur 2018).

From the late nineteenth century onwards international and local agencies targeted affluent sections of Indian society as potential consumers of a range of commodities. These were invested with meaning by emerging popular commercial art forms which fed into the founding of agencies that hired local copywriters, artists, and designers (Guha-Thakurta 2017). While some companies advertised their own products, Indian professional agencies competed with global players during the interbellum years (Maheshwari 2019). The existing studies of these interventions highlight the complex heterogeneous nature of Indian audiences (Haynes 2015; Rajagopal 2011). Thus, pharmaceutical marketing in late colonial India brought local and global players catering to different populations into competition (Mukharji 2009; Sharma 2012). The success of local agencies was partly built on their expert knowledge of vernacular motifs and visual tropes that referenced a range of subcultures which advertising simultaneously reflected and produced into consuming communities (Haynes 2015; Jain 2017).

Most advertisers constructed a product identity that distinguished it from similar products but added one or more significant qualities in accordance with the origin of the brand, the nature of the product and the target group. Thus, adverts on cooking oil came with warnings about the risk associated with locally manufactured unbranded but cheap ‘adulterated’ oil or soap, while one drug advertised in Tamil media promised to cure all ailments. Agencies advertising housing presented knowledge of architectural designs of home as dream sites associated with consumption, leisure, and traditional

family values; while household appliances were promoted as related to health and as labour saving devices. Ads for toilet soaps referred to nature, tradition, and nation, but also served as cultural commodities selling stardom (Gadihoke 2010). Coffee and tobacco were projected as indispensable parts of leisure, relaxation, sociability, and satisfaction. But the tag of modernity was common to all products advertised.

The 1940s brought a push towards professionalisation to what had hitherto been a bricolage of practices and practitioners relying heavily on enthusiastic and entrepreneurial amateurs (Jain 2017). Furthermore, the state became a major player in campaigns, which increasingly included selling public sector programmes to large segments of the population.

Following economic liberalisation, studies on consumer identities in India feed into debates on the rise of the so-called 'new' middle class in South Asia (see e.g. Brosius 2012; Donner 2011; Fernandes 2006; Liechty 2002; Lukose 2009; Mathur 2010; Mazzarella 2003; Baviskar and Ray 2011a). While commodity consumption had been a matter of much debate in the nationalist movement, it was in the post-liberalisation era that consumer society became the focus of moral panics explicitly associated with middle-class aspirations. During the 1990s India was recast as a global economic player, and the earlier notion of a nation run by educated and enlightened middle-class planners, where economic efforts focused on development, was substituted by a push towards consumer citizenship and capitalist expansion. Scholars working on middle-class identities have suggested that this phase charted a deliberate disengagement from Nehruvian values and a reordering of state-citizen relationships with middle-class interests taking priority over questions of redistribution (Varma 2007; Jaffrelot and Van der Veer 2008; Donner 2011).

In this and other national contexts, middle-class lifestyles came to be hegemonic even where commodities only index desires for social mobility which may not be attainable. Commodities and their usage are increasingly seen as a main means of self-making and are entangled in mediascapes which, driven by cheap digital technologies, are available to most sections of the population. Here as elsewhere, consumption as a site of desire, fulfilment, and active identity construction, framed by the overwhelming impact of the media and advertising, feeds into consumer communities managed by professionals, who make them sites of belonging. As Mazzarella's (2003) early ethnography of marketing shows, tying in with earlier nationalist narratives, commodities are elevated to a higher level of experience through the way they draw on ideas about the nation and appropriately modern middle-class lifestyles in post-liberalisation India.

However, the pressure to continuously engage with the world of commodities, as van Wessel (2004) points out, can also be perceived as oppressive when 'keeping up with the Joneses' causes friction and conflict as well as anxiety (Dickey 2013; van Wessel 2004). The adverse effects of consumerist paradigms were of course theorised early on by Weber, who argued that

status anxiety is an implicit condition of modernity and of class formation, as middle-classness can only ever be conceived as a project (Weber [1946] 2009). Furthermore, as Baviskar's (2018) discussion of the consumption and appropriation of industrial food shows, global commodities like Maggi noodles provide stratified access to consumer citizenship. Narratives of national belonging and class-based status are shown to be mutually constructive both dependent, and both depend on the successful appropriation of consumption practices with a broad appeal.

Bourdieu (1984) suggests that consumption demonstrates command over cultural and symbolic forms of capital which are mostly available to middle-class consumers but appear to be within reach of the masses. Rather than levelling inequality, mass consumption allows for group-based identities to be articulated (Falk 1994; Miller 1995). At the same time, the proliferation and affordability of commodities also differentiates between specific practices broadly associated with 'being modern' in a host of new contexts. As Liechty's (2002) work on middle-class Nepal shows, engagement with public and performative aspects of commodity consumption, for example through fashion or eating out, affirms the morality of specific behaviours: what is considered too much, too ostentatious or too little is constantly reassessed according to context. Clearly, moral discourses on respect, reputation, and rationality are not the preserve of the middle class. But given its hegemonic positioning at the nodes that promote consumer citizenship – be it as owners of capital, as taste-makers, as experts or globalised trend-setters and educators – middle-class sections of Indian society are also its chief consumers.

However, rather than just affirm inter-class boundaries, commodity consumption differentiates between those belonging to lower status groups and others, whilst it unites communities and the nation in a discourse around commodities and their desirability. In South Asia consumption often helps to express differences between groups in terms of religious or ethnic community, caste, or folk ideas about class. Careful analysis has however emphasised that the values attached to specific food practices, rituals, dress codes, educational, and occupational histories have been seamlessly translated from upper-caste tradition into middle-class status and notions of upwardly mobility (e.g. Dickey 2013; Osella and Osella 2000). Documenting and analysing the rapidly changing world of India's middle-class lifestyles, such studies highlight how such practices have fed into various notions of South Asian modernities. But literature concerned with the formation of the middle class and the role of its 'cultures' has also delineated that at different times, non-consumption, partaking in anti-consumerist movements, and the selective appropriation of global habits form part of these processes. With reference to India, a range of scholars have shown how being middle class constitutes a political project that has led to a range of transformations that promote consumer citizenship (Fernandes 2006; Goptu 2013; Liechty 2002; Srivastava 2014). Commodity consumption, consumerism, and neoliberal ideologies focusing on market relations play a major role in these transformations of public as well as of

supposedly private discourses. Commodities, increasingly of unknown or multiple origins and disembedded from their context of production, are incorporated into citizens' everyday lives as objects of desire, indicators of modern dispositions and markers of difference. Consumption identified with specific castes, communities, and regions is also a matter of linking disparate spheres of personal and political relationships, for example between urban sites of consumption and rural producers, as in the case of commodities like coffee, tea, and tobacco, and fashion and 'ethnic' luxury clothing, and of rethinking Indian modernity on a global scale, as established diaspora 'cultures' and migrant lives connect to 'home' in multiple ways. In this way the nation remains closely associated with imageries that rely on the flow of specific commodities and shared practices that make it real through consumption (Ciotti 2012; Kuldova 2016; Mankekar 1999; Osella and Osella 2000; Rajagopal 1999).

Many of these ethnographic studies show that complex significations are created through advertising and media representations, underlining the context within which such re-embeddings take place and become meaningful. This directs attention to the broader transformations of work places, cityscapes, religious practices, and intimate lives which remake the way Indian citizens situate themselves. As commodities and markets are promoted as predominant modes of engaging with the world, increasingly also in rural areas, empirical research has shown that rather than creating homogenous landscapes of goods and their buyers, economic integration often enhances pre-existing inequalities. These emerge within households and communities and are always gendered and communally differentiated, as access to commodities requires control over funds, networks and knowledge, which makes consumer citizenship attainable for those able to acquire education, secure well-paid jobs, safe housing, and financial stability.

Consumer citizenship

The desire for enhanced access to commodities, including goods, services, and infrastructure, has been shown to drive large-scale political and economic transformations and is a main marker of Indian public debate. Within this context, neoliberal ideologies of access, choice and entrepreneurial selves have been associated with neoliberal politics of empowerment through consumer citizenship (Baviskar 2018; Gooptu 2013; Lukose 2009). Even the voice of marginal communities who protest against the costs of capitalist expansion often draws on the history of nationalist anti-consumption agitations using the language of the market (Varman and Belk 2009). Middle-class citizens are today routinely articulating demands in terms of a reformulated ideology of 'the common man' and 'his' needs, evident in consumer and anti-corruption movements (Baviskar and Ray 2011b; Brosius 2012; Webb 2019). Furthermore, the pressures of consumer culture have brought a whole host of newcomers into novel, and more often than not, precarious, social and economic relations. This is for example

the case with young men and women employed in Andhra Pradesh's Special Economic Zones, who enter exploitative employment to earn cash for their households as Cross (2010) has shown, or young mothers acting as surrogates to enable their families' access to commodities like private schooling (Sangari 2015). Financial agencies now market their products to ever remoter and more marginal populations, drawing them into aspirational consumer practices, and the intersection between poverty and commodity markets creates a whole new set of inequalities. The accompanying ongoing commodification of social relations includes the way transport, energy supplies, and water distribution are reorganised, but also – importantly – the privatisation of less tangible commodities, including healthcare, schooling, credit, and the commodification of care. All these processes are expected to enable access to modern amenities and, as such, play an important role in discourses on national development, but also the making of aspirational lifestyles. As these commodities become subject to extreme speculation, insecurity, and financialisation, citizens, regardless of economic standing, come to be closely and exclusively defined in terms of consumption. While middle-class consumers are using the accompanying politics of access and a discourse on consumer rights to appropriate global, aspirational lifestyles to their own advantage, others are increasingly pushed to the margins. It is therefore the case that the notion of citizenship itself has been transformed through mass consumption which enables demands to be made but differentiates notions of state obligation. This becomes particularly obvious where struggles over infrastructure, like housing and water, set up those able to make full use of new opportunities and play the game against those fighting for their livelihoods. Where theories of commodity consumption highlight its potential for self-fashioning, autonomy, and pleasure, the analysis of consumer citizenship suggests that the associated processes of accumulation enhance exclusion and marginalisation of large sections of the population (Ganguly Scrase and Scrase 2009; Ghertner 2015; Graham et al. 2013).

The current volume

The current collection adds to the body of literature on consumption in South Asia but is distinctive in a number of ways. First, the chapters on history spans the entire twentieth century, with contributions by Rajagopal, Venkatachalapathy, Haynes, and Sinha-Kerkhoff covering the early decades, while Ghosh, McGowan, and Bhattacharya write on the post-Independence era. The contributions by Donner, Khan, and Kar bring us into the contemporary period starting with the 1990s. Second, by bringing historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural studies scholars together, the volume offers a range of perspectives on the long-term processes of 'making consumers'. Third, the contributions link the social life of things to the production of knowledge that allows for their meaningful appropriation. That this process is one of multiple agents – including the state, advertising, and a community, broadly conceived – is demonstrated in the chapters concerned

with the contemporary appropriation of ideas about suitably modern consumer identities as well as chapters focusing on the genealogy of consumer citizenship. Fourth, diverse affiliations and attachments, for example as part of an association with a public place, households, neighbourhoods, membership of caste, or ethnic/religious communities in an abstract but often also localised sense, reflect collective and individualised understandings of the social landscape. The practices discussed show how commodities move from the colonial period onwards into contexts marked as ‘modern’, a discourse still present in contemporary consumption patterns. The sites where this is persistently manifest include debates about nation, the middle-class home, youth culture, or the constructions of the ‘deserving poor’.

Rajagopal’s chapter critically engages with the diverse genres and of forms of communication that mark the ‘Indian market’. The production of formal ‘advertising’ in late colonial India was limited to imported goods while ads in the bazaar were attached to durable and useful items like a calendar that circulated as part of a gift economy. Adopting a pedagogical role, the advertising industry represented a hegemonic cultural form, and although foreign agencies had to understand local customs, foreign-made goods were considered superior and even local manufacturers preferred foreign advertising agencies. While a limited number of accredited agencies served the metropolitan area, a larger number of agencies from vernacular regions were never registered. Advertising was, however, only one part of successful marketing, which also involved logistic networks, distribution, purchase, packaging, and sale for making the commodities available in local bazaars for mass consumption.

Venkatachalapathy traces the history of adverts in the late colonial period from handbills to advertising agencies through the slow and gradual development of Tamil print technology. The chapter highlights the existence of different types of marketing communication ranging from private advice of the merchant to the customer, the pedlar’s cry, adverts on lorries to adverts in print both in vernacular and English language media, which are shown to cater to different sections of society in the same localities.

The topic of appropriate forms of consumption is also the subject of Haynes’s chapter, which, using advertisements for electric household appliances in Western India addresses changes in domestic infrastructure during the interwar period. Given the availability of domestic labour the campaigns devised by agencies had to focus on the hidden advantages of electrified homes, and had to tap into the pedagogical project of a home suitable for middle-class citizens and their changing families. Whilst indoor plumbing and electricity were soon the norm in upper middle-class homes, labour-saving electrical devices were not embraced as servants were easily available and were charged with the most arduous tasks.

Sinha-Kerckhoff charts the spread of specific patterns of tobacco consumption, which displaced other kinds of smoking popular across castes,

classes, communities, genders, and regions in pre-colonial India. By the time nationalists became concerned about ‘non’-Indian, Western consumption practices, tobacco had indeed become so deeply embedded in the local economy and smoking culture that nationalists targeted only foreign cigarettes that became available from the turn of the nineteenth century onwards. In an ironic twist, this form of tobacco became an essential element of highly differentiated class-and gendered consumption patterns. The local *bidi*, on the other hand, came to represent traditional, rural India and remains popular among large sections of the working class and in rural areas.

Ghosh’s chapter shows how multiplicity rather than homogeneity marks representations of the nation where marketing of commodities was concerned. Drawing on print media published in Bengal between 1947 and 1965, the paper contrasts nation understood in terms of community with common traits of the nation as the body politic. Not surprisingly campaigns funded and devised by government departments highlighted how specific industries helped national progress. In contrast, private campaigns focused on a sense of tradition in order to highlight shared sensibilities of a specific target group. Thus, rather than sharing in a common project, those producing and promoting commodities created and circulated diverse ideas about the nation.

In a chapter drawing on publications of the Cement Association and the Concrete Association of India from the interwar period to the 1960s, McGowan shows that such marketing companies created material that aimed at educating the middle class in ‘suitably modern’ family and residential forms. These publications, written in English and with similar designs, addressed a pan-Indian audience and imagined middle-class domestic arrangements in terms of the modern nation by promoting values such as rational planning, hygiene, comfort, and thrift as shared ideals. More than presenting affordable housing plans the publications promoted ‘modern living’ through shaping aspirations in the process.

Bhattacharya’s chapter provides an insight into the creation of a domestic market for coffee in India. The coffee industry in India had been oriented towards the export market prior to the 1930s and local consumption was limited to the South, when the collapse of the global market forced producers to enhance national sales. In the course of a well-orchestrated campaign, the India Coffee House, a chain launched in urban India from 1936 onwards, facilitated an appreciation of the beverage. The Coffee Board, however, ignored the initial success of the campaign when new export markets opened up from the 1950s onwards, and emphasised the export market again. Commercial in the country failed to present coffee as an everyday commodity at the pan-India level. Global brands helped popularise coffee across India, but the consumption of coffee outside South India was still largely associated with public spaces, a pattern of consumption that by and large remained unchanged since the first attempts to expand the market for coffee.

The chapter by Donner focuses on the way commodity consumption allows us to analyse the intersection of gender, labour, and class through an exploration of the role mothers and wives play in the Bengali middle-class home. As increasingly consumerist lifestyles have been adopted, femininities long associated with tradition and domesticity have changed significantly, and commodity consumption plays a major role in these transitions. Based on fieldwork with middle-class families in Kolkata over two decades, the chapter argues that mothers as chief consumers are forced to acquire extensive knowledge to manoeuvre consumer identities, which are not only heavily promoted by media representations but are also reflective of changing gender roles and notions of the family. Here, as elsewhere, it is mothers' reproductive labour that creates homes fit for middle-class children's successful socialisation as global workers and consumer citizens.

Khan's contribution provides an insight into how consumer citizenship plays out on the ground as part of communalist politics. By analysing the way Muslim youth's experience access to middle-class jobs, she traces how familiarity with 'modern' consumption patterns differentiates on the basis of class and ethnicity. The chapter shows that not all urban communities are imagined as suitable consumers and that Muslim youths are excluded from spheres that allow a full realisation of contemporary citizenship. In the case of these inner-city youths, their real-life participation in novel practices fails to register with gatekeepers and does therefore not translate into desirable jobs. Because young Muslims are seen as 'traditional' and less educated by the majority, community structural exclusion, based on spatial segregation and educational marginalisation, limits the effects of status-enhancing engagement with youth cultures and consumption patterns.

The complex relationship between consumer citizenship and marginalisation is also explored in the final chapter by Kar, which focuses on microcredit schemes targeted at poor urban women and the way consumerist identities are implied as a precondition for full participation. The chapter shows how access to credit depends on engagement with consumption patterns that bind poor households to the scheme. Charting the tensions within idealised narratives of inclusion through microcredit the intersection between debt and development is shown to reproduce gendered marginalisation and determines women's overreliance on community and family relationships.

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1 Notes on the advertisement and the advertising agency in India's twentieth century

Arvind Rajagopal

A correspondent asks for my definition of the objective of advertising. That's like asking for the objective of electricity. I doubt if one can be written that is broad enough to cover all cases, and specific enough to be useful.

(James Webb Young [1943] 1944: 183)

Introduction

In the arena of fast-moving consumer goods, in which brands fashioned by advertising agencies are prominent, it is unbranded commodities that have long formed the universe, certainly in India and probably elsewhere too, against which modern brands claim their distinction. Too often, questions about the advertisement and its influence have been posed from within a context dominated if not saturated by branded consumer goods, and by extension, of advanced capitalist societies in the west. Some widely cited analyses of advertisements, e.g. Raymond Williams (1980) or Judith Williamson (1978), in fact pay little attention to historical analysis. Those that do tend to form their arguments based on specific historical contexts, e.g., Jackson Lears (1994) and Marchand (1985), without considering what comparative analysis might reveal. One could easily draw the conclusion that advertisements constitute abstractions from the complex entanglements of social relations and can be analysed on their own terms, as if capitalism itself were thereby briefly made legible. Such an assumption eliminates the distinction between the commodity and its image, or between commerce and communication, as if the one automatically implied the other. This assumption is certainly advanced by the advertising agency, which has sought to become, and arguably has become, the chief curator of the history of advertising.¹

But advertisements can be produced in diverse historical contexts, and by a range of actors. Within consumer advertisements alone, there are those for branded goods sold by the modern corporation, and ads for products that may appear like brands but feature the names and images of animals, flowers, gods, or numbers that sometimes have only a tenuous relationship to what is being sold. Then there are announcements aimed at the sale of commodities

and services from any of a variety of parties, and messages from governments and voluntary organisations that ‘sell’ ideas or instruction, not products for cash.

However, accounts produced by the advertising agency tend to treat the progression from the classified advertisement, which is a personal notice, to contemporary consumer brand promotion, as a natural evolution and as representing the development of the advertisement as such. The advertising agency has in fact sought to become the custodian of its own history, keeping larger issues of capitalism’s history constant, as fixtures adorning the evolution of the modern ad (Halve et al., 2011). A comparative approach however, leads us to reverse the direction of inquiry, to ask what we can learn about a given historical context by examining advertisements and debates accompanying their production. While modern manufacturers and bazaar merchants both used advertisements, they related to each other as signal to noise in advertising agency accounts: bazaar advertisements are treated as curiosities at best, while advertisements produced by the agency are treated as if destined to become dominant. I will argue that the competition between metropolitan capital and bazaar capital, or big and small business, is valuable in clarifying how the history of advertisements in India is distinct, while noting that this competition is itself partial and inconsistent.

The oldest profession?

An advertising executive has observed, ‘We must ... accept the contention that advertising is as old as human civilisation’ (Banerjee 1982: 23).² This impulse, to naturalise and indeed neutralise the distinction of the advertisement as a form of communication, coexisted with a rival impulse, namely to aggrandise its power and to persuade potential clients to engage the services of an advertising agency. The argument made usually depended on the audience.

The worldwide expansion of the advertising industry began in the interwar years, before the era of decolonisation. As challenges grew to colonial rule, the advertising industry, which became dominated by multinational agencies, learned to acknowledge nationalist sentiment and to avoid antagonising national governments. Professional expertise became their credo and the function of advertisers acquired a technocratic aura. If advertising and electricity had similar objectives, as James Webb Young suggested (in the epigraph above), the task of advertisers was then akin to a scientific task, helping economies grow by cultivating demand to meet supply. This meant playing a supporting role to the government in economic planning. Curiously, the advertising agencies’ own accounts describe this involvement with the state as one of subjugation followed by emancipation from the state, the latter being thanks to economic liberalisation. Alongside, advertising agencies claim kinship and continuity between apparently primitive forms such as the cries of bazaar pedlars and the demonstrations of fairground hucksters with their own, implicitly more sophisticated appeals.

Thus, in an interview in the early 1990s, a former country head of Ogilvy & Mather in India and a legendary figure in his own right, S.R. 'Mani' Ayer, described the situation of the advertising industry during the license-permit raj:

Even if people had purchasing power, there was nothing to buy. Getting even a scooter or a fridge could require waiting for a long time, and credit was tight. It was only when liberalization came, and restrictions on import and consumption relaxed that advertising could take off.³

Ayer's picture of the period prior to economic reforms is recognisable from many other such accounts of the era of strict state regulations. Consumer spending was an exercise in frustration, Ayer suggests, with the government limiting supplies, not only of essential commodities, but also of items that many soon regarded as basic necessities, such as two wheelers, cars, and telephones. The government treated the latter as 'luxury goods', and interested customers had to endure lengthy waiting periods before being able to buy what western counterparts assumed as their right. Advertising was a 'fringe benefit' and taxed, instead of being encouraged. Advertisers, in this account, were the unsung prophets of the Nehruvian era; they knew better than the government what Indians really wanted, but were ignored or punished instead of rewarded.

Ayer's account characterises the agencies' view of advertising, as celebrating the pleasures of consumption, i.e., of a private vice with far-reaching virtues. It thereby stimulates demand and economic growth, and enhances consumer power as well as the general prosperity. When India was in the grip of Nehruvian socialism, owing to the well-meant but misguided assumptions of the first Prime Minister, the power of this beneficent form of communication was throttled. But its ubiquity and force thereafter confirmed that, had advertisers only been allowed to do as they believed was right, the nation would have benefited.

S.R. Ayer's story about the industry suggests that it was not only future-oriented, but that the future it anticipated was more or less the one that finally materialised. In other words, the world changed, but advertisers, and advertising, in some fundamental sense, did not change because they did not need to change.

Until recently, historical accounts of advertising have tended to be biased towards the kind of story that those such as S.R. Ayer, who worked in large advertising agencies, chose to tell about their industry. Such accounts celebrate the vision of large agencies, and confirm the sense that however much artistry it might involve, advertising as a form of communication is essentially commonsensical and natural, and an expression of basic human tendencies. These accounts often locate their origins in face-to-face interaction, and in essential forms of market exchange, as in a hawker peddling his or her wares, and calling out to customers in the bazaar. Likening it to the unaided

endeavours of individual entrepreneurs, however, implies that a pre-existing environment mediates advertising. However, advertising as an aspect of the culture industry, posits a social environment that copywriters and visualisers strive to make plausible, in which consumption of the goods in question seems natural or necessary. This larger industrial effort at orchestration is obviously lost from view in such accounts.

When the bazaar had a more extensive presence than it does today in India, however, advertising agencies could not hide the uphill character of the battle they were engaged in. Advertisers were keen to distinguish their own activity as modern and enlightened, in contrast to what they claimed as unsanitary and/or unsavoury bazaar practices (see, e.g. Burke 1996; McClintock 1995). Such assumptions not only pertained to the racial and cultural attributes of natives, they also extended to the potential contained in the native economy as symbolised by the bazaar. Such assumptions were not necessarily restricted to those who endorsed the benefits of colonial rule. For example, Clifford Geertz has written about the inherently limited nature of the bazaar economy, due to its reliance on kin and client networks and, consequently, on limited forms of information that made the bazaar involute rather than outward-looking and future-oriented (Geertz 1978: 28–32).

Stigmatising the bazaar did not prevent foreign manufacturers from utilising it to the hilt in promoting their wares, however. They had no option: the bazaar was the principal venue for selling goods. Thus, when large companies introduced products, they hired hawkers, itinerant vendors who often circulated in bazaars, thus relying on old ways to sell new kinds of merchandise. We know that Japanese manufacturers gained a foothold in Indian markets using such methods in the colonial period (Renshaw and Spofford 1925: 22). Large companies cultivated relationships with local ‘big men’, engaging them as stockists to supply bazaars with their products. Exposure to trading customs in the bazaar was the equivalent of fieldwork; it oriented company recruits with knowledge that ensured their professional expertise would yield value.

With deeply rooted trading networks that spanned the country long before the British arrived, there was inevitably the ambivalence of bazaar merchants towards branded goods, whose margins were lower than those on commodities. Although advertisements tended to present each branded product as *sui generis*, shoppers could purchase the brand piecemeal, as if it were a commodity. ‘More often than not, products are asked for by their price – “Give me one rupee’s worth of soap”’, according to one account, more than four decades after independence (Mukherjee and Jacob 1990: 1). A branded bar of soap would then be sold by the slice. The price sensitivity of the Indian market has remained, even as consumption has increased. Over time, however, the bazaar’s margins have been squeezed by the growing market for branded goods. A conversation with bazaar merchants can easily turn to a discussion on the predatory force of big firms, who demand that retailers invest more money in successful brands even while reducing margins.

Meanwhile these merchants have less capital for trade in commodities, from which most of their revenue may derive (Rajagopal 2016: 88–98). Why then would they stock brands at all? Because when they are plentiful, the presence of branded goods suggests a prosperous business. Moreover, brands are acknowledged to have a certain pulling power in luring customers away from merchants merely stocking commodities. In other words, the impact of advertising branded goods as a whole outweighs that which results from individual brands and individual advertisements, which are often the focus of scholarly analysis.

Market extension into the bazaar, as well as the latter's resistance to branding (and therefore to 'full' or more intensive commodification) is part of the history of Indian advertising. In the view of advertisers, the bazaar confronts the self-styled modern market not as an encounter between two equal and independent social forces, but rather as a phase of development in which commodities are incompletely realised until they are branded and shelved in the ordered space of the supermarket.

For many years advertisements in India were defined as those forms of publicity directed chiefly towards imported goods, and for a very limited market, as a 1925 report from the US Department of Commerce suggests:

The great bulk of advertising done in India is intended to attract attention to imported goods and is paid for, directly or otherwise, by foreign manufacturers ... On several occasions actual measurements confirmed the fact that of the display advertising contained in one of Calcutta's leading English newspapers, 33 per cent related to American goods, an equal amount to British goods, while the remainder was devoted to the wares of India and of all other foreign countries.

(Renshaw and Spofford 1925: 13)

There were, however, different streams of advertisements, reflecting a market that was deeply stratified. There were ads directed at the trade and others aimed at potential consumers for all manner of merchandise. Ads in the bazaar signalled the use of a gift economy to open up the indigenous domain of business to external sources of capital. For example, pictures of Hindu gods, accompanied by calendars, could serve as gifts from manufacturers to wholesalers, distributors and retailers, one or more of whose names could be included in the text. Outside city stores, most goods were sold through bazaars run by indigenous merchants. Despite their entanglement with the segment of the market that styled itself as modern, the relationship between the two strata was deeply hierarchical, reflecting, initially, the dominance of the colonial ruling class and after independence, that of the urban middle classes. Notwithstanding its ubiquity, the bazaar has persistently been imagined by corporate advertisers and marketers as destined to fade away, ceding place to the department store and its mutations. The modern advertisement, which

was a key element in the attempt to implement such a vision of the future, was thus part of a project never to be realised.

Commerce, communication, and advertising's civilising mission

In 1922, the Hon W. Hulme Lever, then acting Chairman of Lever Brothers, and son of the founder, Viscount Leverhulme, addressed the members of the Commerce Society of the Liverpool University on the subject of advertising thus:

Today we live in an age of advertising. It calls to us from almost every page of our morning paper. Its echoes reverberate down the streets of our cities. It shrieks at us from the skies at night. It is our constant travelling companion by railway or by tram; nor can we escape from it in the high roads nor in the lanes of the countryside ... If the public desire for an article ceases, the goodwill of a business is destroyed, the machinery stands idle, capital ceases to receive any return, management is no longer required. It is advertising that creates this public desire. It is the honest advertising of an honest article that builds up the goodwill of a business.

(1922: 75–7)

In Lever's view, advertising was an inescapable and obtrusive presence, though it generated goodwill and was indispensable to business success. Interestingly, Lever assumes the desire of others for the products as a social fact, proven by the persistent circulation of advertisements, although his own response is ambivalent to say the least.

Such facts, produced through publicity but invested with a sense of intimacy imputed to others, could not have emerged without resistance. Curiously, existing accounts of the history of advertising offer little detail in this regard. If advertisements do not indicate by what authority they claim attention, or with whose endorsement they are allowed to dominate public space, many historical accounts compound the error by conflating commerce with communication. In the particulars Lever offers, the status quo has hardly changed from his day to ours, although his vivid observations help interrogate our own more anaesthetised perceptions.

Not only commerce but communication too, is at issue here. The right to communicate freely with a general public was far from a natural right. On the contrary, it was and remains a contested issue, liable to be compromised by shifts in political equilibrium and by new technologies. The right to communicate was in fact crucial in one the first successful anti-colonial struggles, namely in the American Revolution, triggered by the 1765 Stamp Act which imposed a tax on all printed communication. It was nearly a century before a similar struggle succeeded in Great Britain itself, when the duty on newspapers and on advertisements was repealed, following many years of protest against any 'taxes on knowledge'.

Such campaigns in Britain thus assumed a political hue, arguing that taxes on newspapers and on advertisements represented an impediment to public enlightenment and were not a justifiable levy on trade and labour as the government claimed. One influential advocate stated in Parliament, 'It is a tax on the intercommunication of wants and wishes, which, in a commercial community, strikes at the foundation of all transactions' (Cobden 1853). So construed, the agitation gained an unstoppable political force. In the words of one historian, 'The people did not appreciate the evils of taxes on industry, they did care for politics, and thus did see the iniquity of Taxes on Knowledge [*sic*]' (Collet 1899: 143).

The irony is that once the tax was repealed in 1853, serious concern over advertisements returned to the domain of trade and industry. Advertisements were acknowledged as crucial to the growth of the press, but dubious as a set of truth claims since they were after all a form of propaganda. For example, a nineteenth-century historical account describes advertising as 'an important branch of commercial speculation' (Henry 1874: 6). This is a precise definition. It is difficult to predict what kind of advertising appeal will succeed, or to isolate the effect of a successful ad campaign from that of distribution, marketing and sales. But such definitions are rarely reproduced. The nineteenth-century candour could not survive the growth of the advertising agency, which sought to professionalise the field and emphasise variously, scientific method and positive cultural knowledge over speculative practice.

By 1925, *The Statesman* of Calcutta was running advertisements which elaborated on the virtues of advertising Lever alluded to:

Who pays for advertising? Nobody pays for advertising. It pays for itself. It pays for itself out of the money it saves on the cost of making goods and the cost of selling them.

(Choudhury 1992: vi)

Economies of scale are implied to be inherent in advertising, as if communication were only an aspect of the production of goods themselves. The claim does not bear scrutiny, but it was part of a widespread campaign to render advertising respectable in the years following World War I, perhaps to distinguish it from any association with war propaganda. Thus a 1924 editorial titled 'Truth in Advertising' in the *Times of India* stated:

Prejudices and convention die hard, and the opinion of many English people is still that the advertised article must be dear, because it has to bear the cost of advertising, and inferior for otherwise it would sell itself. Neither of these ideas has the remotest connection with the truth.

(1924: 10)

The previous month, the Prince of Wales had inaugurated the first International Advertising Convention of Europe, attended by over 5,000

delegates from all over the world. In his speech, Prince Edward praised advertising for promoting free competition, reducing prices and unemployment (see *Times of India* 1924). In 1926, President Calvin Coolidge addressed the convention of the American Association of Advertising and stated that advertising was ‘part of the great work of the regeneration and redemption of mankind’ (Marchand 1985: 9).

In the interwar years many leaders conceived of advertising as a civilising force and as part of the global extension of commodity markets, although market cultures were manifestly uneven and far from being globalised at this time. Just as the war had made leaders aware of the power of propaganda and the capacity of governments to effectively engage in mass mobilisation, advertising offered the prospect of a motivational tool whose possibilities seemed limitless at this time. Advertising could stimulate economic growth and thereby add to state revenues. And it could also mould minds and uplift citizens, it seemed (Marchand 1985: 8–9). The Indian market itself was deemed important enough that the US government produced a report in 1925 on Indian advertising, for the benefit of US firms (Renshaw and Spofford 1925).

This mutual interfusion of commerce, publicity and opinion was so well established by the second half of the twentieth century, and the view about advertisements as a form of protected speech so well entrenched, that it has escaped scrutiny. For example, few scholars appear to have noticed that questions of taxation and regulation, including censorship, do provide strong if subtle ties between the civil society advertisers claim to represent and the state that they typically distance themselves from.

In the 90 or so years after these remarks by Hulme Lever, the advertising industry has grown enormously. Today it pervades not only the economy but politics and culture as well. As a curious legacy of Reform Era protection given to the newspaper industry in Britain, print advertising in India retained tax exemption well into the post-Independence era (A. Sarath, personal communication, 3 March 2013). Advertisers also have the remarkable status of being ubiquitous in their announcements and displays, and yet are subject to weak oversight at best in terms of the accuracy of their messages. Instead, the advertising industry regulates itself, through the Advertising Standards Council of India, a body founded only in 1985, amid national television’s rise (Chowdhry 2009: 123–39; Mazzarella 2003). If advertisers claim a primordial status for their activity, advertising has also been allowed to grow with little hindrance. This growth has been accompanied by claims likening advertising to an elementary aspect of human society, while in fact it benefitted from the most advanced developments.

Whether owing to attempts by the industry to dissuade from or mystify their influence, advertisements have typically been treated as a self-evident category, not requiring definition. Attempts to understand it are bedevilled not only by the scarcity of documentation internal to the advertising industry but also by a persistent conflation of specific products of the industry, chiefly print, radio, and audio-visual messages, with the much broader array of

activities to which the gerund 'advertising' can refer. The latter can include everything from calls by street vendors and up-country promotional motor tours, to point of purchase artefacts such as calendars, danglers, posters, and stickers, and product demonstrations such as washing clothes with soap or frying sweets with cooking oil. The failure to define advertisements was of course useful for the advertising agency in its efforts to lobby against taxation. If the object to be taxed was undefined, the category included many 'advertisements' that would be hard to tax, such as pedlars' cries and 'dangling' publicity at the storefront (Rao 1965: 549–50).

Fugitive commodity aesthetics

Available source material on the introduction and promotion of fast-moving consumer goods in India suggests that advertising became significant during the interwar years. During this time, the need to retain political support for colonial rule dominated over purely economic interests in India; British imports diminished and Indian manufacture gained ground over the same period. If World War I brought a measure of prosperity to the Indian economy, colonial administrators were also concerned to limit the disruption that unchecked market growth could cause. Many members of the colonial administrators were oriented not in favour of industry so much as against it, one historian has noted (Tomlinson 2002). The organised sector for consumer goods in India, for its part, tended to assume a limited market. Such a reckoning was based on the premium consumer market, which remained relatively stable until nationwide television uncovered the extent of latent demand. However, at the level of commodity aesthetics we notice a fugitive movement between the bazaar and its more modern counterpart, alongside market growth.

For example, native manufacturers as well as British and other European companies relied extensively on images of Hindu deities in advertising and packaging of consumer goods. This can be read as emphasising traditional values in the course of reproducing or expanding markets. But traditional Hindu practice did not necessarily centre on the authority of Hindu deities. Louis Dumont, for instance, has noted that the figure of god as understood in the Christian tradition, is epiphenomenal to Hindu practice; custom and ritual nested in caste communities are superordinate (Dumont 1970: 16). Nevertheless, images of Hindu deities became something like a currency generating recognition across differences of region and literacy. Indian nationalists themselves drew on this deistic bazaar art to fashion an altogether new deity, Bharat Mata, to which religious orthodoxy did not object because such an innovation was neither heretical nor impious.

But at this time, advertising agencies in India could not disguise the limited status of their presence. In fact, a wealth of recent scholarship from a range of disciplinary perspectives has implicitly drawn attention to the limited character of the advertising agency's promotional narrative. Scholars have pointed to the

profusion of non-realist visualisations circulating in the bazaar, often of gods and goddesses, and of violence alongside more conventional private behaviour whether of consumption or of worship (Jain 2007; MacLean 2015; Pinney 2004; Ramaswamy 2010). But accounts to replace the advertising agency's view of the history of market growth are only recently beginning to emerge (see Haynes, forthcoming). Here it is the English language work of advertising agencies that is best known. Indian language advertisements are of course accessible in newspapers and periodicals, but less is known as yet about who produced them and under what conditions. Embedded in the way advertising developed in India was a distinction between copywriters and visualisers. The former were usually convent-educated and spoke English, while the latter were more comfortable in Indian languages, and if they had college degrees were from technical institutes and art schools, which emphasised more narrow and specialised curricula. At least until recently, it was verbal copy that dominated in national advertising campaigns, however, with the initial copy conceived in English and then translated into Indian languages by lowly paid translators. Ads conceived for regional markets could, by contrast, be conceived and circulated in regional languages (Haynes et al. 2010).

To see calendar art and hawking as part of the extension of commodity logic underlines the epistemically diverse spaces across which the market functioned. The mediatic forms provided by advertisements created material links across compartmentalised worlds. Calendar advertising, which could be purchased or given as gifts, and often contained pictures of Hindu gods, had a long display life (Jain 2007; Pinney 2004). Meanwhile the kinds of in-person vocal appeals by hawkers regarded as the original form of advertising as well as other demonstrations and performances aimed at selling goods are at best mentioned, although industry literature itself includes the latter under this rubric.

The urban affluent classes were the focus of the big advertising agencies, and Western consumption models set the standards for most of the appeal during the British era, although *swadeshi* made some inroads. One industry chronicler notes:

Advertising served British big business and relied on English newspapers. There was little competition. There was no need to develop an Indian idiom, although some of the Indian manufacturers of toiletries and textiles did make a feeble attempt.

(Banerjee 1982: 26)

Contained in this dismissal of Indian manufacturers' 'feeble attempt' are unspoken assumptions about what a more vigorous or viable 'Indian idiom' would be in advertising and for whom this would be the case. Animals, birds, colours, numbers and Hindu deities had been used to identify and label products in the market since the latter half of the nineteenth century. Imitations of successful advertised products also flourished and constituted a

distinct genre in the market, that in terms of their commercial presence were hardly feeble. Lever's Chairman W.P. Scott, referring inter alia to the promotion of local imitations through his company's advertising, observed after a tour of the Indian market: 'We should bear in mind that whatever we may do in an endeavour to increase soap consumption will benefit our competitors as well as ourselves and may attract other competition to the market' (Banerjee 1982: 53).

'A soapless country'

In a country notable for what a 1936 Lever report called 'the incredible poorness ... of the Indian consumer', with an average annual income per head of between £4 and £5 a year, advertised goods catered to a minority. Most advertised goods were sold in the towns and cities, but most of the goods consumed were in rural areas, procured for cash or kind, and most of the trade occurred in up-country bazaars. As late as 1959, a report by J. Walter Thompson & Co noted that advertised goods were almost never sold in villages. The more prosperous villagers travelled to the towns to buy such goods (J. Walter Thompson Co., 1959).

Not only was the bazaar a problem, so too were the kind of goods that might be procured there. Fourteen years after Lever had arrived in India, a correspondent observed in 1902:

India is still virtually a soapless country. Throughout the villages of Hindustan soap is, indeed, regarded as a natural curiosity. And in 1936, Levers still did not have even one percent of the market, which only amounted to 140,000 metric tons in the entire country.

(van den Berghe 1936)⁴

The bulk of the soaps sold were made on a small scale and were either unbranded or locally branded, and were more or less commodities not brands. The advertising industry focused on the sale of branded goods, but the overwhelming majority of goods sold were commodities. A third category, not large but significant in terms of market dynamics, comprised commodities that aspired to be brands but lacked the wherewithal in terms of advertising, adequate packaging, incentive schemes for dealers and retailers to promote the product, and so on.

Brand advertisements targeted the relatively well to do and effectively advertised their consumption, making the general public more conscious of branded products. A host of imitators typically sprang up around any successful brand, moreover. Advertisements not only sought to open the minds of their target audience to choose their product, therefore. Frequently, they also attempted to influence potential consumers about the appropriate setting for consumption, and to be wary of the bazaar as a place where quality could be compromised.

The bazaar was indispensable to market extension because it was constituted through the social networks that provided credit, employment and selling space, not only for the trading castes and those who assisted them but also for those who had nowhere else to go, even if the terms were exploitative. It is ironic that although the growth of the rural and small town market constituted the economic frontier of expanding consumption, there is little available research on the forms of engagement between metropolitan and small business. For this reason, one needs to read the archive against the grain to see just how important the bazaar was to modern commerce, despite being stigmatised as a lesser form of activity.

Correspondence internal to Tata Oil Mills Co. (Tomco) from 1950 hints at the constant tug of war between the large business firms and the traders in the bazaar. The front line of business competition was the retail store. For traders, the margins offered by branded goods were smaller than with unbranded or ‘feebly’ branded commodities, but they constituted a source of prestige and increased the chances that more affluent customers would patronise their establishment. Stocking relatively expensive brands such as those of Tata or Lever was a mark of distinction in a marketplace where most traders were merely selling grains, lentils and oil, or betelnut and tobacco. Big businesses were aware of this and sought to make distributors and retailers work hard to earn their distinction. They asked traders to buy more items in ‘slow moving lines’ and place them more advantageously in storefront displays, and held out faster moving items as an inducement. Tata was of course an Indian company, but its claims of *swadeshi* identity tended to arise mainly when it was on the defensive in market competition; consumers of branded advertised goods preferred the foreign *chaap*.

Businesses had to compete with each other for the limited display space and labour time available within each store, using cash discounts, concession schemes, and retail margins as both carrot and stick. Although Tomco (“Tata Oil Mills Co”) and Lever both operated within the prestige economy of branded consumer goods, they adopted different strategies while also constantly monitoring each other’s practices. Lever shipped their goods to the major ports where wholesalers would pick them up. They relied on a combination of advertising, brand power, and financial inducements to move their goods up-country, largely through third parties, although this changed gradually over time. Interestingly, Tomco spent far more on advertising than some of its board members thought wise. But as an Indian company, they prided themselves on ground level work, rather than simply launching their products from big cities like Lever. The expense of appointing distributors added to the cost of the products, however, and even then, Lever’s products outsold theirs. Dealers and retail traders had significant clout in this situation, and the archives provide occasional hints of the fierce antagonism even within the supply chain of a given item:

By the presence of distributors we can remain in constant touch with the markets. Although our salesmen are now carrying out retail sales pretty

regularly since the expenses have been sanctioned by us, the appointment of distributors is likely to improve our retail distribution still further. The sale of our slow moving lines will also receive more attention ... As regards Messrs. Lever Bros. you are well aware that in this area they have a very strong hold, on account of the popularity of Sunlight and Lifebuoy Soaps and it will take us some time to dislodge them. According to my observations during the last year or so they have been losing ground, but their sphere of influence is so vast that it is very difficult to observe any minor set-back ... I would also like to remind you that while you were in Delhi last some of the wholesalers apprised you of the difficulties in connection with our present system of bonus and have been pressing us all along to change this to cash discount. My suggestion is that if this is not feasible and I think it is not feasible under the distributorship system, we should agree to pay the bonus to parties who cross the maximum limit. Bonus for the rest of the dealers can be settled at the end of the year. These dealers have given us to understand that in case no suitable arrangement is made to meet their wishes they will cease taking interest in our products.

(Varma 1951)

Dealers could boycott the products of manufacturers who displeased them, or who failed to grant them a reasonable return on their efforts. And so on down the line. There were repeated discussions on the merits of the 'open market system' which Lever's relied on, which was more driven by brand power, as against working through a series of known intermediaries in the supply chain.

There was a two-way street here, it should be emphasised. The issue of demand did not arise from the consumer as such, and shape supply on its own, of course. Customers often had long-lasting relationships with their retailers, whose advice they followed about which products were worth buying. Retailers in turn allowed their own decisions to be influenced by how well their distributors rewarded them. Retail sellers earned the least for their efforts and were the most numerous and diffused in their presence. But as the interface with customers, they could not be ignored. When Tata considered following Lever in using the open market system, one shareholder wrote a warning letter:

In his note Mr Gosalia remarks that the retail dealer is the most important link in our business and that the present system does not cater to their requirements. I am convinced that working the open market is not going to yield good results and that the distributor system has to be retained.

(Narielwala 1950)

Eventually, it was Lever who adopted Tata's system of appointing distributors, whom they christened 'redistribution stockists'. The expansion of the market

and intensifying competition led to increasing expenditure in advertising, but nothing could obviate the need for specific attention to the bazaar as the crucial site where revenue was earned. There is a cryptic allusion to this fact years later, in a Lever in-house magazine:

Mr Sen, Marketing Manager, Toilet Soaps and Promotions, explained that the relaunch of Rexona [toilet soap] was to improve its market share in the competitive toilet soaps market ... Sen informed the salesmen that a major factor for the success of Rexona in the market-place today would be the use of what he described tersely as ‘bazaar power’ or the power of merchandising and displays.

(*Hamara* 1971: 5)

What the company magazine writer diplomatically glossed was a reference to the fact that in market competition words and images did not always substitute for grosser weapons. ‘When we fight, we fight to kill. I’ve done it’, a former Levers distributor said, clenching his fist (personal communication, 7 January 1997).⁵

The competition between Tomco and Lever illustrates the strategic distinction that the claim of origin could exercise in the market. Lever advertised powerful brands that dominated the market, while Tomco’s indigenous brands were priced to mimic foreign brands or insinuate a similar status, but invoked *swadeshi* origins when on the defensive.

Advertisers claimed they were engaged in a pedagogical mission and not merely fulfilling the needs of commerce. The task of most advertising agencies was self-consciously a modern one: to wean Indians away from their existing habits that often involved no purchase at all, to consumption practices that required the purchase of branded, packaged consumer goods. From using twigs to clean one’s teeth and mud to bathe one’s body, from beating clothes on rocks to wash them, or from wearing no upper garments (for men) or footwear at all, it was considered modern to use toothpaste and toothbrush, toilet soap and washing soap, and to don shirts and shoes, for example. Cigarettes were more modern than *bidis*, and tea was better than water, although of course no substitute for it.

In the universe of Indian advertising, using electricity was modern, as was using mechanical forms of transportation, such as the bicycle, whereas manually powered activities acquired a lower status. Boiled sweets, chocolate, and toffee were modern, whereas traditional Indian sweets including anything made with jaggery were, by definition, not. Hats were modern, turbans not. Suits and dresses were modern, dhotis and saris were not – or not until much later, at least as far as saris were concerned.

The dividing line for advertising was thus a clear if shifting line between forms of consumption designated as enhancing personal life and those pre-existing habits that were based on custom which did not allow individuals to

distinguish themselves from others. Although this was overlaid with *swadeshi* themes over time, it is a fair summary to say that advertisers in India justified their task as one of modernisation, where what was modern was derived from the West.

Beyond the content of the communication, which promoted branded, packaged goods that the overwhelming majority of the population could not afford, the modernity of advertising was also a matter of form. Although advertising agencies might claim kinship with bazaar vendors when indulging in rhetorical flights of fancy, the former saw their own communication as insulated from the bazaar's physical contamination and cultural opacity. As purer communication, advertising promoted by the agency enabled bypassing the confusing signals the shopper might get from the indigenous merchant. Rigging of the scales, adulterated or unsanitary produce and the fear of infection, and the proximity to poverty, all combined to present threatening images invoked in early advertising that contrasted with its own self-presentation as relatively rational and trustworthy.


Derogatory references to the bazaar were routine in advertisements. A 1934 ad for Tata's Cocogem, a cooking medium, compared the 'absolutely pure and wholesome' product with 'adulterated bazaar ghees', as if that would be the commonsense point of reference (Figure 1.1).

'You never know with bazaar ghee', went another ad. In the accompanying cartoon, in a conversation between a European couple in response to a question from the man about whether the woman, presumably his wife, had read about adulterated bazaar ghee in the newspaper, she replies in the affirmative and mentions 'the flies swarming in those shops' (Figure 1.2). Even honest merchants would, despite themselves, be selling impure products under such circumstances.

Caste and racial distinctions can be discerned in some of the advertisements. An ad for Horlicks begins 'Coming, Sahib!', and the figure shows a coloured hand bearing a silver dish and bowl, and a bottle of Horlicks Malted Milk (Halve and Sarkar, n.d.: 48; Figure 1.3). The space of branded consumption was conceived as implicitly reproducing caste and racial privilege. Advertisements in latent or patent ways took this reality as a selling point for the goods being promoted.

Advertising and the war

Against this context of a limited market for advertised goods, advertising began to be conceived of in much larger terms. For example, Evelyn Wood, writing a report for J. Walter Thompson & Co. from Bombay on the eve of World War II, urged his superiors not to relax in their quest to gain accounts for the advertising agency. The war could afford opportunities in the Indian market even if it had diverted consumption towards military hardware in the West. Given the extremely low levels of income prevailing in the country, the



Impure ghees . . . doubtful oils . . . **DON'T RISK THEM**

Pure **COCOgem**, in vacuum-sealed tins,
is more economical, infinitely better

YOU never know, with bazaar ghee. It may be (often is!) heavily adulterated . . . or contaminated before it reaches you. But, apart from that risk, nothing which makes good food greasy and indigestible is a real economy.

You're safe with Cocogem, in its sealed tin. It costs no more than pure ghee. And it is infinitely better for frying than any animal fat—ghee, dripping or lard—because it reaches a far higher temperature without burning.

Any chef will tell you that the secret of good frying is to use great heat, so that the outside of your fish, meat, rissoles or whatever it may be is instantly browned, sealing the flavour in and the fat out. Cocogem can be heated above 450°

Fahrenheit, the best frying temperature—more than 100° above the burning point of ghee or dripping. Result: crisp, light, digestible food, with no greasy flavour.

Thanks to this high cooking temperature, Cocogem neither absorbs nor transmits the flavour of meat, fish, vegetables or anything else—so it can be used again and again. There's a real economy!

And because Cocogem is itself tasteless, it is ideal for such dishes as pillaus and also for cakes and pastry, which it makes as light as a feather and with no trace of greasy flavour.

Make your cook use Cocogem and notice the difference! And remember—Cocogem is rich in food value and has an addition of bone-building Vitamin D.



DID YOU READ THIS ABOUT ADULTERATED BAZAAR GHEE?

YES, AND I'VE SEEN THE FLIES SWARMING IN THOSE SHOPS! COCOGEM FOR ME, EVERY CLEAN AND PURE

Cocogem


Cocogem is not merely acid-free vacuum-sealed! The air is exhausted from the tin before it is sealed in this vacuum chamber.

T.M.C.O.

Sales Dept.
P. O. Box 528
Bombay

Cocogem is sold at all provision stores in 1 lb., 2 lb., 6 lb., 9 lb. and 36 lb. vacuum-sealed tins

Figure 1.1 Adulterated bazaar products. *Times of India*, 23 May 1934.



Impure ghees . . . doubtful oils . . . **DON'T RISK THEM**

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is more economical, infinitely better

YOU never know, with bazaar ghee. It may be (often is!) heavily adulterated . . . or contaminated before it reaches you. But, apart from that risk, nothing which makes good food greasy and indigestible is a real economy.

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DID YOU READ THIS ABOUT ADULTERATED BAZAAR GHEE?

YES, AND I'VE SEEN THE FLIES SWARMING IN THOSE SHOPS! COCOGEM FOR ME, EVERY TIME—IT'S PERFECTLY CLEAN AND PURE.

Cocogem is not merely sealed but vacuum-sealed! The air is exhausted from the tin before it is sealed in this vacuum chamber.

Cocogem

Cocogem is sold at all provision stores in 1 lb., 2 lb., 6 lb., 9 lb. and 36 lb. vacuum-sealed tins

T.M.C.

Sales Dept.
P. O. Box 528
Bombay

Figure 1.2 You never know with bazaar ghee. *Times of India*, 5 July 1933.



Figure 1.3 The Bearer is kept busy with calls for Horlicks. Anand Halve and Anita Sarkar, *Adkatha: The Story of Indian Advertising*, p. 48. Centrum Charitable Trust, Goa, India. No date.

influx of investment, even if aimed at advancing the Allied War effort, would be certain to lead to advantages that advertisers could make use of:

It is quite definite that the war of 1914–18 brought a sudden increase of prosperity to the lower-middle classes and those of higher incomes throughout India. All the primary products of this country ... definitely secured bigger money returns to the petty trader and his dependents as well as the richer classes, who all became bigger customers for imported manufactures, largely as the result of war conditions. India's new industrial

opportunities were also created by the last war. The wealth generated in India by her new iron and steel industry, her cotton and jute mills, and in part her sugar factories was a gift of troubled Europe to the (up to 1914) considerably exploited Indian lower-middle and upper-classes.

(Wood 1939)

The sale of imported consumer goods benefitted from the growth of the expansion during the interwar years in the market for raw materials, although it is not clear just how strong this expansion was. The Depression had led to a downturn in the market for most raw materials, from 1929 until the war (Hazari 1986: 36). But Wood understood the effect of advertising in wider terms than merely reproducing a limited market. Even if only a small consuming class spent its money on advertised goods, it was through public recognition that this motivation had to be sustained. This is where the work of advertisers was critical:

The prognosis of business in packaged goods in India is therefore, in our view, a healthy one, provided that the 'nervous system' of advertising is not impaired. We are thinking of businesses in imported products which cannot easily be reproduced by Indian manufacturers; or which are no attractive to the industrialist here. To cancel any advertising campaign for imported goods indefinitely at this juncture would go a long way towards the complete destruction of the public recognition of the imported product which has been built up during recent years.

(Wood 1939)

Using a formulation that is analogous to James Webb Young's (in the opening epigraph), Wood explicitly focused on the market for imported goods alone. But his argument for advertising was framed as if it were conceived in relation to the economy as a whole. He described advertising as a nervous system whose signals traverse an organism and coordinate voluntary and involuntary parts of the body. Investment in advertising had to be continued even if its effects could not be evaluated in the short term and even if returns were not immediately forthcoming, in this view. Maintenance of the nervous system is of course essential to health and thus not an option. To view the company's work in terms of discrete acts of persuasion would underline the modest character of J. Walter Thompson's portfolio of client accounts in a limited consumer market. Instead, Wood urged his superiors to take the long view and behave as if advertising were an indispensable part of the economy. This was the kind of activity that needed to be undertaken by governments, and interestingly enough, that is precisely what occurred.

In World War II, advertising and propaganda would fuse together and several advertising agencies would combine to assist in the government's war effort. This was a turning point in the development of Indian advertising. British personnel left their jobs to enlist in their military, to be replaced by

Indians who filled their shoes and helped in the creation of war propaganda. Following the war, government planning allocated large sums of money for advertising to advance its developmental goals. This, combined with the money accumulated during the war, suddenly expanded the existing elitist consumer market (Banerjee 1982: 26–7).

The Indian government also supported the advertising industry's demand for a 15 per cent commission on advertisements published in newspapers registered with the Indian and Eastern Newspaper Society, which was the accrediting agency for Indian newspapers. This meant that all government and public sector advertisements, which formed the largest share of advertising accounts, would yield the commission that agencies desired and create a demonstration effect for clients who might seek to pay less. Advertising became, as a chief executive of J. Walter Thompson & Co. in India would later remark, 'a protected sector' (Ghosal 1984).

Although they were periodically subject to criticism for underwriting wasteful consumption and for being dominated by foreign companies, advertising agencies had little option other than to endorse the planned economy and state-led development. Once Mrs Indira Gandhi became the Prime Minister in 1966, however, contracts for government work, beginning with family planning and tourism, began to be awarded. The slogan 'If You Have Two, That Will Do', was coined by Sylvester Da Cunha who ran ASP (Advertising, Sales and Promotion, Ltd.); later 'We Two, Ours Two', was a slogan included in much of the family planning publicity (G. Da Cunha, personal communication, 25 October 2018]. Public sector units began to initiate outreach campaigns; notably, Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. commissioned a widely appreciated series of advertisements via R.K. Swamy & Co., leading other PSUs to inaugurate publicity efforts (Chakrapani and Ramnarayan 2007: 182–3).

From Mrs Gandhi's tenure onwards, agencies were treated as professionals whose communicational expertise was valued (see Raja 1975: 229–32 for the earliest explicit criticism I have found). The communication they practised, however, in key respects retained a colonial mindset; foreign goods and foreign advertising were assumed to be superior to Indian goods and Indian advertising, for example. Tata was an indigenous company but used foreign advertising agencies, for example. The consumer goods they sold were marked at prices higher than those of 'important manufacturers', local and foreign, 'for obvious reasons', according to a confidential company note. It is likely that their higher price signalled a level of quality that compensated for the product's domestic source.⁶

For example, a confidential note from Tomco in 1938 regarding the company's strategy observes:

All the varieties of Levers' products are far cheaper than ours. In spite of the cheapness of Levers products and their free gifts of saleable soap and vigorous and lavish propaganda, it will be appreciated that we have

more or less been able to maintain our sales ... For obvious reasons we do not wish our prices to be on level with those of the important manufacturers ...

We do not at present recommend any reduction in the price of Toilet Soaps as their sales are steadily going up and the cake of Hamam is bigger than any other standard soap for 0-3-0. It requires more publicity which is being attended to.

(Tata Oil Mills Co 1938: 3)

Lever itself explored the possibility of producing its soaps within India and, based on discouraging responses, postponed local production by at least a decade. Duraiswamy Iyengar, Lever's agent in Madras, reported to the company's representative A.C. Knight in December 1923, saying that if soap were made locally, the market would expect the price to drop and expect it to be priced 'at native soap levels' (Fieldhouse 1978: 161). They decided that they would fare better by marketing foreign-made soaps even though they knew they could make equivalent products more cheaply within India.

The advertising and marketing of packaged consumer goods was overwhelmingly oriented to a relatively well-to-do minority. Agencies catered to the educated elite and paid little attention to the majority. Although in the United States Ford Motors had transformed the market by acting on the view that workers should also be customers, the same was not true in India even for relatively inexpensive products like Lever's soap. By and large, this elitist mindset carried over into the post-Independence period with little opposition from the national state or from the Indian business community, until a more extensive market emerged in the wake of the growth of television and, later, mobile telephony.

Conclusion: advertising's hegemony

Advertisements today are ubiquitous and indispensable to both economy and politics. It belongs in a conception of modern society where individuals make informed choices based on their desires, opinions, and interests. Such a conception is often held to confirm the participatory if not democratic character of modern society. Although advertising's success depends on what we can call an infrastructure of marketing, distribution, and sales, the advertising industry promotes its products as if pure communication could do the job, informing or inspiring consumers who then decide how to consume. At the same time advertisements are not only means of selling goods; they are themselves products that are promoted intensively by the industry.

Today, private communication promoting commerce has acquired what we may call social gravity. Freestanding messages, absent any knowledge about the communicator's antecedents, can now routinely inform social action without bringing any discredit to that action. While speaking to the public maybe treated as a free speech right, the massive growth of advertising has

led to a situation where advertisers can appear to speak not just to, but for, the public as a whole. Such messages thereby undergo a steep elevation from the low status of the itinerant pedlar's cries or of bazaar discourse. The advertisement, which began as private communication and for the most part is still understood as such, has over time unobtrusively acquired the authority to address the public as a whole without identifying at whose behest the message is delivered, although the interests at stake are typically sectional.

To the extent that we focus on advertising messages and omit a consideration of other factors bearing upon consumption choice, we risk assuming communication to be a separable category of activity, encountered as discrete information, which may succeed or fail as suasion. The unintended effect is to overlook not only the lengthy historical process through which the perception of communication became distinct and separable from both the communicator and from the scene of communication, but as well the infrastructure essential to this process. On this account, the history favoured by the advertising agency focuses largely if not exclusively on the superstructure.

The brief accounts presented here, drawn from a moment before the advertising agencies' own perspective became commonsense, suggest that it was not clear where the boundary was to be drawn between what was considered advertising and other activities, but no one seemed perturbed about the lack of clarity. Manufacturers did not understand it to be a specialisation confined to advertising agencies; modestly paid propagandists accompanying up-country motor vehicles could do it as well, while conveying consumer goods to remote places. Marketing, distribution and sales, point of purchase promotion, packaging and other aspects of product get-up, credit lines and octroi subsidies to dealers and wholesalers, to name but a few, are not so glamorous and seldom find much discussion in historical accounts of advertising, except perhaps to acknowledge in passing that promoting consumption is a many-sided activity.

Contrast the image conjured in Sarojini Naidu's oft-cited poem, *In the Bazaars of Hyderabad*:

What do you sell, O ye merchants?
 Richly your wares are displayed,
 Turbans of crimson and silver,
 Tunics of purple brocade,
 Mirrors with panels of amber,
 Daggers with handles of jade.
 What do you weigh, O ye vendors?
 Saffron, lentil and rice.

...

What do you call, O ye pedlars?
 Chessmen and ivory dice.

(Naidu 1912: 62–3)

More a museum than a place where goods were sold, Sarojini Naidu's bazaar was a space insulated from most of the modern economy, a scene of delectation and not a mundane site of exchange. For companies like Lever, the bazaar was merely a means of gaining access for their products to the rural hinterland. Since the increase in market share thereby gained was small, the bazaar was of limited interest. For nationalists, for whom the colonial drain of Indian wealth was the stimulus to define their political concerns in modern form, the bazaar was a site of tradition and was treated with ambivalence. Home of the *bania* and of native usury, it was subject to critique, while as the place where indigenous products were gathered, it could be regarded as a place of Orientalist fantasy. Both for the British and for nationalists, therefore, the bazaar was overlooked as a site of analysis or theory generation.

Industry accounts encouraged this view, despite intricate and extensive channels of distribution whose tendrils encompassed virtually every corner of hinterland markets. In fact it is in the electoral arena where political parties are like brands, albeit of a distinct kind, and where advertisers achieved their greatest victories (Rajagopal 2015; Shah 2014). Advertisers' impact on political outcomes in India today is arguably at least as significant as their effect in the marketplace, to the extent that we can regard these contests as distinct. No doubt the consuming middle classes are increasingly large and brand-aware, but this should not detract from the peculiar nature of advertising's success in India. It has been more of a political than an economic success and today advertisers are engaged in attempts to tilt the market itself, in addition to staging market competition as such (Rajagopal, 1999). As this chapter has tried to show, analysis of the economic history of advertising in terms of its relationship to the bazaar, can help to diminish the extraordinary, unquestioned power this form of communication has acquired.

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Notes

- 1 The use of the gerund form, advertising, to characterize the process, the product and the producers too, can be confusing. The advertising industry itself has not attempted to dispell this confusion; on the contrary, it has sought to make capital of it, as I will show below.
- 2 Banerjee, who is one of the first chroniclers of the advertising industry, started as an advertising copywriter with D.J. Keymer & Co. (which later became Ogilvy, Benson & Mather), and later joined Clarion Advertising Services as account executive. By 1964 he had become resident director at Clarion, which was one of the major Indian agencies at the time (see Banerjee's entry in Dunn [1964: 566–94]).

- 3 Interview with S.R. 'Mani' Ayer, *MICA Communications Review*, vol. 1, no. 1.
- 4 Young (1944: 183).
- 5 Name and place withheld.
- 6 Sampson (1874: 6).

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2 A magic system?

Print publics, consumption, and advertising in modern Tamil Nadu

A. R. Venkatachalapathy

Once, in an early editorial notice in the *Swadesamitran*, the first Tamil daily, its editor G. Subramania Iyer, published a plea to its readers: he requested readers not to send either money or letters asking him to send the products advertised in his paper! Advertisements, he explained, were placed by businesses that dealt in the advertised products, and the editor had nothing to do with them. It is not uncommon to find such editorial disavowals in the Tamil press of the early twentieth century. Such notices demonstrate that advertising was a novelty in Tamil society barely 100 years ago. This chapter traces the history of print advertising in twentieth-century Tamil Nadu in the context of an emerging public sphere, a fast-expanding culture of print and the advancement of reprographic and reproductive print technology – these playing out in the context of an economy characterised by extensive imports, increasing factory production, and expanding consumption. The history of advertising in India much less of Tamil Nadu awaits its historian, though there have recently been some excellent essays.¹

Handbills and notices

The earliest print advertisements in the Tamil country can be traced to the *Madras Courier*, established in 1785, in the colonial city of Madras. It needs no stating that this tabloid-sized weekly was exclusively targeted at the European residents of the first modern city in India. The *Madras Courier* carried advertisements of goods that arrived in ships from the metropole. Even though Tamil journalism had its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century it was only at the end of the century that Tamil journalism can be said have had some serious presence. By the last decade, *Swadesamitran*, the only major Tamil periodical (started in 1882 as a weekly, *Swadesamitran* became a tri-weekly in 1897 ultimately turning into a daily in 1899), had begun to have a dedicated audience and could be said to have created a semblance of ‘public opinion’. Even by the early 1910s, well after the first wave of mass nationalism in the form of the Swadeshi movement, there were few popular Tamil periodicals and they rarely sold more than a few thousand copies, if that. The most widely read and only daily, the *Swadesamitran*, sold barely 3,000 copies

until the end of World War I. It was in this ‘small world of [Tamil] journalism’ (Das Gupta 1970) that advertisements had to take root.

In such a small world, when the public sphere was incipient, print advertisements hardly marked their presence. It could be argued that periodicals were not the sole locus of advertisements. The definitions provided in Miron Winslow’s *A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary* (1862) and even the much-later University of Madras’s *Tamil Lexicon* (1912–36) of *vilambaram*, the modern term for advertisement, attests to its still evolving and new meaning. The definition of the term variously as ‘advertisement, notice, publication, proclamation’ without zeroing in on the newly acquired meaning indicates how tenuous this phenomenon still was.

At around the turn of the twentieth century leaflets, handbills, and broadsides, rather than advertisements in the periodical press, were used widely to advertise products. Interestingly, such ephemera did not replace tom-toms and town criers, but rather supplemented such kinds of direct canvassing. This form was especially used for advertising theatre performances. From about the 1890s, especially with the growing popularity of touring Parsi theatre groups and its imitators, plays were staged in most towns of the Tamil country. Printed drama notices were used to advertise the staging of these plays, as these could be targeted at prospective spectators in habitations in the vicinity of makeshift theatres. The autobiography of the famous theatre personality T.K. Shanmugam provides many instances of such advertising (Shanmugam 1972). A bullock cart with placards and canvasses pictorially depicting a few scenes from the play would go around town with an employee of the drama company announcing and advertising, often with a megaphone, the evening’s play. Printed notices would be distributed as the cart, followed by a bunch of boisterous boys, made the rounds on the streets (Figure 2.1).

Autobiographies and memoirs of those times indicate that these drama notices were the earliest form of printed material that people had access to. Such drama notices became collectors’ items and were probably the earliest collectibles before the popularity of postage stamps. Roja Muthiah, the antiquarian, collected hundreds of such drama notices, which are now housed in the library named after him in Chennai.

The drama notice was so popular that it became a widely used simile. Anything that was distributed widely and freely, to this day, is said to be ‘distributed like a drama notice’. The drama notice had distinctive features. Printed usually in black or blue ink, on coloured – very often in dull and not bright shades of green, pink and yellow – manifold paper, they employed a variety of fonts, and wrong fonts and wrong points (printing terms which have lost meaning with the use of word-processing software) were quite common. Arabesques, decorative lines and type-made blocks (Venkatachalapathy 1999) were quite liberally employed.

Mathimosa Vilakkam, a contemporary compendium of frauds, describes in detail how drama notices were often misleading, to put it mildly (Venkatachalapathy 2006). Until even the early 1930s, before multi-colour

அபிநயநாஞ்சனம் எல்லா வலிகளுக்கும் கைகண்ட மருந்து

சென்னைப் பற்றாடலையையே உபயோகிப்பவர்கள் விலை டப்பி 1-சது 2 1/2 அணை ஸ்ரீ கிருஷ்ண தேவபுடர் கம்பெனி P. T. மதுரை.

இந்தியாவின் சிறந்த நடிகரும் தர்மசீலருமான
ஸ்ரீமான் C. கன்னையா அவர்கள் இயற்றிய கடைசி நாடகம்

சென்னை திருவல்லிக்கேணி ஸ்ரீ பார்த்தசாரதி பெருமானுக்கும் பிராட்டியாருக்கும் ரத்னகிரீடம் திருவாரணங்கன்செய்ய இந்நாடகக்கோவையின் கிரக வாபமுழுவதும் வினியோகிக்கப்படும்.

1932ஆம் செப்டெம்பர்மீ 24-முதல்
ஒரு மாதம் வரையில் பிரதி தினமும் நடைபெறும்.

பிரதி சனி, செவ்வாய், வியாழக்கிழமைகளில் இரவு 9-மணிக்கும் பிரதி ஞாயிறு, திங்கள், புதன், வெள்ளிக்கிழமைகளில் மாலை 5-30 மணிக்கும் நடைபெறும்.

ஸி.கன்னையா கம்பெனி
மதுரை பெரிய தகரக்கொட்டகையில்



சகல வேதாசு, புராண, இதிகாச, சாஸ்திர சாராம்சமும்
கலியில் பகவத் அவதாரப் பிரதிநிதியுமாகிய

ஸ்ரீ ம த் ப க வ த் கீ தை

ஸ்ரீ மத் பகவத் கீதையைப் படிப்பதும், கேட்பதும், நாடகமாய் நடப்பதும் பார்ப்பதும் பாரதமக்களின் இன்றியமையாக்கடமை.

நான்கு வருஷங்களாய் சீன்களும் உடைகளும் இக்கம்பெனியார் இந்த நவீன நாடகத்திற்காக தயாரித்தனர் என்பதும், சென்னையிலும், திருச்சியிலும், சும்பகோணத்திலும், திருநெல்வேலியிலும் தொடர்ச்சியாய் தினசரி நடிகப்பெற்றது என்பதும், இந்நாடகத்தின் மேன்மையை நன்குவிளக்கும்.

ஸ்ரீ மீலும்பிகை பிரஸ், திருநெல்வேலி டவுண். காப்பி 50000

ROJA MUTHIAH
KOTTAIYUR-623 106

Figure 2.1 Notice for C. Kannaiah Naidu's play *Srimad Bhagavad Gitai*, Madurai, 1932. Courtesy: Roja Muthiah Research Library. The colophon states that 50,000 copies of the notice were printed.

blocks became common, it was customary for Tamil periodicals to use the very same manifold paper for its wrappers. The Bharati scholar R.A. Padmanabhan recollects in his essay on *Ananda Vikatan's* early days that its wrapper was printed on paper 'like a drama notice' (Padmanabhan 1980). Readers socialised early in their life to print through drama notices could seamlessly integrate with such magazines. Such notices were employed not only for advertising theatre performances but also for a wide variety of household and other goods.

VPP: Value Payable Post

In the absence of histories of consumption and distribution structures we do not yet have a map of consumer products and the networks of retailing. But an impressionistic understanding based on a reading of contemporary writings and advertisements indicates that such retailing structures were still elementary. In the city of Chennai, the arterial Mount Road was the centre of business in the early twentieth century. This business district largely catered to the European elite of the city. George Town (as Black Town, the native quarters next to the white Fort St George was called after 1905) was a major market for Indians. As Pudumaippithan, the great Tamil short story writer, describes in a story of these times, 'There was neither electric train nor Meenambakkam airport. The civilisation of concrete structures called Mambalam was still a swampland. And Tambaram was a distant region' (Venkatachalapathy 2000: 481). If such was the state of Chennai little need be said of the other parts of the Tamil land. Each town had a bazaar, and smaller towns and villages were at best served by weekly makeshift bazaars. Haruka Yanagisawa's revisionist account of consumption, which strongly demonstrates increased consumption in the interwar period, however, is about goods – rice, oil and hosiery – that were not amenable to advertising (Yanagisawa 2010).

In such a situation the primary conduit for distribution of consumer goods was the postal system. The innovation called Value Payable Post (or Cash on Delivery System) – or VPP for short – introduced by the postal department in 1877, nearly a quarter of a century after the introduction of a modern postal system in India, made a crucial contribution (Clarke 1921: 40). Under this system, consumers could acquire products from sellers by sending a postcard requesting a product and accepting the product through mail by paying the money to the postman at the doorstep – much like what online retailers such as flipkart.com or amazon.com do these days. It was a combination of registered post and money order, and the buyer had to bear these costs. 'By this system the Post Office not only undertakes to deliver a parcel, but also, for a small commission, to collect the cost of it from the addressee.' In a context 'where there are few large firms outside the Presidency towns, the value-payable system has proved an inestimable convenience to the upcountry purchaser' (Clarke 1921: 51).

It is difficult to estimate the volume of commercial traffic in this system, but it was large both in volume and in proportion to total sales. In the words of an early historian of the Indian postal system, this system was ‘so largely adopted by all retail traders’ that it had ‘diverted the whole of the light parcel traffic from the railways to the Post Office’ (Clarke 1921: 50).

There is virtually no advertisement of the times which does not make mention of the product’s availability through VPP. ‘Postage Extra’ was a mandatory line figuring at the end of any advertisement copy, immediately following the marked price.

Not only established business houses and firms but especially small-time merchants used this system to sell goods widely. This was also the time, as has been noted by scholars, of the ‘arrival of relatively inexpensive imported items’ into India (Hodges 2008: 106). In the 1920s, in Tamil Nadu, a variety of goods, popularly referred to as *shoppusaamaangal* or ‘shop goods’, arrived by the shiploads from Japan and Britain, consisting of such imperishable consumer items as soaps, combs, mirrors, needles, beads, toys, play balls, etc. (Sunda 1976: 200). These items were generally readily available in Chennai and other towns for retail sales, but in order to reach the mofussil areas, a new type of business person emerged. These business people would print a catalogue of such items or take out advertisements in the press. Conceiving advertisements for mail-order business was a challenging task: for the advertisements to be successful, the copy had to be worded in such a way that buyers could make up their mind without actually seeing the product. A contemporary advertisement manual devoted a separate chapter for writing such advertisement copy (Sivasambu 1928: 26–32). Such manuals notwithstanding, catchy advertisement copies tended to be often misleading, with unreliable descriptions and images. On receiving specific orders, they sold these products through VPP.

One of the most successful mail-order business people was S.S. Vasan, who later became a media baron (publisher of the hugely popular weekly, *Ananda Vikatan*) and movie mogul (proprietor of Gemini Studios). He used innovative methods to extend his business. Rather than sell individual items he offered a package of 144 such items for a rupee (Sunda 1976: 200)! A typical example of a business firm that employed the modalities of VPP would be P.M. Raju Mudaliar & Sons who described themselves as ‘Book and Medicine Sellers, Gold Gilded German Silver Jewellers, Rubber Stamp Makers, Publishers of Annual Diaries and General Commission Agents’.²

Similarly, producers of chapbooks, who for the most part operated in the working class neighbourhood of Choolai in Chennai, dealt with a variety of often unrelated objects. Chapbooks carried advertisements of products that were to be sold by VPP. For example, Choolai Manicka Nayagar, one of the more prominent dealers of chapbooks in the interwar period, routinely advertised hair oil, Japanese silk scarves, oil for turning grey hair black, antidotes for scorpion bites and soaps usable for depilation.³

Another familiar item was the cure-all tonic. *Minsara Rasam* (lit. ‘electric fluid’) produced by Dr P. Varadarajulu Naidu, a prominent political leader,

was a hugely successful product that kept the cash till ticking. As Sarah Hodges observes, ‘health products had a disproportionately large place within emergent print advertising across ... Tamil south’ (Hodges 2008: 108). This was especially so in relation to ‘contraceptive products ... [and] for books relating to birth control’ (Hodges 2008: 105). A contemporary manual on advertising also made this point about advertising by spurious drug companies who also employed it for prurient purposes (Sivasambu 1928: 7–8). From the work of Douglas Haynes, we know that the Tamil country was not exceptional in this (Haynes 2010). It has been observed that medical advertisements were ‘the largest single source for newspaper revenues’ (Arnold 2013: 124).

Considering the nature of the system itself, not surprisingly, VPP lent itself to abuses. A contemporary historian of the postal system observed that:

Like everything designed for the good of mankind, the Value-Payable Post is not an altogether unmixed blessing ... people have to buy articles without seeing them, and if they are disappointed in their purchases they are inclined to think that the Post Office is at fault and to demand their money back.

(Clarke 1921: 51)

How the typical mail-order business person worked, in the colourful description of *Mathimosa Vilakkam*, the great compendium on fraudsters, is as follows:

People who don’t possess a quarter anna coin, would assume names such as Raju & Company or Burt & Company or Thangavelu & Company, and somehow raise enough money to print a catalogue of at least ten formes [80 or 160 pp]. The catalogue would include a list of books, a list of silver and copper ornaments with descriptive details, a list of perfumes, a list of varieties of oils, a list of medicinal products, and *lehyams* [electuaries]. People who saw these catalogues would be tricked into believing that the company was trading in thousands of rupees’ worth of commodities.

(Bhoopathy 1929: 128–9)

These fraudsters, according to *Mathimosa Vilakkam*, bribed people in rival companies to steal their mailing lists and then mail catalogues, printed in numbers such as 4,000 or 5,000, to the addresses – quite like how dotcoms and other online sellers and spamsters operate now. The catalogue would also include pictures, printed with images of fountain pens, bracelets, anklets, waistbands and watches. The catalogues always claimed that stocks were limited and that the great deals were only for a limited period. These catalogues claimed that they were trustworthy business people who had been conducting their trade for a long time. But in reality, however, they would make a mixture of pulverised coconut shells, salt, dried ginger and areca nuts, fill them up in small tins, and paste fancy labels and pass them off as

medicines and cures. For a product that cost an anna, the listed price would be eight annas, with additional costs for postage and packing. Some products they would buy from Gujilee Bazaar, or 'the thieving bazaar', the flea market of Chennai and pass it off as new. And who fell for such tricks? The gullible people in the villages and people working with white sahibs in the hill regions, who took pride in postmen coming looking for them calling out their names (Bhoopathy 1929: 131)!

Mail-order business people adopted carpet-bombing strategies and distributed their catalogues widely. Advertising through catalogues was a shot in the dark. Mail-order business people would send off catalogues to any address that they chanced to lay their hands on. Certain types of advertising material serving prurient interests were sent to college students as a group. The colonial state was particularly concerned at the practice of sending *en masse* pricelists of cures for impotence and venereal diseases addressed to students. It ordered the postal authorities to intercept and forward these to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), alongside seditious literature.⁴ Mail-order business was a precarious business and perhaps S.S. Vasan was exceptional in being successful.

Sometimes these mail-order business people did not just send out catalogues; they even mailed articles themselves:

Although strictly forbidden by the rules of the Post Office, the small trader sends out numbers of articles by value-payable post to persons who have not given any orders for them, trusting that some of them will be accepted by a confiding public, and, strange to say, he manages to do a certain amount of business in the way.

(Clarke 1921: 52)

It hardly needs stating that cheating was a two-way process. If mail-order business people tricked their customers by short-changing them, the prospective consumers often put them at a loss by refusing to accept the goods: after all, ordering cost little more than a quarter anna, the price of a postcard. 'Many people are quite ready to order things from shops which they hope to be able to pay for upon arrival, but unfortunately for the firms that supply them, these hopes are often not fulfilled' (Clarke 1921: 52). Schoolboys were frequent malefactors who got a kick out of ordering expensive objects like watches and not taking delivery. It was estimated that about 20 per cent – a rather significant percentage – of value payable articles posted were refused by the addressees (Clarke 1921: 52).

A returned VPP article caused much loss to the company as the VPP charges had now to be borne by them, and the product also lost its sheen and crispy newness in the process, making it difficult to sell even in such a blind process as VPP. This was especially so for printed books. The legendary editor M.V. Ramanujachari had some strange experiences with his monumental edition of the Tamil translation of *Mahabharata* which he published in fascicules over a

quarter of a century. Certain subscribers, who had patiently received 43 fascicules over 25 years through VPP, refused the penultimate fascicule when it appeared at their doorstep! The lament that readers refused VPP packets was something that can be read often in editorial prefaces and publishers' notes of the times.

As a contemporary manual of advertising observed, the unscrupulous nature of many mail-order business people created a situation where a general lack of confidence developed (Sivasambu 1928: 30). The heyday of mail-order business through catalogues was the decade immediately following World War I. The decline of mail-order business was paralleled by the rise of Tamil journalism.

Advertising comes of age

As noted earlier, Tamil journalism was plagued by low circulation figures until well into the twentieth century. The leading vernacular journals in the Madras Presidency in the mid-1870s sold as little as a few hundred copies (Das Gupta 1970). By the late 1890s the *Hindu* and the *Mail* both carried many pages of advertisements. *Swadesamitran* was probably the earliest Tamil periodical to carry advertisements. As late as in 1928, an advertisement manual stated that a magazine with a circulation of 5,000 was 'excellent' from the point of view of advertising (Sivasambu 1928: 47).

By the beginning of the twentieth century advertisements began to be ubiquitous and prominent in the periodical press. The time of the Swadeshi movement, with its advocacy of indigenous production and boycott of foreign goods, marked a new beginning in advertising, especially in Bengal where Swadeshi enterprise made deep inroads. Though the Tamil south was somewhat behind, a British journalist visiting Chennai commented:

And now in Madras I found the Swadeshi movement very strong. 'None but Swadeshi goods', 'Buy our Nationalist cottons', 'Try our Bande Mataram cigarettes', were the most telling advertisements a shop could write up or insert in the native newspapers, which are particularly strong and excellent in Madras.

(Nevinson 1908: 122–3)

During this period there was a clear distinction between news pages and advertisement pages, as any modern historian who has worked with old newspapers as a source will recollect. Front and back pages were usually reserved for advertisements (hence the joke that even the Mahatma's assassination did not make it to the front page, especially in papers such as the *Hindu*). Early advertisements were usually set in columns with a modicum of pictorial depiction, evolving from the 'classified' kind. Firstly, the technology for reproducing images was limited. Many of the advertisements were content to use only minimum embellishments such as the hand, the arrow, the asterisk, NB, and floral designs, borders, and arabesques. An innovation

called ‘the typemade block’ – readymade blocks sold by type foundries by casting a standard set of designs – was frequently used to give some variety to plain copy. No wonder a contemporary manual for advertising noted that ‘all ads should be printed in plain type and easily read; type so fanciful with such flourish that it is difficult for the most educated to decipher was to be avoided’ (Naidu 1913: 4).⁵

Advertisement rates that periodicals charged were not usually one-off, and one could take insertions for weeks and months – an indication that advertising was relatively cheap. Periodicals would keep the advertisement matter ‘standing’, as it was called in publishing parlance, i.e. the typeset advertising matter would be left standing without being distributed and recomposed every time.

Given both technological and commercial limitations often the only image that Tamil periodicals before World War I could afford was the stylised mast-head and the logo. If serials were run, a block was made as it could be used repeatedly issue after issue. English newspapers such as the *Hindu*, targeted as it was towards the English-educated who had more purchasing power, used more images. Metal engraving was widely available at this time – Perumal Chetty & Sons was known for its metal engravings – even though it was expensive. Only line blocks were therefore used. The technology of off-tone blocks meant for reproducing photographs became available to Tamil periodicals only in the mid-1920s, and even then, Tamil journals desisted from using them due to costs (Figure 2.2).

The leader of the Dravidian movement, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, known for his penny-pinching, is said to have advised sub-editors of *Kudi Arasu* to scratch old blocks beyond recognition: the printing result was smudged and the face unrecognisable, giving the impression to readers that blocks had indeed been used but only that the printing had been fouled up! That Periyar’s tactic worked indicates that printing technology of the times was so inefficient that smudged pictures in newspapers were so common that readers could be fooled by such ruses. It is said that Periyar was once very angry to see that C.N. Annadurai’s photograph had been printed in his daily and he was mollified only when he was told that the block was borrowed and no money had been spent on making a new one (Arangannal 1988: 82–3).

By the mid-1930s multi-colour blocks – three blocks would be used to print the three primary colours: cyan, magenta and yellow to give the result of a colour picture – were beginning to be available. But they were so expensive that only special plates and backside wrappers of special supplements were printed using multi-colour blocks. Costs were especially high because multi-colour blocks yielded results only when printed on art paper. Printing blocks were so expensive that even a major newspaper like *Dinamani* did not think it below its dignity to borrow them – in fact, once it even thanked the lenders in a box item, e.g. *Triveni*’s editor Ramakoteswara Rao.⁶

In such a situation of expensive technology for printing images advertisements had to take extensive recourse to words. In Pudumaippithan’s story *Oru Naal Kazhindathu* (A day has passed), Murugadasar is a poor author

For Quality **BLOCKS**
LINE
HALF-TONE
 &
COLOUR

ALSO CINEMA SLIDES

THE RAVI PROCESS
 42. MUKER NALLAMUTHU ST.
 POST BOX NO. 248. G.T. MADRAS.

ஆப்டோன், கிளி, கலர் பிரிவாக்கு கேடலாக்கிற்கும், ரப்பர் ஸ்டேம்பி
 கேடலாக்கிற்கும் வேண்டுவோர்கள் எழுதவும்.

Figure 2.2 Advertisement from a maker of line and half-tone blocks.

who has a dream to write a novel of epic proportions. But what he is fated to do for a livelihood is to write advertisement copy for imported goods for ‘an advertising company’. In the ironic words of Pudumaippithan, ‘rather than writing indelible portraits of adventurous heroes’ Murugadasar is reduced ‘to writing the sagas of a variety of imported goods dumped daily from abroad, from soya beans to candles’. For writing sagas on Tapaza Energy Tablets and Lipton Tea his European boss pays him a princely salary of Rs 30 a month (Venkatachalapathy 2000: 375–84).

Not many business people could afford even this small sum to hire a copy-writer not to speak of an advertising agency. To address this need, one P.P. Naidu came up with a useful handbook. Titled *Advertisement Writing Made Easy* (1913), it described itself as ‘the first of its kind’ and was addressed to ‘progressive merchants’, ‘being a collection of over 3,000 meaty mottoes, headings, phrases, catch lines, introductions, etc. suitable for all business’. It is however better described as a collection of clichés, worn-out phrases, hackneyed and pedestrian lines. Nevertheless, it gives us an insight into the infancy of print advertising in colonial India.

This was in a context when even Subramania Bharati, romanticist and idealist, wanted to publish his books in 40 volumes with a first print-run of 10,000 copies each and thought of advertising as a crucial component of this exercise. Certain that his books would be 'sold as easily and quickly as kerosene or boxes of matches', Bharati estimated that his publication plans would require Rs 20,000 as production costs and Rs 10,000 towards advertising expenses (Padmanabhan 2005: 83). Despite his long experience in Tamil journalism and publishing, this grand scheme only shows how advertising was still not a well-understood system.

In this context P.P. Naidu's manual is illuminating. Stating that 'No business man of today can afford to neglect any opportunity to increase his knowledge of successful ways and means to conduct his business', he had 'a talk with the Merchants': 'As a business-creator, what is there better than advertising. Advertising is the most important thing in any business. It is the vital spark'. 'It is the systematic, persistent, truthful effort that pays in advertising'. And he gave an example, 'It is the continuousness that has made each letter in the word PEARS worth what it is today' (Naidu 1913: 1-2).

Another advertisement manual of the times, a much longer work produced evidently by a more experienced professional, suggests that things had improved little in the 15 years since P.P. Naidu's guidebook. *Vilambara Virthi, Vilambara Yukti* (in English, titled *Advertising: The Business Aid*) by R.N. Sivasambu is an extraordinarily comprehensive work. Published by one Modern Publicity Company from Madras – apparently an advertising agency owned and managed by the author himself – this manual of 154 pages (Royal 1/16 size) is actually a detailed primer. Though no David Ogilvy, the author explains in a clear and crisp language (bristling with literary allusions to boot), the rationale for advertising and provides do-it-yourself techniques of advertising. Interestingly, it also makes a strong case for hiring professionals for the job of advertising. The content and tone of the manual show that advertising in India/Tamil Nadu was still so nascent that the very idea of advertising had to be advertised. Considering the pioneering nature of this manual, here is a detailed summary of the contents.

Claiming to be a graduate of one Dixon Institute and an advertisement consultant with 20 years' experience in the field, R.N. Sivasambu stated that, from his 18th year, he had been avidly following advertisements in magazines and books published from the West. As is often the case with any new work in colonial India, the author begins with a lament on the paucity of advertising manuals in the vernacular languages which he sets out to redress.

Firstly, Sivasambu sets out to explain the indispensable link between commerce and advertising in the Western world and how the art of advertising was a specialised course of study in the West. In contrast, in India, he bemoaned that advertising was still in its infancy: only firms with some connection to the West did any advertising at all.

The elementary nature of the questions that Sivasambu tried to address attests to the fact that advertising in India was still in its infancy. He disabused

his readers of the misconception that advertising increased costs. Rather, as anyone would now know, advertising increased demand and led to increased sales and, consequently, profits. Counterintuitively, he also advised his business readers to increase their advertising budgets during periods of low sales: the analogy he employed was that of putting a convalescing patient on a high nutrition diet. In short, advertising was a long haul and not meant for immediate results. Raising the question, 'What can advertising do?' he argued that it could even change, or create, new tastes. Here he cited the example of tea in the United States and also pointed out how advertising for *beedis* was ridiculed initially.

For Sivasambu, the periodical press was the prime vehicle for advertising, and it is to the growing organic link between print and advertising that we now turn. 'Advertisement is the oxygen of the press' (Sivasambu 1928: 51) and in Sivasambu's view 'the relationship between print and advertising was intimate' (Sivasambu 1928: 116). The manual also had a clear sense of what in current advertising parlance would be called media planning, discussing the location, periodicity, and character of audience, etc. in relation to placing advertisements.

Advertisements were a critical input in the widening world of journalism. The interwar period, despite the Great Depression, was the time when many things fell into place for advertising. First was the quantum leap in the circulation of Tamil periodicals. As T.S. Chockalingam, the doyen of Tamil journalism, reflected contemporaneously in a set of insightful essays on its history, it was marked by three moments: public interest in reading news began seriously with World War I; the second moment was the time of Gandhian Satyagraha and non-cooperation; and the third was the momentous civil disobedience movement (Chockalingam 1943: 18). At this time a new innovation called the *kalanapathirikkai* (lit. 'quarter anna journal') made its appearance. Published often as a biweekly, its catchy format, of eight pages in crown quarto, with a cartoon on the first page, with no separate wrappers, sold tens of thousands of copies. *Suthanthira Sangu* even claimed that it sold 100,000 copies. The 1930s also saw the rise of *Ananda Vikatan*. In February 1928, S.S. Vasana acquired *Ananda Vikatan*, a tottering humour magazine, and hit upon a successful mix of humour, fiction, and cartoons with a dash of nationalism. Besides, he conducted crossword puzzle contests with fabulous prizes, which boosted circulation. By 1933 *Ananda Vikatan* was claiming sales of 50,000 copies. As David Arnold points out, in 1931, Madras presidency could boast of 100 Tamil periodicals with a combined circulation of about 2.1 lakhs and over 50 English language newspapers with a combined circulation of about half those numbers (Arnold 2013: 122). As T.S. Chockalingam reckoned in 1943, 'The last ten years constitute an important phase in the history of [Tamil] journalism'. Adding, 'Never before had the press grown like this', he also forecast a bright future for the vernacular press, a hope that was not belied (Chockalingam 1943: 18).

By the late 1930s, 'Without advertising revenue journalism simply cannot function' (Chockalingam 1943: 24). Drawing attention to the cost of producing

a newspaper or news magazine, he explained that it was advertising revenue that made it possible for the cover price to be considerably lower than even the actual production costs.

In the early decades of the twentieth century a clear language divide became entrenched in print advertising. The bulk of the advertisements, especially of high value products, went to the English language press. The *Madras Mail* and the *Hindu* cornered a lion's share of advertisements. Advertisements of low value goods went to the Tamil press. The first rupture in this scene was made by S.S. Vasan and *Ananda Vikatan*. If Vasan himself had cut his business teeth as a low-level advertising agent collecting advertisements and earning commission, in turn he hired T. Sadasivam (better known as the husband of the famed Carnatic musician, M.S. Subbulakshmi) as his advertising manager. Sometime in the 1930s, it is said, he launched an advertisement *blitzkrieg* in London newspapers about *Ananda Vikatan* and its circulation – directed at London-based firms and their advertising agencies, the advertisements asked if *Ananda Vikatan* was part of their media plan? The London firms and agencies in turn deflected this question to their Madras branches and advertising agents and, consequently, it is said, *Ananda Vikatan* was flooded with advertisements.⁷

Despite this optimism and the growth of Tamil journalism it was a poor cousin to its English counterpart. The pecking order established quite early in the century marked a clear divide between the products advertised in English periodicals and the Tamil press – a state of affairs that changed little until after the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990s. As C.R. Srinivasan, editor of *Swadesamitran*, and nephew of *Hindu's* editor A. Rangaswamy Iyengar, observed in 1949:

It is foreign producers who are subsidizing [Indian] newspapers. For the purposes of their business they assess the customs and habits of Indian people. Their first target is the class of Europeans who live a high life; next come the high status, English-educated Indians. The common people with their rising standards of living and wants come last. Accordingly, in the advertising world, the hierarchy is Anglo-Indian papers followed by Indian-owned English papers and lastly the vernacular papers.

(Srinivasan 1949)

T.S. Chockalingam argued that it was a misconception that only English readers had more purchasing power (Chockalingam 1943: 26). Averring to the difference between English and vernacular newspapers, he also pointed to the disproportionate share of advertising revenue that went to the English press while the Tamil press received only a fraction of it. Consequently, he asserted: 'there is not a single vernacular paper in the Madras Presidency that can boast of a monthly advertising revenue of more than Rs 10,000' (Chockalingam 1943: 24).

This was also complicated by the fact that in the absence of professional advertising agencies the press relied on agents to canvass for advertisements

on a commission basis. With no dedicated agents, more than one agent canvassed with the same clients and often undercut tariffs leading to uncertain and skewed revenues.⁸ This also compounded the practice of giving out unreliable circulation figures a situation remedied to an extent with the constitution of the Audit Bureau of Circulations in 1948.

Editorials written at the beginning of a new year or of a new volume invariably made reference to the support of advertisers. By the mid-1930s *Ananda Vikatan*, *Dinamani*, and other journals were publishing special annual numbers with better content and a lot more advertisements. It was also customary to print an index of advertisers in such annual numbers. For instance, *Dinamani*'s annual number for 1937 carried over 70 pages of advertisements in a total of 232 pages. The *Dinamani*'s annual numbers were commercially so successful that Pudumaippithan, sub-editor in charge of the special numbers, was demanding extra pay considering that the proprietors were making so much money (Venkatachalapathy 2003). Even by the late 1920s Periyar's *Kudi Arasu* was devoting half of its pages to advertisements.

By the 1930s there was easier availability of technology to produce images. Crucially missing until this moment were the right products for advertising. No doubt there were a number of products such as cosmetics (soap was a symbol of modernity, and in the hot and humid conditions of the Tamil country talcum powder cut deep into the market touching the lowest classes), beverages, biscuits, fans, pens, watches, gramophones that were being widely consumed. Advertisements for baby formula foods also made a big impact. In a 1934 story Pudumaippithan writes with wry sarcasm of poor children who played by the railway tracks squeezing in through the fences: 'Were they chubby Glaxo or Mellin's Food babies that they could not do so!' (Venkatachalapathy 2000: 67). The extensive use of a ghee substitute, the generic Dalda, also needs to be noted in this context. (Notwithstanding all these brand names, branding was still somewhat of a novelty. They tended to be exclusively promoted and trademarked by foreign firms.) Further, there was the 'contraceptive boom' – the marketing of contraceptive and gynaecological health products, apart from the general health merchandise – that Sarah Hodges mentions had its limitations.⁹ Douglas Haynes has already referred to the extensive advertising taken out by insurance companies. Railway companies too were major advertisers. Railways, then in private hands, such as the Southern Indian Railway and Madras & Southern Mahratta Railway companies, launched advertisement *blitzkriegs* at the time of major festivals and fairs to lure pilgrims. But all these products and services didn't add up to the incredible cultural and technological product that was the cinema.

Enter the talkies

It was at this moment that the talkie made big strides in Tamil Nadu. The Tamil talkies, born in 1931, penetrated deep into Tamil society by the mid-1930s and were also reinforcing linguistic boundaries that the Tamil press was

also shaping. Here was a product with a wide, if linguistically bounded, potential that could at least theoretically encompass the entire Tamil populace, creating an imagined community.¹⁰ The surfeit of advertisements for Tamil films at this time is impossible to miss. Advertisements quite literally leapt from the pages at the front and back of the periodicals (Figure 2.3).

It was customary for filmmakers to take out special supplements in major dailies on the day of the release. And it was the usual practice to demand two pages of advertisement for a four-page supplement – surely a money spinner (Venkatachalapathy 2006: 109).

A.K. Chettiar, the pioneering documentary filmmaker, engaged a Chennai firm, Premier Advertising Service, to work on the publicity of his film on Gandhi (1940).¹¹ Two lakh stamps with Gandhi's image was printed and distributed among school students, who proudly affixed them on their notebooks and textbooks. A beautiful two-colour calendar with Gandhi's picture was printed and given to commercial establishments. As A.K. Chettiar proudly recalled, even 40 years later, he could still see the picture pasted on walls. Posters of different types and folders in art paper were printed apart



Figure 2.3 Advertisement for Kaccha Devayani. *Ananda Vikatan* (Supplement), 27 October 1940.

from large photographs for display and many types of blocks for newspapers (Venkatachalapathy 2006: 106).

Film advertisements required images to be successful, and with the high advertising revenues that they generated the print media was happy to employ thus far expensive technology. It may be added that many film companies often provided blocks of the stills for the periodicals to use.¹² The ‘music boom’ of gramophone records that immediately preceded the ‘talkies boom’ prepared the ground for this.

By the end of the 1930s film producers were taking out special supplements in the periodical press. This not only extended the market for films but also greatly increased the viability and the profitability of print media. This was also the time that the gap between ideologically oriented journals and the commercial press widened. Advertising revenue separated out the two, e.g. Periyar’s *Viduthalai*, the organ of the Dravidar Kazhagam, and *Dinamani*, the commercially run daily. In the 1930s, as the political pitch rose, Periyar cut down on the number of advertisements to find more space for party propaganda – something unthinkable for a commercial business-oriented publisher. As his printing machines had limited capacity Periyar reduced advertising pages from 7–8 to 3–4 pages of his 16-page *Kudi Arasu* (*Kudi Arasu*, 23 December 1928). One scarcely needs to add that Gandhi’s journals never carried advertisements – he believed that they encouraged unnecessary consumption.

It was not long before film and consumer product advertising were married, leading to celebrity endorsement. Until this moment celebrity endorsement was exceptional: I have seen a bangle-seller from Girgaon, Mumbai, at the height of the Swadeshi movement advertise his products with a picture of the jailed *swadeshi* leader V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and his exhortation ‘to use only Swadeshi goods’.¹³ By the 1920s, however, Gandhi’s name was invoked extensively to market goods, including cigarettes – obviously without the Mahatma’s permission! Khadi products were also extensively advertised. Tagore endorsed Cadbury’s Bournvita. But celebrity endorsement was still uncommon, if not exceptional, until cinema made inroads. By the late 1930s film stars were endorsing products. The most memorable ads were for Lux. In 1941 Leela Chitnis was the first Indian film actress to endorse the product. Tamil followed suit. The female star chosen for Lux – ‘the Beauty Soap of the Stars’ – was an according of rank.

By the 1930s advertising was a cultural phenomenon. Periyar termed the Congress leader S. Satyamurti’s zealous publicity seeking as akin to the carpet-bombing advertisements for Amrutanjan pain balm. Similarly, in the mid-1930s, he said that Nehru was being advertised widely like tea (*Kudi Arasu*, 22 March 1936). By this time, it was becoming common wisdom that:

[n]ewspaper advertising will always pay, and no scheme of publicity is complete without newspapers. The best paper always brings ample returns to its advertisers. Most of the local merchants’ advertising money

should go to newspapers. No other advertising medium is as desirable in all aspects. Some other kinds – booklets, folders, cards, letters, etc. are always effective – but as a usual thing they cost much more. Newspapers are read by everybody who is a possible customer of yours.

(Naidu 1913: 4)

During World War II and after

During World War II and its immediate aftermath, the Indian publishing industry and the press suffered. Government took over many newspapers, often on lease, to further war propaganda. The government also placed advertisements in newspapers. In a situation of widespread scarcity of goods there was little need for advertising as the government discouraged consumption. The government floated bonds to mop up savings. Moreover, newspapers suffered from an acute shortage of paper. There was a moratorium on the launching of new periodicals, and even existing ones had to cut down on printed pages due to the system of paper quotas. This was definitely not the time for advertisements.

But in the years immediately after independence a new consciousness about the role of advertising and consumption emerged in the Tamil public sphere. For instance, *Chinthanai*, a new literary journal, carried as many as four essays on advertising in a single year (1949). The crux of the essays was to explain to the reader the place of advertising not only in the publishing economy but in the larger production and consumption economy as well.

Thi.Ja. Ranganathan (Thi.Ja.Ra.), a popular columnist, wrote what would ultimately become a cliché about advertising. Alluding to a popular Tamil saying about the impossibility of imprisoning the fragrance of the jasmine flower, he stated that, in the modern world, even jasmine flowers needed advertisement. A common refrain of these essays was the impressive if not breathtaking power of Western advertisements (Thi.Ja.Ra. 1953: 174–5). We also notice that these essays display great reflection on the art of advertising.

In an easily discernible reference to S.S. Vasan's early days as a small-time merchant, Thi.Ji.Ra., then a cub journalist, recollected how he advised a disappointed Vasan to take out a full-page ad once rather than resort to classified insertions over weeks and months (Thi.Ja.Ra. 1953: 175). By this time, of course, advertisements had matured enough to have advertisement wars: two rival soap companies ran campaigns and counter-campaigns about the use of animal fat in their products (Thi.Ja.Ra. 1953: 173–4). Many of these essays debunked the old-fashioned understanding that advertisements amounted to squandering money.¹⁴ Explaining the capitalist logic behind extended reproduction they demonstrated how large-scale production, increased sales and advertising were organically linked. There was unanimity that advertising by itself would not succeed if the product was not good or if the marketing network was weak (Natarajan 1949). The point about not

cluttering the ad copy with too many words can be read as a comment on the still rudimentary nature of Tamil advertisements.

A longish essay by C.R. Srinivasan was perhaps the first to explain the conundrum of the cheap cover price of bulky newspapers to a lay audience: dramatically posing this problem he explained to the readers how advertisements subsidised the newspapers for its readers (Srinivasan 1949). In explaining the way market worked he also made clear how newspapers themselves worked according to market logic.

It was in this context that advertising agencies in the modern sense emerged. Advertising agents/agencies had meant something very different well into the 1930s. The term then referred to agents who worked on behalf of a newspaper or magazine to meet prospective advertisers and canvas for advertisements earning a commission in the process. S.S. Vasana had begun his career as an advertisement agent canvassing for Periyar's *Kudi Arasu*, attracted by its low tariffs.

This was to change after the War. C.R. Srinivasan refers to this explicitly: 'In the past few years a new class has emerged between advertisers and the newspapers. They make a living by bringing the two together' and added, 'I refer to the advertising agencies.' Advertising agencies were 'not mere brokers', he asserted: 'It requires knowledge and experience to expertly spend the ad budget. They have expertise in producing ad copy; choosing the right media [media planning] and conducting "propaganda war"' (Srinivasan 1949).

In the post-Independence period Mumbai emerged as the undisputed advertising capital of India. The production of advertising was highly centralised. If, during the days of the Raj, advertisement copy was imported along with the products, a similar centralised system operated in Mumbai as well. Creative departments were centred in Mumbai and advertisement copy was conceptualised and executed in English – a practice that plagued Indian advertising with creative staff orienting their talents towards winning international awards rather than helping to sell products. This copy was translated into various Indian languages. Language translators were chosen from within Mumbai itself, for the sake of convenience.

An example of this was a middling sort of writer called Sura (not to be confused with the great modern Tamil writer Sundara Ramaswamy). Sura, who began writing short stories and reviews from his school days in the late 1930s, landed up with a clerical job in the Indian railways and in 1949 found himself in Mumbai. One day an old friend sought him out and invited him to moonlight for Lintas – every day he was to spend a few hours translating advertisement copy with more work farmed out for the weekend. As a government employee Sura was somewhat hesitant but soon the lure of making some extra bucks got the better of him. To escape possible punishment by his employer, the work was carried out in the name of his wife, a common enough ruse adopted by public servants! Soon he found himself moonlighting for various advertising agencies such as ASP (Advertising and Sales Promotion Service), Everest, Greens Advertising, etc. (Sura 1990: 42–9).

One fallout of such unprofessionalism was the poor quality of translated copy. Firstly, translators were cutoff from the cultural milieu in which language functions. Especially in a situation where the language was transforming quite rapidly – as was the case with Tamil – translators were often out of synch with creative language. More importantly the copy had often to please a manager who did not know the language (often the manager resorted to reverse translation to check the fidelity of the translation). Fidelity came at the cost of creativity, and even until the early 1980s Tamil translation copy was the butt of ridicule as translation was often awkward and unidiomatic. The reality of segmented markets with different cultural mores dawned on advertising professionals very late. (Horlicks had a big market in the South and advertisements specially designed to this market were late in coming.) But these processes were played out in the context of a small economy. No wonder the Press Commission, in 1953, estimated the advertisement industry at only Rs 50 million of which Rs 35 million went to the print media (Doctor and Alikhan 1999).

Writing the long history of advertising in twentieth-century India requires further work, and it is hampered by the lack of access to sources such as the archives of advertising agencies.

Concluding remark: a magic system?

In a chapter intended for *The Long Revolution* but published later separately, Raymond Williams called advertising the magic system. Writing in the late 1950s, Williams described advertising as ‘a highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical system in simpler societies, but rather strangely coexistent with a highly developed scientific technology’. Tracing its evolution from the simple announcement of shopkeepers to being a part of capitalist business organisation, Williams provided a critique of how advertisement was making ‘man the user’ into ‘man the consumer’ (Williams 1980: 184–6). Was print advertising in colonial Tamil Nadu a magic system?

Given the narrow economy, a still evolving transport network and limited purchasing power, consumption in Tamil Nadu was restricted. In the absence of a network of retail outlets well into the 1920s, mail-order business was the largest conduit for consumer goods. This business received a fillip with the dumping of low-cost goods by Japan. The nascent state of advertising was reflective of the limited consumption that characterised this economy. While pre-modern forms of advertising such as tom-toms were still prevalent even in the early twentieth century, print advertising was dominant and remained unchallenged even when the radio began to make tentative beginnings in the 1930s. From simple forms of print advertising such as handbills and notices, advertisements began to dominate the periodical press after World War I. By the 1930s, in the high noon of nationalism, with a quantum leap in circulation figures of the periodical press, advertising subsidised newspapers and

magazines and was their mainstay. New mass-consumed products such as tea, coffee, soaps, etc. and services such as insurance demanded extensive advertising and overtook advertisements for what has been described as ‘contraceptive commercialism’.

However, it was the advent of talkies that extended the use of print advertising. This moment coincided with the availability of better reproduction technologies such as halftone blocks and multi-colour block printing. But the periodical press was deeply divided on language lines. English papers received a disproportionate share of ad revenue while the vernacular press was a poor cousin. Well until Independence professional advertising was in its infancy and there were few firms that specialised in advertising. The politico-economic changes after 1947 significantly altered the field and professional advertising witnessed a bigger growth.

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Notes

- 1 See especially the essays by Abigail McGowan, Douglas Haynes, and Harminder Kaur in Haynes et al. (2010). Arnold (2013) deals with advertising *inter alia*. Vikram Doctor and Anvar Alikhan (1997) have sketched a fascinating long-term history of advertising in India: ‘*Kyo Na Aazmaye: The Indian Advertising Century*’. Mazzarella’s (2003) admirable ethnography of advertising devotes barely two passages to the history of advertising in India.
- 2 *Puli Pocket Diary* (1909).
- 3 *Arul Nadai Palani Andi Pandaram Pattu*. Chennai, 1927.
- 4 G.O. no. 1273, Judicial (Confidential), 25 August 1910, Govt. of Madras.
- 5 Relying completely on words often had unintended consequences. For the documentary film on Gandhi, in 1940, the producers took out a front-page ad. An upstart copywriter, instead of calling it simply a ‘Documentary Film on Gandhi’ as the director had asked him, phrased it as ‘Mahatma Gandhi in Celluloid’. A few days later they received an order from a lawyer in a mofussil town: ‘Please send me one dozen by V.P.P’! (Venkatachalapathy 2006: 106–7).
- 6 *Dinamani* Annual Number, 1937: 210. The weekly *Kalki* once advertised that it was selling used blocks at half price (*Kalki*, 1 April 1942: 9)
- 7 This is part of oral lore, and is mentioned in various tributes to S.S. Vasan; I have been unable to trace the advertisements in London papers.
- 8 See B.S. Ramaiah (1980: 48–9) for his experience of canvassing for advertisements.

- 9 See Hodges (2008). The extent of the boom is authenticated by how perturbed the state was by 'indelicate and indecent advertisements [which] lower the tone of the public press'. The government wrote confidentially to some journals persuading them to desist from advertising aphrodisiacs and the like. In fact, an official of the education department actually took the trouble to cut out such advertisements ('out of curiosity', as he put it) from respected dailies like the *Hindu* and the *Madras Standard*, and wondered if the government should provide them patronage. See Venkatachalapathy (2012: chapter 6) for more on the colonial state's policy towards morality.
- 10 For how Tamil cinema came into its own in the 1930s, see Hughes (2010).
- 11 This is one of the few explicit references I have ever found to advertising agencies in Tamil Nadu. A cursory survey of advertisements in the 1930s periodicals did not reveal ad agency signatures.
- 12 As late as in the early 1960s a popular magazine devoting many pages to cinema, *Naradar*, exhorted film companies to provide blocks for its use.
- 13 *Swadesamitran*, October 1909.
- 14 R.M.K. Viswanathan mentioned in an interview with me of how his grandfather, the founder of the RMKV textile shop in Tirunelveli, was averse to the idea of advertising. Conservative businessmen were wary that advertisements would attract unnecessary attention if not the evil eye!

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3 Making the ideal home?

Advertising of electrical appliances and the education of the middle-class consumer in Bombay, 1920–40

Douglas E. Haynes

If there is any clear symbol in our imaginations of middle-class consumerism in America, Europe, and Japan, it is the home filled with modern appliances and technological gadgets: electric lamps, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, fans and air-conditioners, washers and dryers, radios, the telephone and, of course, after World War II, the television set. This image, however, is largely absent in our view of the Indian middle class, at least before the advent of the TV-VCR age in the 1980s. To a great extent, history writing about the Indian middle class before 1947 has overlooked the importance of consumption, concentrating instead on the occupational character of the middle class, its advocacy of social reform and reformulated gender roles, and its involvement in national politics. Recent work has questioned this focus, arguing that consumption practices and anxieties about consumption were critical to the making of the middle class (for instance, the essays in Haynes et al. 2010; Tarlo 1996; Venkatachalapathy 2006). Yet this literature has not considered the role of electric technologies in middle-class consumption, despite the fact that commodities like electric lights, fans, refrigerators, and many other appliances began to enter the Indian marketplace before World War II.

This chapter examines the advertising of the new household technologies in Bombay during the late 1920s and the 1930s. During this period, local electric companies sought to use advertising significantly during this period to broaden their customer base beyond the ranks of industrial producers and to introduce electricity and the use of electrical commodities to neighbourhoods where middle-class families lived.¹ Urban consumers in India's biggest cities had gained potential access to electricity shortly after their counterparts in the United States and Europe. Because of the development of major hydro-electric projects in the nearby Ghats, Bombay possessed a significant electricity supply by the end of World War I, when only 6 per cent of British households had electric connections (Davidson 1986: chapter 2). Goods like vacuum cleaners and refrigerators, which were invented just before the War, were sold in the city by the 1930s, and their manufacturers began to market them aggressively. A particularly noteworthy aspect of the attempt to popularise such commodities in Bombay were the efforts of the Bombay Electric

Supply and Tramways Company, Limited (BEST), which regularly ran ads in local newspapers to promote individual products and the consumption of electricity more generally.²

Advertising by BEST and the manufacturers of household technologies was associated with a broader development that I call *brand name capitalism*. Between the two world wars, new kinds of consumer-oriented business, often global in character, entered the Indian market, seeking to persuade members of the middle-class-in-the-making to abandon commodities produced at home or in their localities and to give up many prevailing bodily practices in order to use brandname products. These businesses sometimes hired international advertising agencies (such as the US firm J. Walter Thompson Company) or employed in-house specialists. Professional advertisers promoted certain universal advertising conventions, including the use of catchy 'copy' and a reliance on 'commercial art'. They also targeted specific local consumer groups, identifying two major sets of actors – the European expatriates and the Indian urban middle class – as potential consumers. To expatriates they stressed the desirability of maintaining standards of comfort characteristic of 'home', the importance of sustaining European patterns of mixed-gender sociability, the need to withstand the trying character of the Indian climate and the value of asserting authority over unruly servants. In addressing the larger middle class, which multinational companies came to view as a more significant market, advertising campaigns increasingly converged around the importance of sustaining the modern conjugal family.

The effort to sell electric appliances seems to be out of proportion to the level of prevailing demand. For middle-class urbanites, the purchase of these goods involved serious, often impossible, strains on families' budgets. Their use, moreover, often required a radical shift in household practices. For instance, the new products sometimes necessitated that the Indian housewife take over, or supervise more closely, functions previously performed by servants, a transformation few families were ready to accept. As a result, the advertisers of electrical appliances and telephones faced an Indian consumer who was often sceptical about deploying the new kinds of machines broadly within the home.

I argue in this chapter that BEST and electric goods manufacturers adopted an overall approach to advertising that reflected an awareness of the ambivalence of middle-class attitudes towards household technologies. First, they remained committed to winning expatriate customership to a greater extent than did the manufacturers of such products as male tonics, medicines for women, soap and drinks like tea and cocoa. Second, they developed appeals specifically designed to goad middle-class consumers into expanding their customership even if such increases were to be marginal ones. Advertisers in effect participated in a 'pedagogical project' (Rajagopal 1998), instructing hesitant families that electrical goods were critical to attaining modernity. In some cases, advertisements came to insist that electrical products were

essential to the conjugal family's central priorities and to the housewife's special responsibility in maintaining the well-being of her husband and children.

The ideal home

The advertisement of electrical goods emerged at a time when middle-class residents of Bombay and other western Indian cities were involved in shaping novel ideals of the home. Many of the men who worked as clerks and other low-ranking office jobs continued to live in chawls, essentially slum buildings without internal plumbing and other modern amenities. Upwardly mobile individuals and families sought housing that would more strongly distinguish their living spaces from those of mill workers and the urban poor. In Bombay, where housing availability was very limited, many middle-class individuals turned to the self-contained flat as a desirable form of living space. In other locales, as Abigail McGowan's chapter in this volume suggests, they increasingly regarded modest, self-contained houses as an ideal.

Nikhil Rao has argued that the primary feature distinguishing the urban flat in Bombay from previous forms of housing was the presence of the toilet *within* the home; toilets required more elaborate systems of internal plumbing to facilitate the flow of water into the flat and waste waters out (Rao 2013). Rao particularly suggests that high-caste, middle-class migrants from South India to Bombay, with strong concerns about purity and pollution as well as self-conceptions as modern individuals, played critical roles in influencing the urban flat's internal design in Bombay. The installation of toilets within the home became characteristic of new flats among other middle-class groups as well.

Another feature that came to distinguish early twentieth-century flats (and middle-class houses) from traditional chawls and working-class housing was access to the public electricity supply. New housing increasingly included electric installations by 1920;³ older homes were wired for electricity more slowly. Electric lamps became nearly universal in middle-class homes in Bombay by 1940. Middle-class families apparently needed little convincing to add a couple of fixtures with a single bulb each so that they would have light at night.⁴ In some cases, male spaces, where men read and boys studied, possessed electric lamps, while female-dominated areas like the kitchen continued to depend upon the light of a charcoal stove.⁵ But, as we shall see, electricity use in practice often went no further than electric lighting.

While significant changes in the character of middle-class housing were undoubtedly taking place, local architects, journalists and other urban professionals were starting to articulate a more ambitious transfiguration of the home and its internal characteristics. This vision included the types of building material to be employed, the positioning of various rooms within the flat and the specifications of plumbing as well as the furniture to be bought, the cooking facilities to be included and the electrical appliances to

be utilised.⁶ During the 1930s, local newspapers, especially the *Times of India*, ran articles on housing forms that their authors felt should be emulated. The utopian image of the ‘ideal home’ espoused by these figures also required a transformation in consumption patterns. Discussed in these articles were specific products such as electric stoves, water heaters, electric mirrors, hair dryers, washing machines, irons and refrigerators. The articles emphasised the importance of moving beyond electric lighting to adopt a new, modern mentality that would involve widespread use of electricity:

Within the last few years, many revolutionary changes for the better have been made possible in our houses in India, and perhaps the most important has been the gradual spread of electric power and light systems. These systems have given us liberty to take advantage of refrigerators, fans, electric cookers and other kitchen necessities – and now we pampered dwellers in cities and other places where there is electricity can even heat our water by it.

(*TI*, 28 May 1934: 5)⁷

In May 1936, the *Times of India* devoted several pages on the newly built Dhanraj Mahal, a state-of-the-art building complex of perhaps 100 flats and offices in Kolaba.⁸ The articles praised the project’s architects and builders for applying the most modern methods of construction. Manufacturers of various items used in the structure – from concrete to floor tiles – ran advertisements stressing that their products reflected the highest standards available. Makers of electrical goods, too, used the occasion to champion their commodities. The sellers of His Master’s Voice Refrigerators stressed that there was an HMV refrigerator in every flat in Dhanraj Mahal while Siemens’ advertisements highlighted that 300 of its ceiling fans had been installed. Under the caption of ‘Carefree cooking for all tenants of Dhunraj Mahal’, the Bombay Gas company proclaimed ‘Modern housewives in modern flats do all their cooking on clean, quick efficient BURMA gas cookers’. Such ads implicitly urged homemakers everywhere to emulate the residents of Dhanraj Mahal (whom, I suspect, were predominantly expatriates) (*TI*, May 27, 1936: 17–20).

Perhaps the most significant effort to publicise new housing models was the Ideal Home Exhibition in Bombay in 1937 (previously discussed in Rao 2013, chapter IV; Prakash 2010: 97–8). Sponsored by the Indian Institute of Architects (IIA) and held in the Bombay Municipal Town Hall, the exhibition ran over two weeks and attracted as many as 100,000 visitors, both European and Indian. As McGowan’s chapter in this volume suggests, IIA members at the time were seeking to establish their professional identities; their promotion of housing standards was perhaps rooted more in a quest to establish credibility as architects than in any realistic notion of plans residents might actually adopt. The whole exhibition was organised with an eye to the

pedagogic function it would play, as a *Bombay Chronicle* article stressed: ‘This Exhibition will show completely furnished and equipped rooms – designed to show how the best of the most modern equipment can give a genuine comfort which human beings are entitled to enjoy’ (*BC*, 3 November 1937: 14). Visitors to the exhibition found themselves moving from bedrooms to living rooms to bathrooms, all reflecting the latest in furnishings and equipment. Some of the rooms, including a billiard room, a cigar room and a bar, had no counterpart in Indian homes whatsoever; there was even ‘an ideal operating theatre’, probably included at the behest of local doctors or hospital administrators. Little thought was given to housing for workers or the lower middle class, a fact highlighted by Prime Minister B.G. Kher of the newly elected Bombay provincial assembly in the exhibition’s keynote address. He gently chided attendees by reminding them of conditions elsewhere in Bombay, implicitly critiquing the artificial, remote character of the housing models under display:

We cannot afford to lose sight of the practical realities of life. The housing conditions of the majority of people inhabiting this city are far from satisfactory. The slums of Dharavi, the chawls of Parel, and many other parts are a standing reproach to the fair name of our beautiful city. And I cannot help feeling that it is the duty of every citizen to do all that lies in his power to do away with the slums, which I repeat are a disgrace to our fair city, and to provide decent housing conditions for the large number of people living there.

(*BC*, 4 November 1937: 8)

The Ideal Home Exhibition directly linked the home with new forms of material consumption. Very much part of the ideal home conception publicised by the exhibition’s planners was a transformation of the technologies and bodily practices of everyday life: the preparation and preservation of food, the treatment of clothes, bathing and so forth. According to the *Times of India*, one of the exhibit’s purposes was to provide visitors with an understanding of how technology might address central questions about improving modern living:

How can the housewife be spared some of the totally unnecessary drudgery known as ‘housework’ and devote her time to the running of an ... every way pleasant and efficient home? [sic] What has modern industry, in numerous new and fascinating materials, to contribute to amenities of house and home?

(*TI*, 3 November 1937: 15)

The Ideal Home Exhibition included rooms with lighting provided by the Eastern Light Company, electric cookers and electric fittings supplied by

BEST and electric geysers for heating kitchen and bath water furnished by Johnson and Phillips (*TI*, 3 November 1937: 2).

Articles in the *Times of India* and other newspapers at the time specifically promoted the value of electricity use. One writer touted the importance of good house lighting:

In these days of cheap electric power and frosted electric lamps, there is no reason why even the meanest city home should not be brilliantly illuminated yet how often does one find even adequate illumination in the wealthiest of Bombay homes?

(*TI*, 3 November 1937: 19)

Another article, discussing the utility of appliances and gadgets including toasters, irons, shavers, carpet cleaners, scalp brushes and clocks, insisted that these commodities 'do something useful more quickly and efficiently than ... was done before'. The article set forth an ideology of modernity in which electricity was critical (as well as new ideas for deploying servant labour):

This is indeed an electric age. I am probably prejudiced in my views but I find it almost impossible to conceive of existence without electricity. Almost nothing seems to have escaped the manufacturers' eagle eyes, but it might almost literally be said that we depend upon it for very nearly every form of heating and cooking, lighting and action.

Boy, switch on the punkah!

(*TI*, 3 November 1937: 19)⁹

Stories about the exhibition were accompanied by ads from companies championing the value of their products in making ideal homes. An ad run by BEST showroom made a general plug for the use of electricity, arguing:

ELECTRICITY IS THE ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN THE MODERN HOME. IT PROVIDES:

GOOD LIGHTING Correctly designed fittings

COOLNESS Fans and Air Conditioning

LUXURIOUS HOT WATER Geysers and Storage Tanks

SAFE FOOD Electric Refrigerators

HYGENIC COOKING Electric Cookers

CONVENIENCE

A thousand Electrical Appliances which make life easier, healthier and better at a trifling cost.

(*TI*, 3 November 1937: 19)

Collectively, therefore, the discourse of the exhibition, newspaper coverage of the event, and commercial advertisements at the time reinforced one another,

creating an equation between electricity, on the one hand, and modernity, sanitation and comfort, on the other.

The commercial rationale of advertising

While it provoked much local interest, the Ideal Home Exhibition and the publicity surrounding it had little impact on everyday practice. Existing evidence, including oral recollections, suggests that the idea of a home filled with labour-saving devices held little sway with middle-class families of western India. Urban residents took up new household technologies in a piecemeal fashion, often adopting electric light and perhaps an electric fan but little else. Relative to other electrical goods, these two types of commodity were cheap and they allowed household members to carry on existing activities without disturbance in the social relations of the household. Virchand Dharamsey recalls in his youth (during the late 1940s) the presence of electric lights in his house, with kerosine lamps (*kandeeel*) kept in reserve, but without fans or other electric appliances until decades later. Cooking was done on a charcoal *saghadi* (stove) and there was only one family in his building with a phone or radio (which were sometimes used by neighbours). The electric washing machine, perhaps the most significant major appliance adopted in US homes during this period, was entirely absent in Indian contexts, where Indian dhobis did the clothes cleaning.¹⁰ Refrigerators were purchased or rented to a limited extent, hot water heaters were adopted hesitantly and telephones did not become fixtures in middle-class homes until the 1980s.¹¹

The most obvious reason for the inapplicability of the ideal home concept was the limited buying power of middle-class households. Perhaps 40 per cent of these families lived at income levels barely above those of more prosperous working-class families (Haynes 2010). Food and housing took up most of these households' expenditures. According to family budgets collected by the Bombay Labour Office during the 1920s, while working-class families in the city used about 28 per cent of their income on items other than food, fuel, bedding, and house rent, families defined as middle class devoted on average only slightly more about 35 per cent to such goods (among those earning less than Rs 125 a month, only 29 per cent went to such items).¹² In these reports, the category of fuel and lighting – with fuel more important than electricity – constituted 5.5 per cent of a typical family budget, which was about Rs 8 for a family earning Rs 150 a month. In 1938 H. Shankar Rau, discussing recommended family budgets for Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmans earning Rs 175 a month, suggested Rs 3 a month was an appropriate allocation to electricity, advising that families confine themselves to baths in cold or tepid water and avoid bright lights (Shankar Rau 1938: 22); Rau assumed the use of charcoal stoves for cooking.¹³ Refrigerator rentals in Bombay during the 1930s cost Rs 14 a month and telephone use Rs 16, which was about a third of an average middle-class family's expenditure on *all* items other than food, housing and clothing; this was clearly a prohibitive cost.¹⁴ These kinds of

material circumstances are poignantly illustrated in Rohinton Mistry's 2002 novel, *Family Matters*, written about a later period but apt in capturing the precarious character of middle-class existence before the transformations in material life that began in the 1980s.

The middle-class household in India also did not face the same internal pressures to abandon labour-intensive methods for completing housework as did its counterparts in industrialised countries. The adoption of household appliances in North America and Britain during the 1920s and 1930s was not driven simply by the lure of modern technology but also by the declining availability of servant labour in the home, as working-class women entered factory employment, clerical positions and jobs as shop assistants that yielded higher wages than domestic work (Cowan 1983; Day 1992). These developments compelled housewives to take up the slack (since men rarely assumed these responsibilities). The replacement of labour-intensive methods of performing housework with methods relying on electric technologies sometimes made it possible for women to keep meeting societal expectations for maintaining their homes and taking care of children. In contrast, there apparently were no such shortages of domestic labour in urban Bombay. The ranks of servants may have expanded during the interwar period as more migrants entered the city while opportunities in the formal sector (such as in the cotton textile mills), especially for women, became more constrained.¹⁵ Even lower-middle-class households often hired a servant to help at home, sometimes in collaboration with other families in their chawl, apartment building or neighbourhood. The wage labour supply available for domestic work, in other words, remained abundant.

At the same time, cultural norms, especially those surrounding gender, constrained any tendencies to transform bodily practices associated with family labour. Partha Chatterjee's (1989) well-known discussion of the world/home dichotomy stresses societal fears of Westernised women who indulged themselves in leisure activities and the consumption of luxury items. Domestic manuals set out a heightened array of female responsibilities; the need to free women from the drudgery of housework certainly did not become a priority in middle-class ideology (McGowan 2006; Walsh 2002). As ads for household products sometimes indicate, societal values clearly frowned on housewives who escaped their obligations to do clothes washing, cooking and child care in order to attend cinema houses or engage in other leisure activities. The idea that women might seek employment outside the home was entertained by only a tiny minority. In short, the pressures to reduce the time women devoted to household labour, a key driving factor behind the use of electric technologies in North America and Europe, were absent.

Given middle-class hesitations in embracing new forms of material consumption, why did manufacturers and sellers of electrical goods invest so significantly in advertisement? There were at least two factors encouraging aggressive marketing of electrical technologies. First was the presence of a sizeable European community in Bombay.¹⁶ Many of the members of this

community were short-term sojourners in the city, but they often possessed much larger disposable incomes than the Indian middle classes and they often held strong expectations of standards of comfort that would compensate for the rigours of living in exile.¹⁷ As the *Times of India's* social pages indicate, the more prosperous European households fashioned a social fabric around the extensive circulation of women between each other's homes and of couples between homes and local clubs (including the Taj Hotel for jazz).¹⁸ By the 1930s, some members of the Indian upper class, composed of businessmen's families and a few civil servants, became participants in these circles, slowly transforming their racial exclusivity. The European/upper class Indian community no doubt constituted a relatively steady market for electric goods. Poorer Europeans and Anglo-Indians, with aspirations to upward mobility and concerns to be included in the ranks of the ruling race, may have seen the acquisition of electrical appliances as a status marker. Some advertisements clearly targeted members of European society alone, sometimes evoking a distinctive kind of consumption logic focused on parties, dances, visits to friends, and even romance.¹⁹ The audience of some other ads was unclear, for instance as in a Gujarati-language ad for an electric geyser that featured a European woman (wrapped only in a towel) stepping out of her bath, and another Gujarati ad picturing a (seemingly European) man standing with his luggage on a quay, having missed his boat home because he had not been reachable by telephone. Whereas advertisements for soaps, medicines and cocoa drinks explicitly targeted Indians by this time, ads for electrical goods sometimes remained weakly differentiated in their audience, striving to attract both expatriate and middle-class customers with the same messages.

A second factor was the set of special incentives for electricity suppliers in Bombay, notably BEST, to reach out to small sets of middle-class consumers who might be induced to increase their electricity use in marginal ways. BEST was a firm initially formed in London in 1905 with British capital; it was later incorporated in India around the end of World War I.²⁰ BEST's primary role before 1920 had been the extension of the tramways and their electrification (Bombay earlier had a horse-drawn tramway system), but it also was authorised to provide electricity to Bombay industries, shops and homes. (For a discussion of the history of Bombay's tramways see Conlon 2013.) At first, BEST built coal-burning generating stations in the city to create much of its power. In 1910, however, the Tata Hydro-Electric Power Supply Company Limited completed a major power-generating project by constructing large dams at high elevations in the nearby Ghats. There was a brief period of conflict between Tata and BEST. Ultimately a settlement was reached; BEST was not allowed to sell electricity to large industrial concerns while Tata conceded BEST the right to supply smaller consumers. BEST's role in electricity provision thus became confined to small-scale industrial users, shops and especially urban households. The company was shut out of the expanding market associated with local mills, which were converting from steam power to electricity.

BEST soon reached an agreement to purchase electric power generated by the hydro-project at 1 anna per unit (60 per cent higher than the rates charged to industrial consumers). It still tried to produce much of its requirements on its own, even constructing a major coal-burning station during the second decade of the century for this purpose. But when coal prices went up by several times after the war, electricity generated by BEST's plants became significantly more expensive than hydropower and BEST came to rely on Tata for its supply. For Tata the demand of BEST's consumer clients, which peaked when business usages ebbed, led to a more efficient distribution of the load on the system over the day.²¹

Local politics in Bombay further constrained BEST's profit possibilities. The Municipality, for instance, prohibited the company from raising its fares during the 1920s for tramway passengers. Bombay consequently possessed one of the cheapest public transportation networks in the world. Running at a loss in its tramway operations, BEST increasingly relied upon earnings from supplying households.²² But BEST was also compelled to reduce the base rates it charged small consumers for electricity from 8 annas per unit in 1905 to 4 1/2 annas in 1908, 4 annas in 1934 and (after a reduction in rates charged to BEST by Tata) to 3 annas in 1938 (Mahaluxmivala 1936: 326–45; Pendsay 1972: 28–34). At the same time, the company was already extending electrical transmission to new neighbourhoods for the tramways, so the infrastructural costs of establishing electrical connections for new domestic consumers were relatively low. In short, this situation – exclusion from the industrial market, an inability to raise prices on the trams and the small marginal costs of establishing new connections – created a strong incentive for BEST to encourage as many households as possible to use electricity.

BEST's advertisement of electrical appliances thus was in effect a means of stimulating wider electricity consumption, not just the purchase of the individual products featured. By the 1930s, BEST became extensively involved in urging Europeans to buy more appliances and prodding middle-class residents to purchase items other than electric lights. BEST tried to achieve these objectives in part by opening a showroom in 1926 at Electric House on Colaba Causeway where Bombay residents could observe the varied usages of electrical goods and overcome hesitations about bringing electricity into their homes. This location, modelled after similar showrooms in England, possessed a special educational function. Potential customers who entered the premises acquired information about available appliances, received advice about using these devices and were offered instruction about the virtues of electric power. The showroom's Lighting Bureau furnished guidance about lighting offices, factories, and homes; its personnel sometimes visited these locations to design specialised lighting arrangements. A letter published in 1935 in the *Times of India*, written under the pseudonym 'Electric', congratulated BEST for opening the showroom and urged the company to devote itself to converting city-dwellers to the ideology of electricity:

The report that the company is shortly opening a 'show room' at their Head Office in Colaba for the demonstration of domestic appliances for Indian conditions will be received with great joy by all who, though poor, yet possess sufficient 'sanitary conscience' to wish to do away with the foul odour of coal and charcoal gas ... The millennium does not appear to be far away when one reads that even at 'Hackney, one of the most unattractive and depressing parts of London, the local authorities, by assiduous service, have so developed the use of electricity for cooking and heating in these small homes that it is becoming the universal agent'. But how far the citizens of Bombay will avail themselves of the facilities offered greatly depends upon the efforts the organisers make to spread the 'electrical idea' into the home of every family as well as upon the economic efficiency of the 'new order of things'.

(quoted in Pendsay 1972: 28–9)

The showroom's purpose was thus to transform the consciousness of Bombay citizens by exposing them to a fantastic array of electric lights and appliances they would otherwise never encounter. BEST used newspaper advertising to carry the same message to the homes, offices and libraries where middle-class city-dwellers read their papers. In effect advertisements transmitted the wonder world of electricity into print spaces, creating an imagined sense of what it was like to have a range of electrical devices at one's disposal. BEST's managers probably did not expect advertising to generate a mass market in some quick fashion. But since any increase in customership likely meant enhanced profits, they hoped to extend consumption beyond its more reliable forms – household usage by European residents, consumption by shops, smaller factories and the tramways, and use for basic lighting. The text of newspaper appeals clearly suggests that advertisers saw themselves as addressing reluctant consumers ignorant of these products' advantages and recalcitrant in their buying practices. In attempting to reach untapped or weakly tapped sets of buyers, advertisers adopted a pedagogical style aimed at persuading the middle-class family that its modernity was at stake in its decisions about household technologies.

The pedagogy of electricity

Ads promoting the general use of electricity. The most ambitious advertisements designed by BEST championed the general use of electricity. Addressed to European and Indian customers simultaneously, these ads echoed the logic of the Ideal Home Exhibition, insisting that wide adoption of household technologies – not just electric lighting – was critical to a more complete modernity. Such ads portrayed other sources of energy (whether human, charcoal, or gas) as antiquated, wasteful, and inconvenient. At the same time, they touted what the advertisers argued were the many advantages of electricity and disparaged those who used it for only restricted purposes. The instructional tone in these

messages was overt as was the critique of the householder who used electricity only for lighting the home:

There comes a time when you realise that the house is getting almost too much for you. Supervising this, that, and the other. Electricity is fool-proof. Household tasks are made lighter – cleaner, briefer and brighter – with the help of electricity. It is not the people who run their own houses who say the old-fashioned way is best ...

Everywhere it [electricity] is the cleanest, healthiest and most convenient. *Are you using electricity? – or only electric light?*

(*TI*, 16 December 1939: 13; italics mine)

The logic of modernity was especially explicit in the ad shown in Figure 3.1 addressed ‘to every baby in the land’:

You have arrived in a wonderful age – in the most wonderful age the world has ever known. You will be a healthier, merrier child than it was possible for any baby ever to be, because you are born in Electricity days ... Yes, indeed you are to be congratulated. And later on you will think of former methods of cooking and water heating just as we now think of the stage coach as a pre-historic institution. Then as you get older, you will find more and more uses for this great gift to mankind, rapid new ways of doing your great work in the world.

(*TI*, 18 November 1939: 11)

In effect, the implicit message here was that those who refused to adopt electricity represented values that history would prove hopelessly wrong. The ad’s goal clearly was the *conversion* of the householder to a new way of regarding electricity.

One of the more interesting themes in this ad was the relief from drudgery that electricity offered the modern housewife. This theme was repeated even more forcefully in another ad which pictured a sari-clad woman performing various tasks around the home – cooking, ironing, storing food, and cleaning – with the help of electrical devices. The ad’s text berated families that allowed women to continue working without broad access to electricity:

WILL SOMEBODY PLEASE TELL US WHY some women slave away like drudges at household tasks which can be done quicker, cheaper, better by electricity? If they haven’t heard of electric cooking, electric water heating, electric cleaning and electric ironing – surely their husbands have?

(*TI*, 23 October 1939: 11)

This ad served as a critique both of the ignorant wife who remained stuck in traditional behaviours and the recalcitrant husband who shielded his wife



TO EVERY BABY IN THE LAND...

You have arrived in a wonderful age—in the most wonderful age the world has ever known. You will be a healthier, merrier child than it was possible for any baby ever to be, because you are born in Electricity days. Of course, you do not know now what that means to you, but your mother does. She knows that by using electric cooking, all your food, your milk and later on your more solid diet, will be heated and boiled and cooked without dirt getting near it, without fumes harming it, with all the nourishment retained. Your mother, enjoying the ease of, an electric home will have far more time to give to you, sharing, with you, health and happiness. And when you grow into your teens she will still be young, thanks to the freedom from household drudgery. And you will be bathed soothingly in water easily heated by the same wonderful force of electricity. Your clothes will be washed at any time they need washing, because in these amazing days hot water is always ready in the home equipped to heat water by electricity. Yes, indeed you are to be congratulated. And later on you will think of former methods of cooking and water heating just as we now think of the stage coach as a pre-historic institution. Then as you get older, you will find more and more uses for this great gift to mankind, rapid new ways of doing your great work in the world.



Born in
ELECTRICITY DAYS
— congratulations

Bombay Electric Supply & Tramways Co., Ltd.
Electric House, Fort, BOMBAY.

Tel: 26024 (7 lines)

Figure 3.1 'To Every Baby in the Land'. *Times of India*, 18 November 1939, 11.

from modern possibilities. Interestingly, servants, who typically performed many tasks featured in the ad, were missing from the visual frame. Instead it was the housewife whom the ads held responsible for upholding the standards of the home. The advertisements thus suggested the incomplete modernity of householders whose use of electrical goods was partial.

Ads for individual products. Most of the advertisements for electrical household technologies, however, sought to persuade consumers to purchase specific products, not electricity in general. The nature of the pitch in these appeals depended greatly on the item. In general, the more radical the alteration of the home environment the product required, the more strongly advertisers felt they needed to take a stance offering the householder schooling in how to be modern. Advertisers seemingly felt little need to resort to this mode in promoting electric bulbs and electric fans. Often the advertisers of these goods sought not to persuade their audience to buy the kind of product in question for the first time but to induce them to purchase a specific brand. An ad for Bijlee bulbs, for instance, asks purchasers ‘Has your bulb this chemically protected filament? It is new! ... Sensational! ... Revolutionary! The Chemically Protected Filament in Bijlee makes for the highest light-giving properties’ (*BC*, 18 December 1937: 16).

An ad for GE fans featured a sari-clad female in its appeals designed to convince consumers to buy its products:

You can always tell a G.E. FAN GIRL, she is the personification of good health and vivacity, her complexion has that delicate bloom which instantly reminds one of a delightful Hill Station even though she has never moved out of the city. She takes full advantage of a refreshing breeze from a G.E. fan.

(*BC*, 19 May 1924: 11)

BEST did, however, deploy advertising to persuade middle-class flat residents to *expand* their use of lighting. BEST readily chastised such families in its ads, suggesting that they were likely to perform their tasks badly or cause their eyesight to deteriorate if they continued to insist on the minimum lighting possible. The presence of a doctor in one Gujarati ad, scolding a patient about the inadequacy of lighting arrangements in his home, evoked the scientific principles being neglected by the householder who economised by using lights with low candle power (*MS*, 8 January 1938; see also *BC*, 7 December 1937: 3).

In cases where electric appliances simply replaced non-electric technologies that performed the same task, advertisements typically introduced readers to the practical advantages of the new product over its non-electric counterpart. An ad for a BEST electric water heater in the kitchen (an item that would have displaced a coal stove) featured a housewife at work over a sink filled with hot water and emphasised the reliability of electric water-heaters (see Figure 3.2) informing readers that they could make water warm any time it was needed (*MS*, 27 August 1932: 4).



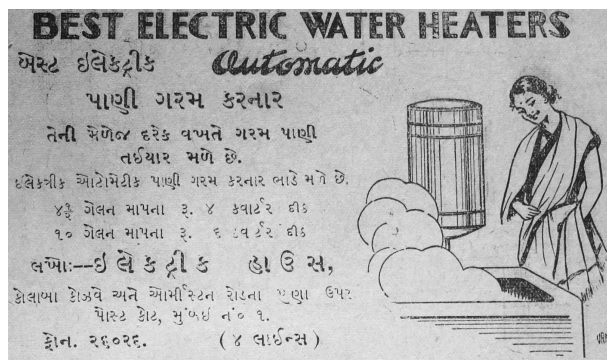


Figure 3.2 ‘BEST Electric Water Heaters’ [in Gujarati], *Mumbai Samachar*, 27 August 1932, 4.

Another BEST ad in Gujarati for an electric *saghadi* (sigree in English-language ads) for drying clothes informs the reader there was no need to be concerned about monsoon dampness if the consumer purchased such an item (*MS*, 13 August 1932: 14). Other ads for *saghadis* offered explicit comparisons to non-electrical methods, stressing how the product saved the home from the ‘foul smell and smoke’ produced by charcoal-burning stoves that performed the same task (*BC*, 11 July 1936: 16).

But when the product advertised involved the introduction of a technology with no parallel to an existing non-electric counterpart, advertisers often grounded their appeals in values that were already highly emotive to consumers. In these instances, the advertisement combined the use of the pedagogical voice with the evocation, not of a generalised ideal of modernity but of specific anxieties of Indian middle-class householders. Such ads illustrate the arguments of Judith Williamson and Timothy Burke, who have stressed how advertisements need to evoke powerful ‘prior meanings’, that is, concepts and values that already resonate deeply in the audience advertisers are trying to reach (Burke 1996; Williamson 1978). In particular, the promoters of electricity geared their message to widespread concerns about the home and about the maintenance of modern conjugality that were emerging among members of the middle class (Haynes 2012). They argued in effect that if householders wished to uphold expectations as male providers or female housewives, they needed to purchase the product in question. These ads typically made little reference to relieving women from the ‘drudgery of labour’, an appeal, as we have already seen, that had no place in the prevailing discourse of the home; instead, they insisted that the housewife could better execute existing responsibilities by renting or buying the appliance.

In some ads, for instance, there was a stress on the value of the product as a ‘servant’ in the household. ‘Electricity’, one advertisement in the *Times of India* proclaimed, is ‘the ideal and cheapest Servant’. Such ads drew upon prevailing middle-class Indian (and European) perceptions of servants as unreliable, prone to careless errors and characterised by a poor sense of judgment (*TI*, 3 April 1935: 5), as well as upon emerging norms that insisted housewives take firmer control over the household. In a few cases the use of the products advertised would have involved the housewife displacing the need for the *dhobi* who washed clothes, the *hamal* who took care of lamps in the home, or the *punkahwala* who kept family members cool (in the most wealthy households) by operating a manual fan. The ads emphasised the housewife’s supposedly superior ability to perform these tasks, not any labour-saving that might take place.

A particularly prevalent theme in advertisement was the product’s essential role in maintaining family health. This theme was especially common in ads for refrigerators, whose chief advantage, according to a wide range of advertisements, was ensuring the healthy character of the family’s food. Often these ads featured a sari-clad housewife, the person most responsible for upholding family wellness. Figure 3.3 is an English-language ad in a Gujarati newspaper clearly directed to a middle-class audience – an ad that clearly contrasts with Figure 3.4, an advertisement featuring foods consumed by expatriates where the focus on the family is absent (*MS*, 9 May 1938: 11 and *BC*, 20 June 1936: 15, respectively).

According to one BEST ad:

You cannot afford to take risks with the health of your family. Hot, humid weather has a bad effect on many foodstuffs which is often undetected until it is too late ... An electric refrigerator will keep your food safe and fresh, and will avoid the great dangers of food poisoning.

(*TI*, 20 May 1936: 11)

Another implored: ‘Is the health of your family worth 8 As (the daily cost of renting a refrigerator)? ... How many people risk their own health and the health of their families by not making sure that all food at home is perfectly fresh?’ (*TI*, 6 May 1936: 13). Such ads took an instructional tone, but they linked themselves not so much to universal notions of modernity as to emerging Indian conceptions of the conjugal family as a medicalised unit oriented towards maintaining the well-being of children and thus ensuring familial self-reproduction (Bose 1995, 1997). They particularly evoked anxieties among fathers and mothers about whether they were taking the steps necessary to confront the invisible dangers posed by germs, which modern medical science was now confirming as the cause of illness. And they explicitly referred to the difficulties of doing so under the conditions of the monsoon and Indian sanitation. By contrast, the comforts associated with the refrigerator, such as the ability to keep drinks cool in the hot weather, were typically stressed only in ads geared to expatriates.

SAFEGUARD



Your family's food supply

You cannot afford to take risks with the health of your family. Hot, humid weather has a bad effect upon many foodstuffs which is often undetected until it is too late.

An **ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR** will keep all your food safe and fresh, and will avoid the grave dangers of food poisoning.

In addition to this, an **ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR** is invaluable for making pure ice cubes and cold dishes and for keeping drinks really cold.

An **ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR** can be hired from the **B.E.S.T.** for Rs. 10 per month. Call at our showrooms or write for a representative to come and discuss the matter with you.

Use an
ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR

B.E.S.T.

SHOWROOMS

ELECTRIC HOUSE, - - - - FORT.
Telephone: 26024 (7 lines)

Figure 3.3 'Safeguard Your Family's Food Supply', *Mumbai Samachar*, 9 May 1938, 11.

With some telephone ads there was often a similar effort to connect the imperatives of family health to the commodity. In contrast to appeals directed to expatriates – which often emphasised the telephone's value for keeping in touch with friends and learning about mixed-gender parties – advertisements for telephones addressed to Indians or to both audiences generally emphasised risks to family well-being associated with not having access to a phone. Some ads, for instance, mentioned the need to get in touch with the doctor if a

IS YOUR FOOD SAFE?

Are you satisfied that the food in your household is safe? In this climate food is affected so quickly by heat and humidity that unless you have an ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR you cannot be sure that your food supplies are in good condition.

An ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR is very cheap to hire—only Rs. 14/ per month—and will amply repay its cost by the saving effected through using it. With an ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR in your home you can avoid much of the wastage that occurs when food has to be thrown away.

Install an ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR now and safeguard your health during the hot weather.

BEST

Install
AN
ELECTRIC REFRIGERATOR

THE BOMBAY ELECTRIC SUPPLY AND TRAMWAY CO., LTD.
COLABA CAUSEWAY, BOMBAY

Figure 3.4 'Is Your Food Safe?', BC, 20 June 1936, 15.

child were suddenly to become ill. In one image, the copy reads 'save life, save time, save money' (TI, 30 May 1936: 17). The fact that health concerns were mentioned first here is noteworthy. Another ad emphasised the value of being able to contact a range of people from doctors to storekeepers and the police, allowing the family to maintain a sense of safety and security (TI, 16 July 1938: 8).

In short, advertisements for household technologies displayed a range of persuasive strategies to prompt customers who had proved refractory in using electricity. They could stress the general value of adopting electrical goods to the process of becoming modern, they could mention the practical advantages of particular products, or, when a radical change in household practice would be required, they could evoke specific anxieties of the Indian middle class. But what they usually held in common was a pedagogical style. Advertisers saw themselves as prodding customers whose allegiance to electricity was incomplete and who were in need of instruction about the value of specific products and electricity in general.

Conclusion

A historian first confronting the widespread presence of discourses about ideal homes and the large number of advertisements for new household technologies placed in Bombay newspapers during the 1920s and 1930s – both in English and in vernacular languages – might assume that the era of mass consumption in electrical goods had already begun. Such a conclusion, however, is at odds with what we know about actual material practices. This chapter has suggested that demand for electrical appliances in Bombay was limited, confined to a fairly small group of Europeans, upper-class Indians and Anglo-Indians with significant enthusiasm about using these commodities, and to a larger Indian middle class whose attitude was ambivalent and highly selective. But because BEST was responsible for selling electricity, because its opportunities for profit in its other areas of operation were so constrained, and because the costs of extending electricity to new users were relatively modest, the company had significant motivation to encourage even relatively marginal increases in consumption. A close reading of local advertisements suggests that these appeals' designers viewed the middle class as reluctant customers who had to be goaded into using electricity broadly rather than as participants in a consumer revolution.

Middle-class families in Bombay typically regarded the new technologies of the home as prohibitive in cost, as involving the adoption of unsettling new bodily practices and as carrying out tasks that the household could meet through the deployment of servants or unpaid family labour. To confront these attitudes, advertisers stressed the urgency of buying the new technologies, sometimes castigating non-users for their hesitations. Advertisers adopted a pedagogical stance, insisting in some cases that the use of electrical goods was central to the priorities of modern conjugality. They emphasised that consumption of the new household technologies made it possible for housewives to manage homes that would otherwise be unruly, unsanitary and dangerous, and that refusal involved exposing a household to unacceptable risks. The increased opportunities for leisure and luxury that electrical goods might afford took a backseat in commercial campaigns to the alleviation of key middle-class preoccupations. In effect, then, advertisements drew upon


a 'heightened emotional context of the home' that necessitated that parents in a conjugal family, especially housewives, play extensive roles in guarding against a host of potential medical and social threats.²³ Outside the context of the ideal home exhibition, therefore, the view of the home that advertising generated was a highly contradictory and fractured one, filled as much with disruptions and dangers as it was with comforts and pleasures.

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Notes

- 1 In using the term 'middle class', I want to make clear my agreement with such scholars as Sanjay Joshi and Prashant Kidambi, who insist that the middle class was not a fixed sociological entity and the notion of middle-classness was constantly under construction – Joshi (2001) and Kidambi (2010). The universe of people discussed in this chapter self-identified as middle class and were regarded by contemporary observers as such.
- 2 The larger history of BEST is discussed in Mahaluxmivala (1936).
- 3 In a personal communication, Frank Conlon has mentioned that housing in the cooperative housing complex of the Saraswat Brahmans of Bombay, built in Gamdevi around 1915, possessed electric service.
- 4 The relatively quick adoption of electric lighting as a replacement for gas lights in Europe has been discussed by Schivelbusch (1988). My thanks to Shekhar Krishnan for this reference.
- 5 Communication from Shekhar Krishnan.
- 6 These features of middle-class housing are being examined by Abigail McGowan in her current research, including her chapter in this volume.
- 7 This reference and the following one were located in Proquest Historical Newspapers: *Times of India* (1838–2003). My thanks to Abigail McGowan for the reference. Other *Times of India* references were located in original copies of the newspaper.
- 8 The complex still survives today, though it would no longer be recognized as a structure once regarded as ahead of its time.
- 9 Punkah refers to a fan (here, an electric fan). 'Boy' obviously refers to a male houseservant.
- 10 For the washing machine in the United States, see Vanek (1978).

- 11 The use by Americans and Europeans of household appliances before 1940 should not be exaggerated. Electricity use was still largely urban in character until the late 1930s, and the adoption of electric household goods was gradual. In the United States, a third of US homes possessed electricity in 1920; the figure was two-thirds by 1930. In Britain only 6 per cent of British homes were wired for electricity in 1918. The US middle-class household also embraced some products more quickly than others. The initial household purchases in the United States were often washing machines and vacuum cleaners. By 1935, 35 per cent of US families owned a washing machine and 44 per cent owned a vacuum cleaner. Only 13 per cent, however, owned a refrigerator. Fewer than 10 per cent of households owned washing machines in England and Finland at the end of World War II. See, for instance, Bowden and Offer (1994); Cowan (1976, 1983); Davidson (1986, chapter 2); Day (1992); Kline (2002); Pantzar (2003); Vanek (1978).
- 12 Compare *Report on an Enquiry into Middle Class Family Budgets in Bombay City 1928*: 1–5 with *Report on an Enquiry into Working Class Budgets in Bombay 1923*: 5.
- 13 My thanks to Frank Conlon for this reference.
- 14 These figures were included in some of the ads that will be cited later.
- 15 Measuring this growth is unfortunately not possible because of the changing nature of census categories. For instance, the Census of India 1911 used a category of ‘workers and dependents’ while the Census of India 1931 used that of ‘workers’.
- 16 The 1931 Census indicated that the European population of Mumbai was 9409, of whom 6071 were males. The number of European male income-earners may have been about a tenth of the comparable figure for Indian middle-class males. The Anglo-Indian population was 7089.
- 17 European business firms in Bombay were often expected to provide salaries that would facilitate the sustenance of lifestyles comparable to those possible at ‘home’; this included the adoption of electrical appliances used in Europe.
- 18 Naresh Fernandes’s book (2012) depicts richly the rise of jazz as a musical form in India but does not discuss the musical scene’s role in constituting this new European/upper-class Indian society.
 For example, see *BC*, 15 July 1936: 4.
- 20 The dating of BEST’s establishment varies in different accounts because the firm went through several different stages.
- 21 This account of BEST’s history in the above two paragraphs comes from (Gandgadhariah 1935; Mahaluxmivala 1936; Pendsay 1972; Ratnagar 1912).
- 22 The history of Bombay’s tramway system has been explored in Conlon (2013).
- 23 I borrow this notion from Ruth Cowan’s work (1983) on US housewives and household technology during the same time. Cowan’s concept coincides nicely with publications on India written by such scholars as Hancock (2001), McGowan (2006) and Walsh (2002). See also Strasser (1982).

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4 Wooing Indians with new smokes

Cigarette and *bidi* advertising in British India

Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff

Introduction

Along with other drugs and intoxicants, global trade in and consumption of tobacco were a result of the rise of European maritime empires (Mills and Barton 2007). This chapter analyses changing tobacco consumption regimes during the last decades of the colonial history of India and claims there was an interplay between changing tobacco consumption patterns and corresponding advertisement strategies and socio-cultural and political-economic struggles that ensued between Indians and British expats in many parts of British India.¹

Contemporary texts, oral traditions and material culture provide an understanding of the deep socio-cultural roots of tobacco use in colonial India. From all this evidence, we can gather that by the beginning of the twentieth century both colonisers as well as colonised throughout British India were well acquainted with the weed that was introduced by the Portuguese in the Deccan at about the beginning of the seventeenth century (Gokhale 1974). During almost three centuries, different tobacco consumption practices had been verbally and visually advertised through myths, legends, proverbs, folklore, riddles, songs, poetry, paintings, and sculptures. Contemporary travel accounts too witness that tobacco had become a fundamental part of social-cultural as well as economic exchanges. In 1840, J.F. Royle, a colonial officer on the medical staff of the Bengal Army in British India, even claimed that the commodity should not be viewed as a 'luxury' but 'classed as quite as great a necessity of life to the poorer classes of natives as salt'. In his judgement (Royle 1840):

The quantity of tobacco consumed in India must be enormous, for men, women and children in most parts of the country all smoke, and to many an ill-fed labourer a few pulls at a *chillum* answer the purpose of a light meal in staving off hunger for the time and enabling him to continue his work with renewed vigour.

But though tobacco consumption had thus become firmly embedded in Indian society, the way tobacco was consumed as well as advertised

changed over time and space and different class, gender, religious communities, and even age cohorts had their own ways of either smoking tobacco or using it as snuff, for licking, drinking, or as chew (Billings 1875; Sinha 2004). As Trentmann (2013) also argued, consumption thus mirrored human conditions. Venkatachalapathy (2006: 35) found, for instance, that whereas *cheruts* (*cheroots*) were smoked by the lower classes in Tamil society, a Brahman would lose caste if adopting such a practice. Besides, the *hookah* so popular among in particular Muslims in Tamil society was not seen at all among other groups in this region, some of which preferred tobacco chewing to smoking. Again, even smoking habits were diverse. Gilchrist (1825: 231–2) described how ‘lower classes of Europeans and of natives’ and ‘most of the officers of country-ships’, smoked different types of *cheroots*, which he believed exactly corresponded ‘with the Spanish *segar*, though usually made rather more bulky’. Elsewhere, other smoking habits were popular. Laufer (1924: 19–20), for instance, reported the use of particular kinds of ‘cigarette and cigars under the Malay name (*punka*)’ in some regions of seventeenth-century India. On the Coromandel coast Laufer had also noticed the use of such cigarettes and ‘for want of pipes’, but there they were locally known as ‘Buncos’. A *Bunco* was:

[a] little tobacco wrapt up in the leaf of a tree, about the bigness of one’s little finger, they light one end, and draw the smoke thro’ the other; these are curiously made up, and sold twenty to thirty in a bundle.

During the early twentieth century, as detailed in this chapter, this latter smoking device became extremely popular all over India as *bidi* (*biri*, *beeri*, *beedi*).

Notwithstanding such smoking diversity, however, until 1900 at least, Indians in northern and eastern India in particular still mostly consumed tobacco through the *hookah*, albeit in different shapes according to class and with stems (*chillums*) of various lengths (Habighorst et al. 2007: 43–72; Ray 2009). *Hookah* smoking was most vividly described in contemporary texts and was frequently a main theme of paintings and drawings. During the nineteenth-century use of the *hookah* by British and Indian men and women, it even appeared as exemplary sari prints (Sangar 1981; Lefèvre et al. 2015).² Besides witnessing *hookahs*’ great popularity, this could be seen as yet another way of more traditional advertising. Yet by the turn of the century, the use of this water-pipe to ‘drink’ the smoke had gone out of fashion among most of the English in India who now preferred other devices for smoking tobacco, such as cigars (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014: 90). Around the same time, contemporary accounts also describe the introduction in India of yet another smoke: the machine-made cigarette. What is more, traditional ways of advertising gave way to modern (print) advertising. Tobacco in its avatars as cigarette and the *bidi* became important social facts in British India during the first half of the twentieth century characterised by increased alienation

between colonisers and the colonised. This chapter describes and illustrates their (advertisement) histories and therewith underscores their related socio-cultural histories in a political economy shaped by protests against British rule in India and struggles for independence. In this context I argue that white cigarettes as well as the brownish *bidis* were relatively modern commodities and indigenous as well, as British strategies to promote them were associated with different collective representations of ‘Modern India’. We in particular look at the efforts of the Imperial Tobacco Company of India Ltd (now known as the ITC) to get all Indians into the habit of smoking the ‘white slaver’ (i.e. the cigarette) (Goodman 1993) through alternative ways of advertising. It is described how such advertisements of a ‘foreign smoke’ were not only joined by efforts of Indian business people to promote their ‘Indian cigarettes’ in similar fashion, but I also argue that this competition unlocked an incentive among ‘vernacular capitalists’ (Haynes 2015: 369) to market the *bidi* on an all-India scale.

Promotion of the imperial connection: selling cigarettes in British India

The hand-rolled cigarette was introduced into the United States from England where chewing tobacco, dipping snuff, smoking pipes, and cigars dominated nineteenth-century tobacco use. However, even in the United States, cigarettes, or the ‘little tube of joy’ (Harrald and Watkins 2010), became the usual mode of tobacco consumption around World War I only. Advertising them in new ways that became an essential part of ‘American society and modernism’ (Zabel 1991) had been perceived of as crucial to popularise cigarettes in that country and later on in other countries including British India, as detailed in this chapter.

The machine of a mechanic James Bonsack enabled James Buchanan Duke, known as the ‘Father of the Modern Cigarette’, to produce many more cigarettes than could be made through hand-rolling. Yet, Duke produced more cigarettes than he could sell even in his own country. He thus had to work out how to capture a bigger market, so advertising as well as branding became a major strategy. Apart from using other advertising strategies that had already been employed by the W.T. Blackwell Company, Duke sponsored races, gave cigarettes out for free at beauty contests and placed ads in the new ‘glossies’. Duke also believed that the inclusion of collectable cigarette trading cards in tins and later cigarette packages was ‘as important as getting the product right’. In the United States, Duke’s ads emphasised the ‘modernity’ and ‘hygiene’ of the new product, which no longer was the result of human hands and saliva, and placed the cigarette in ‘modern city life’ (Kremer 2012).

Duke of course did not remain alone and soon other cigarette manufacturers in the United States also pursued markets in this way and provided innovative ideas. What is more, Duke stopped concentrating on the national market only

as his gaze turned towards the global. After ending the rivalry between Duke's American Tobacco Company and the UK's Imperial Tobacco, a conglomeration of different tobacco manufacturers in the UK was formed, headed by W.D. and H.O. Wills Ltd. with its head office in Bristol. The establishment of the British American Tobacco Company (BAT) in 1902 was the outcome of this truce between these two giants in the tobacco world and had 'a far-reaching impact on the history of tobacco' (Goodman 1993: 234). Though the two 'monsters' retained rights to trading in each other's brands, cigarettes in the rest of the world were to be supplied by this new company (BAT), which was registered in England and was two-thirds owned by American Tobacco and one-third by Imperial. BAT wanted to tap all markets outside the UK and the United States and somewhat different packaging and marketing strategies were developed in different countries. India and China seemed the most promising markets (Cox 1989). Once BAT had made successful inroads into the Chinese market, it began to exploit other opportunities, in India in particular.

The appearance of machine-made cigarettes in British India initially imported from the UK, the United States, Egypt, and Turkey was noticed by colonial official J.E. O'Connor in 1903 (Watt 1908: 810–11) who observed that within the last three or four years:

A singular modification of popular taste has been witnessed, one which hardly would have been possible in such a country and amongst such a people. Some enterprising firms in Europe thought they saw an opening in India for the Native consumption of America tobacco in cigarettes in supersession of the *hookah* (or water-pipe) still commonly used by the people. Acting upon this idea they imported cigarettes in increasing quantity at lower rates bringing them within the reach of the masses, and in a very short time the arrangements made for bringing the cigarettes within the easy reach of the consumer had a very manifest effect.

Though even in England itself the cigarette had only very slowly become more popular than other smokes, as increasingly more imported cigarettes became available in India, cigars and pipe tobacco went out of fashion during the first decade of the twentieth century and many a British urbanite in India now desired this 'modern' commodity. Cigarette smoking linked them more closely to imperialism and willingly alienated them from the 'natives' who smoked, in the eyes of many a coloniser in India at the time, not only tobacco of so-called inferior quality but also through a 'decadent and unhygienic fashion' (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014: 82–91). Yet though this increased internal demand for imported cigarettes mainly came from this expat community in India as well as the army, some better-off English educated Indians had also positively responded to this 'entirely new' object of Western material culture. In fact, this luxury commodity became a status symbol among this class and demonstrated their higher standard of living as well as their desire to distinguish themselves

from the ‘masses’. This ‘conspicuous consumption’ also firmly linked them to those in power. These sections of urban society smoked branded cigarettes often manufactured by large US and UK-based cigarette concerns such as John Player & Sons, J.B. Duke and W.D. & H.O. Wills.

The Wills concern was the largest constituent of Imperial Tobacco and became most active in advertising its produce among residents in British India. As detailed elsewhere (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014), this company initially imported cigarettes manufactured in Bristol, England, to British India, and such foreign cigarettes and other imported tobacco products like cigars and pipe tobaccos were retailed in specialised outlets by tobacconists in major cities, foremost in Calcutta the capital of British India until 1912. But like elsewhere in the world, in India too machine-rolled cigarettes had to compete with other tobacco *avatars*, i.e. chewing tobacco and *cheroots* but foremost the *hookah*. Contemporary observers described how persistent this smoke had been and even at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Nobles and beggars, pious and wicked, devotees and freethinkers, poets, historians, rhetoricians, doctors and patients, high and low, rich and poor, all! All seemed intoxicated with a decided preference over other luxury, nay even often over the necessities of life. To a stranger no offering was so acceptable as a Whiff and to a friend one could produce nothing half so grateful as a Chillum. The habit became so rooted that the confirmed smoker preferred to remain without food and drink rather than relinquish the gratification he derived from inhaling the fumes of this deleterious plant! Nature recoils at the very idea of touching the saliva of another person, yet in the present instance our tobacco smokers pass the moistened tube from mouth to mouth to another without hesitation on the one hand, and it is received with complacency on the other ... the smoke [of the *hookah*] is a collyrium to the eyes [lotion to clean], whilst the fire, they will tell you, supplies the body the waste of radical heat.

(Yule and Burnell [1903] 1984: 926)

The Imperial Tobacco Company in the UK now needed to find a niche for its novel product and its strategy of gaining a foothold in the Indian market was based on BAT’s experience in China. Firstly, the company marketed its imported products and then, as we will discuss, began to manufacture its own cigarettes (Cox 1989: 53). Besides, the China experience also influenced Imperial’s advertising strategy in British India. However, as long as cigarettes had come from outside India and were not manufactured inside the country, images on the packages as well as brand names did not change at all and neither did the trading cards (between 35 and 50 cards) that went along with the tins/boxes. For instance, there was BAT’s series ‘Kings of England’, ‘British Born Film-stars’, and ‘Famous Beauties’. These therefore used to reflect ‘social facts or imagined futures and modernities belonging to other cultures and other historical located activity’ (Rajagopal 2015).

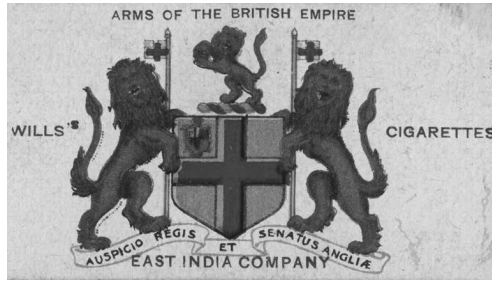


Figure 4.1 Wills Cigarettes, George Arents Collection, The New York Public Library. East India Company.

Yet, when BAT started producing cigarettes in India (at times using imported tobacco though), images on packages as well as trading cards changed and strongly advertised India's inclusion in the British Empire. Such an advertising strategy could be called 'colonisation of the modern'. BAT's series named 'Flag Girls of all Nations', for instance, included a 'Flag Girl from India' dressed in sari and holding the British flag. Images and texts on packages in English advertised that such cigarettes were either made in England or using tobacco cultivated in the British Empire. Moreover, brand names used for cigarettes in India using Virginia tobacco were similar to cigarettes sold in the UK. It was in particular through cigarette cards such as the one shown in Figure 4.1, which was part of the series 'Arms of the British Empire', that the Imperial connection between such (imported) cigarettes and India was explicitly advertised.

Made in India: selling *swadeshi* cigarettes in British India

Increased demand in British India and the imposition of import duties on unprocessed as well as processed tobacco, as well as the fact that British colonial officials in India increasingly argued in favour of the establishment of an import substituting British financed and managed tobacco industry within India (Lees Smith 1909; Lethbridge 1988), made BAT decide to set up tobacco cultivation and production facilities within India. An added spur that prompted BAT to form the Peninsular Tobacco Company in London to operate as its manufacturing arm in India was a nationalist-inspired boycott movement against, among others, 'foreign cigarettes', i.e. especially those manufactured in England.

Analysis of this so-called *Swadeshi* (patriotic) Movement in Bengal that prevailed during the first decade of the twentieth century (Bourdillon and Mitchell 1905: 117–18) is not the aim of this chapter. Yet it is important to mention that although *swadeshi* was originally conceived of as merely a boycott of foreign goods and was meant only to urge the use of indigenous

in preference to foreign goods, it later attained a much more comprehensive character and became a concrete symbol of nationalism that was later set out in detail by the important nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi. For the time being, however, and also outside Bengal, if anything, *swadeshi* epitomised the fierce economic competition between indigenous small-scale industrialists and powerful British-owned firms. It also echoed disillusionment with the Imperial rulers among some Indian (English-educated) middle-class communities and had stimulated them to not only rethink ‘modernity’ and directions of national development but also spurred them into action like consumer boycotts as well as calling for indigenous entrepreneurship. Among these classes there grew a group of nationalist-minded politicians who themselves started or asked other Indians to start their own small-scale so-called *swadeshi* industries. Such small factories, often unregistered, would offer alternative commodities that could replace those imported and boycotted. Crucially, this *swadeshi* spirit affected the tobacco scenario in British India with lasting impact on cultivation, consumption, import-export, production as well as advertising strategies (Bhattacharyya 2007; Prabhu 2012; Sarkar 1973, 1983).

Significantly, cigarette boycotts were supported by some of the very *babus* who by the beginning of the twentieth century had abandoned chewing and the *hookah*, and who through smoking the new and foreign cigarettes had re-fashioned themselves as ‘modern middle classes’ in the British Empire (Ray 2014). Even more surprisingly, perhaps, was that many among the commercial communities of urban India, though often pro-British in other contexts and against boycotts where many other ‘foreign’ commodities were concerned, also supported boycotts against ‘foreign cigarettes’.

Often cast out by nationalist leaders as ‘comprador bourgeoisie’ (Bhattacharya 1980: 32), some of these commercial communities had even been retailing ‘foreign’ cigarettes. Yet, such business was now condemned as ‘unpatriotic’ and tobacconists were picketed and cigarettes burnt during boycott actions. Besides, demands for this ‘novel product’ (temporarily) decreased and had never been high because of its high costs. Such business people had therefore had no other choice but to join the boycott. But even more importantly, theirs had not been a general anti-tobacco movement, but rather cigarette boycotts stimulated them to produce alternative indigenous and cheaper/less risky alternatives to foreign cigarettes. Consequently, some among them set up so-called *swadeshi* enterprises during the years from 1903 to 1908 that produced a cheaper kind of cigarette than those imported from abroad (Bhattacharyya 2007: 167–86; Sarkar 1973: 129–30; Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014: 163). Most of those started during this period of *swadeshi* were located in Bengal and included companies such as the Rangpur Tobacco Company, the Indian Cigarette Manufacturer Company Limited in Murshidabad, the Naidu Cigarette Company, the Bengal Cigarette Company, the East India Cigarette Manufacturer Company Co. and the National Tobacco Company.

Later, during more all-India phases in the national movement against British colonisation, more such 'Indian' cigarette factories were started elsewhere. In 1930 in Bombay the Golden Tobacco Company started producing brands such as 'Panama', 'Flair', 'Chancellor', 'Esquire', 'Legend', and 'Burton'. Significantly, many such India-based companies (also) came out with alternative brand names that alluded to the fact that these cigarettes were not 'foreign' but 'made in India'. In this way, a firm such as Vazir Sultan Tobacco (VST), established in 1916 in Hyderabad and which was later taken over by Imperial Tobacco, came out with 'Charminar' and 'Zaffran' cigarettes. National India Tobacco in Bombay manufactured 'Star of India Cigarettes' and the front image on the package portrayed a Nehru-cap wearing man whereas the back image added that the cigarettes were 'guaranteed to be made from best matured *Indian* Virginia tobacco with *Indian* labour & capital' and emphasised that 'only the cigarette paper' was 'Egyptian' (i.e. foreign). The Great Indian Confectionery MFG Co. in Bombay branded its cigarettes 'Rashtriya'. The Osmanieh Cigarette Company that had registered branches in Calcutta, Delhi and Bombay sold 'Hind Mata' cigarettes and added a similar text but in Hindi.³

The advertisement strategies used could be defined as the 'Indianisation of the Modern'. Most of these cigarette factories mixed 'Indian themes' on packets' images such as Indian music instruments, Indian women dressed in saris, the Begam, Snakes, Tigers, Indian Princes, Hindu Gods, the Moon, etc. Some also mentioned they used rice paper in which to roll the Indian Virginia tobacco. Drawings on packets were most likely designed by employers themselves or those already employed in their factories as the hiring of professional artists would have increased the cigarette price, which had to remain lower than the foreign cigarette in order to be competitive. Importantly, therefore, small-scale India-based cigarette producers and/or retailers of such cheaper cigarettes were supposed to replace imported ones, but they actually at times used imported US Virginia or Turkish tobacco or blended this with tobacco cultivated in India, or sometimes even employed high power cigarette machines imported from England for rolling (India Commercial Intelligence Department 1907: 64). They emphasised on the package itself that their cigarettes were not foreign and thus had no link with the British Empire. Some pamphlets were even issued in this regard that urged customers to boycott 'foreign' cigarettes and buy and smoke the 'Indian' product made with 'Indian capital management' and therewith demonstrate their patriotism. For instance, a tobacconist for Nizam, Vazeer & G.T. Nizam cigarettes that were manufactured in Bombay by John Petrino & Co. issued a pamphlet that stated in English: 'Support the Indian industry by smoking guaranteed Indian made Nizam, Vazeer & Gold Tipped Nizam'. This firm that also produced 'Taj No.1 Cigarettes' sold packets of ten cigarettes each that were according to the text on the pamphlet: 'Made in India! By Indians! For Indians!'⁴ Brand names and images on cigarette packets themselves were the most important means of advertising these cheap cigarettes that came without collectable cards, most likely as these would have increased their costs.

Selling cheap cigarettes in British India as a modern commodity

Such national developments that started around 1905 but continued and with even greater impact during the 1920s and the 1930s greatly influenced BAT's strategies in British India. Firstly, BAT decided to set up a cigarette factory in Monghyr in Bihar (that time part of Bengal) that was managed by the newly established Imperial Tobacco Company of India (afterwards: Imperial Tobacco), which had its headquarters in Calcutta. Besides, though most of the *swadeshi* factories could never compete and all but vanished after a few years, or were ultimately incorporated by Imperial Tobacco, these developments made BAT realise that in order to expand its market share beyond the Indian upper crusts and expat communities, it had to reach out to the 'common man' through a particular cheaper but also a more 'Indian' (national) cigarette. Accordingly, the factory in Bihar started producing a new cheap kind of cigarette that was specially manufactured for the less-well-to do (Indian) smoker who had to be introduced to, 'the pleasures of smoking cigarettes' (Basu 1988: 13). This 'Indian cigarette' was advertised as a 'modern' alternative meant to replace particularly the *hookah* but also the more expensive 'foreign cigarettes', which had come in for much disrepute during the *Swadeshi* Movement.

'Scissors' became the most famous (Wills' cigarette) brand and was officially launched during the Delhi Durbar in 1911 to mark the shift from Calcutta to Delhi as the capital of British India. During promotion campaigns this brand extolled the attributes of cigarettes as such, not the brand 'Scissors', or the company, Imperial Tobacco. 'Scissors', as (almost) the equivalent for 'cigarettes', was positioned in the market as a new concept in smoking. Its novelty meant that no other brands were promoted more than this one for some time (Ramaswamy and Namakumari 2013: 360). However, Basu (1988) described that distribution and promotion of the new wares proved difficult and accounted for the bulk of Imperial's expenditure at this stage. Giving away samples by the millions by district sales people was a first strategy. During these early days of cigarette advertising in India, sport meetings and races would be arranged together with lucky dips and cigarettes shies to attract people to cigarette stalls that were adorned with posters depicting the new commodity. Horse-drawn *gharris* hired from a nearby bazaar were also plastered with placards advertising the cigarettes that were given away while driving from village to village, from *haat* to *haat* and from *mela* to *mela*. If not horses, bullocks, donkeys, mules and even elephants were used to carry the new wares and moveable stalls (Haynes 2015: 363, 372n7). Later, trains, cars and river boats were also pressed into service to tap areas hitherto uncharted on the cigarette map. Basu (1988: 14–26) detailed how an audience was gathered in small village markets, how cigarette smoking was demonstrated to a populace that had hitherto smoked through 'a small type of *hookah*' or were used to tobacco chewing and had never seen a cigarette in their lives.

Advertising was not confined to villages of course and sales' agents were as much active in cities. Yet, at the time, no official advertising agencies existed in India and in ITC's historian Basu's (1988: 15) judgement, advertising was 'naive, amateurish and unsophisticated'. Low price and high promotion were components of marketing in this launch phase. It had to somehow communicate to the prospective customers, who were used to non-cigarette forms of tobacco use, and tempt them to shift to cigarettes, a 'modern commodity'. Generally, 'modernity' was advertised on images printed on cigarette packets in the shape of technical innovations such as cycles, motor cars, bridges, railways, electronic dumpers, factories, monoplanes, jeeps, light houses, steam engines/boats, locomotives, etc. At times 'the modern' was expressed in new lifestyles such as sporting activities like horse racing and polo. Branding remained largely referring to the 'foreign' (exotic animals and plants for instance), the 'Navy', 'Britain', the 'Sovereign', the 'Imperial' or the colour of the '(American) Virginia' tobacco. New cigarette card series followed the same pattern. Yet during these times of regular 'national outbursts', Imperial also realised that it somehow not only had to emphasise that its cigarettes were 'modern' and 'cheap' but also 'Indian'. The text (in English) on the packets printed in Bihar therefore mentioned that the cigarettes inside were manufactured in Monghyr. What is more, a few series of collectable cigarette cards were issued that depicted 'Indian monuments' and 'Hindu Gods'.⁵ A rose by any other name would smell as sweet one would think, yet Imperial Tobacco thought differently and decided to give the modern commodity an 'Indian touch' by branding some of them with more Indianised names such as the 'Hawagharri' (see Figure 4.2).

Imperial Tobacco set up its own in-house advertising agencies in 1935. The first such agency was called the General Advertising Agency (GAA) and with this agency cigarette advertising in India became more 'professional'. Such cigarette ads appeared in English newspapers, on stamps, postcards, company letterheads, bills and receipts, and on posters, for instance. Nevertheless, many of the images of 'modern India' that in particular embellished new tobacco card series equated British India as experienced by the new Indian middle classes, in particular those employed in the Indian Civil Service, rather than an India that was familiar to the (poorer) 'masses'. Besides, though ultimately Imperial also started using texts in Devanagari, English remained its main medium to convey its messages. Apart from aiming at the 'common man', Imperial also continued advertising its modern produce among the expats in British India and therefore also catered to 'British tastes' (Masood 2015). These ads normally appeared in English language newspapers and translated 'modernity' more through new (read 'Western') life/hair/dress styles, sports (cricket, boxing, tennis, polo, etc.), the more 'hygienic' nature of the product (fabricated by machines in 'AC' conditions) and new gender relations rather than through technological innovations like those advertised among the Indian 'masses' or 'the common (Indian) man' (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014: 196).



Figure 4.2 Hawagharri, Peninsular Tobacco Co. Ltd., Monghyr.

The brownish *bidi* in competition with the white cigarette

Notwithstanding their innovative patriotic advertising style, competition between the cheap cigarettes produced in the *swadeshi* cottage industries and Imperial's domestically produced cigarettes that used locally cultivated tobacco and were much cheaper than its imported cigarettes, quickly subsided. By 1926, the factory in Bihar had imported Bonsack cigarette machines, a carpentering plant equipped for converting rough logs of timber into finished packing cases and its own printing press, and the whole machinery was driven by electrical power. In fact, the Peninsular Tobacco Company at Monghyr was at the time in terms of employment 'one of the largest in the world' (Sinha-Kerkhoff 2014: 222). Yet, to their horror, the British factory managers soon realised that though the cigarette had made considerable inroads, the indigenous population of India continued to consume their tobacco in its 'traditional' avatars such as through water-pipes, taken orally, or smoked through *cheroots*. What is more, some of these habits such as *hookah* smoking were now also advertised in modern fashion.

More importantly, besides cigarette, *cheroot*- and *hookah* smoking, another smoke was popular. Birdwood (1907: 1073) mentioned that on average the

consumption of cigarettes represented, 'five per head of the population of British India but the consumption of the imported article is still insignificant as compared with the consumption of the native *beri*'. It was the increase in this habit that worried Imperial most. Like chewing and *hookah* and *cheeroot* smoking, smoking of these hand-rolled filterless tobacco cigarettes could indeed be called 'native' as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts describe this habit of consuming tobacco rolled in a leaf of a tree. Yet, it had rarely been part of the market economy and was mainly prepared for home consumption only. Besides, socio-culturally and spatially, this habit had been confined. Though the *bidi* became 'a common man's smoke' (Chauhan 2001: 9) used by urban as well as rural dwellers all over India during the first decades of the twentieth century, before that it was only or particularly popular among different 'tribal' (*adivasi*) communities in particular regions.

Among these tribal communities it had acquired various names, however, and none among them resembled the word *bidi*, which is derived from Sanskrit. Moreover, the smoking device was not marketed by them. It was only by the beginning of the twentieth century that the word *bidi* (also spelled as *berilbirilbeedi*) appeared frequently in contemporary texts and referred to this smoking device that was the result of wrapping tobacco in a suitable leaf and making the whole in a conical shape. Pimpalpure (1999: 111) maintains that the word *bidi* has its origin in the Indian states of Rajasthan and/or Gujarat. Lal (2009: 1335) further details that the word *bidi* is derived from *beeda* (a word in Marwari) that refers to a betel leaf-wrapped offering of betel nuts, herbs, and condiments. Lal explains that in the Rajasthan and Gujarat regions in pre-British India, the *beeda* was a symbol of esteem and that it had gradually become a display of respect and reverence across the Indian sub-continent even before the arrival of European colonisers. Betel leaf and areca nut were regarded as auspicious symbols of hospitality and denoted a moral, social, and legal commitment.

The leaf used for wrapping the tobacco roll initially differed from place to place and depended on the availability of suitable leaves. Indigenous people in what is now Madhya Pradesh used to smoke dry *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) leaf from trees found in forests by rolling the leaf (without tobacco in them!) into a conical shape, burning it and inhaling the smoke. This smoking habit was, such *adivasis* believed, wholesome (Kumar 2001). Other communities elsewhere had adopted the same smoking habit as *tendu* trees were found in other Indian regions as well. Yet, they increasingly filled the leaf with brown-coloured shredded uncured or sundried tobacco and tied the whole with a small piece of cotton thread. Thereafter, *tendu* leaf was more often used than other types or leaf for making *bidis*, as some had decided that this leaf blended much better with the taste of tobacco.

Such were the first *bidis* introduced in Indian markets that previously had not seen such a commodity. Lal (2009: 1335) argues that it was the *Marwari* business community from Gujarat who were the first to make a commodity out of the smoke, with tobacco as the only filler in the *tendu* leaf. It seems

that it was also this community that first started marketing this new smoking device as *bidi*, a name already widely known in the region as a respectable and importantly a traditional consumption habit, though in this case tobacco replaced the areca nut and the luxury item was smoked not chewed. It is for this reason that I define the way in which this modern commodity was marketed as the ‘traditionalisation of the modern’. Branding the new smoking device as *bidi* was a first step in that direction.

In Gujarat, only *astra* leaves had been available in which to roll the tobacco. Yet, when in around 1902 some Gujarati *Marwaris* migrated to Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh and wanted to open a *bidi* shop and prepare the commodity themselves instead of having it imported from Bombay for instance and found no *astra* leaf available, they instead used another locally available leaf known as *tendu* that served the same purpose. Lal describes how these businessmen and their [male] workers rolled their own *bidis*, put them in a *thali* (tray) and sold them along with unprepared tobacco and matchsticks in local *haats* (weekly markets). He also mentions that Gujarati families that had settled in Bombay saw the potential of the *bidi* business and soon started manufacturing *bidis* on a larger scale.

The *bidi* industry experienced a considerable boom particularly during the 1920s and the 1930s. This had ‘a disastrous effect’ on local cigarette factories like that in Monghyr producing cheap ‘European style cigarettes’ (Advisory Board of the Department of the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research 1932: 176). During boycott actions in the early 1930s, this concern even closed down its departments for a short while, but its management argued that ‘the buy *swadeshi* propaganda’, which had been ‘on foot in India for about the last two years’, had not become ‘a permanent feature in Indian life’. However, it was admitted that *bidi* consumption had increased tremendously in India. Yet the real reason for *bidi*’s popularity according to the management was the fact that it was cheaper than even the cheapest cigarette manufactured by Imperial’s factories and even cheaper than cigarettes produced by Indian enterprise. One of its managers stated that even ‘very poor people’ could afford it (GDK 1932: 89–91). This made them realise the necessity of reaching out to the ‘poorer classes’ and consequently these classes were included in their advertisement strategies, as illustrated above.

Embedding the *bidi* as a traditional Indian commodity

During a period when nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi had come out with his most forthright statements on imperialism and under whose leadership the so-called Non-Cooperation Movement of the Congress Party attained national allure (Sarkar 1983: 204), Gandhi had also advised labourers, ‘to give up their bad habits of drinking, gambling and smoking and to make their hearts pure’ (Hingorani 1998). Datta (1969: 122) also reiterated that Gandhi, though confessing that he himself had also once succumbed to this ‘sin’, had called for habits such as smoking of *bidi* and *ganja* to be given up.

He knew that 'even rich and learned men smoke cigarettes and *bidis*', but asked them as well as factory workers to abandon such 'vicious habits' that had simply wreaked havoc among mankind. According to Gandhi, spending money on tobacco was a waste of money and he also believed that tobacco smokers 'become callous and careless of others' feeling'. Smoking was also 'unhygienic' he believed and 'causes salivation and most smokers have no hesitation in spitting anywhere'. After analysing the habit of chewing, smoking and snuffing in India, Gandhi had concluded that, 'if we think over it calmly, all the three are most dirty habits' (Kumarappa 1954: chapter 9).

Gandhi also scorned Indians trading in liquor and other intoxicating drugs such as tobacco and had therewith 'made money by robbing the poor labourers' (Hingorani 1998). Yet, as it happened, Gandhi's philosophies of abstinence did not translate into a movement against tobacco consumption or even control. In fact, as other scholars have shown for other commodities, they translated into consumerism of a different kind, in a *swadeshi* way. According to Ananta Kumar Giri, these 'politics of consumption'/ 'political consumption' were linked to 'production' (2013: 207) and Sarkar indeed detailed that the 1920s and 1930s generated numerous and distinct social groups and classes with their own versions and interpretation of *swadeshi*, boycotts and abstinence (1983: 204). Going by Gandhi's verdict that it was the 'patriotic duty' of men with capital to pioneer *swadeshi* industries (not only a revival of traditional industries but also start new industries of commodities that had till then been absent from mass consumption in India unless produced by and/or imported through foreign capital), Sarkar pointed out how this had caused the revival of traditional craft industries, handlooms, etc., as well that it produced altogether new 'modern' industries (Giri 2013: 208; Mazzarella 2003: 5, 290nn5 and 6). The *bidi* industry could be considered as one of these modern outcomes of such a *swadeshi* commerce (Bhattacharyya 2007: 163).

Apart from *Marwaris*, various other business communities became involved in commodification of the refashioned *bidi* and therewith fundamentally changed the apportionment of power among *sahibs*, *babus* and *banias* in this industrial field. Abdul Noor Mohammed, a Muslim, for instance started a *bidi* rolling unit in Sagar and Bhagwandas Shobhalal, a Jain, established B.S. Jain & Co. also in Madhya Pradesh. Datar (1989: 27–30) mentions that there was already a '*bidi* making firm' in Calcutta in 1885 but that Nipani on the border of Maharashtra and Karnataka and on the Bombay-Bangalore Road that links western and southern parts of India, became a most important *bidi* manufacturing area after 1915. In was however only during the 1920s and the 1930s that the progress of the *bidi* became traumatising for the cigarette (Basu 1988). Encouraged by the explicit nationalist propaganda in favour of self-reliance and small-scale industries, many small-time capitalists started *bidi* concerns and supported cigarette boycotts throughout India that were more effective than in earlier days. The *bidi* cottage industry not only penetrated all parts of the country but was sometimes encouraged by the Government in particular after the Government of

India Act that expanded the number of Indians in Government positions (Government of Bengal 1929). Moreover, all kinds of transformations were experienced and advertised such as the ‘self-lighting Jalti Biri’ that promised ‘quality, comfort, economy and fashion’ and eliminated ‘all inconveniences of matches, experienced generally in railways, trams, motor cars, lorries or in strong wind’ (Central Board of Revenue 1935). Importantly, the *bidi* was promoted as an indigenous alternative to the ‘foreign cigarette’ and became marketed as a truly ‘national commodity’.

This upcoming *bidi* industry was small-scale and unorganised, and a panorama of manufacturing systems prevailed. There were one-man businesses, family units as well as larger units employing a great number of ‘*bidi*-rollers’ (Giriappa 1987: 31). Many *bidi* factories closed down after a few years or even months while new ones were started elsewhere. As the commodity’s production required no machinery and a limited capital, hand-rolled *bidis* were cheaper than even the cheapest cigarettes manufactured by Imperial. By the 1930s the system under which the production of *bidis* was organised had already started shifting from urban ‘factory-like’ units employing mostly men as rollers to the home-based/outwork and contractual systems in the rural landscapes where we find most of them even today, using mostly women and children for the same work but with much lower wages (CWDS n.d.).

Demand for *bidis* increased from World War I onwards after cigarette prices increased. Yet, this not only stimulated increased demand for the cheaper *bidis* but also triggered inner competition and, as a result, branding as part of advertising became important. It also could be considered a means of collective representation of the (religious) group with which the brands’ manufacturer identified with. Though initially there had not been more branding than the generalised label *bidi* given to the commodity, sub-branding was begun around 1920 and typical ‘Indian names’ such as those referring to Indian gods seemed to be most favoured. A plurality of other names existed, however, but for only a short while as brands came and went quickly. For instance, the *bidi* industry in Nipani, which was founded by local traders, Salve and Kadam, came up with their own ‘Pistol Bidi’ brand in 1927 and other factories in India followed suit. New brand names also reflected the *swadeshi* spirit such as the ‘Charkha’ (spinning wheel) brand of *bidis* that was riding on the popularity of the nationalist movement and *swadeshi* sentiment. Messrs Koolji Sikka & Co. of Calcutta, which had its factory in the Central Province, manufactured ‘Mohini *bidi*’, which was quite popular during those days. Its ads, as Bhattacharyya (2007: 163) informs us, ‘showed enough political maturity’. The message on the package read: ‘Keep the wealth of the country, within the country and help thousands of countrymen make both ends meet by consuming world-famous hand-made Mohini *bidi*’. Another *bidi* manufacturer, expressing his gratitude for Gandhi’s general support to ‘cottage industries’, came out with a really intriguing brandname: the ‘Gandhi *bidi*’ (Govindu and Malghan 2009).⁶ Even ‘Mother India’ herself became a *bidi* brand, as illustrated in Figure 4.3.



Figure 4.3 Hindmata Chhap, General Bidi Company.

Compared to cigarettes, there were much less *bidi* ads in vernacular newspapers or the like, but some appeared on letterheads, for instance. Yet, obliged to keep costs to a minimum and being aware of the fact that most of its clientele was illiterate, texts were limited to brand name, manufacturing place and perhaps something that read as *pikar santusht hoye!* (after smoking you will feel satisfied!).⁷ It seems that packaging and branding itself were normally the only ways to promote the product. Yet as competition came more from within rather than from cigarettes, at times posters and panels were designed by retailers that implored consumers to smoke a particular brand of *bidi*, e.g. ‘Leader Bidi’.

In this way, and normally using a mix of Devanagari and Urdu scripts with a sprinkling of English at times, and applying bright colours or just using black and white and simple messages or no message/slogans at all, and often adding an image of the manufacturer himself, small-and middle-scale capitalist manufacturers aimed at popularising *bidi* use among educated middle-class Indians as well as the poor (ILO 2001: 6–7). This was accomplished by transforming the ‘modern’ into the ‘traditional’, aiming at replacing the ‘traditional water-pipe’. Within the contemporary socio-economic and political

climate, the *bidi* was also placed before the public as the ideal traditional alternative to even the cheapest (white) *swadeshi* cigarette.

By the time ‘Mother India’ attained her freedom, and unlike cigarettes, *bidis* were embedded in society as ‘Indian produce’ and were almost equated with the new nation (Lal 2009: 1336). An advertisement of one *bidi* brand named *Asli Sher Chaap* (‘the real tiger brand’) manufactured in Jabalpur around 1950 and largely couched in Hindi clearly illustrated this: a partly visible map of India – its new borders erased – is shown occupied by a *bidi* packet surrounded by male bodies variously attired to signify different regional, sectarian and caste communities. The use of the map form allowed the manufacturers of this *bidi* brand to announce the all-India popularity of their product. To be Indian, the ad seems to implicitly suggest by drawing upon and deploying the map of India, is to smoke *bidis* (Tasveer Ghar 2015).

Conclusion

Tales regarding the diffusion of tobacco consumption in India are virtually missing (Goodman 1993: 95; Goodman et al. 1995: 257–8). The absence of this history in a country that remains one of the biggest tobacco consumers in the world is significant and might be due to the fact that this history has been, as Ann Bermingham suggested in a different geographical context, ‘a culturally suppressed one’. This chapter detailed that during the first two decades of the twentieth century, both cigarettes as well as *bidis* competed as ‘novel’ commodities for mass consumption in India. Indeed, between 1935 and 1965 cigarette consumption per adult more than doubled in India. Yet by 1950, unlike other countries in the world and also unlike other countries in Asia such as Japan and China that actually stood out as countries most thoroughly committed to cigarette consumption, manufactured cigarettes accounted for only 12 per cent of total consumption in India (and Pakistan/Bangladesh). What is more, *bidis* contributed a lion’s share of the total tobacco consumption. Our findings impel us to position this consumption history as an ‘Indian exceptionalism’ (Fischer-Tiné and Tschurennev 2013: 19) if compared with other national histories of ‘the evolution of smoking’ that describe the pipe as the most preferred smoking instrument during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to be displaced in the nineteenth century by the cigar and in the twentieth century by the machine manufactured cigarette (Schivelbush 1993: 111).

We captured the three competing historical social images that *bidi* and cigarette advertising represented and analysed what messages these ads provided regarding ‘modern men’:

[w]ho would smoke *bidis* or cigarettes instead of more traditional smokes such as *hookah* and *cheroots* and in this way also captured hidden messages for women who would or would not smoke. Such advertisements mirrored three existing but contradictory social fantasies regarding modern India.

(Ciarlo 2011: 18)

Despite advertising to change their image, the smoker of the machine-rolled cigarettes represented 'India' as part of the British Empire or at least as 'Modern India', whereas hand-rolled *bidi* smoking refashioned this 'Modern India' into 'Traditional India', as it was imagined to have been before British rule (Sinha 2000).

Defining 'advertising' narrowly to denote the use of the modern print to promote commercial enterprise, I analysed and compared the type of changing commodity images that were designed by the Imperial Tobacco Company of India, the largest cigarette manufacturer in British India, to lure Indians to their wares. I compared this with efforts by smaller and wholly Indian-managed so-called *swadeshi* enterprise that also tried to market cheap cigarettes. I illustrated that such strategies enticed owners of small, mid-sized and large *bidi* units to persuade Indian smokers in somewhat similar fashion to both give up the use of the cumbersome *hookah* as well as abandon 'foreign' cigarette consumption, which was decreed as a modern (read Western) and expensive habit. Instead, potential customers were wooed to adopt the more manageable *bidi* as their favourite and truly 'traditional' and cheaper 'national smoke'.

During the first half of the twentieth century, in an India characterised by *swaraj*, boycotts, civil disobedience and *swadeshi* that signified 'colonialism under siege' (Bose and Jalal 2014: 111–17), a kind of 'Free Tobacco Movement' had thus been initiated that sought to free tobacco from its foreign curse. In this environment, the embedding of cheap Indian-made cigarettes through advertisements that aimed at the Indianisation of the modern (i.e. reflecting a nationalist masculine modernity, Ghosh 2008) proved extremely unsuccessful. Like these cigarettes the marketing of even cheaper *bidis* had been a new phenomenon. Yet its sellers realised that the modern commodity had to be traditionalised to suit the anti-British climate and general human conditions of the times. During the 1920s and 1930s, *bidi* 'factories' sprang up all over India and sometimes employed only a handful of workers and were at times managed by one man only. These men participated in procedures of the modern nation by 'articulating especially subaltern visions of freedom and their own initiatives of independence' (Dube, 2011, 2017: 81).

By the 1930s cheap brands of cigarettes manufactured by Imperial accounted for 70 per cent of all cigarettes sold in India, yet company managers in Monghyr found that *bidi* smokers still outnumbered those of cigarettes by a factor of ten to one (Cox 2000: 228). Importantly, in 1931, the Royal Commission on Labour (1931) officially labelled the hand-rolled *bidi* units as an 'indigenous industry', though such 'factories' were not older than two decades maximum. However, it remains a matter of informed speculation to judge on the success or failure of the visual culture of advertisements used by small and large businesses alike that sought to transform attitudes about commodities and the material habits of consumers (Barlow 2012; Haynes 2015: 366, 367). I argue that an understanding of why *bidi* smoking became more popular than the use of cigarettes should recognise that the tobacco

market in India was and remained bifurcated between rich and poor, between city and countryside, and between men and women (Benedict 2011: 11). Rather than different advertising strategies, therefore, it most likely was simply the fact that *bidis* were even cheaper than the cheapest cigarettes that made them more popular among the ‘masses’ (and unlike cigarettes, included men and women).

It also could be argued, however, that not only Imperial’s more ‘professional’ advertising made their cigarettes more expensive than *bidis*, but also that their advertising images alienated the ‘poorer masses’ as they presented a kind of ‘Modern India’ that was not part of their lived experiences. Until 1950 at the earliest, the ‘new’ machine-made cigarette was still looked upon as a ‘foreign’/‘Western’ commodity (Bansal et al. 2005; Roy 2012; Stigler et al. 2010). Correspondingly, cigarette smoking was looked upon as part of a ‘Westernised’ lifestyle whereas *bidi* smoking was considered an ‘indigenous’ or traditional habit. Modern print advertisement strategies either mirrored or lent a hand in engendering this social reality.

Notes

- 1 This is one of the first outcomes of a two-year research project supported by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), New Delhi (2016–17) that looked at a wide variety of tobacco consumption modes in eastern India during almost three centuries. For the purpose of this chapter some more materials were included that specially focused on modern print advertisements and it also trespasses on initially selected geographical boundaries.
- 2 Pran Nevile (2010: 75–81) depicting life of ‘English gentlemen’ in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century India, showed that during those days, even the ‘Sahib was hooked to hookah’.
- 3 www.prafulthakkar.in/my-hobbies/other-collectibles/cigarette-packs.html.
- 4 <https://cuttingthechai.wordpress.com/2007/06/07/indian-cigarette-ads-from-1800s-to-2000s>.
- 5 www.listal.com.
- 6 Similarly, there had been the ‘Mahatma Gandhi Cigarettes’, to Gandhi’s ‘astonished outrage’ (Alter 1996: 303).
- 7 <http://gagankundra.blogspot.in/2011/10/advertisements-in-old-times.html>.

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5 Creating desire

In the name of the nation, 1947–65

Chilka Ghosh

It would be normal if the official or the state-owned media advertised the nation-state. But between 1947 and 1965, a variety of images of the nation formed points of reference in the advertisements printed in the newspapers published from Bengal: nation as a community with common traits, capability tradition (as defined by the media concerned), a political entity, a growing and developing entity with a beneficial character – these were allusions that were actually meant to speak about the efficacy of the advertised commodities. The purpose of this chapter is to question the rationale of using the nation as a point of reference to advertise commodities. Advertisements try to melt away all static identities based on birth to create newer and transient identities that can be affixed to and crystallised on commodities. Nationalist appeal in advertisements could have worked in the opposite direction; to the newspaper reading public of a newly independent nation it might have sounded like a call for sacrifice – even the purchase of goods could feel like performing a duty towards the nation. This would be especially problematic because several fictional and non-fictional Bengali literary works of the colonial period would show that the Bengali Bhadrakol were never averse to consumption. (While fictions introduce us to young indulgent husbands who bought perfumes, soaps, ‘begum bahar’ sarees, or glass bangles for their wives, non-fictional literature introduces us to the young indulgent women addicted to luxuries and men who failed to ‘control’ their womenfolk – both actions were supposedly enough to destroy national tradition and value.) There could thus be no reason for advertisements to create further dilemma for Bengali consumers.

In the first section of what follows, I shall show that the ad texts were so fashioned that the consuming public of Bengal could see beyond the nation and/or use the referred nation to consume with a clear conscience. The question of clear conscience arises because while the urban middle class was never antipathetic to consumption, austerity was considered as a virtue up until the 1960s as well.

In the second section the intention is to show that even when government undertakings advertised in the name of the nation, the target was to encourage consumption to increase revenue. However, the design was also to prove the strength and efficacy of the nation-state. Here, on the basis of a study of

commercials in various newspapers of the period, I argue that while these advertisements succeeded in increasing consumption of products like tea and services like tourism, the government was increasingly failing to preserve the Bengali Bhadrakok's faith in the nation-state. Both sections would thus show that consumers 'see' in advertisements exactly what they choose; they are perfectly able with or without the help of the ad text to read between the lines. The important point here is that since consumers 'read' means to satiate not their needs alone but their desires as well, they attach symbolic values to most commodities. Hence, even an apparently sublime point of reference like nationalism in ads would increase instead of restrain consumption.

The moot question remains, however. Why would private entrepreneurs use the nation as a point of reference at all if they ultimately left fissures through which consumers could look beyond the nation? During the colonial period, indigenous producers, more often than not, were part of the constructive *Swadeshi* Movement; their allusions to the nation reflected their political faith though the more successful among them never lost sight of the importance of increasing sales and profits. On the other hand, when independence marked the apparent victory of nationalism, reference to both 'the nation as a community' and as a 'progressing nation-state' could make its citizens proud and reassured enough to desire more. The advertisers during the post-Independence period endeavoured to cash in on the pride and hope of potential consumers to sell their products.

Self and the advertised nation

This section will cite advertisements of private entrepreneurs from both the colonial and the post-colonial period to indicate the crevices through which consumers could look beyond the nation to satisfy personal desires; the purpose is also to show how the image of the nation changed from a community with traditions to a developing nation-state during the mentioned period. As I intend to deal with desire and consumption, the advertisements would be of consumer goods, especially those that could promise beauty/fashion and/or self-development. A brief comparison with foreign products of the colonial period would show how through allusions to the nation as a community the advertisers tried to distinguish themselves.

The 16 January 1947 issue of *Amrita Bazar Patrika* carried a commercial of Qumaresh (a patent medicine for stomach ailments) showing a picture of a male child with the words, 'Vanguard of the Nation. But who guards him?' The single child of the advertisement represented all children who were the budding futures of the nation, according to the advertiser. It would thus seem that the producer existed and functioned only with a nationalist rationale. But what would the parents see in the text is the key issue here. The advertisement consisted of the pictures of the child and of the bottle of medicine and a two-part linguistic text. The above cited lines formed the heading in bold while those in smaller type below the picture of the bottle mentioned

the herbal composition of the medicine. There is a disjuncture between the first sentence and the child in the picture; in the innocent smile of the bare-bodied child with his hair arranged on top of his head (like one finds in the pictures of child Krishna), kohl both as eye make-up and a dab of it on the brow to ward off ill-luck (a common superstition) with a rattle in his hand, a mother would not necessarily see a distant abstract ‘vanguard of the nation;’ she would rather see her own child. This means that any parent could have perfectly personal reasons for using the medicine. On the other hand, Phillip’s Milk of Magnesia, for example, assured cure for same types of ailments as did ‘Qumaresh’. Hence, to create a distinct group of patrons this advertisement posed itself as Bengal’s very own medicine using common herbs to treat her *own child* (the appearance of the child is very Bengali) and aiming to benefit the nation – Bengal/India.

On 10 September 1947 *Yugantar* printed an advertisement of Bijon’s Palm Candy that said, ‘Healthy and thoughtful young boys build the future of the nation; unadulterated food, Bijon’s Palm Candy, helps them’. Parents would not need a nationalist justification for feeding their children ‘unadulterated food’. But the producer thus positioned his product vis-à-vis for example, Wakefield’s Custard, which too was a ‘pure’ and ‘light’ food for young and adults alike. If the latter was for just ‘anybody’, this was meant for ‘us’.

On 11 February 1947, N.C. Koley & Sons advertised Mundle’s Barley in *The Statesman*, which read thus:

Typhoid, phthisis ... malaria, these are the more formidable diseases in India ... The longevity of Indian life set against these monstrous enemies is roughly 27 years which compares ill against 63 of average English life ... That is why, we should be careful in selecting our nutritious food and drink.

The ‘we’ and ‘our’ in the concluding sentence of the advertisement underpinned its tone, which rests on the ‘we/they’ dichotomy spurring a sense of competition. This is an advertisement of a period when independence was in the offing and desires to out-manoeuvre the colonial masters were in the air. Moreover, much of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings exploring and explaining the cause of India’s subordination to foreign rule ascribed it to the ill-health of the Indians/Bengalis along with other causes. Members of many secret societies involved in the nationalist struggle underwent physical training to surpass the mentioned weakness. Therefore, summoning an advertisement might strike a resonance with those opinions and actions. It would be a call, the language of which would be meaningful to certain people; people who were still proud of the nationalist struggle (and that was the purpose of the advertiser) and appeal to those who could not perhaps afford, for example Polson’s Butter (promising good health), or the aforesaid custard powder, or Western medicines, or were already apprehensive about anything Western if not out of patriotism then thanks to religious superstitions. By

mentioning the longevity of the English, the advertiser counter-posed it to all Western products that were supposedly capable of ensuring good health. Nevertheless, the consumer ultimately saw in the advertisement assurance of long life and remedies for the mentioned diseases, which were real dangers in those days, at an affordable price.

Nevertheless, allusion to the nation in the pre-independence period was not always to awaken the desire of the consumers – it had at times been a survival strategy for indigenous producers. The strategy remained in vogue for a few years after independence after which the companies either became extinct or developed by their own merit. The next two examples would prove the point and more; for a company to survive adherence, real or otherwise, to nationalism was not enough because consumers would ultimately seek satisfaction of need or desire in a commodity which they would not sacrifice for the nation.

Supra Fountain Pen Ink (*Yugantar*, 8 September 1947) said, ‘Give up the infatuation for foreign ink’ (emphasis added). Faced with stronger competitors, the former entrepreneurs, even after mentioning the tangible benefits of the products, used this mode of advertisement to create a distinct ‘austere’ group for themselves. The more established entrepreneurs perceived and advertised the nation as a happy zone where people could expect social prominence and/or material benefit. Whether a producer would depend on a particular myth or not surely depended on its own business condition, as the case of Sulekha Ink would confirm. Gradually ‘Supra’ faded out not in the face of foreign competition but partly because of ‘Sulekha’, which was making steady progress. Retired Colonel Mani K. Gahatraj remembered, that in far away from the busy town, in Kalimpong, during the 50’s when they were permitted to write in pen, they all proudly carried a bottle of Sulekha ink¹. He mentions many foreign cheese and cake shops and other signs of British legacies but does not mention any foreign ink. It would also be interesting to note that Sulekha never exploited the nationalist sentiment although it too started manufacturing ink in 1934 as part of the *Swadeshi* project. In fact, Sulekha already had three running factories in 1946–47. It advertised the brightness of the ink and later its waterproof quality but not its nationalist ventures. Business success rendered exploiting nationalist feeling unnecessary; in fact, that could even blur its success story.

Panama Cigarette (Golden Tobacco Company) advertised on 5 March 1948 saying, ‘There is no dearth of good quality tobacco or skill in our country. The powerful foreign lobby is the only impediment.’ By the 1950s, however, Panama too advertised in a way that tangentially indicated its quality too. One big ‘1’ formed the background of the cigarette that jutted out from the packet of Panama in the picture and the header said, ‘First cigarette made with Indian capital, first in many other fields’.

To the indigenous producers of cosmetic products, the reference to national tradition had a completely different purpose. The allusion helped them resolve the apparent though controversial issue that centred on the use

of cosmetics and other fineries by women, from the late nineteenth century. The advertisements of private advertisers cited later referred to the nation and the national tradition to endorse sensuality.

During the early 1940s, indigenous cosmetic products advertised only very irregularly in news dailies. Much apprehension and dilemma centred on these products. In spite of peoples' general love for novelty, the opposite is usually effective in removing apprehension about a thing or a practice. Hence, the advertisements alluded to the national tradition to solicit endorsement for products condemned as modern and hence antinational. The mode of campaign can work only when the addressees are keen on protecting whatever is regarded as the national identity.

Toiletries like cream, powder, perfume and soap were already, though sparingly, used by Indian middle-class women. Perceiving toiletry as *biliti* (foreign) luxury, the conservative social thinkers criticised the Bengali middle-class women for their addiction to these as a negative outcome of the progressive social reform movements of the nineteenth century. *Swadeshi* leaders appealed to them to boycott such luxuries of foreign make. Gandhiji felt a love of fineries often deterred women from enduring the hardship involved in the nationalist struggle (1929, 1936, 1938).² Yet for the indigenous producers the target was the middle class as the upper class relied on foreign companies. It was thus essential for indigenous producers to refer to some Indian sentiment to advertise their products. These sentiments were real middle-class sentiments, of which the advertisers were aware but could not endorse. The debate revolving around cosmetics and toiletries continued until the early 1950s at least. It is apparent from a collection of newspaper articles written by Benoy Ghosh (1995) under the nom de plume Kalpencha.³

A comparison between two advertisements would make this clear. On 1 January 1947, 'Vinolia White Rose Soap' (made in England) advertised the product saying, 'To enhance your beauty'. In the hand-drawn picture, the woman, though clad in sari, wore a sleeve-less blouse and short hair while the accompanying man wore a dressing-gown – a clear reference to the target class. It also said that the scent of the soap would remind one of the great Indian white rose. In the picture, while the woman on a swing tried to reach out to a rose, the man extended his hand lovingly towards the woman clearly showing who coveted what. The advertisement dwelled on a woman's supposed desire for beauty, luxury and male attention. On the contrary, Mysore Sandal Soap, a product of the Government of Mysore, advertised the product on 14 May 1947; it did not promise beauty. Here is a girl with well-combed straight hair, standing erect, demure with down-cast eyes holding Puja offerings on a plate. The text says, 'Melts away dirt and impurities and leaves your skin fragrant'. The first advertisement overtly advertised the fragrance of the soap without mentioning it as a cleanser. The second advertised the product primarily as a cleanser and purifier. Coupled with the picture the promised purity seems akin to sanctity. With an incense stick on the plate and Sandal as the name of the soap, the promised fragrance would remind one more of piety than the

luxury of the white rose because sandal paste is used in religious rituals. The choice of the fragrant objects by the two companies – rose by the former and sandal by the latter marks the difference between their advertising strategies.

Speaking the language of national sentiment, the advertiser thus sought to resolve the controversy centring on luxury that supposedly allured the ‘modern women’. The second advertisement hinges less on a presumed desire of a woman and more on her necessity to conform to social expectations to link women with traditional practices. By trying to introduce soap into middle-class homes, the advertisement was actually moving away from longstanding beliefs. Well into the early 1950s, oiling the body and rubbing it during bath time was considered enough for cleansing. But women bought and used soap sparingly as a rare luxury in hiding. The advertised soap helped the women to indulge themselves more frankly with the nation as the pretext.

Advertisement of ‘Renu-Sisir Soap Works’ of Dumdum in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (8 January 1947) drives home the attempt further. It says, ‘Such bath may not bring one salvation but it certainly brings [a] delightful sense of cleanliness’. Two phrases of the statement are important; one is, ‘may not’, which might indicate that ‘it may’; the second, ‘sense of cleanliness’ is if the soap cleaned the body the question of sense/feeling of cleanliness arises less because it is an objective fact that is easily verifiable. Sense of cleanliness is a matter of feeling, which means the advertiser promised something sublime, something beyond the five senses with which Indians were, supposedly, more habituated than physicality. Under such circumstance, the word ‘salvation’ merges somewhat with ‘sense of cleanliness’. In other words, the product was advertised in the name of a constructed national tradition (the picture of the girl standing in knee-deep water in a pond surrounded by greenery as in rural Bengal). To in fact break the same producer would be another apt example of how certain practices were projected as traditional and a product was merged with it to make it seem like an extension of that tradition which was Indian. It reads thus, ‘Perhaps no other people in the world are so bath conscious as we are. The life of an Indian from birth to death is one continuous festival of bathing.’ The picture comprises three women with straight long hair, and *bindi*⁴ signifying supra-regional Indianness; but the women are seen wearing the sari in the typical Bengali fashion. Thus, the word ‘we’ without the word ‘Indian’ in the second sentence could also mean Bengali. The ambiguity is natural: the product was locally made, but the uncertainty constructed the required linkage with Indian tradition that was pivotal in most cultural debates during the nationalist movement and the product was associated with Indian ritual practices in an effort to remove suspicions from it. An advertisement of Godrej Sandal Soap (1948) is a further example where the reference to religion and sanctity is made even more clear by writing the word ‘sanctimonious’ in large bold font in the top right corner. The soap is juxtaposed with a South Indian temple so that the word covers both. The text below begins thus, ‘There is a close connection between cleanliness and religiosity. It is, therefore, necessary to use a pure soap before performing a religious

rite.' It ends with, 'The human body is the abode of god.' The debates centring on cosmetics was pronounced in Bengal because this was the seat of many women-centric reforms during the nineteenth century; but elsewhere in India too people were apprehensive about these products, as the proclamation, 'contains no animal-fat' in the text shows.

Apparently, the softness of petals (advertisement of Vinolia) is sensuous; the blooming of the flower is a reminder of a young woman's opening up as a tantalising being as compared to the fragrance of sandal, the powder of which is burnt (sacrificed) as an offering to the divinity. The name Renu-Sisir is metonymic. Renu is pollen but reminds not only of flower but of the idea – real or otherwise – popularised through classical Indian literature that the 'Nayika' used pollen powder her body both for hue and fragrance. Sisir or dew alluded to things smooth, cool and delightful to touch. I have recently learned that dew is also considered as the epitome of purity and has ritual purpose. Hence, in the name of religiosity and purity the manufacturer invited consumers to the world of rich sensuous luxury into which they would readily enter with a clear conscience as the world was associated with 'Indian tradition' by the advertiser. In 1947 while Lux (bearing faces of familiar Indian film actors like Kananbala, Ratnamala, and Ruplekha) was packed, luxury and glamour soaps of indigenous makes were wrapped in holiness and purity – once more, only deceptively. Through metonymic use of words like sandal, and pictures of girls standing in knee-deep water, the advertisements tried to mask the allurements they created. Like fine mesh, they exposed more than they concealed. It is hardly credible that advertisements could control the meaning of fragrance more, because while sandal paste had associations with religious ritual; it also had a cosmetic use from very ancient times. In this sense it was truly traditional and, therefore, advertisements indicated that while remaining within the bounds of tradition, women could satisfy their desire for luxury. The next advertisement is more significant. In the same newspaper on 12 January 1947, there was advertised the painting of a picture of luxury but with reference to the age of Kalidas.⁵ It was described as a time when women liked to chew beetle nut with cream, sip aromatic honey ... pots filled with aguru⁶ – smoke and incense.

The pictures in all three advertisements cited have double significance. In other words, the first signified a different time, to borrow the concept of Roland Barthes. While the girls with puja offerings signified Indian tradition according to the advertisers, to many male viewers it signified a time when women were more subservient, less exposed to the outer world and were the custodians of patriarchal tradition and hence were more easily possessed. If the pond and vegetation of the Renu-Sisir advertisement signified rural life, it further signified a milieu untouched by women-centric reforms and hence was free of (male) anxiety. It moreover added meaning to the female body in the picture by re-establishing the connection between the female body and nature/nurture. In this connection, the word 'sisir' attained another meaning viz., coolness, a quality expected of women.

On 4 January 1947 ‘Himkalyan Hair-oil’ was advertised in *The Statesman* thus: ‘Vesaj Visharad Nagendranath Sastri’s Himkalyan, Genuine and Refreshing Hair-oil’ with a picture that is notable for several reasons. First, to stress on the Indian tradition the drawing did not follow the Western naturalistic style; it had no tonal quality (present in all hand-drawn ad pictures then) but relied on a linear quality associated with classical Indian art. Like the *Nayikas*⁷ of classical Indian painting the girl in the picture had elongated eyes, delicately tapering fingers and long wavy hair and wore choli and a loincloth; her ornaments resembled those worn by women in classical Indian paintings.

Overall, the image presented by indigenous producers of cosmetics was no less sensuous than that presented by the foreign brands. Moreover, if the latter assured beauty, aroma, long hair or removal of skin marks, the former did not promise but suggested a relationship with a luxurious lifestyle. In other words, what consumers bought in the former case was not a solution to a beauty problem; the lifestyle advertised in these was a distant shadow that could not maintain constant desire without satisfying it completely. Consumption began with viewing the advertisements. What ‘Maharani Sandal Soap’ overtly said in 1962 – ‘You will feel like a queen on using the soap’ – the earlier advertisements had said covertly.⁸

Hence, frequent reference to a traditional identity instead of being prohibitive proved liberating. If nationalism demanded keeping women away from luxurious habits when several foreign cosmetics and even gold ornaments of English design (Sripantha 2014) were available in the market, nationalism could mean restriction. On the contrary, these advertisements removed the restriction by attaching the tag of ‘national habit’. This means that although the advertisements apparently proffered a message that did not always correspond to the aspirations of the middle class, they could construct their own pleasure quotient from them. Moreover, even after the ‘meanings were taken’, the consumers would decide what was consumed because how the ‘meaning’ was ‘articulated in practice’ could not be controlled by the advertiser, and yet many of the entrepreneurs who had started their business during the nationalist period as a nationalist project had to distinguish themselves and adhere to the nationalist sentiment by adopting this mode of advertising (Hall 2009).

The difference between these ads and an ad from Hindustan Lever of the 1950s shows how the nation was used by an MNC brand. Not only did this tone change the meaning but the nation too had changed. In Hindustan Lever’s advertisement (February 1954), the header reads, ‘In the plan there is arrangement for his bath too’. What catches the attention immediately after is the picture of the child pouring water from a smaller bucket into a mug. There is a small cake of soap beside him, but the flowing water is much more prominent. The smaller bucket juxtaposed with the larger one illustrates the ‘arrangement’ made for him. The two buckets in fact anchor the header to the picture very directly. In this combination, the name of the advertiser is nowhere in sight though this should have been the most prominent part of

the advertisement text. Therefore, when the eyes of the viewer glide from the picture to the header and back to the word 'plan' in combination with the flowing water, it metonymically means the Five Year Plans (arranging for every child to have access to water in the country) instead of the business plan of the company. Before reading the name of the company, it is difficult to understand what the text was advertising. Even the text begins by stating exactly that which the viewer might have already guessed from the picture and the header. It says that the 'National Plans' have taken care to ensure bathing water reaches every child and, to cooperate with the Plans, Hindustan Lever has made several brands of soap to guarantee a 'healthy bath to the nation'. Seemingly, since the advertiser was only a collaborator its name appeared right at the bottom and the soap in the picture was smaller than everything else. Actually, since this was not an advertisement for any one of the mentioned soaps in particular, the picture of the soap in the pictorial text is small (otherwise, the picture of the cake of soap would have to be large enough to see the brand name on it). The name of the company appearing at the end was a final touch; after reading a text full of ambiguities viewers would try to make sense of it and would finally learn that Hindustan Lever made soaps for healthy baths. Hence, the name of the manufacturer would remain in the readers' minds as a lasting effect. If they did not care to read the text in unreadable small fonts, in the first instance, both the name of the company and the picture of a loving child would catch their attention and they would form a connection between the two. The focal point of the advertisement text is the picture of the playful child from whom attention would then radiate to the other points. In the child a reader could see her own child and remember the name of the company in connection with him or her just as Lux was remembered in association with popular actors and Lifebuoy in connection with a jubilant youth (both produced by Lever Bros). Although national planning and development could have inspired a section of the viewers, in the advertisement text there were many other pleasure points.

The style of advertising in the name of the nation continued during the post-Independence period too, however, and was used by foreign companies and MNCs during a period when the boycott of foreign goods had become irrelevant and so had the producer-consumer partnership of constructive *Swadeshi*. The producers tried to or thought they would still be able to thrive on the ground as a result of the producer-consumer pairing of the *Swadeshi* (anti-imperialist) era, but the question is what the consumers read in the advertisements. If the mentioned basis still worked, then evidently consumers had already lost sight of its historical context, meaning that it had lost its political edge and had become a myth; otherwise MNCs would not have been able to use the trope. The nation was, in these cases, just a take-off point for advertisements – a take-off point that was actually a meeting ground for all consumers from where each could choose their own route. No other common ground was yet in sight although fashion was showing its promise very faintly from the mid-1950s.

An apt example to explicate the point would be the advertisements of the 'Watch Makers of Switzerland' – by no means an indigenous entrepreneur. The Watch Makers of Switzerland (*Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 24 November 1952) begins by saying that four large laboratories have been set up in India within five years and then informs the reader that in all major laboratories one would find clocks made by them. 'Precise time is required to run ships' means readers can understand that this watch is supposedly used by serious (the expression of the man) professional men who understand machines (his right hand is on a machine that he handles deftly while his gaze is fixed on this band of watch). His manner of handling the machine without looking at it is a proof of his efficiency; but from his 'efficient right hand' the reader's gaze would glide onto the watch on his left hand – the relationship between his efficiency and the efficiency of the watch would thus be established. Nevertheless, this efficiency and the source of or aide to the efficiency is meaningful, according to the advertisement, only in the context of the 'developing nation'. In the process, through both the header and the long text below, the picture of the developing nation is advertised while the pictorial text advertises the watch that is part of and partly a cause of the development.

People who wore the watch and worked in laboratories, steered a ship or developed the nation were portrayed as important and wise. In the inside/outside dichotomy they were parts of the outside – they controlled that sphere – that was important. The watch would acquire meaning from this importance, not from how it had been serving the nation. Probable consumers would desire to purchase the importance via the watch not patriotism. Since by the 1950s the nation had been transformed in ads, from a struggling proud community to a progressive state, it had also become a ground, a geographical space, where citizens could be persuaded to play important roles and/or desire importance. The nation had become such a trope that in another advertisement of the same brand a woman is seen with the same heading 'Time and Nation' although the advertiser could not offer any reason as to why the woman would require punctuality; at least in the context of the growing nation her role remained unspecified. There, a fashionable woman was portrayed to allure consumers; they were expected to desire fashion, modernity signified by the model's style of dressing and her ability to negotiate the 'outside'. The latter ad furthers the point that the nation in ads was often a pretext, more in the post-Independence period, transparent enough to enable consumers to read real encoded messages.

The next two examples of Horlicks further exemplify the point. The Horlicks advertisement of 10 December 1955 in *Ananda Bazar* entitled 'Bravo Yadu!' showed a weak young boy. The doctor prescribed him Horlicks to regain his strength and energy to play and enjoy life. However, he did not use the regained vigour for personal pleasure. He overheard his father say, 'We all ought to do something for the flood (relief) this year' (emphasis added). On hearing this, with full energy, he organised a charity cultural show for the purpose and his work was highly acclaimed.

From fatigue to energy is a mental journey; the next step would be to buy the product. The advertisement structure encouraged readers to move along with the characters of the stories. By the time the journey ended, the problem posed by the advertisement became universal and its solution, common sense.

There is a basic difference between Yadu and the little boy of the advertisement of Qumaresh. While the male child of Qumaresh represents all 'vanguards of the nation', Yadu is an individual (by virtue of having a name the story becomes the story of a successful boy) evoking aspiration in other boys similar to him in sex, age, and physical condition. Throughout the advertising text, he occupies the centre stage position that would draw general attention. His mother too is showered with attention as the mother of the booming boy.

The next advertisement for Horlicks of the same year makes the focus of the producer even clearer. It is the story of a railway clerk especially responsible for transporting relief material for the people of the nation. In the latter advertisement, a railway employee failed to concentrate on his work and irked his superior. Later, his colleague advised him to drink Horlicks – a sweet, malted, hot milk beverage sold in powder form – to regain energy. It worked wonders and he was able to please his superior to the extent that the latter recommended a promotion for him. Advertisements of indigenous health products of the late 1940s encouraged customers to look beyond the nationalist logic but as members of the nation/community, whereas Horlicks' advertisements stirred individual ambitions in the customers, keeping the image of the nation faintly in the background; it proposed creating individual members of the group competing with each other instead of with the 'other'. Without any reference to competition, these advertisements told success stories of individuals rather than of a group and thus paved the way for advertisements of the 1960s that overtly spoke of outshining others without even any tangential reference to nation. The former bestowed the distinction of patriotism on the consumers but did not try to sell it through the products. The advertisements took off from the sentiments of the consumer–producer patriotic partnership of the *Swadeshi* movement and tried to continue the spirit to create brand allegiance. The latter kept the nation in the background but sold supposed means of personal achievement.

There is no denying that what we today mean by consumption, shopping spree or consumption as a mark of personal identity was absent not only during the 1940s but also during the 1960s. However, one needs to understand consumption not as a mere habit or subjective trait but as an economic phenomenon/material activity in a concrete situation and, therefore, it would be slightly off the point to compare the intense desire to consume of the neoliberal era with that of the period under discussion. Besides, there is little doubt that even before *khaddar* became a mark of identity and part of a lifestyle of the Bengali nationalist, Bhadrakol of the early twentieth century played the same role. Nevertheless, along with being the marks of identity of individuals, they identified the individual with a group with a higher

ideology, and however much some might have faked the identity by merely wearing *khadi*⁹ or *dhoti*,¹⁰ the symbols emerged out of and entailed struggles that even the unworthy could not forget. Hence, to associate these with mere consumption to my judgement would not be appropriate. While at present when one uses a sling bag ‘like’ an artist or as a signifier of intellectualism, or teashops serve tea sans milk in small glasses from an aluminium kettle as signifiers of ethnicity that a special group of people are able to appreciate, neither marker retains any connection with their source and their history (in case of the former especially) is not remembered. I argue that this makes the consumption of these a mere act of consumption, when consumption alone has the power to define a person. On the other hand, using a soap, a perfume, hair oil, or a watch even if in the name of the nation could not be for the nation, ultimately the consumption practices are for self-aggrandisement and the advertisements are fashioned to lead consumers towards that.

The advertised nation and the nation-state

In this section I deal with advertisements of products and services produced by the government/government undertakings of the post-Independence period to show how these advertised the commodities along with the efficacy of the nation-state. In these ads the nation obviously meant the state and was a growing and progressing entity. My purpose however is to show how consumers might have read the advertisements. The reading entailed not only looking beyond the nation but also the outright rejection of the encoded message that advertised the benevolence of the state. At the same time, I mention without going into the detail, advertisements for certain capital goods by private companies and/or MNCs that spoke in terms of the nation to show how the meaning of the term nation had changed along with the purpose of its use in ads.

The two advertisements for tea, cited later, are from 1955 though they have reappeared during subsequent years as well. Personification of tea in a particular style and their successive appearance (each appeared twice every alternate week) make them a series. These did not advertise the product as a luxury product, but rather advertised the importance of tea production as an activity for the national benefit. It appears that when the government encouraged the production of a commodity it ought to be neither for luxury nor for private profit. Hence, it was necessary to project the tea industry as one with accelerating effect on other industries and as a vital product.

In the picture of the advertisement published in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* on 2 September 1955 ‘Tea’ says, ‘My name is Tea – I correlate many industries.’ At the end of the text, Tea says once more, ‘My name is Tea – I help other industries.’ The written text below explains how transport, fertiliser, cement, pottery, and some other industries can keep growing simply to satisfy the needs of the tea plantations and industries. While speaking of the plywood industry the advertisement raised the issue of nationalism more

directly. According to the text, by catering to the tea industry alone, the plywood industry has developed manifolds in India and stopped the import of plywood crates to conserve national wealth and provide employment to thousands. As a mark of the interrelation, there is a chain bordering the text with the names of the above-mentioned industries written on each link of the chain. The chain obliterates the distinctiveness of the industries and makes the tea industry a part of the industrialising process that benefits the nation. Here the nation is not merely a collective but a collective under a system and has formed the beneficent nation (state).

The other advertisement, also from the Tea Board, printed in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* on 15 October 1955, is a further case in point. Here, with one leafy hand on his waist (a proud gesture) 'Tea' introduces himself, 'My name is Tea – I keep the nation's industries alive.' The end line explicates, 'I provide energy to the workers.' Below him, in the picture, is the drawing of factory shades towards which 'Tea' extends another of his leafy hands. The board in the adjoining text, after explaining the importance of tea-breaks to enthuse workers, encouraged factory owners to open canteens to provide tea to the workers at the expense of the Tea Board. There is in between the lines another message: workers need tea-breaks not to take a rest but to increase production. By implication, it defined the nation as an army ever ready to further the interest of the collective – the Tea Board would supply the means to fulfil their wish to work for the nation. It is to be noted that the suggested tea-break was not a reward for increasing production but a means to do so, because increased production in the industries of the nation (the geographic space) was itself the reward for the nation (the people of that geographic space).

These advertisements (there were four more ads of the type at the time) posed consumption as a duty towards the nation-state although it would be amusing to think how the Communist activists discussed methods to counter the very structure over several cups of tea every day. In the context, I would mention that they drank many cups of tea to kill hunger for they could not always afford food; on the other hand, the upper echelons of Indian society considered it fashionable to drink tea even when tea was a 'colonial drink' and continued to do so when it became a 'nationalist drink' (Gautam Bhadra 2005). In other words, whatever an advertisement professes or pretends to profess, people would always have their own reasons to consume a product and among different sections of consumers the same product might be imbued with different symbolic meaning. Tea, for example, was soon associated by the middle-class Bengali with either Communist activism and/or intellectualism but curiously enough never with nationalism, especially from the late 1950s and 1960s. Roadside teashops were meeting places for *adda*¹¹ of the disgruntled youth of the 1970s, with no connection with nationalism/patriotism whatsoever and yet statistics say internal tea consumption increased from 15 per cent before independence to 31 per cent in the 1950s. Since then the rise has been uniformly constant. The statistics and common experience would show that while the meaning of patriotism has changed, or patriotic feelings might

have ebbed over time, the consumption of tea has become part of Indian life. The Tea Board does not need to advertise any more to encourage people to drink tea. Private producers do not need to teach consumers to make tea in their ads as they did in the 1950s. These days tea consumption does not signify anything except a longstanding habit although one's tea cups or mugs or the tea joints one visits signifies class to the middle to upper middle classes.

From commodity I now move onto services to show how the nation was used to encourage consumption or, more importantly, to change patterns of consumption. On 4 February 1962, Tourism Development of India advertised in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*: 'To know India tour your motherland'. (Instead of tour, the Bengali word used was *darshan*. It means to see but at the same time has a religious connotation.) The accompanying picture – a conglomeration of several religious relics of India – underpinned the spiritual component of the advertisement. Nevertheless, the advertisement indicated a religion of a different kind; the few lines below the picture roughly attempted to describe the motherland as 'a panorama of diverse sights, sounds and color'. By using lexis such as *darshan*, 'motherland' (to merge the archetype mother with the country) and by using pictures of religious relics, the advertisement infused secular tourism with a religious fervour to make the practice seem traditional and necessary. Secular tourism gradually became popular in India, but the middle-class Bengali for a very long while – up until the late 1960s at least – went to Puri (Odissa) not to enjoy the beach but primarily for the Jaganath Temple, or they visited certain parts of Bihar to recover their health. *Wanderlust* took more time to develop and advertisements both government and private (Kundu Special was the oldest Bengali touring company) increased popular interest without doubt. However, the moot point was, could the government advertisement encourage the probable consumers to perceive the country as *Devi* or the archetypal mother as they gradually took an interest in tourism? It is important in this context to mention that the Kundu Special did not advertise 'in the name of the nation' and yet it remained a trusted name up to the 1970s or before more touring companies appeared on the scene, to most Bhadrakol Bengali who cared to travel for pleasure. On the other hand, newspaper reports would prove that despite this and many such advertisements the 1960s was a period of regionalism/separatism/micro-nationalism. I quote two such reports to explain the point.¹² The quoted reports apparently have little connection with tourism, but they definitely show that the advertisement appeared at the time when middle-class Bengali, for various reasons, had begun thinking more in the terms of West Bengal than India. My purpose is not to examine the cause and nature of these feelings, but to show that although ads are capable of popularising commodities and services, they cannot guarantee the transmission of the connotation or the sub-textual meanings to the consumers of the ads. It is therefore important not only to read the connotations along with Roland Barthes but also to match the readings with different particular situations to understand that people consume for reasons of their own, and more even derive meanings

from commodities often independently of the media. One may agree with Stuart Hall and say that encoded messages are not always decoded in the way desired by the media (Hall 2009)¹³; they may be decoded in some other way or parts of the message may even be resisted by some members of the target class.

In most of the post-Independence advertisements, the nation instead of being an identity was rooted in time and within a specific geographical area and properly speaking with measurable quality. The developmental factor of individuals and of the collective within a specific time and space was mentioned in these advertisements without any reference to the power equation. Emerging out of a historical context the image of the nation deserving service and subsuming its people had become so pure that it could be used even when the context had changed – it had become a myth (Barthes 1993). It enabled advertisers to connect their products with the nation (at times forcibly) while enabling consumers to see through the image to things of their own interest.

In fact, newspapers were so full of information about national development and about debates centring on them that people were attuned to feel an interest in these. Conditioning readers/consumers was important for entrepreneurs producing capital goods because:

[a] plethora of government financial institutions ... set up for distributing government funds to private business at rates of interest which were negative in real terms ... have been attested to by a report of a government committee, the Industrial Licensing Policy Inquiry Committee.

(Patnaik 1995)

Otherwise, in the first place, they need not have advertised in news dailies at all for their chief purchaser was the government, and hence there was again no reason for them to make any effort to impress the public with reference to nationalism unless they wanted to justify their mode and method of existence. I would argue that, like government advertisements, these too advertised a benevolent nation that could be an apt milieu for consumption because while Tata produced steel, it also manufactured soaps and oil (at the Tata Oil Mill). Moreover, capital goods and consumer goods industries are interrelated and interdependent in more than one way.

Although the chapter focuses on advertisements of consumer goods primarily, I cite one advertisement from Tata Iron and Steel to explain my point. Tata did not follow this mode of advertising alone; among others were Stanvac, Burma Shell, and Sahoo Cement.

Tata Iron and Steel Company Limited (TISCO) advertised itself on 30 November 1955 in *Ananda Bazar Patrika* as a 'non-government organisation forever devoted to the service to the nation'. The first part of the advertisement seems reluctant to advertise the company; instead, it shows concern over India's low rate of literacy because the roots of development are in people's

growing awareness of the same. Even the accompanying hand-drawn picture shows a rural young boy studying. The next part shows through statistics how Tata had increased its production of iron and steel (without any mention of the profit it had made) because iron and steel were important to the likes of the boy pictured. To educate the millions, it said, paper was needed, and iron and steel was needed as in other industries, in paper mills as well. In the process, the advertisement also mentions with statistics the growth in paper production during the preceding five years. There is thus a seeming altruism even in the mode of advertising – the semantic value of this gesture is immense. It could mean that Tata, instead of advertising its industrial prowess, was speaking for and about the nation in connection with which its name *had* to appear because one could not talk about (development of) the nation without mentioning Tata. Inconsistency lies elsewhere too – between the linguistic and pictorial text of the advertisement. While the linguistic text speaks about the industrial progress already made and the high target set for the next five years, the picture depicts the traditional Indian tradesman and a young boy in rural traditional costume. As subsequent advertisements of Tata aptly show, it never depicted the urban Indian populace, who were the product of the new industrial development that the advertisements highlighted. While the rural traditional image of India was thus highlighted as ‘the India’, it, on the other hand, tried to strike a balance between the Gandhian vision of development and the Nehruvian programme of development in operation. Moreover, it addressed the business community of India that survived during the colonial era through a traditional caste/community-based network that was at the same time inter- and intra-communal. Tata subtly made itself part of the network while figuratively holding onto the tradition that was non-government/private beyond the state.

Conclusion

As various industries both indigenous and foreign/MNC and those owned by the government advertised in the name of the nation, multifarious images of the same nation circulated through the advertisements – from a proud community with common traditions and a golden past to a geographical area, a nation-state to a growing entity – each was, depending on the prevailing political culture, as seductive and yet as volatile as the other. In advertisements, the nation was either a pretext or justification for consumption, or a thriving space where one could happily desire for more. Nevertheless, consumption has a life, logic and hence dynamic of its own; within that frame consumers might need the logic or pretext offered by the advertisers, but that necessity would never be permanent. For example, suffice to say that by the time of the third general election *Ananda Bazar Patrika* was publishing interviews and articles that exposed public disillusionment with national planning and the ruling party. There were news items too that viewed several national issues critically, especially those related to development. News about regional unrest

and micro-nationalist movements, on the other hand, betrayed the fact that popular faith in the nation as a homogenous entity was showing signs of crumbling. And yet, the number of published advertisements, the language of these and the increasing variety of goods and number of brands advertised during the period following the 1960s clearly indicated that consumption was on the rise in India. This was in spite of popular unrest, the ebbing faith in the nation-state and the receding sense of national pride so much so that advertisers per force changed their mode of advertising and all references to nationalism vanished at least from the advertisements of private entrepreneurs from the middle of the 1960s.

Notes

- 1 Gahatraj, K. Mani. 2019. <https://www.ghumakkar.com/kalimpong-in-50s-life-was-like/>, last accessed on 08 April 2021.
- 2 Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. 1991. *To the Women*. Translation by Reba Ray. Kolkata: A. Mukherjee and Company Private Limited. Bengali translation of a collection of his letters and articles published in *Young India* and *Harijan* and lectures delivered in different parts of India and Singhal – now Sri Lanka.
- 3 Ghosh, Benoy. 1995. *Kalpenchar Naksha*. Agra: Bihar Sahitya Bhavan.
- 4 A coloured spot, usually red, painted between the two eyebrows by Indian women. It is worn to signify the married status. Widows customarily are debarred from wearing bindi.
- 5 One of the greatest Sanskrit poets and dramatists of Ancient India. He was the court poet of Chandragupta II (380–415 CE).
- 6 Incense previously used in India.
- 7 *Nayika* means in common parlance the female protagonist (now in films usually). However, in the context of Indian classical literature and painting, a *nayika* is not only the female protagonist but also the ideal lover though not the spouse, most often. Therefore, in classical Indian love paintings the *nayika* is Radhika, the lover of Krishna according to Vaishnava literatures.
- 8 In this connection I would point out that while other soaps of the time were packed in fine coloured papers, Mysore Sandal was packed in white thin paper in which jewellery were wrapped and the off-white colour cardboard box with colourful floral designs resembled Indian traditional jewellery boxes. The traditional look was given to make the soap stand out in the crowd of foreign brands of soap but the choice of the design also signified richness, luxury, and pleasure – the very obvious symbols associated with consumption.
- 9 Indian home spun cloth. Gandhiji insisted that Indians wore khadi material to boycott foreign (English) goods. However, though the term khadi was not in use the same tactics was adopted during the *Swadeshi* Movement.
- 10 A loincloth usually white with or without a border, worn by Indian males though slightly out of fashion now. However, there are occasions on which it is desirable to wear a dhoti. Moreover, it is in vogue partly in the rural areas. The cloth is not simply wrapped around; there is a specific way that it is worn. Regional peculiarity of style is also not uncommon while the style would also depend on class.

- 11 *Adda* means a gathering or a place for gathering but in common Bengali parlance it means chatting and discussing several things and the word is often used together with a verb.
- 12 1 January 1962 Indira Gandhi quoted ‘Bengalis will certainly love Bengal, but everybody should think (in terms) of Indian citizen (ship)’. The following day, however, the same newspaper commented on unemployment thus, ‘it is known from those concerned that certain institutions are continuing with their policy of not appointing Bengalis. This has increased the number of unemployed Bengalis.’ It is to be noted that the news was on the unemployment problem of West Bengal, which comprised both Bengalis and non-Bengalis. ‘Grievous result of differential distribution policy of the authorities: Coal-famine in coal-rich Bengal. Severe industrial crisis in near future feared’. *ibid.* 18 January 1962.
- 13 Hall, Stuart. 2001. Encoding/Decoding. In Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner (Eds), *Media and Cultural Studies (Keywords in Cultural Studies)*. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, p. 171.

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6 Consuming the home

Creating consumers for the middle-class house in India, 1920–60

Abigail McGowan

In September 1946 the Cement Marketing Company of India published a glossy book of architectural plans entitled *Sixty Designs for Your New Home* (Figure 6.1). Evoking the optimism of a country heading towards independence, the book offered modern houses to suit a range of budgets and requirements, from modest bungalows priced at Rs 11,000 to luxurious mansions costing over a lakh. Each page offered basic floor plans along with an artist's rendering of an exterior – with the house usually situated on an expansive plot of land, a car parked prominently outside. Basic cost estimates given with the plans simplified the creation of a house to a basic market transaction: pay this much and the house will be yours. Celebrating the happy result of such a transaction, the book's cover depicts a husband seated in his armchair studying blueprints as his wife gazes over his shoulder in admiration – although whether the admiration is directed at him or the plans, it is hard to tell. From the darker foreground where the plans remain on paper, the light in the background draws our gaze to their ultimate goal: a fully realised house, bathed in sun.

Sixty Designs for Your New Home was one of a series of design books published between the 1920s and 1960s that tried to reshape tastes in domestic architecture. The Concrete Association of India (CAI) – founded in 1927 by India's major cement producers as a central clearing house for information on the use of cement – was perhaps the biggest contributor to the field, with five titles between 1940 and 1966, many of which went through several reprints.¹ But there were many others, written by scholars, architects, engineers, government planners, and more. Published in a period of dramatic urban expansion in India, these books helped to imagine new modes of living in emerging suburbs, free of the traditionalism, poor sanitation, and rough-and-tumble of urban cores. Servicing that imagination, this was an era of professionalisation in architecture, engineering, building contracting, and even interior designing, with newly trained experts eager to create homes and home furnishings.²

Books like *Sixty Designs for Your New Home* offered new styles and construction options, promising domestic bliss in thoroughly modern forms to Indian readers. To some extent, this was a national story (e.g. Desai et al. 2012). Architectural books across India often featured strikingly similar



Figure 6.1 Front cover, *60 Designs for Your New Home*, Bombay: Cement Marketing Company of India, ACC Limited, India, 1946.

designs, deliberately evoking national audiences through titles such as *Indian Architecture* (Iyer 1920), *Modern Ideal Homes for India* (Deshpande 1939), or *The Modern House in India* (Concrete Association of India 1943). Published in English, these books aimed to transcend regional differences. As engineer R.S. Deshpande put it, he wrote in English rather than Marathi in order to reach ‘a greater number of readers in all communities distributed over all parts of the country’ (Deshpande 1935: v). The very portability of pattern books made them a crucial technology in the spread of common styles across broad geographies.

The fact that Deshpande lived and worked in Poona, however, is probably not coincidental. Despite some prominent titles published elsewhere, a significant number of mid-century pattern books were produced in western India by Deshpande, the Bombay-based CAI and others. That regional dominance was the result of a combination of developments. To start with, architecture first emerged as a profession in India in Bombay, with the subcontinent’s first architectural diploma course begun in the city in 1913 and the Indian Institute of Architects founded there in 1925 (Billimoria 1942). Bombay continued to dominate the profession throughout mid-century, boasting half of the 200 licensed architects practising in all of India as of 1947 (Lang et al. 1997: 143–6,

190). Industrially, the Indian production of cement – so necessary for modern construction – first emerged in 1914 in western India and remained heavily concentrated in the region for years. In terms of construction methods, in the 1920s Bombay had more professionally trained builders than elsewhere, boasting 33 contractors qualified to build in concrete as compared to 12 in Calcutta and only one in Delhi (Tappin 2003).

Books of house plans in India are part of a much wider, global history of architectural pattern books. In the United States, for example, nineteenth-century authors like A.J. Downing established broad demand for regularly reprinted books – books which helped solidify the professional claims of architects as uniquely trained experts distinct from mere builders (Clark 1986). The popularity of nineteenth-century pattern books brought common designs to small towns and cities across the country, even as individual builders modified patterns in construction (Upton 1984: 136–42). Standardisation was even more thorough in the twentieth century, when industrial production of building materials enabled US sales of house kits via catalogues from Sears, Roebuck, the Alladin Company, and others (Erbes 1998; Upton 1984).

Indian pattern books shared much with their global counterparts. As in the United States, the history of pattern books in India is only partially the history of built space, since builders more often used plans as a source of inspiration than directly translated printed ideas into three-dimensional form. In India as well as globally, pattern books are thus important partially for their immediate influence on built landscapes but also for what they reveal about contemporary understandings about domestic architecture. As a study of US pattern books notes, in every era writers describe ‘some aspects of the building process in great detail, but [are] silent on other key factors... The topics on which they lavished the most attention are those that were new at the time, or that they felt needed to be taught’ (Urban Design Associates 2004: 13).

For all their similarities, Indian pattern books differed from their global counterparts in the topics of instruction offered to readers. Whereas twentieth-century US pattern books featured standardised house kits composed of industrially produced elements, Indian books gave home-owners more active roles overseeing construction and imagining domestic life. In the 1920s and early 1930s books offered design advice in the context of earnest details about construction and home hygiene. After independence, construction details disappeared as new publications adopted a lighter tone, evoking comfort and sociability within depictions of the home as a site of leisure and consumption. Pattern books in India thus may have participated in global conversations about domestic designs, but they also developed their own trajectory. As such, these books have their own history to tell, one that, as Vikramaditya Prakash suggests for Indian modernism more generally, ‘is both inextricably linked to global modernism and is uniquely located in the history of India’ (Prakash 2011: 264).

Changes in pattern books are only one part of a larger story by which houses were remade in mid-twentieth-century India. Indeed, the larger project I am working on explores housing changes across classes in this period with a particular focus on Bombay, examining how home reforms offered a way to discipline the poor, define middle-class identities, express gender ideals, and build a new nation. My work builds off a spate of recent research examining housing and town planning policies in colonial India, emphasising public attempts to address urban overcrowding (e.g. Chhabria 2019; Kidambi 2007; Rao 2013; for earlier work, see also Conlon 1984; Gooptu 1996; Kumar 1987). It also builds off work by architectural historians tracing the development in India of new styles of domestic architecture (Chattopadhyay 2005; Desai et al. 2012; Glover 2008). Thanks to this scholarship, we know a lot about public initiatives in housing and new architectural practices. We know less, however, about how and why people responded to the new styles and modes of living. Questions of consumption are common to analysis of real estate markets from the 1990s onwards, when farmhouse developments and gated apartment complexes took over urban billboards across India. With this chapter I hope to propose some ways of thinking about desire and consumption in housing for an earlier era – an era when domestic architecture was very much in flux and when consumers sought out a range of publications offering advice.

Technical solutions for healthy homes: 1920s and 1930s

What appears to be one of the earliest books of house plans in India was published in 1916 by A.V. Thiagaraja Iyer, a self-declared architect based in Madras. Published with the patronage of some 25 princes from all over India (Desai et al. 2012: 124), the book originally contained three parts devoted to the history of Hindu architecture, principles of architectural design and modern architecture in India. It was the last part, however, which proved most appealing to the reading public, prompting Iyer to reprint it as a stand-alone volume in 1920. In that form, the book provided plans and elevations of different kinds of buildings enabling ‘the modern builder to copy or adapt the styles suitably to his own purpose’ (Iyer 1920: 2).

Iyer’s book is divided into 11 chapters discussing where to site a building, which roofs were appropriate in different climates, principles of light, ventilation, and drainage, how to ensure a healthy water supply, the durability and strength of different building materials, how and when to economise in construction, and a variety of basic design principles from symmetry to ornamentation to the value of Indian as compared to foreign styles. Sprinkled throughout the text were a total of 18 house plans, each depicted in multiple plates devoted to floor plans, side, and front elevations, and longitudinal sections. These plates offer a wealth of detailed information. Alongside construction-related elements indicating dimensions of walls and openings, instructions on social utilisation are offered via careful labelling of different rooms as bedrooms, drawing rooms, offices, and more. Finally, aesthetic

advice appears via plates illustrating how façades could be transformed by applying different ornamental styles.

Although Iyer's book was among the first of its kind, the genre soon grew, with several authors from western India entering the field in the 1920s and 1930s. One was Bhavnagar State Engineer Virendraray C. Mehta, who in 1937 published *Grihvidhan*, a comprehensive guide to planning and building houses, intended for those interested in building within a new suburban town planning scheme in Bhavnagar (Desai and Desai 1993; Mehta 1937). A writer who found an even wider audience was Poona-based R.S. Deshpande. Born in 1889, Deshpande was an engineer with the provincial Public Works Department who helped to organise one of the first housing cooperatives in Poona city. Experiences building homes for himself and his neighbours prompted him to write a series of books detailing construction principles and offering plans for small cottages, bungalows, and apartment buildings. Among his titles were *Building Construction Simplified* circa 1930, *Residential Buildings Suited to India* in 1931, *Cheap and Healthy Homes for the Middle Classes* in 1935, and *Modern Ideal Homes for India* in 1939. Enormously popular, the books enjoyed multiple printings, sparking construction in cities across western India.

Iyer, Mehta, and Deshpande differed on aesthetics. Whereas Deshpande advocated global modernism, Iyer and Mehta favoured traditional Indian styles reinterpreted for contemporary needs. But the three authors shared a common vision of what readers needed to know. For one, all of their books took a similarly educative stance, helping readers avoid disaster by walking them carefully through all the steps involved in creating a house, starting from site selection, through to creating plans and final construction. As Deshpande noted, too often people tried 'their own hand at planning without the necessary knowledge, discrimination and experience, which the importance of the work demands'. Lacking that foundational understanding, owners were at the mercy of builders who were unable 'to properly grasp the ideas of a decent living, and to provide the arrangements and comforts which a cultured man with a delicate and refined sense of decency, demands'. The result, Deshpande warned, would be inconvenient homes unsuited to climate, inviting unnecessary debt and marital strife (Deshpande 1931: 2–5).³

This is where advice books stepped in, to train the 'cultured men' of India to design and supervise the construction of their homes.⁴ The focus on education was visible first and foremost in the proportion of text to image in these early books. As suggested above, Iyer's *Indian Architecture* offered only 18 house plans in a book that ran to 232 pages. Deshpande's books were similarly text-heavy, ranging from *Building Construction Simplified*, which offered only written instructions and no plans, to *Residential Buildings Suitable to India*, which was a balance of half text and half plans, and others which fell somewhere in between those two extremes (Deshpande 1930, 1931).

Pattern books offered novel information for the intended middle-class audience, few of whom would have had any personal experience in construction.

First, advice books abstracted hands-on knowledge about how to build a wall, dig a foundation, or assemble a staircase into principles of load, drainage and stress. The emphasis was not on the *practice* of putting materials together, but on the underlying principles of *why* that might be done, of how the mechanics of things like light reflection or tensile strength determined different options. The practice was, in the end, beside the point; manual work would have been beneath the purview of educated, middle-class readers. Pattern books brought construction into the realm of modern, technical knowledge, subject to external laws and suited to the scientific worldview claimed by educated elites. That knowledge promised to reverse the relationship between middle-class home-owners and lower-class traditional builders. Rather than be dependent on builders – assumed to be ignorant of modern requirements – middle-class men would now be able to direct construction.

Second, advice books translated material three-dimensional realities into two-dimensional plans, reproduced in print. That itself was a novelty. As Mehta suggested, a book like *Grihvidhan* exposed readers to otherwise inaccessible ideas – inaccessible whether (for men) because local styles were limited, or (for women) because of restrictions on public mobility (Mehta 1937: 1–3). For most readers architectural plans would have represented an unfamiliar visual idiom, capable of communicating a broad range of ideas in compact form. To help readers understand this idiom, Deshpande offered a ‘Key to the Reading of Plans’ explaining common notations for arches, windows, doors, staircases, cupboards, and more (Deshpande 1931: 113). To further assist in the translation from plan to built space – and perhaps to highlight his personal experience supervising house construction – Deshpande regularly included photographs of houses constructed on the plans given, noting in one case that ‘no less than ten buildings have been erected on the scheme of the plan with slight alterations at different places’ (Deshpande 1939: 286).

In these books, house design appeared as a technical problem to be solved efficiently, through a combination of thoughtful layout and sound construction. Good buildings did have to honour aesthetics. For Iyer, it was ‘the adoption of apt aesthetic details ... more than any other factor, that makes all the difference between ordinary *building construction* and *architecture*’ (Iyer 1920: 202; italics in original). But whereas aesthetics were subject to changing fashions, authors admitted no debate about hygiene, sanitation and ventilation; those were practical problems, demanding the application of reason and scientific laws – reason and laws given extensive coverage in these books. Implicitly, by devoting more attention to construction methods as compared to aesthetics, these pattern book authors made visual appeal just one small component of the proper home.

Well aware that not all of their advice fitted with readers’ expectations, authors regularly deployed the language of economy to overcome perceived opposition. Anticipating popular desire for variegated façades, Deshpande argued that uniform window sizes saved money. Similarly, although a

high-ceilinged room might suggest coolness and repose, he advised that, 'For the middle-class people there is no better way of effecting a considerable economy than by restricting the height of floors' to eight and a half feet (Deshpande 1931: 18). Deshpande went so far as to warn that 'it is the social duty incumbent on everyone who wants to build a house, to practice economy wherever it is possible to do so. On the contrary, it is economically criminal not to do so.' But he also insisted that excessive cost-cutting could jeopardise the house, admonishing readers that, 'A strong and solidly-built structure proves to be cheaper in the long run. Only the rich can afford to pay the heavy maintenance charges of cheap and jerry-built structures, which is not possible for ordinary people' (Deshpande 1931: 16).

Such advice helped to translate built space into a series of consumer choices, carrying individual price tags. Deshpande was perhaps the most explicit about the monetisation of design choices, listing prices on each plan, and offering detailed tables pricing out building materials and wages (Deshpande 1931: 99–105). More broadly, Deshpande also sprinkled his advice with references to sale prices, returns on investment and housing markets. In defining what it means to have a well-designed house, he argued:

The *value* of a house designed for comfort will certainly be enhanced if it synchronises with external beauty. But a house with the best exterior may be found to be *a failure as an investment* when compared with a cosy, plain-looking cottage solely designed for convenience and comfort.

(Deshpande 1939: 4; italics added)

For all the financial importance of the house, pattern book authors also emphasised the social implications of house building. Different house plans implied different types of social relationships, allowing or necessitating variable distributions of labour within the house and varying levels of intimacy with those outside the house. Iyer, for instance, offered several plans in 'the Western model', which had rooms labelled 'office', 'study' and 'library'. Prioritising male intellectual pursuits within the house, these plans relegated kitchens to outbuildings, thus displacing women's work from the heart of the home and mandating a prominent role for servants (Iyer 1920: 98–100, 103). Other plans from both Iyer and Mehta assumed traditional ideas of female isolation, offering clearly demarcated zones for women at the rear of the house with open courtyards, kitchens, and service rooms for their particular use. Meanwhile Deshpande addressed concerns about domestic labour by creating designs for 'small middle class families' who could not afford cooks or ayahs. In these plans, kitchens provided room for both cooking and dining, so the housewife could both prepare food and serve her family easily. Rather than devote space to a separate nursery, the modest middle-class house might feature a verandah opening off the kitchen so the mother could keep an eye on children at play while cooking (Deshpande 1939: 38, 70–1; see Figure 6.2).

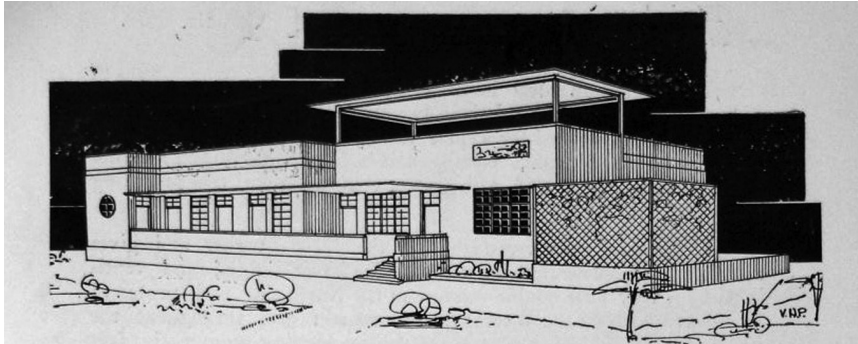


Fig. 42

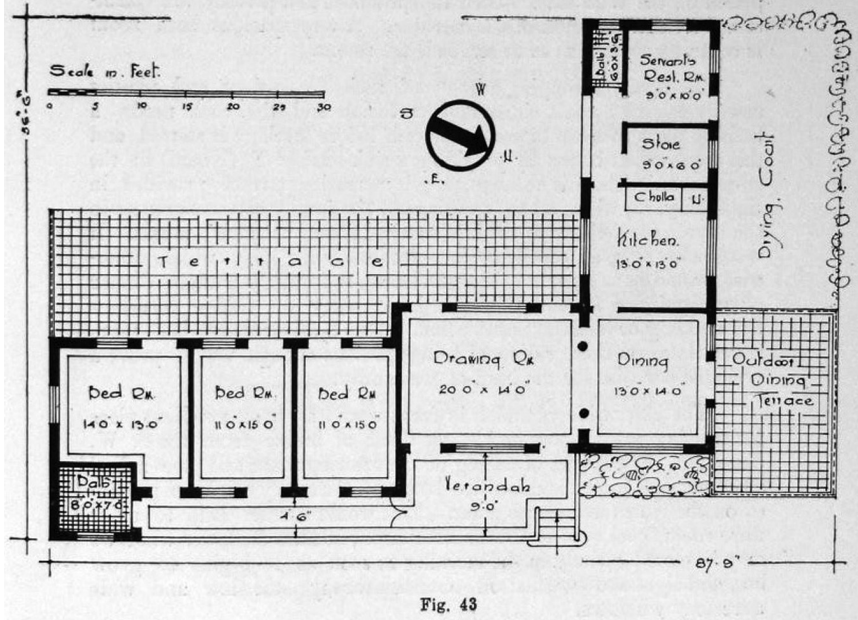


Fig. 43

Figure 6.2 Elevation and floor plan for a house on a 'commodious scale', with cost estimated at Rs. 7860. From R.S. Deshpande, *Modern Ideal Homes for India*. Poona, Aryabhushan Press, 1939, p. 153. Used with permission of the family of R. S. Deshpande.

If house plans gave physical form to ideas about the family, they also allowed owners to express their commitment to modern visions of health and sanitation – visions animating, as Will Glover has demonstrated, new strategies of construction across urban communities in South Asia (Glover 2008: 130–5). An impressive amount of space in these early books explored issues like how to connect to sewer systems, get enough fresh air into rooms and build latrines.

This focus reflected the new status of sanitary engineering and town planning at the time – fields which drew public attention to the health consequences of water, sewer, and garbage systems (Kidambi 2007: Chapter 7). Ignoring these issues, pattern books warned, could invite disaster. As Deshpande put it, the ‘Malaria, Typhoid, Anaemia, Tuberculosis, Neuralgic diseases, Cholera, Plague, etc., which take annually such a heavy toll of human life, owe there [sic] origin entirely to deficient light and ventilation, to damp, and to generally insanitary conditions in and around habitations’ (Deshpande 1935: 2). But attention to health and hygiene also reflected the spaces in the city where these new homes were to be built: emerging suburbs. In India, as elsewhere, moving to the suburbs offered a promise of escape from the dirt, pollution, and disease of densely packed urban areas (Archer 1997; Rao 2013). In an era of the medicalisation of the Indian middle-class family (Bose 1997), building anew in the suburbs offered a crucial way to improve health. As Mehta argued, ‘the many hazardous health effects of living in a city’ meant that ‘there really is no other decision to be made but to build one’s house outside of town’ (Mehta 1937: 7).

Architectural design books from the 1920s and 1930s offered detailed advice on how to build those new, sanitary homes in the suburbs. Insisting that owners understand construction principles well enough to supervise work, pattern books of this era promised to rationalise house building and align it to middle-class expectations. At the same time, pattern books insisted that different styles of houses could solidify class status, give shape to traditional or less traditional family relationships and secure marital harmony. Alongside the promises offered in pattern books, however, came threats: that poor choices invited material and medical peril. Design and build a house badly and it might collapse from damp, sicken its inhabitants with noxious air, or undermine class standing. Just as advertisements in the interwar years for health tonics, medicines, and soaps played on anxieties about bodily health and earning capacity (Haynes 2010), architectural books from the same era evoked concerns about how failures in domestic space might weaken the family. Building a house, then, presented both opportunities and dangers. Iyer, Mehta, and Deshpande offered to steer readers carefully away from disaster, towards personal achievement through home construction.

Envisioning the ideal: Dreams of home, dreams of concrete in the 1940s and 1950s

Compared to the dire warnings of house dangers offered in the 1920s and 1930s, pattern books in the 1940s and 1950s offered a decidedly sunnier tone. In place of an educational, text-heavy approach, publications now kept textual commentaries to the bare minimum, giving pride of place instead to artists’ renderings of houses set in lush landscapes populated by happy families (Figure 6.3 A and B). The CAI’s 1946 book *Sixty Designs for Your New Home*, for instance, featured seven pages of text compared to 60 pages of images. Even more dramatically, the CAI’s *The Modern House in India* (1943) presented only one page of text in a 72-page book filled with photographs

of recently constructed homes. In these books, visuals carried the burden of explanation, emphasising images of **complete home over construction processes**. This new era of pattern book placed earnest instruction with seductive promotion, emphasising themes of modernity, comfort, sociability, and contented domesticity.

The visual representation of house ideals had also changed. Pattern books from the 1920s and 1930s had offered detailed drawings, intended to provide specific guidance to builders. In his books, Deshpande celebrated that construction orientation, noting which plans had been used by readers to build their own houses (Deshpande 1939: 287). By contrast, the new generation of books in the 1950s and 1960s explicitly warned readers *against* trying to use book images to create a house on their own. As the CAI's 1966 book *Designs for Modern Living* put it:

This book is a book of ideas. In presenting it, our intention was to provide a source of inspiration for those who are dreaming of a house of their own... Let us emphasize that it is far from our intention that the compilation be used as a plan service or as a copybook. *We hope, and ask, that readers will not write to us for blue-prints. Indeed, none are available.*

(Concrete Association of India 1966: 4; italics in original)

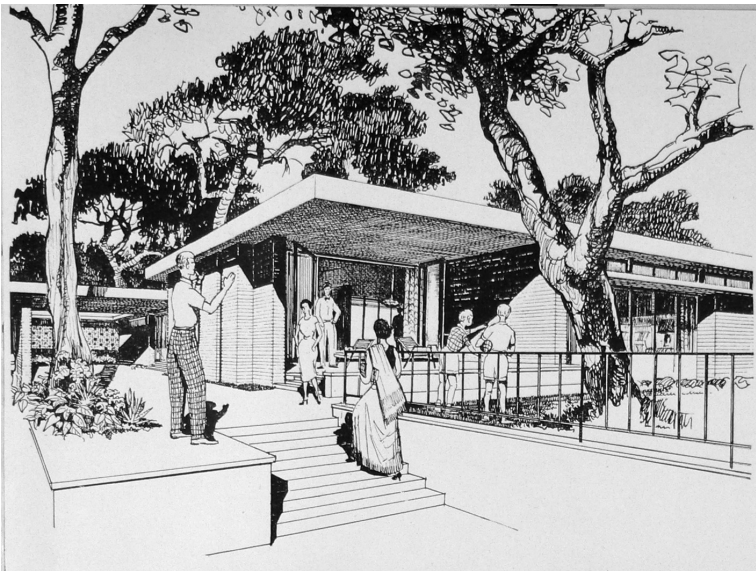


Figure 6.3 A and B A three-bedroom, four-bath house ‘surrounded by open terraces to permit frequent and informal entertaining’. *Designs for Modern Living*, Bombay: Cement Marketing Company of India, ACC Limited, India, 1966, p. 18.

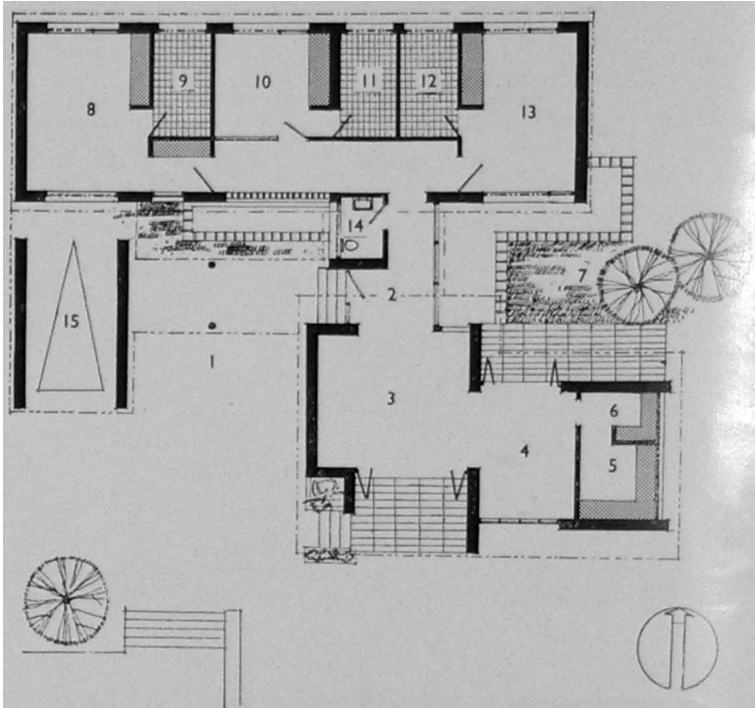


Figure 6.3B

Post-war pattern books offered designs annotated with only basic external dimensions and a general sense of the internal arrangement of rooms. Free of the visual clutter of detailed measurements, plans of this era emphasised the interrelationship of different parts of the house, visualising the spatial experience of various house options. Focusing on that interrelationship explicitly, Jaipuri architect B.L. Dhama grouped multiple small-scale plans together on single pages of his 1962 book *Domestic Architecture*. By comparing one plan to another, readers could see how moving an entrance or shifting the order of rooms affected the house as a whole. Although facilitating visual comparisons, Dhama's plans were rendered on a tiny scale, without corresponding elevations; this meant they would have been impossible to translate into built form. This lack of construction orientation was probably strategic. Although Dhama did not directly suggest readers hire him to prepare more detailed drawings, he did offer his home address to facilitate correspondence. Others were more explicit. In the 1947 book *Ideal Small Houses on Modern Styles Suitable in India* S.V. Puranik warned that 'No part of this book may be re-produced in any form [sic]', inviting anyone interested in building from his ideas to purchase 'detailed working drawings, showing

the details of doors & windows, staircases, balconies, railings, elevations, etc. on suitable scale' (Puranik 1947: 3).

To many readers, it may not have mattered that pattern book plans were unsuitable for construction, since so few could have built new homes anyway. During World War II and then well into the 1950s, India faced serious shortages of building materials, leading to strict government price and distribution controls that, in the case of cement, lasted until 1982. Under that regime of rationing, the government funnelled core materials towards 'essential' construction needs: schools, hospitals, dams, factories, and other areas of national priorities. Housing was considered a priority need, but only for some groups and only up to a point. Writing in a volume of house plans produced for a 1954 UN-sponsored exhibit in Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru affirmed the nation's responsibility to assure every family basic shelter – shelter that he defined as, at its minimum, 'two rooms, a kitchen, a lavatory and a small verandah'. The problem, Nehru warned, was that:

If we are to have large-scale house construction, we must give up the idea of encouraging very big houses... We have a limited amount of material and what goes in the very big house comes up to many small houses.

(Government of India 1954: 5–6)

Housing books from the 1940s and beyond acknowledged government restrictions on construction supplies. Given how many of the books were published by the CAI, which represented India's cement producers, shortages in the industry could hardly have been ignored. Government rationing provided an awkward backdrop for gauzy publications visualising a modernist, concrete-lined architectural future. *Eighty Designs of Buildings for Every Purpose*, for instance, noted in 1950 that 'The present shortage of building materials may perhaps make this publication seem inopportune' (Concrete Association of India 1950: vii). But that awkwardness was overcome more easily than one might think. Many writers simply assumed that conditions had to improve. Writing in 1947, Puranik declared confidently that 'It is certain that as the war is over now and the ban on the building materials being removed by the Government, private buildings will spring up in the new premises round about towns' (Puranik 1947: 3).

Looking forward to that better future, books of the era offered a vision of home that was anything but minimal. A 1966 plan for 'an orderly terrace of maisonettes', for instance, was presented as 'a carefully studied solution to the problem of housing small families in an economical – and yet gracious – way'. The design, however, offered a sense of style and spaciousness totally out of keeping with Nehru's vision of two rooms plus a kitchen crammed efficiently together. Here the ground floor of each unit had a kitchen, pantry and a living-dining room whose large plate-glass doors opened onto a small terrace and private garden; upstairs were two bedrooms, a balcony, bathroom,

and store-room (Concrete Association of India 1966: 24). Larger houses were even more luxurious, offering three or more bedrooms, carports, and sprawling outdoor spaces 'to permit frequent and informal entertaining' (Concrete Association of India 1966: 18). Many were specifically designed as second homes, including a lakeside retreat 'designed expressly to provide an escape from our daily routine – for a weekend or a whole summer or a winter holiday' and a 'mountain hideaway' built high above valleys to command 'a magnificent prospect of near and distant peaks shrouded in clouds or bathed in sunshine' (Concrete Association of India 1966: 34–5).

The authors of these books obviously did not assume that everyone *could* build spacious, four-bedroom homes, let alone mountain hideaways for weekend getaways. With so many in the country badly housed, if housed at all, these designs were pitched far out of reach of most Indians. And yet, pitched they were, with glossy images of sleekly designed exteriors, well-appointed interiors and gardens dotted with decorative pools. The point was not to sell practical details of how to build a house, but to offer dreams of what a house *could* be, with enough money, space, style and free time. In keeping with that focus on dreams, in the 1950s books stopped offering prices attached to individual plans. Much as window shopping taps into the pleasures of modern consumption without providing material fulfilment, in these books visions of home become ends in themselves, sources of entertainment in their own right. As the introduction to *Sixty Designs for Your New Home* put it, 'there are few things so amusing as planning one's future home and if this little book gives some slight assistance, we shall feel amply rewarded' (Concrete Association of India 1946: vii).

If not detailed information on how to build, among the things these books sold were aspirational lifestyles linked to modern architectural spaces. Strictly speaking, posing multiple figures in a drawing made it harder, not easier, to understand the structure depicted, since often people obscured key elements. And yet the presence of those figures in CAI books, combined with evocative short descriptions of each building, was vital to establishing the underlying message: that the right kind of building could create the right kind of life. Thus in a 1946 plan for a four-bedroom house labelled 'An artistic design', the accompanying text emphasised how long verandahs connected the main living spaces to a 'secluded sunny garden in the rear', creating 'a happy sense of openness and freedom'. Upper terraces 'provide opportunities for sitting out in the invigorating morning sunshine' while the 'deep verandahs below with their cool shadows provide restful shelter during the later part of the day'. Underlining the opportunities for relaxation, the artist's rendering of the house showed three people reclining in sun and shade, with a fourth about to leave the verandah for the living room (Concrete Association of India 1946: 7).

That three of those people were clearly women is not accidental. Whereas earlier books offered designs that segregated space along traditional lines, by

the 1940s almost all plans assumed men and women would socialise together. Among the many houses presented in *Sixty Designs for Your New Home*, only two offered segregated male and female space. Both were decisively marked as exceptional, titled 'A Mofussil Type' or 'A Villa for the Mofussil' to emphasise that they were no longer appropriate for urban living (Concrete Association of India 1946: 22, 36). Later books ignore sex segregation entirely, rejecting a practice of continuing importance in many families of the time.

In keeping with this growing emphasis on home as a place to relax away from the pressures of the outside world, architectural books from the 1940s and 1950s stressed that home-owners should not get too involved in either design or construction. Construction, they warned, had become too specialised and technical for lay involvement. *Sixty Designs for Your New Home* advised readers to leave all questions of structure 'in capable technical hands and not unduly interfere or assert their pet theories'. As it noted:

[t]he designing and erection of a home are not such simple matters as many people, especially would-be owners, might fondly imagine. In short, they mean a skilled technical job, requiring the services of someone who is best trained in this field. That man is the 'architect'... It is the architect who has the expert knowledge for the proper correlation of construction methods, building materials, technical requirements and design technique suitable for the creation of good homes.

(Concrete Association of India 1946: iv, v–vi)

Eighty Designs of Buildings for Every Purpose similarly warned that:

Architects are to buildings and man-made environment what doctors are to health or lawyers to law... It is surprising, however, that while people are sensible enough to do the obvious thing by consulting a doctor where their health is concerned or a lawyer on a matter of the law, they almost invariably think nothing of spending large sums on the erection of structures without caring to consult a competent architect.

(Concrete Association of India 1950: vi)

The implication was clear: only those with money to waste, who had no respect for technical expertise, and whose sense of their own intellect was grossly inflated, would dispense with professional assistance in building a home.

The popular pattern books issued by the CAI and others in the 1940s to 1960s presented inspirational ideas aimed at clients – clients who would then presumably hire a professional designer. That focus is all the more obvious when CAI publications are seen in contrast to a separate genre of publications which emerged in the 1950s to serve the more specialised needs of builders. The pages of the *Indian Concrete Journal*, for instance, included highly technical articles on new innovations in materials or processes, offering building specifications that were well beyond the needs or abilities of an

average house-owner, with no attempt to translate them into layman's terms (e.g. Venkataram 1952). Similarly, while the Sahu Cement Services' 1964 book *Design of Houses* presented floorplans whose room alignments and proportions might have appeared in CAI books, the overall effect was entirely different (Sahu Cement Services 1964). Images here were practical and dense with detail, listing the total cubic feet of cement, steel and other materials needed for each plan, and specifying the numbers of doors and windows of different sizes required. Instead of the evocative titles given in CAI books – 'a luxurious modern bungalow', 'an artist's home', a 'well-proportioned bungalow suitable for country estates' (Concrete Association of India 1946: 9, 11, 25) – *Design of Houses* listed patterns by code only, carefully grouped according to the presumed income level of inhabitants.

As a medium of construction, concrete was particularly well suited to the bifurcation of publications into ideas as opposed to practical details. As many CAI publications pointed out, concrete offered a range of novel surface and structural possibilities. Using concrete, architects could puncture walls with more windows allowing more light, make spans wider allowing larger rooms, project out cantilevered balconies allowing an interplay of vertical and horizontal elements, and employ stronger pillars and lighter walls allowing taller structures (Concrete Association of India 1950: v–vi). But, crucially, all that could only be achieved with careful control of construction methods, since improperly mixed concrete, partially cured blocks or badly built moulds could seriously compromise structural integrity (Concrete Association of India 1959: 23, 30, 35, 36, 53). Success in concrete, then, required new expertise – expertise available from trained architects, engineers and specialised contractors. Highlighting that combined technical know-how, the CAI's 1943 *The Modern House in India* identified houses with the name of the owner, the architect and the general contractor, with an occasional mention of an RCC engineer or a cement plasterer as well.

In the early years of independence, the CAI did much to promote a vision of concrete as the only appropriate building material able to cope with India's housing crisis – offering speed and ease of construction, durability and structural strength at a time when so many were homeless or ill-housed (e.g. Concrete Association of India 1959). The association also, however, promoted a consumerist vision among elites, assuring upper-class audiences that their modern lifestyles were impossible without concrete. Books advised readers that 'concrete, with its wide range of possibilities for colour, texture, and pattern or shape, lends itself to every indoor and outdoor design for living' (Concrete Association of India 1966: 41). Separate publications promoted the use of concrete for floors, garden decorations, stairs, tennis courts, driveways, and swimming pools. Playful, small slogans in the margins of different CAI books bombarded readers with catchy appeals. Readers of *The Modern House in India* were advised to 'Build in concrete for fire safety, durability and economy'. Their fashion sense was called into play with the admonition to 'Build in modern style – build in concrete'. And they were

warned that ‘The first impression of a stranger on entering the gateway of a bungalow is obtained from the appearance of the driveway. Does yours create the right impression? Is it of concrete?’ (Concrete Association of India 1943: 41, 60, 55).

By the 1950s, architectural advice books offered an increasingly seductive image of the home, promising comfort and sociability rather than presenting the practicalities of drainage and ventilation. These books imagined a relatively narrow, and relatively passive, role for the reader: as a consumer of built space – preferably built and finished entirely in concrete – not an active participant in the creation of space. This shift from practical advice in the 1920s and 1930s to the inspirational ideas of the 1940s and 1950s was accompanied by a shift in publishing style, with severe black-and-white drawings giving way to lush coloured plates. Reflecting the declining cost of colour reproduction, the shift also represented a change in emphasis, from dimensions to inspirations. Evocative embellishments of furnishings, plantings, and inhabitants in the new images helped readers more fully imagine an ultimate home. They also perhaps encouraged readers to skip over all the stages between dreaming and actual habitation.

Few readers probably accepted such a passive role. The regular complaints about home-owners launching into construction ‘without caring to consult a competent architect’ (Concrete Association of India 1950: vi) suggest many continued to direct home projects on their own. Post-war books thus both advised passivity and acknowledged it as unlikely, insisting on the importance of trained experts even as they enticed readers to care enough about design to make their own decisions. Returning to the cover of *Sixty Designs for Your New Home* discussed earlier (see Figure 6.1), it is worth noting that the plans the husband holds so proudly are blueprints, drawn up by an architect or engineer; they were nothing he could have prepared himself or clipped from a book. On the one hand, this suggests professional exclusivity for designers and builders; from the comfort of his chair, the man need do nothing more than step forward into the brightly lit, fully realised concrete masterpiece waiting in the background, prepared by professionals. On the other hand, however, the image also suggests the centrality of home-owners to the process, responsible for sifting among the ideas offered in the inspirational drawings of books like *Sixty Designs* to create houses that suited their needs.

Conclusion

Architectural advice books of the 1950s and 1960s imagined house-owners as a particular kind of consumer, responsible less for supervising construction than for choosing between dreamy visions of the future. This is not to suggest that these later books ever fully displaced the thorough construction advice offered by Deshpande and earlier writers. As suggested earlier, Deshpande’s books proved popular well after independence. The ninth and final edition of *Modern Ideal Homes for India* came out in 1976, while the ninth and final

edition of *Cheap and Healthy Homes for the Middle Classes* came out in 1982 (N. Deshpande 2017). Books spanning the period of the 1920s to the 1960s shared a common understanding that the choice of a home was an act of consumption, reflecting the owners' temperaments, personalities and social relationships, but also their ability to deploy capital in the marketplace. The books from different eras just pitched that consumption in different terms. Whereas pre-war books treated consumer choice as a sober responsibility to be handled with care, glossy post-war publications layered a new level of consumer fantasy onto the process, offering dreams of generous rooms, spacious gardens, and smoothly cured concrete surfaces as the core of modern living. In this new vein, design books celebrated choice and discernment, lauding the readers' ability to shape the material world for the better and declare their identity through tasteful decisions. This, of course, even while advocating that real power should lie in the hands of architects, engineers, and contractors, all of whom insisted that their expertise triumph over the pet theories of would-be house-owners.

By the end of the 1950s, it was becoming easier for those with capital to build a house. More advice was available in print, more professional architects, engineers, and contractors were on hand to offer guidance, and there were more physical examples of modern homes in major cities to provide inspiration. Commercial real estate developers were increasingly buying up land and building modern bungalows for sale to the middle and upper classes, helped along by city officials who drafted town planning schemes converting urban space into middle-class residential enclaves. Even shortages of cement did not seem to slow the rate of construction, if the regular pictures of new projects offered in trade journals like the *Indian Concrete Journal* and the *Journal of the Indian Institute of Architects* are anything to go by. All of this smoothed the process of construction for those anxious to move out of city centres.

Indian design books emerged in the 1920s and 1930s to try to shape construction in newly emerging suburbs. In the 1940s and 1950s the number of publications ballooned, with key titles reprinted regularly in new and updated forms to meet steady popular demand. But it was not just those building new houses who provided the audiences for such books. As already suggested, even those who could not afford a luxurious weekend getaway or a sumptuous bungalow could still turn to pattern books for inspiration or an escape from less appealing domestic surroundings. Pattern books, then, shaped consumption on several levels. Most obviously, they tried to shape a market for houses, influencing styles, attitudes towards construction, faith in professional expertise, and the image of how a house could reflect self, family, and community. At the same time, however, the books were themselves objects of consumption, creating their own markets and exciting their own desires. Indeed, for all that plans increasingly glossed over construction costs, the price tags of books were always prominently displayed: Rs 1 for *The Modern House in India*, Rs 2 for *Sixty Designs for Your New Home* and Rs 5 each for *Eighty Designs of Buildings for Every Purpose* and *Designs for Modern Living*. As

such, these architectural books were not just a means to building a house, but an end in themselves, to be bought, read, pored over, and consumed in their own right.

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Notes

- 1 The Indian Cement Manufacturer’s Association (ICMA), which formed in 1925 to regulate cement prices, was the initial beneficiary of CAI efforts. When ten of India’s top cement companies united in 1936 into the Associated Cement Companies, Ltd (ACC), the ACC then took over control of the CAI (Associated Cement Companies 1954).
- 2 For the development of architecture as a profession, see Lang et al. (1997); for the development of interior design as a profession, see Chauhan (2007).
- 3 For similar warnings about how bad plans led to marital discord, see Iyer (1920: 218).
- 4 Middle-class readers were not left entirely on their own, of course. As with domestic management, child-rearing, hygiene, and other areas into which experts increasingly claimed the right of instruction and supervision (Bose 1997), architectural books put readers in a relationship of dependence on professional experts, even while sharing crucial insights. Iyer, for instance, frequently warned readers to consult experts (Iyer 1920: 150).

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7 Drink it the damn way we want

Some reflections on the promotion and consumption of coffee in India in the twentieth century

Bhaswati Bhattacharya

To the world outside India, the subcontinent is known for its tea among other exotic products. Until recently, even specialty shops in European countries offered no Indian coffee. Even within India it is hardly known that coffee has a longer history in the country than tea. Although the Sufi saint Baba Budhan is believed to have introduced coffee in India, *Coffea Arabica*, the most prized variety of coffee, was directly imported from Arabia to India through the usual Indian Ocean commercial and cultural links in the seventeenth century. The process of transplanting coffee from the highlands of Arabia to the hills in Karnataka must have followed the same trial and error method accompanying the history of the globalisation of other plants and commodities. A part of the peasant economy on a small scale since then, embedding coffee in the local economy was a European and Indian endeavour in the aftermath of the large-scale commercial plantations begun by the English in the 1830s (Bhattacharya 2014). Until the 1940s, India's share in the global coffee economy was insignificant and in the world statistics of coffee India was listed under the label 'others', indicating countries contributing less than 1 per cent to the total world coffee production (Pai 1966). Almost all the coffee produced in India was meant for export. It was only in the late 1930s that the Indian coffee industry turned its attention to the domestic market in an organised manner.

This chapter will focus on the policy of the Indian coffee industry about advertising and marketing coffee in the Indian market from the mid-1930s to the entry of the MNCs in the coffee café sector on a large scale in the 1990s. In promoting coffee, the industry sought a unique way of introducing Indians to the beverage by opening coffee-houses where people could drink coffee at a subsidised price. For 15 years after 1936, 43 outlets of the India Coffee House (ICH) served the beverage to Indians throughout the length and breadth of India. To what extent did the measure of opening the coffee-houses meet the goal of aiding the sick industry, and if a domestic market for the crop had emerged in between, what happened to it? I shall focus on the method of popularising coffee through the coffee-houses and the promotional measures of the industry with respect to the domestic market. I will argue here that promoting coffee in the home market became a concern only when the export

market was in shambles and the setting up of the India Coffee House as part of that promotion was viewed as a temporary measure. As soon as the global market looked positive again after World War II, exporting coffee became more profitable and the domestic market became secondary. What is more important is that this method of promoting coffee, with its effect on the pattern of consumption in a large part of India outside the coffee-growing states, left a permanent mark in the coffee sector continuing even into the new millennium.

Coffee has 50 species and sub-species, and of the two commercially important categories – Arabica and Robusta – the lion's share grown in India belonged to the former. The existing literature does not shed much light on the awareness of the early twentieth-century Indian consumer about the variations of the bean. A discourse between two equally strong, distinct strands is already recognisable from that time: one advertising 'pure' coffee in its 'unadulterated' form and another that sold coffee blended with chicory. A perennial herbaceous plant, chicory belongs to the dandelion family; the roasted and ground root resembling ground coffee is the most common coffee substitute and additive. The Continental System introduced by Napoleon resulted in sanctions being imposed on trade with France creating a shortage of coffee leading to the commercialisation of the practice of blending coffee with chicory. In erstwhile French colonies like New Orleans, chicory coffee is still called 'French coffee'. In India, while brands like Polson's advertised chicory-blend as 'genuine French coffee', the coffee popularly consumed in Tamil Nadu was (as it still is) also a chicory-blend. Indeed, most of the liquid coffee available in cafés and restaurants, and the branded ground coffee retailed to date, contains a good dose of chicory – sometimes the coffee to chicory ratio is as high as 51: 49 (Chandrasekharan 2017). Before delving into the details of marketing, it is appropriate to glance at the production of coffee in India.

Although India ranks sixth in the list of coffee exporting countries, its share of global coffee exports is below 5 per cent. Since its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, the commercial production of coffee in India has been dominated by small holders. Holdings of 10 ha and below constitute 98 per cent of the land under coffee and contribute more than 60 per cent of the coffee grown in the country (Achoth 2005; Bhattacharya 2014). The Coffee Act of 1942 that transformed the Coffee Market Expansion Board of 1940 to the Coffee Board stipulated that all coffee produced in India would be pooled by the Board. Since the inception of the Board, and especially since 1943–44, it became compulsory for every coffee estate to be registered with the Board. Save for a small quantity allowed for seed purposes and their own consumption, coffee growers had to submit all their coffee to the Board. With its control over collection and allotment in internal and external markets, the Board exercised a monopoly over the entire coffee crop in India (Gowda and Venugopal 2007).

The importance of coffee for the economy of the newly independent country and of the coffee-growing states can be understood from the

encouragement given to the production of the commodity after 1947. The Plantation Inquiry Commission (PIC) of 1954 recommended increases in both production and export. The area under coffee increased from 9,000 ha in 1950–51 to 140,000 ha by 1970–71 and 223,500 ha by 1990–91, and the quantity of coffee produced increased from 19,000 tonnes to 200,000 tonnes during the same period (Darvishi and Indira 2013; Giriappa 1995). The industry received a further boost in the mid-1990s when global investors were allowed a stake in this sector (Bhattacharya 2014). India, growing predominantly the Arabica variety, has shifted its interest since the 1950s to Robusta. As the name suggests, Robusta, or *Coffea canephora*, thrives better in the hot tropical climate and can be grown in areas lower than 900 metres in altitude. Grades of Indian Robusta dominating the domestic market also formed a major ingredient for instant coffee and the blends prepared and marketed in Europe. If the production and export of coffee had to be increased, it would be safer and wiser to focus on Robusta. The proportional fall in the quantity of the Arabica harvest relates to the fact that it can only be grown at high altitudes and also to the susceptibility of the plant to extreme climate conditions such as drought and frost, resulting in the supply fluctuating from year to year (Srinivasan 1950).

Initially the UK and France were the most important importers of Indian coffee (DGCII 1910: 4, 1911: 6). A new trend was ushered in after World War II when export to the United States and the East European countries opened up possibilities of expansion in the industry. Later again, the liberalisation of the Indian market provided new opportunities with increasing exports to Germany and Italy. After Brazil and Vietnam, India is the third largest exporter of coffee to Italy. Some of the best quality Indian Arabica, although highly prized in Europe for its subtlety and low acidity, is used for espresso blends by companies like Illy cafe and not sold as single origin coffee (Davids 2009; Urs 2013). Since the early 1960s a stable 62 to 65 per cent of the total production has been exported while domestic consumption has remained constant at 30 to 35 per cent (Chatterjee 1997: 4), a ratio unaltered in the new millennium.

Bringing coffee to the Indian consumer

Coffee was mainly an export commodity and only a fraction of the coffee produced in India found its way to the domestic market (DGCII 1898: 2). After the preliminary processing of the harvest in estates following either the dry or wet method producing cherry and pea-berry varieties respectively, the beans had to undergo a series of mechanised and manual operations under the process of ‘curing’ that implied removing all husks and parchments and converting the beans into clean, green beans, the commodity for trade. MNCs like Messrs. Aspinwall & Co. Ltd, Messrs. Volkart Brothers Ltd, Consolidated Coffee Estates (managed by Matheson & Co. of the Jardine, Matheson & Co. Ltd), Peirce, Leslie & Co. Ltd and Messrs. T. Stanes & Co. Ltd¹ were some

of the most important coffee-curing companies functioning simultaneously as commodity exporters (GOI 1956). The curing establishments collected the coffee from the estates via their agents.

Mainly an agrarian economy, positive trade surpluses helped the process of consumption in India during 1900–35 (Balachandran 1996; Charlesworth 1985; Tomlinson 1979). Although most of the coffee produced in the country was exported and there was no concerted effort to promote coffee in the domestic market, coffee became a major social institution in the coffee growing states. By the end of the nineteenth century coffee ceased to be a curiosity in South India, where it was ‘rather freely drunk by the native population’ (IOL, DGCII 1897: 2) to the extent that ‘there are *none but the poorest who do not drink coffee and no bazar so small that coffee is not procurable*’ (IOL, DGCII 1907: 4, 1910: 2, 1911: 4; emphasis added). In Tamil Nadu, if coffee had become a cultural marker for the urbanised middle-class Brahmins, lower classes in the countryside took to coffee as well (Venkatachalapathy 2006). In rural areas of southern Tamil districts like Tanjore and Tirunelveli coffee was consumed with locally produced palm jaggery (Hemingway 1906; Pate 1917; Stuart 1879).

The almost simultaneous reference to the availability of coffee in bazaars and the absence of a ‘*local market for coffee*’ (IOL, DGCII 1905: 2; emphasis added) is important in that it shows the reports distinguished between the formal, organised market and the informal bazaar demand. How to explain this inconsistency in the reports or, in other words, how did coffee reach the local market?

Among the first known players operating in the Indian market were Stanes & Co. (1886) and Narasu’s (Salem 1926), both in Tamil Nadu, retailing mainly pure coffee. Outside South India, Pestonji Edulji Dalal, aka Polson, the brand better known for its dairy products, rented a small shop in Bombay in 1887 where he used to grind roasted coffee using a manually operated grinder. He packed the coffee in paper bags and hawked it from door to door (Heredia 1997). Founded in 1902 as Messrs. Polson & Co., it became a limited company in 1909 (TOI 1909).

Both copy and visual in Polson’s adverts (see e.g. ‘Delightfully Refreshing’, TOI, 20 November 1924: 11) indicate that before independence, the brand targeted Europeans and rich Anglo-Indians. The copy of one such advert informs the consumer about the qualities of coffee. Of all available brands, Polson’s was the greatest ‘pick-me-up’ the consumer had ever tasted, and whether at breakfast, after dinner or after a session of tennis, a ‘piping hot’ cup of Polson’s coffee was refreshing and reinvigorating. There were also Amber Tips, Lipton, and other companies selling ground coffee under their brand name. Branded and packaged coffee was thus available in groceries catering to those with a Western taste, while coffee was served also in European clubs, hotels, and restaurants serving the elite.

The first coordinated attempt to ‘promote the sale and increase the consumption of coffee in India’ was initiated by the Indian Coffee Cess

Committee (ICCC; Coffee Market Expansion Board (CMEB) in 1940 and Coffee Board since 1942), the first statutory all-India organisation of the Indian Coffee Industry constituted under the Indian Coffee Cess Act of 1935). Overproduction of coffee in Brazil in the 1920s and the Great Depression adversely affected the world coffee market. With the outbreak of World War II, and especially after the occupation by Germany of Belgium, Norway, and France, a large part of the Indian export market was lost causing a crisis for the coffee industry. As the industry sought redress with the government, a scheme for the control of the coffee industry was drawn up by the representatives of all coffee interests in India.

The ICCC appointed the famous advertising agency John Walter Thompson & Company (JWT) to undertake research into the state of the domestic market and to chalk out a plan for 'propaganda' in the domestic market. According to a report by JWT, their survey of the domestic market in Bombay and Hyderabad during 1938–39 showed that consumption of coffee was limited to a few. Owners of restaurants were not convinced that they would be able to sell coffee to their customers. This report also stated that the coffee-houses were a brainchild of JWT, which agreed to initially manage the outlets on behalf of the Cess Committee. Among the other measures suggested by JWT was a demonstration truck to be stationed at major thoroughfares of towns for the distribution of free cups of coffee followed by a demonstration of coffee-making (JWT 1938–39).

The role played by JWT working under the instructions of the ICCC paying for the agency's work seems to have been conditioned by the industry's knowledge feeding into the market research. The Board's documents show that it took on board the suggestions of JWT to some extent. By 1948 there were 43 outlets of the ICH. From the very outset the outlets became a favourite spot in urban India during the 1940s and at least for a section of the urban middle class, a regular visit to the place was an indispensable part of their daily routine. In 1955, however, the Coffee Board officially decided to close or hand over most of the outlets (Srinivasan 1959). At the same time, convinced that North India was tea drinking, the Board seemed to have addressed a niche market. What did the Board do then to promote knowledge about coffee and its consumption?

Advertising coffee

Advertising is an important part of promotion and marketing. Marketing experts often underline the link between advertising and the Product Life Cycle (PLC) theory in this respect. According to this theory, there are certain recognisable phases in the life cycle of each product: market development, growth, maturity, and decline. During the first phase, the industry creates the demand for a product which is unknown. How long it might take to fully develop the market depends on the nature of the commodity, degree of its novelty, the presence of competitive products, and its place in consumer needs. The

growth phase is marked by an increase in the demand attracting competitors bringing the same product to the market. Maturity is symptomised by the saturation of the market when all consumer agencies use the product and sales increase on par with the population. The fourth stage sets in when too many competitive producers flood the market with the product ushering in a phase of mergers, buyouts, and other aggressive measures ending in the survival of the fittest and the concentration of production in the hands of a few. The industry needs to promote a product when it is introduced to a new market and the market is still growing. Promotion through advertising informs consumers about the nature and function of the product and tells the customer why they need it, pointing to its difference from similar products, if any. Once the market has attained maturity, providing information to the customer plays a less significant role in the growth of its market. The efficacy of using the PLC in organising promotion as part of successful marketing strategy is widely acknowledged (for example, Day 1981; Levitt 1965; Mercer 1985; Schultz and Rao 1986; Vernon 1966).

Comparing the promotion of coffee with that of tea in India, we see that from 1901 the Tea Association was distributing ‘piece packets’ of tea among the poorer classes. Albeit limited, this measure was largely discontinued in 1904 but had resumed by the mid-1930s. This was followed by a consistent policy of promoting the commodity in the Indian market (Lutgendorf 2012). By the time the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board was created in 1935, large advertisements in newspapers directly addressed the housewife instructing her about the qualities of tea and the method of brewing it (Bhadra 2005). When the tea industry took recourse to the mass media for promoting tea in the Indian market, tea was portrayed as *swadeshi*, an indigenous product, like *khadi* (homespun cloth). After World War II, large billboards in vernacular languages placed in retail shops and stations carried detailed instructions about how to brew tea. In the wake of the nationalist movement, tobacco and soap manufactured in India were also projected as indigenous products (Sinha-Kerkhoff and Rajagopal, respectively, this volume). However, despite the longer history of coffee in India where coffee had formed part of the Mughal culture, the fact was not underscored in the domestic market.

Advertising not only introduces a commodity to the market but by using visual images and language enshrined in a culture familiar to the consumer, it presents a cultural narrative – an image of the commodity enticing the consumer to purchase it (Burke 1996; Johnson 2008; Bhadra 2014). It is true that in the interwar Indian context, advertisement in the print media reached only a tiny segment of the population (Rajagopal in this volume) – the English educated urban middleclass. Yet, in an attempt to persuade the middle class, branded capitalism operating in the Indian market during the interwar period used advertisement to appeal to notions of conjugality, domesticity, health, and the idealised male body – concepts critical to the achievement of modernity (Haynes in this volume, and 2010). Advertisers often initiated

a ‘pedagogical project’ for winning the hesitant consumer over to using new commodities (Rajagopal 1998).

The last decades of the colonial regime denoted significant changes in the world of advertising and the role of women in middle-class households. In small nuclear households in urban India in the early twentieth century modern middle-class women, abreast of the details of modern home science, were redefining their positions, taking primary responsibility for household purchases (McGowan 1995, 2006, 2010). Since the production process of advertisements had shifted from Europe to India during this period, visuals produced by Indian artists addressed middle-class consumers appreciative of the everyday lifestyle in vogue in the West (Freitag 2010). The medium of advertising linking production and consumption paved the way for modern art to enter India (Guha-Thakurta 2017; Jain 2017).

In a series of commercials issued in 1949–50, the Central Tea Board presented tea as an anytime, anywhere social, familial drink. In one such commercial we see a mother putting her baby to sleep. The accompanying text borrows from a popular Bengali lullaby. In the original lullaby the mother pleads with the mythical lullaby-aunts to visit her house, put her baby to sleep and receive betel, customarily consumed, and offered to guests. The mother in the commercial promises the aunts bowls full of tea in exchange for their favour. The last line of the copy contains the heart of the matter – she must make tea for her husband who is soon expected to come home [from the office]. The commercial thus drew from traditional practices while playing on the tension of the modern, ideal multi-tasking housewife in an urban nuclear household who had to put the baby to sleep so that she could devote her attention to the refreshment of her husband, who was coming home at the end of a tiring day at work.

Branded goods around the time thus targeted the educated urban middle class – predominantly the new consumer whom advertisements tried to educate as in the case of tea, and as the chapters by Ghosh, Haynes, McGowan, and Rajagopal in this volume suggest.

Coffee brands like Polson’s and Narasu’s serving the national and regional market respectively advertised their products in the media. Interestingly, the commercials of Narasu’s did address the issues related to modernity mentioned earlier. In a commercial from 1944, we see a modern woman looking over her shoulder to the reader. The copy reads ‘women who like to be happy, energetic and wish to maintain their beauty, like Narasu’s’. In another commercial, we see a modern woman looking confident and relaxed, reflecting. The copy reads as follows: ‘The housewife welcomed her relatives and guests with Narasu’s coffee. She knows that her relatives and guests definitely like Narasu’s coffee and tea’ (Figure 7.1).

By contrast, promotion by the Propaganda Department of the Coffee Board mainly informed the consumer that coffee was in the India Coffee House (ICH) where they could consume it. The *Bombay Chronicle* of 5 April 1937 carried an advertisement of the ICH (Figure 7.2) showing five Indian males representing different socio-economic and political ideologies: Congress,



Figure 7.1 'The Confident Housewife knows that Narasu's Coffee is Best for Her Guests', *Kalimagal*, January 1944.

Muslim League, Indian Labour, Progressive, and Independent. Despite the ideological difference visible through their attire, they all agreed that 'coffee is India's most delicious beverage'. Below, the readers were advised to try it for themselves at ICH 'now in new, larger premises'.

Similarly, in another commercial reproduced in the magazine *Indian Coffee* ('The Best for You', *Indian Coffee*, October 1949: xv) the viewer sees female workers sorting coffee beans before being processed. The copy reads: 'The best for you. Indian coffee at the nation's service'. The steaming cup of 'Indian coffee' was to be had at the India Coffee House.

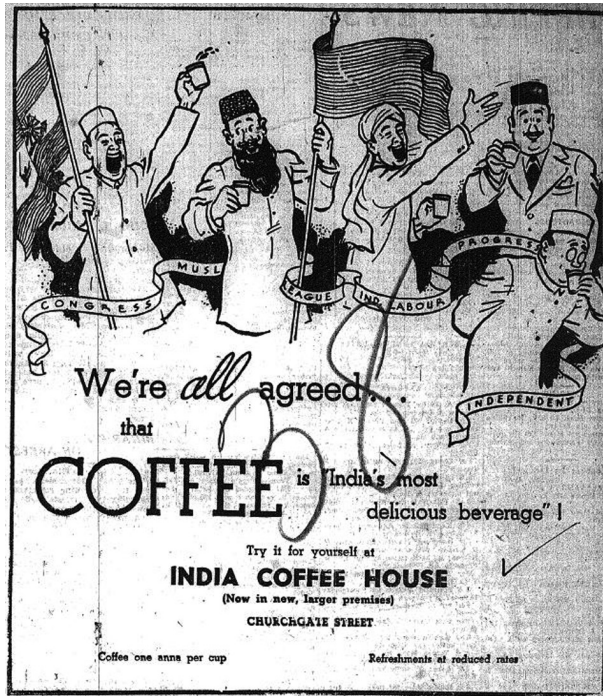


Figure 7.2 'We Are All Agreed', *Bombay Chronicle*, 5 April 1937.

These and similar advertisements encouraged Indians (males) to partake of coffee collectively in the coffee-house. I argue here that when the coffee industry took recourse to the media to advertise coffee, it offered a service rather than a commodity for consumption at home and introduced the public to the new institution it created. This method of popularising coffee through coffee-houses branded coffee as a beverage for socialisation, distinguished coffee from tea, and determined the way the beverage was going to be consumed.

In a most intriguing commercial (Figure 7.3), the centre left of the milk-white background portrays the bust of a turbaned man peering upwards above a flat basket of coffee seeds. On the space right, the copy in fine letters runs diagonally indicating the respective images: 'a fine type' and 'a fine coffee' and continues below to the bottom to state that 'both are INDIAN'.

This Indian's grey hair, flowing moustache and beard are awe-inspiring. While his upward distant gaze indicates spirituality, the green of his turban is perhaps a reference to his religion. I am told that the figure represented Baba Budhan, the Sufi saint who is said to have introduced coffee to Karnataka in the seventeenth century. What is not clear is whether without any other



Figure 7.3 'A Fine Type and a Fine Soul Both are Indian', [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_Coffee_House_Sign_-_Shimla_-_Himachal_Pradesh_-_India_\(25936254494\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:India_Coffee_House_Sign_-_Shimla_-_Himachal_Pradesh_-_India_(25936254494).jpg).

information the average consumer in the pre-internet days was aware of the Baba Budhan myth. Also, was the knowledge that a fine coffee and a fine soul equated with the average Indian gratifying to the middle-class consumer? It is also unclear how the Board perceived its consumers and how these advertisements were to convey the conviction that coffee-drinking could be part of their everyday lives. The coffee presented here seems to be exotic, just like the Sufi saint and the country associated with it. Was it perhaps viewing coffee with the Orientalist gaze keeping the market in the West in mind?

The reference to 'Indian' in these and many other posters issued by the Coffee Board is striking and needs attention. It is to be remembered that the export market was not abandoned even at a time when it showed no prospects. In line with the past, from the very onset the ICCC allocated a sum, initially £1,000, to promote Indian coffee in the UK through the Indian Trade Commissioner and the officials of the Kenya Coffee Board (Annual Report, ICCC 1935–36: 7). Indeed, the brand name 'Indian' made sense in the export market where Indian coffee needed to be distinguished from coffee grown in other colonies of the Empire and other producing countries. The same epithet was supposed to work for the domestic market too. Unlike the commercials

for tea that projected tea as indigenous or *swadeshi*, a part of Indian heritage and culture and as such a part of everyday practice, as in the commercial for tea referred to earlier, the posters issued by the Coffee Board retained the colonial legacy. Even more importantly, these posters were distributed to the outlets of the Propaganda Department of the Board and, therefore, one had to visit one of the outlets to see them. Sometimes these were reproduced as covers of *Indian Coffee*, the monthly magazine for planters.

There is a longstanding tendency in the coffee sector in India to mystify the method of preparing a good cup of coffee, best reflected in the slogan 'coffee making is a fine art'. Roasters may debate if it is a question of 'fine art' or science, but the slogan clearly sends the message that drinking coffee is part of a distinctive lifestyle – for fine art, it can be safely assumed, is not to be appreciated by everyone. Coffee indeed became a symbol of social status for Tamil Brahmins, and as Venkatachopathy has emphasised, the introduction of this new beverage displacing old ones, and the accompanying change of habits, raised anxieties leading to debates on culture, health, and other issues in late colonial Tamil Nadu (Venkatachopathy 2006). No art can, however, deliver the 'perfect' cup of coffee, which is a matter of individual taste. While some would like pure coffee, Arabica or Robusta in numerous varieties, grades, and blends will taste different. The secret of the quality in the cup lies with multiple factors including the kind of bean marketed (e.g. moisture content, variety, and grade, etc.), which depends on the various stages of production and manufacture – picking, processing and storing the harvest, the mode of transport, roasting, grinding, blending, packaging, and storing the roasted coffee – often not meeting the standard (Achoth 2005). Making coffee a part of the everyday implies that a consumer should be able to make a cup of coffee quickly, whereas producing a piece of fine art may take days, sometimes even months. In the same vein, the consumers *must* appreciate the taste of coffee before they decide if they will invest money and time on the 'fine art' to make it a part of their everyday lives. After all, the milky, sugary version of tea, *chai*, consumed throughout North and South India has little to do with how aficionados relish their First Flush or Earl Grey but has lent this form of the beverage a global familiarity.

While the Board was ambiguous in its attitude towards home consumption of the non-traditional customer in North India, visiting the ICH became a part of the everyday for many such urban connoisseurs who were thrilled when the 'modern', well-furnished yet affordable coffee-houses with their roomy, comfortable ambience opened their doors to the public. University students and teachers, self-employed, rising poets and writers, temporarily/permanently unemployed who used to gather at neighbourhood restaurants and teashops began crowding the coffee-houses that soon became the centre of attraction. People from all walks of life could sit face to face. Informal, unscheduled conversations stimulated by caffeine became the hallmark of the ICH.

Initially, the Coffee Board seems to have distributed leaflets with information on coffee brewing among the visitors of ICH in Bombay (ICCC, AR 1936–37). None of the accounts/memoirs of the connoisseurs of ICH, however, mentioned such initiatives on behalf of the Board to spread knowledge of the method of brewing coffee. The publications of the Coffee Board, circulated predominantly among the coffee interest groups, indeed ridiculed the lack of knowledge of the commodity or the ‘proper method’ of preparing a ‘good cup of coffee’ among consumers. The journal *Indian Coffee* had one section called ‘anecdotes’ where officials or members of the Coffee Board shared memorable incidents related to coffee in course of their work/tour. A couple of examples from this source will suffice to show that even after 30 years of propaganda, the Coffee Board had failed to create a general awareness about what coffee looked like or how to prepare a cup of coffee at home.

In one incident, a customer of the Allahabad ICH entered the outlet one morning with the kilo pack of coffee he had purchased at the coffee depot nearby. He was perplexed, because he had boiled the coffee for an hour, and yet, he was not able to get the cup of coffee he had tasted at ICH. The manager pointed out that coffee was not to be boiled, and that he should have put the measured amount in a dry vessel and poured boiling water on top. The exasperated customer claimed he had tried that method too and it did not work. At that, the manager opened the packet and saw that it contained raw coffee beans (Abraham 1966). In another anecdote from the same year a person called upon a university professor in Bhopal and presented him with two tins containing respectively areca nut and coffee. The wife of the professor knew that coffee beans had to be roasted; but then the servant came back with both the tins and asked which of the tins contained coffee (Ahmed 1966).

These anecdotes point to the limitations of the promotional measures and gaps in the way knowledge of the commodity was communicated. The gentleman in Allahabad evidently liked the taste of coffee in the ICH and was persuaded to buy a kilo pack of the commodity. It is not known if the lady in question in Bhopal had tasted coffee. It is remarkable that such potential consumers did not have the basic information on coffee or how it had to be prepared.

As far as the experiment with the ICH was concerned, coffee signified the space encouraging socialisation, and the prospect of leisure time, a break from the everyday. Given that an advertisement usually persuades its audience to purchase a commodity or a service (Pope 1983), the choice of the mode of popularising coffee in North India through coffee-houses decided the destination of the beverage: in urban North India coffee remained a drink associated with public sociability.

Apart from offering catering service on formal occasions like convocations, meetings at clubs, offices, and universities, the Coffee Board also organised occasional demonstrations in ladies’ clubs via the local coffee-house. Demonstration of coffee-making and serving coffee at canteens of railway

stations formed part of the plans. Travelling as a member of the Catering Advisory Committee of Northern Railway, Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal observed that at Delhi station the catering service sold coffee to customers who had ordered tea. When asked why the tea tasted bitter, they were told that the tea was fine and that the fault lay with their palate (Zutshi Sahgal 1994). It is not clear if this deceit on the part of the caterers was on purpose. But while it shows a lack of supervision, it is also an utter lack of respect for the customer. Such practices cannot help in disseminating either the product or its knowledge.

As noted above, people in the coffee-producing states were already familiar with coffee at the turn of the nineteenth century, and knowledge of the commodity and its use was reaching consumers via the networks of production and distribution at a local level. This was confirmed by an anecdote again from the late 1930s. The ICCC had sent three officials to a remote village in Hosur taluk in Tamil Nadu in order to propagate the consumption of jaggery coffee together with puffed rice. The party gave a demonstration for three hours. As they began packing up for departure, an old grandmotherly figure expressed that there was nothing new in what was being explained; she had learned all about jaggery coffee during her stay in Madras (Subramanian 1966). What is striking in this context is that despite such experiences the Coffee Board decided to limit most of its promotional activities to South India where coffee was already known. As suggested by JWT, the Board used coffee vans for promoting coffee – but only in Bangalore, and on an experimental basis in some other cities in South India, thus carrying coal to Newcastle. One of the criticisms of the PIC was that the Coffee Board limited its promotional activities to South India (GOI 1956).

The conservative and patronising obsession with the ‘fine art of making a good cup’ of coffee is in marked distinction to the experience of consumption of coffee at grass-root level or in the bazaar, referred to in colonial reports. Long before using sugar became common, coffee was consumed with palm jaggery in rural southern Tamil Nadu, as was confirmed by the anecdote from Hosur earlier. In rural Andhra Pradesh, coffee was available in the 1960s in a compressed tablet form called *billa*. Coffee was prepared by boiling water in a pan to which a piece of the tablet was added. The black coffee prepared in this way was called *goddu* and was in earlier times taken with jaggery, later replaced by sugar.²

Field research suggests that this traditional way of preparing and consuming coffee is still practised among coffee farmer families, irrespective of class. Following this method, coffee is prepared in the same way as tea is brewed in street-corner shops in India, in this case, by adding ground coffee to boiling water and adding jaggery to the brew.³ This practice is common among some non-traditional middle-class consumers of coffee in Calcutta and Delhi as well, albeit sugar is used instead of jaggery there. Consumers have the satisfaction of drinking filter coffee, which is much cheaper in comparison with instant coffee.

Thus, while precisely how the consumer is going to enjoy their cup is not up to the marketing or promotional agency – as in the commercial for Jim Beam partially cited in the title to this chapter – the task of the advertiser/seller is to introduce the commodity with a persuasive, compelling statement ensuring at the same time that it is easily available in the market.

Creating the domestic market

How effective were the promotional units and the marketing strategy of the Board in generating a demand for coffee in the domestic market? H. Siddaveerappa, the then chairman of the Coffee Board, observed in 1954 that more coffee-houses were needed in North India ‘where now it is almost impossible to get a good cup of coffee’ (*TOI* 1954a). Yet the Board’s decision to close the outlets in 1955 was defended with the statement that many private restaurants had taken over the function of the ICH. Bimal Bose, the Director of Propaganda of the Coffee Board, reiterated this point in 1959 when he underlined that the consumption of coffee in India had increased more than four times during 1940–58, but the increase was only in parts of South India and not due to the ICH. The sale of coffee in North India was limited to South Indians living in the North and no market had been created there for coffee, the habit of coffee drinking being limited to the walls of the restaurant (Bose 1959). In other words, the Board admitted that its promotional measures were a failure.

Not all concerned were, however, convinced that the coffee-houses had outlived their purpose. An analysis of the coffee marketing policy – probably by someone with a stake in the sector – attributed the increase in the internal demand to the success of ICH (Anonymous 1952). In a press conference A.K. Gopalan, the Vice President of the Coffee Board Labour Union, pointed out that the Board had not presented any detailed account showing why and how the coffee-houses had become redundant (*TOI* 1957).

It is remarkable that by 1948, the Coffee Board had 49 promotional units: 43 outlets of the ICH throughout the length and breadth of the subcontinent, two coffee bars, one coffee van and three coffee depots, and the formula of the coffee-houses seems to have been very successful as far as the sale of liquid coffee and coffee powder was concerned (CBI 1947–48).⁴ *Indian Coffee*, the monthly publication of the Board, gave the impression that the outlets served the purpose of promoting coffee in the way that the Board had wanted. Visits of national and international dignitaries to different outlets and their comments on the coffee served were meticulously reproduced accompanied by photographs finding pride of place in these volumes. The total turnover during 1939/40–1957/58 registered an increase in the sale of liquid coffee from 1,138,033 cups in 1939–40 to 9,851,953 cups in 1946–47.

There was some decline in sales in the years immediately after 1947 due to Partition and decolonisation, the departure of US soldiers and many

Europeans and members of other minority groups living in colonial India. They began picking up from the mid-1950s again and during the last three full working years of 1954/55–1956/57 it exceeded 8,000,000 cups. The movement of workers of the Coffee Board against the closure of the outlets and the formation of regional cooperatives explain the drastic fall during 1957–58 (Bhattacharya 2017). The lion's share in the total turnover came from the sale of liquid and dry coffee, but without any indication of what the target was for individual establishments or any explanation for the fluctuations in the annual turnover on different heads, the documentation appears to be mechanical and incomplete. According to market research carried on by Nestlé, the best seller in the local market (their competitor) was the loose roasted and ground coffee blend (75 per cent Arabica Plantation Pea-berry and 25 per cent Robusta Cherry Flats) of India Coffee House (Nestlé 1955). As the coffee depots and ICH sold freshly roasted pure ground coffee, the closure of the ICH and handing it over to private operators must have affected the supply of good coffee especially in North India where otherwise without coffee roasting units the infrastructure of supply had not been developed.

It should be noted that the coffee retailed through the propaganda units formed a small part of the total quantity of coffee released in the internal market. But the inconsistency in the position of the Board about ICH can be understood if we remember that the coffee industry had in the past always focused on the export market. When the industry turned its attention to the domestic market, irrespective of the limited measures adopted, the sale of coffee increased substantially – from 8,000 tons in 1940 to 17,500 tons in 1950 and 35,000 tons in 1960 as stated by the Board itself (CBI 1961: 12; Anonymous 1952), resulting in a shortfall in the exportable surplus (Bose 1959). The substantial increase in the production of coffee in the post-war period notwithstanding, a steep increase in the demand between 1950 and 1952 led the price index of coffee to soar from 450 in May 1950 to 827 in September 1952. In an address to the Coffee Board T.T. Krishnamachari, the Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, reiterated that the consumer was the 'ultimate master' of the grower and the government would not allow any drastic increase in the price of coffee in the internal market (*TOI* 1953).

Shortage of supply in comparison with the domestic demand for coffee led to the smuggling of coffee from the estates (CBI 1966). While in 1952–53 the quantity available for home consumption was 45.3 million pounds, it was observed that a potential area of the market had remained untouched and that the internal consumption still showed a tendency of further increase (CBI 1954). Many growers and traders criticised the price differential between coffee earmarked for the external and the internal market, and further in the latter between the price for auction and allotment to the Propaganda Department at a subsidised cost. Not only did the price differential discourage the growth of the market, in their view it encouraged corruption, leakage, and speculation (Anonymous 1952). Coffee was smuggled even from the Propaganda Department.

Government control of coffee production and marketing via the Coffee Board after the crisis of the 1930s led to the recovery of prices, resulting in an increase in the area under coffee cultivation and a faster rise in the quantity of coffee grown (IOL/Mss Eur F174/1993). But the industry was small and emphasis on domestic consumption allowed export of *only* the surplus after the internal demand had been met, creating a regular shortage in the exportable surplus (CBI 1954: i). Boosting the domestic market required further investment in the curing and marketing infrastructure including transporting to and storing green beans in areas where coffee did not grow. As the Board marketed the pooled coffee, the curer-exporters lost their hold over the export market. While the pooled sale by the Board benefited small growers, powerful planters and curers capable of investing in the infrastructure were reluctant to invest in a system that did not particularly benefit them (IOL/Mss Eur F174/1990). This was also a time when the world market for coffee looked positive again.

The post-World War II period witnessed a 27 per cent increase in world coffee exports between 1947 and 1953 (CBI 1956: v), and the price of coffee in the United States skyrocketed (Bilder 1963: 334). As far as Indian coffee was concerned, there was a shift in the demand in the export market from dollar to non-dollar East European countries, especially Russia, and in view of the high level of prices in the international market it was felt that the export market could be further exploited. An article published in 1952 complained about the lack of encouragement for export which was considered important for 'the best interests of the planters and the national economy' (Anonymous 1952). The planters who had wanted government intervention in order to save the industry in the 1930s resented government control and restrictions on the export of coffee under improved circumstances. It was in view of these developments that the PIC of 1954 was to explore the possibility of further development and expansion of the coffee industry in India. In its report submitted the following year, the Commission recommended advertisement campaigns and promotion through mobile vans and cinema shows but was against maintaining permanent coffee-houses. (CBI 1956: iii–v, 1958: ix).

Although the internal market for coffee had just begun to take off and the market for coffee in North India except for a few cities had not yet been explored, the external market looked more lucrative than developing the internal market for coffee:(CBI 1958–59: ix): 'In the past the policy of the Government was directed towards making larger quantities of coffee available for home consumption. However, in recent years there has been a shift in emphasis from the domestic to the foreign markets.'

Already from the early 1950s the release for the internal market showed a gradual decline matched by a proportionate increase in the export quota (CBI 1955–56, vii, graphs). Following a bumper crop in 1954–55 the planters demanded a relaxation of the rules regarding export (*TOI* 1954b). The Propaganda Officer of the Board stated that since Indian customers were not

willing to pay as much as foreign customers did, they would have to wait until they could afford it (Balu 1966).

Soon after this, India became a signatory to the first International, and remained under its regulatory system until 1989 when the ICA became non-active. India Coffee Agreement (ICA) in 1962 formed part of the working group set up by the International Coffee Council in August 1965 to examine the question of increasing the basic quota to be exported by the producing member countries and to consider the fixing of world production goals and individual production goals by member countries. The Coffee Board stated that it was important to be able to export coffee in the world market at a competitive price in the national interest.

Instant coffee

It was the introduction of instant coffee by MNCs that familiarised the average middle-class household outside South India with the taste of coffee. Nestlé had entered the Indian market exporting infant milk and dietary products in the late nineteenth century. Initially after the launch of instant Nescafé in 1936, the soluble extract of coffee bean used 20 per cent of the carbohydrate part of the bean for manufacturing instant coffee. While there was a controversy in Europe as to whether Nescafé could be called coffee, labelled as a 'dietic product' it was imported to India as 'patent food' for the first time in 1940. This coffee was packed in lots of 48 containers of 2 and 4 oz each and 12 cases of 1 lb each. Wartime conditions prevented its commercial expansion and development up until 1949, but during 1950–55 sales increased substantially, with 7,159 cases sold in 1954 (5,042 × 4 oz; 2,116 × 1 lb; 1 × 2 oz) (Parker 1956; Figure 7.4). This practice continued until 1958.⁵

The setting up of a factory in Moga in 1959 to manufacture dairy products made it possible to manufacture instant coffee locally by using the same machinery. The success of Nescafé in the local and international market led Nestlé in the mid-1980s to build a new factory at Nanjangudin Karnataka with up-to-date machines for soluble coffee and for mixed products from coffee and chicory (Nestlé in India 1993).

Brooke Bond had entered the branded roast and ground coffee market in 1930 when it setup a coffee manufacturing establishment in Coimbatore. It was followed by the establishment of another factory in Ghatkesar (in Telangana) in 1947. In 1962 it launched its Bru Green Label packaged filter coffee to be followed by Bon, pure instant coffee, in 1967. Dilkhush, Green Label, and Café were conventional coffee to be filtered at home. Dilkhush, meant for the working class, came in a convenient tablet form. A part of the tablet had to be broken off and added to the boiling water. The ratio of coffee and chicory for the latter two was 53: 47. The success of these labels inspired the launch of another new 'exclusive' instant coffee mix called Pure Gold. Rich Café, introduced in 1988, is agglomerated instant coffee. As part of an international acquisition, Brooke Bond joined the Unilever group in 1984.



Figure 7.4 'Ask for Nescafe', Nestlé Archives, Vevey.

Together with Nescafe, Bru went a long way in popularising coffee among non-habitual customers in North India.⁶

The entrance of new global coffee brands into the market from the early 1990s saw an increasing demand for coffee for export. The target of the Seventh 5-year Plan of the Government of India (1985–90) was to meet the export quota of 150,000 tonnes and the Ninth 5-year Plan (1997–2002) aimed at increasing the production of coffee to 300,000 tonnes with two-thirds of it demarcated for export (Chatterjee 1997). Table 7.1 shows that, except for 1989, the release of coffee in the internal market remained static at 50–55,000 metric tonnes during 1981–99. Even with the increasing production, it can be guessed that a fixed quantity was earmarked annually for the internal market, with the rest being reserved for export. In an interview given to the current author, a high-ranking official of the Coffee Board stated off the record that consumption in the domestic market was not at all on the agenda of the Board up until the economic liberalisation of India.

Table 7.1 Coffee consumption in India, 1981–2010 (CBI 2011)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Quantity (in metric tonne)</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Quantity (in metric tonne)</i>
1981	50,796	1996	50,000
1982	53,990	1997	50,000
1983	56,079	1998	50,000
1984	53,544	1999	55,000
1985	54,874	2000	60,000
1986	54,421	2001	64,000
1987	58,636	2002	68,000
1988	55,560	2003	70,000
1989	63,328	2004	75,000
1990	54,152	2005	80,200
1991	55,000	2006	85,000
1992	55,000	2007	90,000
1993	50,000	2008	94,400
1994	50,000	2009	102,000
1995	50,000	2010	108,000

The economic liberalisation of India and the home market

During the economic liberalisation of India, the Coffee Growers’ Association lobbied for freedom from the yoke of the Coffee Board. The year 1992 saw the beginning of the decentralisation of the coffee market in a phased manner. The first private coffee auction took place in 1993, followed by the dismantling of the pooling system in 1996 (CBI and UPASI 2002: 183). In January 1994, the Coffee Act was amended to allow the growers a Free Sale Quota of 50 per cent for sale in both the domestic and export market, the rest to be auctioned by the Coffee Board.

The coffee retailing landscape underwent a significant change following the decontrol. The pioneering entrepreneur to first make use of the opportunities it offered was the late V.G. Siddhartha of Café Coffee Day (CCD). With its headquarters in Bangalore, CCD was part of a fully integrated coffee company with nearly 3,000 ha of coffee estates (Amalgamated Bean Trading Company), curing facilities, R&G network and a packaged coffee division. Siddhartha saw the potential of the virtually untapped Indian market and opened a coffee retailing outlet in Bangalore where a cup of cappuccino used to cost Rs 20. In July 2020, there were 1,480 outlets in nearly 200 cities of India, including approximately 600 Coffee Xpress and Coffee Day Take Away in metro stations, airports, and other places offering coffee on the go, with more varieties and luxury available at outlets labelled Lounge and Square to pamper the connoisseur.

Many other MNCs, home-grown and foreign, soon followed in the footsteps of CCD, including the coffee giants Costa Coffee, Gloria Jeans and, lastly, Starbucks. While the entry of a chain is announced with much hype,

what happens afterwards often remains in the dark. Barista, an Indian chain of espresso bars and pioneer coffee retailers in India, was purchased by Amit Judge of Turner Morrison in 2001 (*The Hindu* 2014). C. Sivasankaran of Sterling Infotech Group purchased the café chain in 2004 and later also stakes in Tata Coffee. Subsequently, the Italian brand Lavazza purchased the Barista café group in 2007 only to sell its 190 outlets in India to Carnation Hospitality of Amtek Group and left the scene altogether in 2014 (PTI 2014). A year later Amtek Group was planning to sell the Barista chain (Bhushan 2015). Costa Coffee, which entered the Indian market in 2005, planned to end its existing franchise in early 2014 and subsequently to increase profit rather than chasing numbers (Bhushan and Chakravarty 2014; Jain 2016). Gloria Jeans, which entered the Indian market in 2008, ended its India franchise with Citymax Hospitality (of the Dubai-based Landmark Group) as the latter had failed to extend beyond 27 outlets in India, five of them closed when the franchise was ended in 2014 (Tiwari 2014). Thus, when Starbucks entered the Indian market in 2012, it spoke of a major business opportunity in the country – it was not a net addition to but at the cost of some existing brands. In 2014–15, Tata Starbucks reported a net loss of Rs42 crore on revenues of Rs171.2 crore resulting in the departure of its first CEO (Agarwal 2016). The frequent changeover in management or ownership suggests that the hype is perhaps not matched by the profit from the sale of coffee. Although coffee consumption has increased somewhat, the extent of it is not clear because a substantial part of the revenue of these companies comes from food and beverages other than coffee.

The figures published by the Coffee Board in Table 7.1 indicate a growth in the domestic consumption in the new millennium. However, considering the above, the prognosis of the Board about the internal coffee market is said to be a bit too optimistic. For the year 2010–11, for example, another source suggested 70–75,000 metric tons (Siddhartha 2011). While the quantity sold inland has increased, in view of the population explosion how much of it represents actual growth is unclear.

In the West, coffee was introduced to the public via the coffee-house culture in the second half of the seventeenth century. Coffee not only robbed alcohol of its status as a universal drink, but it also became the most common beverage consumed at home (Schivelbusch 1993). In Bach's *Kaffeekantate* written in the early 1730s (Coffee Cantata 1732–35), we see a father desperately trying to convince his daughter to stay away from coffee – a testimony to the domestication of the beverage. In South India, because it was grown locally, but thanks also to the initiatives of local operators like Narasu's and later the Coffee Board, the beverage was adopted at home, both in urban and rural areas. By contrast, notwithstanding the consumption practices in South India, in North India coffee is still projected, by and large, as an exotic beverage associated with the West and public sociability.

This chapter began with the premise that the way the coffee industry began promoting and facilitating the consumption of coffee in India, left

a permanent mark on the way coffee would be consumed in much of the country. By opening the coffee-houses, I suggested, the Coffee Board was offering a service: consumers were to visit the outlets where they would be served coffee prepared by trained employees. Indian Coffee House, a legacy of the Coffee Board, is an established, popular brand name. And this model of popularising coffee has remained unchanged even after the entry of the post-liberalisation era MNCs that target the globalised middle class who spend time in the respective outlets and have, among other items, coffee. These brands offer variations of the service introduced by the Coffee Cess Committee: one experiences coffee-drinking in the ambience of a specific place associated with a brand. In this, coffee-drinking remains a signifier of the place where it is consumed. Moreover, this new wave of consumption led by MNCs – as it is limited to tier I and tier II cities – has remained, just like during the first wave of coffee consumption, an urban phenomenon (Jain and Shukla n.d.).

Meanwhile, economists suggest that the only way to ensure the sale of coffee to the Indian consumer at a fair price irrespective of fluctuating prices in the world market is to isolate the internal market by creating a reserve stock that can be released in the case of a shortfall in demand, a practice common in many coffee-producing countries. That will definitely serve the interests of the consumer and the small grower, but is the same true for the curer and the trader-exporter too (Gowda and Venugopal 2007)?

Abbreviations

AR	Annual Report
CBI	Coffee Board of India
CCD	Café Coffee Day
CMEB	Coffee Marketing Expansion Board
DGCII	Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence India
GOI	Government of India
ICA	International Coffee Agreement
ICCC	Indian Coffee Cess Committee
ICH	Indian Coffee House
IOL	India Office Library
JWT	John Walter Thompson & Company
PIC	The Plantation Inquiry Commission
PTI	Press Trust of India
TOI	Times of India
UPASI	United Planters' Association of South India

Acknowledgements

The title is inspired by the well-known commercial of the Kentucky grown bourbon brand Jim Beam, 'Drink it any damn way you please'.⁷

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Notes

- 1 Became a public company incorporated on 28 June 1910, www.zaubacorp.com/company/T-STANES-AND-COMPANY-LIMITED/U02421TZ1910PLC000221 (last accessed 8 January 2017).
- 2 In an interview with the late Mr. Rajappa, Librarian, Coffee Board of India, he stated that as boiling affects the aroma, coffee powder was added after the boiled water was taken off the heat. Then it was consumed with jaggery; interview 4 August 2011; Interview Kushalappa, Karnataka Planters' Association, Chikmagalur, 18 December 2018.
- 3 While jaggery is sometimes boiled with water, like the way Mrs. Sushena, a planter in Wayanad does it, at times it is added at the end for preserving the essential qualities of jaggery.
- 4 In the late 1980s there were 48 coffee depots all over India: 10 in Tamil Nadu, 9 in Karnataka, 7 in Andhra Pradesh and 6 in Kerala. In addition, there were 4 coffee vans and 12 coffee houses run by the Board.
- 5 Nestle Archives, Vevey. 'Historical Background of Nestle's Activities in India'.
- 6 The information on Brooke Bond here is collected from different issues of *Sales Messenger* – the in-house magazine of the company.
- 7 www.jimbeam.com/en-us/bourbon-drinks/all-recipes, accessed on 15 January 2020.

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8 The housewife goes to market

Food, work, and neoliberal selves in Kolkata middle-class families

Henrike Donner

Introduction

Since India's opening towards the global economy, neoliberal paradigms have entered public debates and have then filtered down into the everyday lives of the growing middle class. The emphasis on choice, self-realisation, and economic rationality has found its way into all domains of life, including constructions of citizenship, personhood, and the ideology of the family. One of the effects that the hegemonic notion of relationships with the 'market' has is the prioritization of consumer citizenship, which implies different sections of the population in multiple ways. Within this context women are often hailed as beneficiaries of emerging opportunities, on the one hand addressed as newcomers to employment and bargaining power in the public sphere, and on the other hand regarded as those responsible for the reproductive labour that socialises children into consumption patterns that meet class-based expectations.

Much has been made of the question of whether neoliberalism constitutes a useful concept to trace these shifting relationships between the state and its citizens, between the nation and individuals' aspirations, and between commodities, consumption, and new subjectivities. I am here interested in the latter relationship, namely the way middle-class individuals and the family are implied in the construction of subjectivities, which are becoming more and more infused with consumerist lifestyles. In this context I use neoliberalism as a specific set of ideas about governmental practices and an underlying rationality, which is based on the belief that 'human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterised by strong property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey 2005: 2).

These ideological directives materialise and are increasingly experienced in the lives of the growing middle class as the shrinking of the welfare state and the expansion of public-private partnerships, for example in healthcare and education. But neoliberal ideology as a way of understanding the world, with its emphasis on choice, markets, and rational selves, impacts middle-class subjects not only in public contexts but also in their 'private' lives and intimate relationships.

Authors interested in neoliberalism and its gendered effects assert that with the imposition of policies that enable the reworking of public representations new femininities emerge which are based on novel understandings of subjects and personhood. Gill and Scharff (2011) show how this implies a:

[p]enetration over time and its intensification as a force of creating actors who are rational, calculating and self motivating, and who are increasingly exhorted to make sense of their individual biographies in terms of discourses of freedom, autonomy and choice – no matter how constrained their lives may actually be.

(Gill and Scharff 2011: 5)

In the remaining sections I will discuss middle-class femininities in India in the light of such hegemonic ideas and also consider the impact of earlier formations through a discussion of middle-class women's involvement with commodity consumption in relation to the normative roles of wife and mother.

From receiving to giving advice

The term housewife reached the Indian subcontinent during the colonial period, and soon became an important descriptor in debates about class, gender, and social change linked to discourses on consumption. Thus, with reference to India, the analysis of the link between gendered identities and middle-class consumption patterns as a marker of social transformation does not present a novelty. Scholarly work on advice literature from the colonial period onwards suggests that mundane routines in the family home figured as a prime site of reform and active reorientation, very much directed towards women – as consumers and increasingly also as guardians of appropriate and moral consumption (see for example, Banerjee-Dube 2016; Walsh 2004). Ideals of the good wife, of the devoted mother, and the 'domestic orientation' of respectable women commonly found in Victorian literature on Euro-American domesticities, are mirrored by references to women's roles as homemakers and their specific position as symbols and transmitters of appropriate 'Indian' culture. Such ideologies fuelled nationalist discourses as well as the formation of regional identities and brought the organisation of the middle-class family in line with new, 'modern' patriarchies (Sangari 1993).

As Walsh's (2004) and Sangari's (2002) work on advice literature shows, this realignment did rely heavily on reforms of domestic relationships and attention to the minutiae of everyday life. For the mostly Hindu nineteenth-century reformers, educators, and the British representatives of the colonial power, changing domesticities and the morality of what, when, where, and how to consume goods, ideologies, and cultural practices loomed large. The writings of intellectuals of the time cut across generations as they resurfaced in textbooks for girls, but also in almanacs produced for and consumed by

married women, and women's journals shared across all age groups (Basu 2001; Sangari 1993). In much of this literature women's involvement with new consumer cultures, often addressed in chapters on how to deal with servants, the food prepared in the home and budgeting, are already marked as problematic areas. While the ideal of the joint family changed, the focus on women's housekeeping remained a crucial part of such advice literature up until the 1990s and is still a point of reference in many contexts. As Uberoi (2001) remarks, from the colonial period through to the liberalisation era, the 'joint family propped up by arranged marriage' provided the basis for appropriately middle-class socialisation and the needs of a healthy and prosperous family became the most prominent way to promote commodity consumption as part of national advancement by the state. In these narratives patrilocality based on arranged marriages and the exploitation of the labour power of younger women and servants working in the middle-class home constituted the backbone of respectable and desirable domesticity and produced the role of a 'housewife' at the heart of the joint family ideology.

This changed with economic liberalization and because Bengali middle-class families had become more centred around the values, if not the reality, of nuclear family life from the 1990s onwards. My interlocutors, who mostly had experienced joint family life depending on their stage in the lifecourse, often emphasise how joint family values sit uneasily with the demands of 'modern' conjugal relations and in particular the demands of modern parenting (Donner 2006, 2008a, 2011).

Whilst mothers are responsible for the bulk of parenting work, they are also often expected to collaborate closely with other female members of the home, notably mothers-in-law, which can lead to tensions. Early debates around consumption and class-based identities had cast housewives, on the one hand, as ignorant and dependent on experts, but at the same time as responsible for the facilitation of 'good' habits. A major focus of such moral discourses was the preparation and consumption of home-cooked food, which had emerged as a major site of conflict and affirmation from the 1980s onwards. The importance of culinary cultures is evidenced by the proliferation of cookbooks produced by Bengali women from the end of the nineteenth century onwards (Banerjee-Dube 2016). These debates are not only central to Bengal, they appear in different forms across the nation, with the 'Indian' housewife often opposed to her Western counterpart. But food is only one of the long-term markers of class-based regional culture that fed into middle-class lifestyles shaped by a focus on the housewife as performer of morality. As Tarlo (1996) emphasises in her work, sartorial choices in the 1980s middle-class women worked hard at reproducing status through modest clothing in the pre-liberalisation period, and Dickey (2000) discusses how housewives are engaged in boundary marking in Madurai by negotiating access to the family home through control of what and who enters, be they goods or servants. More recently, van Wessel (2004) and Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase (2009) have emphasised how the fierce competition for

status materializes through a proliferation of commodities entering the home, which has revived debates about the collectively acceptable morality of middle-class consumption patterns accompanied by intense anxieties in the post-liberalisation period. All of these histories frame the notion of the housewife and her move from being earlier seen as just the arbitrator between the family and the world of goods, to her current role as chief consumer. As we will see, mothers are guardians of children and providers of family meals with food acting as a means of individuation through individual tastes as well as the material of different forms of conspicuous consumption.

Housewives: consumer citizens par excellence

Scholarship on global middle classes discusses the emergence of commodity consumption as a global signifier of middle-classness, especially in the context of gendered leisure activities (Heiman et al. 2012), but most contemporary research on consumption focuses on public and youth cultures rather than the domestic reproduction of such ideals. In this chapter I will do the opposite and foreground the way middle-aged housewives are implied in class-based consumption patterns and the way consumption has become central in the construction of femininity and thus the ideal female citizen.

Many of my interlocutors in the 1990s referred to themselves as housewives, more often than not using the English term in otherwise Bengali conversations. They described housewives as women who were dedicated to their domestic roles, were not in employment and who were dependent on a husband's and/or son's salary. To those interviewed then, being a housewife meant that they were responsible for a host of everyday tasks related to child-rearing, care for the elderly, supervision of servants, and the maintenance of wider social relations. To be a housewife did not only imply knowledge about the correct ways to cook and help children with schooling for example, it also implied character traits associated with such responsibilities. These, rather than exemplary skills or knowledge, are referenced even today in matrimonials that ask for a 'homely' bride. This disposition, which conscientious parents of a girl may foster, highlights that a wife is made to move into the affinal home. With reference to running a household a young daughter-in-law in my interlocutor's homes needed to be capable of taking the reins only later in life and after being trained on the job. Food practices played a key role in her apprenticeship, regardless of her background or education, or whether she was in employment at the time of her wedding. In most instances she would be expected to continue to work outside the home till the birth of a child, but the main focus would be on learning about the 'culture' of her husband's family home, and that inevitably centred around everyday meals.

This link between femininity, food preparation, and patrilocality emerged as a marker of Bengali middle-class ideology in the nineteenth century, when nationalist inscriptions of values as well as their embodiment focused on the housewife. As Banerjee-Dube (2016) states, Bengali men, and towards the

turn of the century, women belonging to local elites, embraced such ideals, and by merging regional identity, nationalist mobilisation, and class-based consumption patterns, a modern 'cuisine' emerged. Cookbooks produced early on by aristocrats charted the shift from women being advisees towards their involvement in the production of advice on matters of consumption in the home, and much of this engagement centred around 'feeding the family'. Though Bengali women swiftly moved into roles beyond the domestic sphere, as teachers, social workers, and politicians, the problematic morality of modernity and its contestations can be traced through discussions of domestic food consumptions and the role of housewives until today.

The intersection of class, femininity, and domesticity featured prominently in discussions about commodity consumption with my own interlocutors on what it meant to be a housewife. Displaying expertise in food preparation was relevant, and 'typically' Bengali food patterns were regularly referenced when homemaking and the role of women in the home were discussed. It is not surprising that notions of appropriate food served in the middle-class home played a huge role in my interlocutors' boundary work. In the process, the regional roots of (Hindu) Bengali foodways were not only marked as distinctive, they were also clearly and explicitly related to the joint family ideal. Thus, mothers would emphasise how staying at home and cooking, supervising servants who would take on 'dirty', 'hard', and 'rubbish' tasks, was crucial to their personal identity as well as the reproduction of appropriately gendered, communal and middle-class regional ones. A further marker of such appropriate consumption was related to ideas about gender relations and age, as performing the role of the housewife perfectly depended on a husband who would earn the main salary. A common contribution of men to the desired foodways was to take on all the trips to the bazaar and shop for food – and such devotion to the ideal consumption pattern meant a lot to many of my interlocutors back in the 1990s. The importance the division of labour had for middle-class homes cannot be overstated and far outweighed that of other practices, for instance home refurbishment or shopping for other items. When I interviewed Minakshi, who was in her late fifties at the time, she shared her eldest son's family's flat, and like many of her neighbours I knew, she had presided over a joint family home when her children were small. In her affinal home she had worked alongside her mother-in-law and her sisters-in-law and, crucially, two servants. When asked about what being a housewife meant to her, she cited her mother-in-law:

In my in-laws' house there were two servants, one from outside and one live-in servant. My mother-in-law always said that the daughters-in-law should 'look after my sons'. Servants were there for the rubbish work. Women cooked and served food to the sons and children.

Much has changed in the lives of women, mothers, and the middle-class family more generally, but often daughters-in-law in this and other homes

spend most of their days indoors irrespective of whether other members of the household need them to be present or not. Food preparation, the serving of food to male family members and children, the planning of ritual meals, feasts, and fasts, provided the background of an orientation ‘towards the home’. As part of this devotion to domesticity, women were preparing full warm meals before husbands and children left for offices or school, and served another one for dinner, with snacks at the ready for those returning in the afternoon and served on holidays in between meals. In many homes, and commonly as part of women’s life cycle, a mother-in-law shared the work with her son’s wife, and both would often spend much of their time engaged in the preparation of meals from scratch, interspersing bouts of work in the kitchen with watching soaps on TV and having naps in the afternoon. While older women may be content with the routine, it was mostly daughters-in-law who complained about missing the freedom of movement experienced in their natal homes, and the time to engage in socialising, which was now spent on cooking.

Whilst before the 1990s occasional outings with the family to celebrate a child’s birthday or to attend a wedding feast were much anticipated, these occasions would often also centre around parents and their children and not the joint household. Speaking in 2016, Anjali, a neighbour in South Calcutta during the early 2000s, looked back at her time of being a young mother and stated:

[t]hat was when we still lived with my mother-in-law and my daughter was still here – I hardly went out because I was responsible for all the food and looking after the old lady, and we only ate out once a year for our wedding anniversary. I did not really like going out a lot, a home-cooked meal is always the better option. I am a typical housewife.

The fact that respectable women in their 30s and 40s were expected to be ‘housewives’ was marked by this ambivalent and definitely critical attitude towards ‘outings’, which were occasions of leaving the house for the sake of consumption. The reluctance to allow women such leisure activities more often reflected general ideas about gender and consumption outside the home, an attitude externalised in the form of related practices like clothing. For most of the housewives I met, wearing a ‘practical’ nightie during the day served all purposes, and made them distinguish themselves from their counterparts in employment. ‘Dressing up’ to go out was often depicted as a major chore and women like Minakshi and Anjali highlighted being able to spend all day indoors as the ultimate vision of achieved respectability. Crucially, their job was to enable consumption patterns based on their own orientation towards the family home in which food practices played a major role. But gradually, this order of things came under pressure with the influx of commodities, many of them food-related, and the way neoliberal ideologies spread across sites including the family home.

Mediating the everyday meal

Even though it might appear as if consumption has become a focus of public debate only in the aftermath of liberalisation, middle-class citizens have been actively crafting appropriately modern consumer identities for themselves since the colonial period. However, it is the post-Independence period which saw a major shift towards discourses that embrace commodities not only as part of nationalist imageries but as part of global and class-based lifestyles. As Sadana remarks, creating class awareness in the mould of ‘secular cosmopolitanism’ was a project that encompassed media productions as well as manuals about appropriate domesticities (Sadana 2012; Haynes, McGowan this volume). While much of this history remains to be written the emphasis on resolutely secular and upper middle-class representations of appropriate consumption that marked the ‘idea of India’ (though not necessarily its reality) during the Nehruvian era has given way to a proliferation of much more diverse discourse on being middle-class from the 1980s onwards (Khilnani 1997; Varma 2007). The ambiguity and moral anxiety that competitive middle-class consumption patterns raised was often addressed by the housewives I worked with, who saw commodities as part of consumerist lifestyles and new consumption practices as indicators of problematic inter-generational and gender relations. A prime site to articulate such concerns consisted of discussions about food and the way pre-prepared ingredients and eating out have become a marker of upward mobility and access to global middle-class cultures. While such practices seem innocuous enough, their significance is derived from subtle shifts in meanings attached to specific kinds of foods, and their larger implications are easy to miss. After all, eating out was studied as constitutive of cosmopolitan consumer culture as early as 1995 (see Conlon 1995). But such practices were subject to rigid gender- and age-related hierarchies, at least within the Bengali middle-class context. While young people enjoyed the transgressional qualities of consuming street food outside the home, its association with lower-class producers and sites made it figure as the opposite of the highly morally charged family meal (Mukhopadhyay 2004).

The latter used to be highly ritualised and circumscribed by notions of balanced physical qualities so that even at the start of the twenty-first century, food prepared for the family was freshly cooked each day from scratch and the dishes served were marked as Bengali. Today, drawing the boundaries of home through food has become much more complex. Although mothers claim that the availability of fast food and restaurants even in relatively remote suburbs has made things easier for ‘working women’, even those staying-at-home reported that they shared outside food with the family on a regular basis. The reasoning beyond the mere desire for specific foodstuff was the felt need to engage with restaurants, home deliveries, and semi-prepared ingredients as a matter of ‘exposure’ to globalised and modern lifestyles.

In this context Harris points out that urban foodscapes in India have become sites for ‘metabolic’ communion, of inter-subjective negotiations of

modernity in terms of health, individualism, bodies, and the commodity form (Harris 2016). And as I have argued elsewhere, mothers act as chief arbitrators of a world of new foods that are marketed to their families, which often signify not so much group-based identities but gendered forms of subjectification (Donner 2008b). Today, mothers are forced to weigh up the ‘well-balanced diets’ and a growing discourse on ‘healthy’ eating against the engagement with trendy consumption patterns that allow their children to acquire suitably modern habits. Where it was earlier obvious that women in the home decided what to cook, how to spend, and what constituted healthy food, such decisions are no longer this clear-cut. Today, the value of a meal does not automatically stem from its ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ or even ‘everyday’ (*emni*) qualities, earlier cast in terms of ‘freshly prepared’ items a housewife cooked ‘with her own hands’. Many meals prepared in the Bengali middle-class home today carry much more complex connotations, as they signify cosmopolitan lifestyles, aspirations, and urbane cultures. The private re-evaluation and discussion of the family meal that I have documented elsewhere (Donner 2008b) is driven by a range of influences beyond concerns with health, among them media representations and marketing, youth culture, and the mushrooming of new food-related businesses and commodities. And as evident in other contexts, for example in urban China (Jing 2000), children’s consumerist engagements play a special role, as it is through them that demands for novel items infiltrate the family home. Marketing food to Indian middle-class children directly was pioneered in the 1980s when the iconic success story of Maggi Instant noodles began. These were first introduced in 1983 and marketed directly to pupils as a cheap commodity that suggested that middle-class lifestyles were accessible to broad sections of the population (Baviskar 2018). These and other aspirational snacks come to children’s attention at an early age and sons and daughters continue to act as conduits of novel desires throughout their school years and as they become students with more money to spend on fast food (Donner 2008b). Thus it is often to please the youngest members of the household that housewives provide Chinese, North Indian, and vaguely European dishes as they manoeuvre a foodscape that thrives on cheap labour and a host of great ingredients. Whereas Janeja has pointed out that Bengali middle-class home cooking is crucially conceived in the idiom of the ‘everyday’ (Janeja 2010), this notion has come under attack as home-cooked meals are no longer reflective of a *doxa* in Bourdieu’s sense (Bourdieu 1977). Earlier such everydayness implied that food was neither created, nor curated, nor chosen by individuals, but was produced within a rigidly gendered division of labour of shared tasks and hierarchical work patterns. Taken seriously, everyday food reproduced regional and class-based identities as interdependent and reliant on adult women’s respectability, indicated by their married status. While the housewife in charge would prepare some of the dishes with ‘her own hands’, daughters-in-law and servants did the main work. Everyday food was also marked as affordable and centred around routines shared by women, while catering or food from restaurants involved male expertise and was limited to

special occasions. Women's knowledge consisted of the planning of elaborate daily meals, the transmission of techniques required to produce certain dishes and the ability to organise the work that went into the making of everyday meals. In important ways women's roles in the production of such meals were related to set lifecycle expectations, which would make a formerly exploited daughter-in-law the privileged senior housewife at some point in her life. Thus, talk about the everydayness of Bengali home-cooked food implies a very specific kind of femininity, idealised in countless cultural artefacts and media representations as a *grihalakshmi* (mistress of the home) and often depicted in a white sari with a red border, the Bengali version of the respectable national dress. She is an auspicious presence, embodying nurture, sacrifice, fertility, and respectability.

The links between the gendered hierarchies within the home, food as a marker of status, and food as producing appropriately middle-class persons had to be re-evaluated in the twenty-first century. Food practices, as Liechty (2003) points out, play a dominant role in the way South Asian middle classes negotiate the shifting terrain of national identity and global desire, and Bengali middle-class ideology is intimately related to such wider discourses. Apart from its role as signifier of regional identity, food habits are also a site for self-realisation, which is linked to ideas about family life within which traditionally the most acceptable site for individual expressions of selfhood and desire were food preferences. In an interesting twist, it is through food practices that earlier techniques of the self, such as fasting or food taboos, pregnancy cravings and religious observance, become active agents of neo-liberal ideas of selfhood.

Much of what has been said so far is directly related to areas of ongoing concern about commodity consumption for middle-class families and individuals, especially for housewives and mothers. Where once meals had been modernised in the name of nationalism and appropriately Indian identity, such patterns are now threatened by conspicuous consumption and transnational reinvention. In my respondents' representations, food still features prominently as an indicator of Indian middle-class culture, and consumption patterns associated with an orientation towards the family are embraced. But what constitutes family meals has changed and with it the narratives about what it means to be a housewife.

Eating the world at home: maternal cosmopolitanism

The more rigidly state-controlled economy of the post-Independence era meant that the most popular food-related commodities were of Indian origin with the exception of very few products. My interlocutors would readily reel off the names of these goods, which included biscuits, 'Horlicks', and chocolate. Few multinational food items entered the middle-class home before 1990. In fact, more locally known brands, including those associated with white bread, oils, and mustard sauce, were marketed in the vernacular and

were often preferred over ‘foreign’ products. What became clear in the course of my fieldwork was that contrary to what is usually assumed about marketing, middle-class housewives did not establish special relationships with such brands. Which kind of oil to purchase, the exact name of the bread eaten for breakfast, or where to buy Chinese ready meals to take home, was more a matter of practicalities and costs than abstract desire, status-consideration or a major marker of consumer identity. None of these decisions warranted extensive debate or specialist knowledge about the ‘story’ behind the product and when we discussed such matters the price of the item and – most importantly – the reputation of the shop rather than the quality of a brand itself were highlighted. Equally, discussions about private enterprise vs state-run food production were also not clear-cut and in some cases, products were assumed to be purer, or rather less likely to be contaminated, when government agencies regulated their production, whereas the opposite could hold true where specific distributors or items were concerned, for example items purchased from a subsidised ration shop. If such consumption related to the state and citizenship, it was through the narrative of the developmental state, and in particular its many shortcomings, represented in a merely affirmative way – that housewives *felt* these commodities were marketed and were specifically Indian, while whether they were indeed or not was often difficult to discern and of no relevance.

As I pointed out elsewhere (Donner 2008b), though reports of the death of the local bazaar economy in the face of competition from malls and supermarket brands are greatly exaggerated, the kind of items available and the way these are marketed today have changed. Some of my very well-off interlocutors proudly told me as early as 2003 about the new experience of supermarket shopping. At the time there was a local chain, which resembled more of an extended self-service corner shop – and rather grand large stores clearly geared towards the growing car-owning minority. The latter are well-stocked with semi-processed foods but also sell mundane items including dhal, rice, and flour in large quantities and of different brands. Those I discussed such shops with insisted on two things, namely that they were cheaper – often citing the ability of such establishments to buy in bulk – and that the quality was better than in the local market. But most of all, they enjoyed their exclusivity (of customers and of the ‘modern’ foods available) and air-conditioning, which explains why the experience, rather than the reality of a complete shift towards supermarket shopping, took hold in public consciousness. As one of the older interlocutors said: ‘It is so convenient for my daughter to drive there and get everything in one place.’ Asked whether she ever used the supermarket, she laughed and said, ‘No, why would I, it is more expensive and I don’t drive, it is for the affluent ones, in my case, my husband goes to the local market.’ Clearly, for the middle-class, upper crust shopping for food has become more of an experience as they shop in segregated spaces. In contrast, those less well-off may refer to a small walk-in neighbourhood grocery

store as a 'supermarket', which is nevertheless used extensively to buy dry goods and household items as well as frozen goods, including frozen meat. However, in these households one would not use a walk-in store to purchase the all-important daily vegetables, fish, and fresh chicken. For all of these ingredients, most of my interlocutors' families still depend on the bazaar.

Firstly, the diet of middle-class Indians generally, and urban Bengali families in particular, has diversified to include 'foreign' dishes and eating out. Although self-representations tend to exaggerate the degree to which the daily routine has been transformed, it is the exposure to and the interest in such practices as Italian cooking or burger bars, which is relevant. Much of the information on such dishes and the way they are prepared stems from eating out, and large franchises connected to global chains, for example Pizza Hut, as well as small neighbourhood restaurants emulating them, have an impact here. Gradually as youths and young professionals have embraced eating out as a leisure pursuit beyond the quick kebab or street food snack purchased from a hawker, housewives are pressurised into acquiring new forms of knowledge about the availability of dishes, ingredients, and preparations their children crave. Initially mothers were struggling to find an adequate level of engagement with 'foreign' practices (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009). However, within a space of two decades anxieties about such challenges to the 'traditional' image of the family meal have given way to the embrace of novel patterns, and the exclusive provision of home-made Bengali food is often depicted as ideal but unattainable. As Gayatri, a mother of two pointed out, 'who wants to eat the same food day in day out? The children, they get bored'. It is through the perceived 'needs' of children and adolescents that many new consumption patterns enter the home and larger transformations are communicated and justified. In the name of choice, the individuating power of consumption and the need to engage with the demands of loved ones, mothers have reconsidered what makes a 'family' meal and a 'balanced' diet. Today, as the boundary between what is 'food from outside' and what represents 'everyday' food and can be consumed at home has become blurred, the age, marital status, and gender of those sharing a meal is no longer that important.

Last but not least and, probably most significantly, the power of food stuff itself, as opposed to the importance of its global references, has diminished. Most significantly, as I have discussed elsewhere in more detail (Donner 2008b), vegetarianism, earlier an indicator of community, caste, gender, and marital status, has acquired new meanings. In many homes that were pescatarian in the 1990s, as was the norm with many Hindu families stemming from East Bengal, meat dishes, at least chicken, are regularly prepared today. This shift is often triggered by a mother's embrace of her child's need to engage in food practices associated with global modernity. Mothers who started to provide chicken dishes or pasta as part of their children's diet often indicated that in order for children to become full participants in the new middle-class

commodity culture they had to acquire knowledge about and develop a taste for such food. These preferences also link the domain of kinship with its strong implications of interdependence, hierarchy, and filial duty to the domain of middle-class global workplaces and leisure spaces, as a mother's lovingly prepared meal is seen as a matter of 'exposure' to global habits. As the next section will show, public discourses on consumer citizenship frame 'private' discussions about food in very specific ways.

Home-made expertise reworked

Many of my interlocutors engaged with representations of the 'New Indian Woman' (Oza 2006) only reluctantly and raised similar issues around the moral ambiguity of such femininities as those recorded by Van Wessel (2004) and Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase in the 1990s and 2000s related to consumption (Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009). But once neoliberal ideas about individualism and choice were discussed in relation to parenting, mothers increasingly foregrounded new opportunities for self-fashioning through consumption as meaningful and necessary. Changing foodways were a major site for such affirmations, and figured prominently where inter-generational differences were concerned.

The majority of my interlocutors agreed that expertise in food questions was no longer about the special traditional meal prepared, but command over new recipes associated with 'experiences' and 'fun', for example the pasta dish eaten on holiday, the Chinese fare available in Kolkata's famous Chinatown, or the North Indian mutton curry sampled at a wedding. Where housewives would have obsessed earlier about the polluting qualities of specific food-related practices cast in terms of the complex set of rules referred to as *bichar-achar* such concepts marking boundaries of home and community no longer hold the same power. Furthermore, domestic food practices – which were never taken lightly earlier – are today in many contexts expected to provide 'enjoyment', rather than merely to balance physical and mental states.

Clearly, if taken out of the family context, assertions of new consumerist identities based on agentive selves may appear to have fostered a fully fledged embrace of neoliberal versions of individualism. But ethnographic evidence suggests that collective identities are still extremely important and that in relation to food it is not so much the practices themselves that have changed, but rather the interpretative framework within which they exist. A good example of the continuing importance of domestic food practices in constructions of Bengali middle-classness, and a sometimes partisan and hegemonic regionalism, are the many TV and internet channels dedicated to *banglaranna* (Bengali cuisine). Here, as in the housewives' talent shows analysed by Goopta and Chakravarty (2013), middle-class femininity is reproduced through a highly ritualised performance that builds on intra-class and generational differences in a quest for 'everyday' authentic preparations. Similar to recipes presented in women's magazines in the 1990s, such expertise is spread

across different sites including TV and YouTube channels but still consumed almost without exception in the vernacular. In these performances of perfect housewively skills, intra-class differences are downplayed and a kind of consumer-sisterhood among performers and audiences based on the idea that both are women ‘just like us’ emerges. Across India, countless channels are devoted to middle-class housewives’ cooking skills, and though framed and financed through ads selling gadgets and ingredients, these shows are not to be confused with merchandise channels.

For my interlocutors, who rarely mentioned print media as sources of recipes in the 1990s – though women’s journals and daily newspapers contained many – such presentations have become a source of inspiration on different levels. Firstly, of course, they may encounter new recipes and variations of old favourites, which is always welcome in a setting where traditional food is highly valued. Secondly, and probably more importantly, foodscapes, not fashion or employment, are seen as legitimate sites of innovation, directed and embedded individualism, and new avenues for social recognition, especially for women.

As Goopta and Chakravarty point out with reference to housewives and vernacular visual media live TV shows provide viewers with a ‘valorization of housework and home-building which, by implication, enhanced their personal self-esteem and confidence in their own enterprise as housewives’ (Goopta and Chakravarty 2013: 148). The same holds true for the consumption of cookery programmes, which unlike recipes in print, are performed and are thus much more open to interpretation and identification. Bar a few exceptions, my interlocutors were far more interested in recipes ‘sent in’ or presented by those marked as housewives, an expert ‘just like’ them, than shows by professional cooks. And, rather counter-intuitively (and contrary to trends in the West), most cookery shows in Bengali as well as recipes in print media focused on everyday food items they were conversant with. An example is the cookery programme *Rannaghar* (kitchen) produced by Zee TV’s Bengali channel and screened daily, whereas the high-gloss magazine and website *Hangla Hensel* is an example for print media, both of which demonstrate the way that consumption, a revamped ideology of the housewife and food preparation reinforce each other.¹

Even a cursory glance at the website storing *Rannaghar*, which has been running for more than ten years, demonstrates why it may attract the attention of housewives handling novel, food-related consumption patterns. The format, which celebrates middle-class women’s mundane domestic roles consists of a well-spoken presenter, who takes on the typical role of a *didi* (elder sister) to a lower middle-class and much younger contestant cooking a typical dish. Well-educated, well-groomed, worldwide, and media savvy, the presenter guides the contestants, while her guests represent archetypical housewives, indicated by the DIY-style of make-up and clothing and their more traditional mannerisms. However, though the parties are clearly from very different backgrounds, the performative aspect of a show enables an

ideal middle-class femininity to be enacted, which is particularly pertinent in the brief interview guests are subjected to before the cooking starts. These introductions tend to focus on an anecdote from the guest's family life, which the presenter facilitates, and more often than not these are to do with the complexities of affinal kinship relations and food consumed at home. The mostly younger women who are participating are likely to have gone through a similar 'interview' during marriage negotiations, and may have also produced special food on the occasion of these meetings. Furthermore, it is also not uncommon for mothers to be interviewed about food-related practices in the home as part of school admission procedures. Thus, the presenter's role emulates such rigidly hierarchical relationships, and may appear similar to an all-knowing headmistress, doctor, or potential mother-in-law when speaking to the young guest in a patronising manner about themselves and their families.

Participants in the show are mostly young and married, and their authenticity stems from their attire as well as their performance of an insecure and shy woman. Part of this performance is the joint development of a 'storyline' around the family, which highlights their identity as homemakers and subservient daughters-in-law but not solely that. As Goopta and Chakravarty (2009) argue in relation to female game show participants, while clearly embracing the status quo, shows in which young women appear also articulate a desire for some kind of autonomy. But in the case of cookery shows, whether or not the guest is accomplished, the format confirms the existing inter-generational and intra-class relationships because the final part of the performance, when the actual dish is prepared, allows the sophisticated and upper middle-class host, a 'modern' working woman rather than the capable homemaker, to be an expert on middle-class domesticity. It is during the final part of the show that the more senior woman acts as a teacher, or takes on the role of an ideal elder affine, who patiently helps a young bride to become as accomplished as she is herself by telling her how to improve her dish.

In the light of the discursive emphasis on youth culture, social change, choice, as well as individual preferences, it may sound surprising that the items prepared and presented are almost exclusively all-time favourites, and that they are not presented in a nostalgic vein. While some bloggers prepare more exotic fare on-screen, often with diaspora audiences in mind, here a mix of staples holds sway. Not only are the dishes almost always of the curry variety, it appears that their presentation seems of minimal importance. Clearly what is on display is not the food, but the guest–host relationship, staged in a studio kitchen that resembles those found in affluent homes but which is a far cry from what most participants will have at home. However, the reality of the guests is referenced too – thus, all dishes are prepared on the standard two-flame gas burners found in homes across all sections of the urban middle-class population.

If the dishes are so familiar, what is communicated here? First, visible cosmopolitan upper middle-class femininity is shown to be superior and desirable but 'traditional' values shape the relationships in the family home. The participating 'housewife' is introduced in the context of an aspirational setting,

the ideal kitchen, equipped with gadgets, coordinated storage jars, decorative items, and ventilation. For a moment even a young, just married woman is an expert as she does not have to squat on the floor to cut vegetables, and it is her expertise rather than the actual hard manual labour that is acknowledged. As the guest seems to slot in so effortlessly, embedding individual desires within a story about the role of being a daughter-in-law, the dishes testify to this embrace of the order of things and are not surprisingly of the 'everyday' variety. Ideally, the family home is not the site where commodified foodways are embraced. If a housewife harbours ambitions, she can do so publicly by being extra modest, actively subservient and under the tutelage of older women, and by performing expertise in 'traditional' foodways on TV.

Similar messages are communicated by the journal *Hangla Hensel* where the recipes sent in by readers are often rather mundane. As in the TV show, the authors are presented as 'just like us' housewives who peer at the reader from small mugshots that accompany the plain text and photograph of the cooked dish that make the recipe. Contrary to the authentic looks of these homemakers and their recipes the feature articles, which make up the rest of the magazine, are often written by male experts. Here, chefs, renowned writers, and local creative folk cast themselves as foodies with a passion for extraordinary dishes, framed as part of global middle-class consumption patterns, for example in relation to holidays and leisure pursuits. Articles about childhood memories of seasonal feasts, picnics, and similar special events abound and act as confirmation that the domain of the idealised housewife – the everyday – is framed by aspirational consumption or at least knowledge thereof. Such narrative embedding turns the magazine into more than just a collection of recommendations from the family kitchen and elevates the duty of homemakers through expert discussion. While the recipes sent in by readers are more numerous and focus on the preparation rather than the cook, feature articles focus on often male creators and the experience of food consumption.

It appears that expertise and self-realisation are closely related to common preparations of readily available ingredients rather than extensive knowledge about exotic dishes, which are put forward as indicators of modern culinary experiences. Fitting in with Jaheja's claim that Bengali food is cherished as everyday nurture rather than exceptional experience, housewives provide an endless series of such dishes (Jaheja 2010). It is therefore not the food that makes such media representations worthwhile, but the fact that they allow housewives engaging with TV, journals, and websites on food, to mediate the neoliberal demand and the desire for entrepreneurial selves and consumer citizenship. Women often do so within the ideological and material reality of the joint family. In the process the housewife, as chief consumer facilitating food consumption in the home, crafts a niche for herself that reinforces, rather than breaks down, expectations.

Cooking as a performative art, one for discussion and display of individual skills, is certainly a novelty. Shows such as *Rannaghar* were readily embraced

by my interlocutors, who would not apply to take part, but enjoyed watching such programmes. This kind of performance, unlike singing or dancing, skills traditionally also associated with respectable Bengali middle-class femininity, does not require formal training or expeditions to specialist shops. It also allows the middle-class project to come together through the integration of different roles for different women. It is this aspect – the formation of a middle-class discourse across divisions – which makes shows like these ideal vehicles of neoliberal femininity. This is suggested by the fact that Bengali housewives from small towns can engage here with urbane professional presenters from affluent suburban contexts, whom they would rarely encounter on an equal footing elsewhere. What marks out magazines and TV programmes dedicated to Bengali food is the emphasis of a common vernacular: all performances are in Bengali, as are most of the ads, and little effort is made to introduce glamorous backgrounds, exotic recipes or amazing surprises. However, the studio kitchen environment indicates that such shows are also aspirational sites which tie in with wider consumer identities, integrating everyday family meals with new ideals of being female and middle-class, and the role of domestic space in the construction of consumer citizenship.

Reframing the housewife: ‘doing up’ the kitchen

As mentioned in the preceding section, the spaces within which such ambitious versions of the ‘housewife’ are imagined are the well-equipped kitchens associated with gated communities. In the case of my interlocutors, their own homes are very often different from such sites, even where they inhabit an apartment. In media discourses and advertisements kitchens figure as part of modern family living, and are depicted as fitted and stuffed with gadgets as well as being well-lit and sparkling clean. Pink’s suggestion to link theories of practice and place-making (2012: 53) applies here as well, as such modern spaces emphasise functionality by matching the materiality with the practical aspects of activities undertaken, which as Gowan (this volume) suggests featured also in very early rewritings of the modern middle-class home. As Srivastava (2014: 116) has pointed out, for middle-class consumers, kitchen and bathroom refurbishments have become sites to realise ‘modern selves’ in the light of the failed possibility of a full public material modernity. As Brosius has suggested, this withdrawal into the private sphere does rely on multiple sites that advise on how to create the modern home, for example interior decoration magazines, which are consumed mostly by women (Brosius 2010). However, most homes I am familiar with do not contain beautifully fitted kitchens and large bathrooms. More often than not, living arrangements have evolved over time and consist of a bricolage with kitchens and bathrooms in need of basic pipework and worktops squeezed into small and not seldom very dark corners of a general living area. Even in modern apartments food preparation and the associated activities like the washing of dishes, shopping, and storage of utensils and foodstuff, may spill over into other spaces, as ingredients are stored

under beds, gifted gadgets remain hidden away in cupboards, and verandas are used by maids for washing and chopping vegetables. Thus, the actual practice of cooking, which has been mostly ignored by scholars concerned with the politics of intimate space and its transformation, was what my interlocutors focus on when speaking about housewives. What made a good kitchen is in this context clearly interpreted not only in terms of abstract ‘modernity’ but along the complex axes of gender and authority in the family, which rests on the availability of hard physical labour and the exploitation of younger women and female servants. Whilst polished surfaces, gadgets, air, and light were clearly not hampering the production of the all-important everyday meals, to display traditional values by employing a hard-working daughter-in-law or servants for laborious tasks is clearly equally constitutive of status.

Where material improvements have been embraced more recently, this has happened more often than not half-heartedly. This was obvious in the home of the Bose family, who after living in a joint three-generation household had created two separate kitchens in the same space – one for each son’s family. This was not only a marker of the change in family dynamics, in budgets, and life with soon to be married children, it also signified the successful participation in the new consumerist world, which materialised in the form of an espresso machine, a toaster and at least one fully functioning oven. However, while the kitchen created from scratch in one brother’s home was more of the fitted variety, the older brother and his wife did not invest in ‘fancy’ stuff: in true old-school style, they only painted the walls of what had been the large joint space and brought in a local carpenter to add some cupboards, leaving the kitchen looking even more cobbled together than it had appeared before the ‘renovation’. Proudly, the respective sisters-in-law showed me their new kitchens and pointed out details like tiling and work surfaces, and the new seating arrangements in a separate room, which also housed one of the fridges. However, rather than simplistically reading these changes as aspirational discourses or evidence of the nuclearisation of the family, the actual use of the space had not changed entirely. As was evident when I visited, the couples cooked together when guests arrived or the married daughters of the family came to visit, and it was the cooperation and overlap, spatially, financially, and in terms of women’s work, which demarcated the ‘family home’. Thus, while both wives and mothers were citing the refurbishment as an improvement, as good housewives they carefully managed the transition to a new household pattern according to reformulated ideas about jointness.

Conclusion: contextualising the housewife

Here, as elsewhere, middle-class housewives are engaged in reproductive labour, which used to be defined in terms of status production work, including the mediation of commodity consumption. Food practices form part of this field, but unlike housewives’ engagement with the education of children, the way that women are implied and engage with feeding the family has become

the subject of intense debate. This is embedded in wider discourses on female employment, young women's participation in public culture, and media representations of entrepreneurial femininities, which all draw on notions of consumer citizenship. New consumption patterns challenge ideas about gender and intra-generational relations and support neoliberal ideologies by transforming the family from within. But while the individualising tendencies of consumer citizenship are well acknowledged and routinely analysed in relation to gendered agency (see for example Kar, this volume), this chapter focuses on the way it sharpens intra-class divisions between women. By taking the ideal of the housewife seriously and focusing on family meals, the chapter highlights everyday practices that affirm rather than challenge earlier hegemonic femininities. The way neoliberal ideologies are appropriated seems to be easier traced where consumption is conspicuous and takes place in public, in contestations taking place in full view of the media and in direct challenges to gendered norms. However, I suggest that the domestic sphere depending on women's unpaid labour, and the associated intra-household hierarchies, represent a crucial site for the formation of the middle-class project. Here, consumption as identity-forging possibility meets forces that reproduce inequalities that subordinate women through an insistence on specific forms of domesticity, while kin roles are cast as the main legitimate outlet of individualising desires.

The history of middle-class consumption in the period between independence and the onset of liberalisation is yet to be written, but some important markers of the prevailing discourses framed my fieldwork experience. Family homes as locations of commodity consumption, for example of meals, necessitate enormous efforts to guard moral practices, and enable successful consumer citizenship. As Anagnost (2008) observes for China:

[t]he middle class is actively produced through a new model of citizenship: the entrepreneurial subject, responsible for his/her own 'profits and losses' and the anxious manager of his or her embodied capital, whose success is measured in commodified expressions of social distinction, and whose identity as a rights-bearing subject is defined in terms of being a consumer. This production of a consumer-citizenship requires a transformation in the mental life of subjects, a reorientation of the subject's 'intendedness towards the object' – to use Spivak's characterization of the 'idealist predication of the subject' (1988: 154) – that individuates the subject and displaces what formerly might have been collective aspirations.

The recourse to the family as a site of analysis does not therefore imply that the many ads, the TV series and billboards advertising kitchen refurbishments have no impact. As Srivastava suggests, such designed and aestheticised visions of social relations, of status, and reputation, are associated with novel ideas about how to lead middle-class lives (Srivastava 2014). The housewives I met may only realise some of these ideals, but as their kitchen refurbishments indicate, they actively engage with notions of modernity, in

this context for example functionality and refurbishment as a form of investment previously ignored. Secondly, any engagement with these imageries strengthens the familial ideal and a family narrative focused on achievements made rather than mere futures imagined. The resulting tension for women, as Goopta and Chakravarty have shown, stems from the demand to act as an individual consumer and the idealised reality of family life. They argue that housewife-consumers are increasingly expected to internalise the entrepreneurial spirit of the new urban middle-class lifestyle, but that they do so within the limited space kin roles allow (Goopta and Chakravarty 2013). Banerjee-Dube observes with reference to the nineteenth century that scholars working on ‘global domesticity’ missed out on the particularities of the joint family ideology and that ‘the locus of authority was dispersed across several family elders, including women elders, unlike in the dyadic familial unit’ (Banerjee-Dube 2016: 103). In the current climate, with the pressures to embrace neoliberal ideas about the world and the self, a whole set of contradictions implied in the notion of the ‘family’ come to the fore. While commodity consumption is hailed as the main truly individualising practice, the work of reproduction is still governed through family ideologies, which are propping up the gendered division of labour in the home. In the given context, Sangari argues, this happens through re-traditionalisation: ‘Women must be returned to the “social”, construed alternately as the (bad) backward and (good) traditional; appropriate distributions of traditions must be maintained since the self-exploitation of daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, usually stems from familial embedment’ (Sangari 2015: 67). The middle-class family is therefore no longer merely a site of consumption. It is crucial to rethink it in terms of its productive capacity, namely as a site where consumer citizens are realised. Here, women’s work needs to be embedded in the necessities of household organisation and the socialisation of future workers. Calling oneself a housewife is therefore a way to express contradictions that stem from the manner in which domestic consumption patterns are a prime site for the reproduction of class through gendered divisions of labour in neoliberal times.

Note

- 1 Multiple episodes of *Rannaghar* can be found at www.ozee.com/shows/rannaghar. The much less professionally produced Bengali website, *Hangla Hensel*, can be found at www.hanglahesel.com. It is likely that the magazine of the same name is a way to advertise the webpage and that the former is more popular.

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9 Consumer citizenship and Indian Muslim youth

Tabassum Ruhi Khan

Introduction

The struggle to define India's political future and to delineate who (or what interests) would write India's destiny in the new world order hinges on the key question of how does the idea of consumer citizenship redefine political participation in democratic societies? The question is particularly relevant with respect to what does participation as consumer citizens entail for marginalised populations' political agency?

These questions are raised in a political-economic context of India's new economic order, which is founded on promoting consumerism as the identifying practice of its new beneficiaries, and which benefits from the symbolism of consumerism that proliferates in representational and mediated spheres and has become ubiquitous since the opening up of the Indian economy and Indian skies in 1991 to global economic and cultural forces. Ethnographic investigations have focused on several sites to understand the salience of consumption in shaping the ideological underpinning of the emerging social cultural reality. These include how Indian elites, invested in the symbolic spheres of media and advertising, play an important role in translating the political-economic implications of neoliberal globalisation as everyday life practices through the consumption of new products and services (see Mazzarella 2003), how consumption becomes the *leitmotif* of the middle class's culture and identity (Donner 2011; Leichty 2005) and how it shapes gendered identities and gender dynamics (Mankekar 2004).

As a related outcome of the focus on consumption practices, the discourse of consumer citizenship has also gained traction in India since the advent of the economic reforms of 1991, which transformed a formerly developmentalist economy into one firmly ensconced in the logic of market capitalism and globalisation. In the contexts of the economic and social transformations, the consuming middle classes have not only emerged as saviours and heirs of India's future but have also been identified as the force reshaping Indian society and indeed India's destiny (Bhagwati 2004; Das 2000; Nilekani 2008). However, the voices which hail the middle class's ascendancy also endorse their aim to shape the political-economic and social environment through their actions

and policies that enhance poverty and disenfranchisement. In this climate, the selective vision of consumer citizens, along with a belief in the positive trickle-down effects of economic growth, has fostered unquestionable ideologies guiding all political paradigms (Roy 1999). Increasingly, global media, which have made deep inroads into middle-class lives following economic liberalisation, determine Indian cultural publics and citizens. Within this context, 'freedom' and 'choice' promoted by commercial advertising rather than discourses actually enabling citizens' rights and responsibilities (Harvey 2005; McChesney 1999, 2001) have become instrumental in supporting the idea that India needs to realign its politics to the new era of consumerism. Gormless journalists, columnists, and commentators too endlessly regurgitate euphoric endorsements of perceptions about the possibilities for empowerment in a society organising itself along neoliberal economic precepts and values.

However, at the other end of the scale, a few cautionary voices from Marxist affiliated scholars warn that India's embrace of neoliberal capitalism signifies a mere shift rather than an overhauling of earlier, exploitative regimes. In fact, these critics link exploitative conditions of colonialism and empire to the foregrounding of India's consuming middle class's rights and privileges which they argue have aided the demise of redistributive justice and promoted the strident rise of right-wing politics (Mishra 2006; Roy 2016). But, even as debate rages regarding whether engagement in public spheres as consumer citizens is indicative of political agency in contexts of enhanced economic growth, or whether it marks disenfranchisement of large sections of the populations who are unable to consume, my research draws attention to the fact that only the perspective of the dominant Hindu community has so far been taken into account. To address this lacuna, my research focuses on the way Indian Muslim youth experience consumerism as the media becomes an overwhelming presence in their lives, and it seeks to understand how they adapt to consumerist narratives and values, which dominate public discourse in a formerly socialist country (Khan 2015). My ethnographic research stretches across six years, starting from 2006 and leading up to 2013. My fieldwork was conducted in the Muslim-dominated area of Jamia Nagar in Delhi. The research set out to understand how Muslim middle-class aspirations are similar to and also different from those of the dominant community, and how circumstances of discrimination and relative disadvantage influence the experience of citizenship in an age of consumerism. It draws on Nestor Garcia Canclini's (2001) proposition that when citizens demand services, for example improved access to amenities, they are engaging in negotiations with the state and other actors through consumption. Thus, according to Canclini, consumption constitutes an 'interactive sociopolitical rationality' (2001: 39). In the Indian context, improved access to and consumption of education, employment, and other facilities supported by affirmative action policies of the Indian government have been argued as enabling the rise of lower-caste-based political parties (Ciotti 2010), and consumption of facilities such as water have also been seen as a bid for recognition and respect from state

and other stakeholders by lower middle-class or ‘the peripheral middle-class citizens’ (Ranganathan 2014). However, in the case of a religious minority community such as the Indian Muslim, identified by distinct markers of ‘otherness’ (of their social-cultural-religious ethos) as well as by their economic and political marginalisation, how would the socio-political dynamics shaping consumerist aspirations bring them new visibility or challenge their marginalisation? My research draws attention to this question because such an analysis can introduce nuances to the current binary perspective on consumer citizenship as either providing political agency or entrenching exclusion and political disenfranchisement.

Media, consumption, and minority politics

My research site consists of the neighbourhood called Jamia Enclave, which is conceived as a solidly middle-class neighbourhood by Muslims but is dismissed as a ghetto of urban poor Delhiites by all others. Just as in other such areas, residents are often upwardly mobile and many are employed in sectors ripe with new opportunities for growth for educated middle classes, for example the IT sector, telecommunications, multinational banking and finance, pharmaceuticals, media, advertising, and PR. In particular, the expanding educational sector, specifically the Jamia Millia Islamia University which gives the locality its name, employs many members of the community in various capacities ranging from academic to clerical positions. In addition to these kinds of employment, workshops and factories catering to the garment export industry as well as recycling plants treating urban waste are also located here. It is often argued that the regime of meritocracy introduced by multinational corporations has made the job market more inclusive, and it appears from the apparent prosperity of the area (notwithstanding the crush of population) that middle-class Muslim citizens are today making good use of expanded employment opportunities well beyond the state sector, which was the largest employer in the pre-liberalisation era. The community’s increasing affluence is evident in the streets which are choked by flashy cars, bikes, and shops and restaurants doing thriving business. However, these signs of bustling life in the neighbourhood do not challenge the majority Hindu community’s perception of the Muslims in the area which results from historical segregation and isolation of India’s Muslim minority population. For most Delhiites, the locality of Jamia is still synonymous with a space where butchers openly display the despised red meat and where their sensibilities are assaulted by the excesses of smells and dirt (Khan 2015). It is a place where members of the dominant Hindu community venture with great trepidation and then only to partake in the fares at the various restaurants, where aromas of slow roasting meat and *naans* inveigle the senses and reinforce the stereotype of the ‘sensuous Musalman’, whose preoccupations extend only from ‘the *dastarkhan* to the *Janamaz*’ (from the dinner table to the prayer mat). In spite of all the evidence of upward mobility and new types of business

and employment opportunities flourishing in the area, the visitor's existing prejudices become only further reinscribed by their culinary expeditions and by the sounds of *azan* (Muslim calls for prayer) resounding from the various mosques in the area, while many other profound realities escape the casual gaze.

However, for the less casual observer, evidence of the neighbourhood's integrated status is present everywhere: the narrow lanes of Jamia Enclave are teeming with electricity wires providing cable television, internet and telephone connections. The streets are lined with shops selling a multitude of consumer goods and services that connect the area to the world outside, ranging from mobile phones to satellite broadcasting services and high-speed internet, while roof tops and balconies boast precariously balanced satellite dishes. The ubiquitous presence of communication technologies indicate an immersion in the multiplicity of mediated flows and conversations in an otherwise enclosed and homogenous community. However, while weary of the argument of technological determinism, I would like to suggest that everyday life constructed at the intersection of new media technologies and an array of new ideas promises fresh possibilities redefining the Muslim minority population's relative isolation since the independence of the nation in 1947 by aiding novel imaginaries and ideas.

However, the situation is not without its ironies because, even as Muslims seek different perspectives on defining their identity within a rapidly globalising society with strong neoliberal leanings, representation of Muslim identity in the highly charged mediated spheres (led by a host of television channels, now owned and operated by private satellite broadcasters and challenging the hegemony of the single public service providers that ruled the airways prior to liberalisation) continue to position Muslims within the age-old stereotypes of backwardness and lack of fidelity to the nation.

However, on the other hand, privatisation has allowed a number of Islamic satellite television channels to be run by both private interests as well as by the state broadcaster Doordarshan to openly engage with and reproduce Muslim identity in these complex circumstances, and to counter the simplification and even demonisation of Muslim existence. But even if much of the content of some of these channels (such as the now banned Peace TV) is bound up with religious discourse, which is often looked at with suspicion by the authorities who have censored and even banned a number of Islamic media outlets, the silence surrounding the Muslim identity is being addressed. Moreover, notwithstanding the prejudices of communal representations, the inadvertent juxtaposition of Islamic identity with other global and regional constructions of selfhood on the node buttons of the remote control and on the channel line-up offer the Muslim community an opportunity to consume and engage with other global and regional constructions of selfhood, which promise an egalitarianism that is not often matched in real-life contexts. This creates hope but also the consciousness of a lack of opportunities, rights and political clout which Muslim youth experience.

Hence, I argue with Cancilini (2001) that for Indian Muslim youth the consumption of media becomes the first point of contention with regimes of power that enforce their marginalisation. Consumption of globalised media as well as of new streams of content featuring Islamic culture and religious ideology emerging from other Islamic countries mark the community's engagement with new options for exercising agency which did not previously exist in India before economic restructuring and globalisation and the spread of new communication technologies.

Indian Muslim youth and consumer agency

Cancilini (2001), in his work focusing on the effects of the critical intersections of globalisation, urbanisation, the expansion of global media, and the commodity market on citizens proposes that consumption can be seen as a critical tool used by marginalised groups because it opens up new ways of thinking about citizens' expectations as well as their rights in democratic societies. However, Cancilini in his sophisticated argument has failed to provide details and examples of how thought processes may lead to or in any way become politically demanding radical action. The link between consumption and agency, he proposes, is tenuous. My own research focusing on Indian Muslim youth, who were born in the late 1980s and early 1990s and thus represent the first generation growing up and firmly situated within the foundational shifts in India's post-liberalisation era economy and polity, and when new communication technologies were making rapid inroads, attempts to tease out the connections between the practices of consumption and questions of citizenship and political agency. Exploring Muslim youth's everyday life and analysing their aspirations as well as their actual consumption practices, I am able to trace how ideas transformed in conversation with media representations inform real-life performances, which are identifiable with tangible political potentialities. My research endeavours to explore emerging Muslim identity as consumers and as citizens, as Donner (2011: 7) states, 'to study in great detail the middle sections of modern societies and how they relate to the market and the state through specific economic, occupational, educational, and ideological trajectories, which in turn result in hegemonic positions albeit contested ones'.

I draw attention to the complexities, uncertainties, and incongruities in the process of Muslim youth's self-actualisation within the institutional spaces of education, work and leisure to expand cultural studies' key premises beyond amorphous and/or representative spheres. The study of Muslim youth's consumptive practices of everyday life also foregrounds that the idea of consumer citizenship cannot be discussed without examining the politics of class, caste, privilege, and access, which shape ideologies and practices of consumer citizenship, especially in the Indian context (see Donner 2011). Clearly, in the case of my interlocutors, interactions with globalising consumerist narratives are not homogenous but are mediated by localised realities

including the above-mentioned structural constraints. Reflecting the diversity which Fernandes (2006) argues is the Indian middle class's defining condition, the Muslim community's aspirations and desires too are calibrated along the socio-economic-cultural spectrum shaped by class, caste, and regional geographies as the examples of ethnographic encounters I present later enumerate. And yet there is an underlying unity which makes Muslim middle-class experience unique because Muslim youth's sensibilities, as they are influenced by significant restructuring of audio-visual and cultural spheres (with the advent of global satellite media and pervasive internet connectivity), have still to contend with their ideological and physical segregation. Muslim youth interact with new ideas and images, while they also engage with the reality of a rather limited range of possibilities to shape a new selfhood. Indeed, Muslim youth are among the first generation that by default constantly navigate two distinctly different landscapes of a globalised, urbanised life and the realities of their life in urbanised ghettos (incidentally, Muslims have the highest percentage of urbanised population according to the Sachar Committee report). Hence the task of finding a balance and maintaining it is paramount as ambivalence and transience have become dominant themes in Muslim youth's lives.

Also, it is interesting to note that certain institutional sites most important to Muslim youth's ability to grapple with new realities also struggle with the sense of impending ambiguities and uncertainties. For example, Jamia Millia Islamia University, which is also incidentally most important to my ethnographic research and is where I recruited most of my informants, exemplifies how entrenched ways of life shape apprehension and consumption of modernity and the way forward involves dexterous handling of opposing streams of ideologies. The university, notwithstanding its very Islamic nomenclature, is not an exclusive Muslim domain. Rather, it is a Central University which is funded and directed by the central government and follows the guidelines of the University Grants Commission of India on curriculum and admissions. But, because of its history as an Islamic institution, which was created heeding Gandhi's call to indigenise education in the 1920s as a way to challenge and break free from British colonial control, the upholding of Islamic cultural, historical, and ideological norms is also part of its mandate, even as its position as a leading educational institute allows the Muslim community to confront and consume modernity. For example, the university, while undoubtedly embarking on the modernising project through its curriculum emphasising Western and not Islamic education, is deeply mindful of Islamic norms and injunctions. Its Muslim students and even its non-Muslim students cannot be entirely unmindful of the Islamic culture, and the negotiations that are made between expectations of Islamic cultural mooring and modern Westernised sociabilities also influenced my research. Because, even as I had hoped that the university campus would be a convenient place to meet to my informants, considering the fact that norms of privacy and propriety in Muslim homes disapprove of a woman visiting mere acquaintances alone and unaccompanied, it could not be so. I had sought out the university canteen, thinking

it could be a place to hang out and interact, but most young Muslim women refused my invitation. Many of them marked the space out as the exclusive domain of male students alone on account of their lack of comfort with the prospects of jostling with male students in that small and crowded place. They feared the prospect of becoming cynosure of disapproving eyes while mingling and talking to male students especially since interactions between men and women in Islamic cultures are closely monitored. Given their reluctance, the canteen became out of bounds for me too. Grappling with the fact that for members of a segregated religious minority population consumption of modernity would entail extended negotiations with their social-cultural-historical correlates, I approached university faculty and staff and it is through them that I met with students in classroom interactions and made myself known through my lectures and informal talks. But I still sought opportunities to have meandering and unsupervised conversations, so I invited my informants to meet me in the coffee shops in the market close to Jamia enclave, but firmly separated from it by questions of monetary constraints as well as by the Muslim community's marginalisation and segregation. Many young men and a few young women accepted my invitation, which did surprise me considering what I had encountered earlier.

However, meeting with my informants in Friends Colony coffee shops proved to be instructive on many other levels. Firstly, the coffee shops are spaces where cultural and economic forces shaping globalising Indian society can be clearly mapped. Secondly, they proved to be particularly illuminative of the initiatives needed for a discriminated minority and largely impoverished population to enter spaces of neoliberal modernity, while also being illustrative of at what point consumerist desires represent an agency which may qualify as a potential political positioning.

Muslim minority in globalised spaces

Since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in 1991, spaces endorsing Western practices of leisure and personifying the neoliberal model of economic growth with a stress on service economy have flourished in urban India including malls, cineplexes, shopping malls, and cafes. Replacing older and simpler styles of association in parks and small tea shops or *halwaikidukans* (sweet shops), these places reflect new desires and practices, such as in the appropriation of a Western taste for coffee in a predominantly tea-drinking nation. In the coffee shops customers are wont to be served by baristas who are mostly young men working part-time at the job, while being enrolled in some professional certificate course or other – indicating the availability of new professional options as well as an acceptability of new employment positions that would not have been palatable to earlier middle-class generations. Today, waiting tables has become cool and hip and is imitative of lifestyles promoted by popular Hollywood texts (like *Friends*) and also home-grown cinema of the new era¹ to the extent that there is no embarrassment

associated with the job especially when one is serving in establishments where a cup of coffee costs as much as two or three square meals in any one of the mouth-watering restaurants of Jamia Enclave. The coffee shops in Friends Colony were decidedly out of reach for many of my informants who hailed from lower middle-class backgrounds with their family members employed in either trade or clerical jobs. But the eagerness with which they made their way there and sought to insert their presence into spaces made familiar by global as well as Bollywood cinema reflected their ambition to seek new metropolitan spaces and find their identity amid such globalising flows regardless of the impediments. And it is evocative of Malini Ranganathan's (2014) exploration of the political agency of peripheral urban dwellers as they exercised their right to water usage by agreeing to pay for water consumption as a way to claiming respectability and legitimacy before the state and society.

However, in their longing for engagement with the world beyond the Enclave, Muslim youth shared affinities with other Indian youth. At the coffee shops, as I waited for my informants from Jamia Enclave to join me, I was often mistaken by the baristas for a consultant from a multinational corporation holding interviews to recruit personnel. They would quietly come to the table and ask for help in finding a job and about the firm I was supposedly recruiting for. It bespeaks of Indian youth's drive and ambition that even in the midst of serving me coffee they would quietly sneak in their request for help in finding a job. And they were mostly disappointed when I told them I was only a researcher and a writer. But what is more interesting is that my informants also came to meet me with similar hopes, thinking I could be a conduit for their dreams. The desires entertained by Muslim youth are no different from those of the young baristas, and they often shared with me that their goal was to find employment with a 'multinational' and 'to become rich'. Many of the young men among my informants were keen on waiting tables at this plush coffee shop as part of their wish to move fluidly in the new glossy globalised worlds. And after all, there was not that much difference in the income and family backgrounds of the young baristas and the young Muslim men. They too could benefit from working at a part-time job as they pursued their studies. However, what was different was the certain crisis in confidence faced by Muslim men. My informants were hesitant at approaching the position. I felt that they were acutely mindful of their shortcomings and they knew that it would not be as easy for them to secure the job. The history of Muslim marginalisation was implicit in their vacillation. The fact is that the Muslim community in independent India has recorded a much higher school drop-out rate and a lower school attendance rate than any other socio-religious community in India. According to the Sachar Committee report (2006),² almost 25 per cent of Muslim children in the age group 6–14 are not part of the educational system because they face conditions of abject poverty, which are further compounded by the discriminatory treatment of Muslims in educational institutions. The reality of these cold statistics was self-evident in Muslim youth's extremely cautious approach to pursuing their dreams.

And while Fernandes (2006) argues that vast income inequalities construct the spectrum of Indian middle-class realities and simultaneously problematise the notion of a homogenous middle class which is pursued in both popular cultures as well as in policy discussions, notwithstanding the entrenched discrepancies, the experiences of Indian Muslim youth further negate the unproblematic picture of Indian middle-class politics (see Das 2000; Nilekani 2008) by drawing attention to questions of religious identity and minority politics in the construction of middle-class experiences. For example, Muslim youth have to constantly contend with cultural stereotypes marking them as exceptional national subjects within the 'post-colonial condition', which according to Akhil Gupta (1998) is marked by anxieties of keeping up with Westernised standards of development and modernity. However, Muslim populations have been presumed to be an exception to this condition and entirely untouched by concerns of inhabiting and appropriating modernity. Indeed, according to Hasan (2002: 10), they are 'genetically and culturally cast in the role of a religious crusader', while their lives are imagined and evoked within narrow contexts of the segregated enclaves that define their 'otherness' and qualify their detachment from the warp and weft of mainstream Indian society. Therefore, not surprisingly, the Muslim population's experiences should be overlooked in the extensive debates and analysis of aspirations for upward mobility and the middle-class phenomenon in India, even while as the experiences of my informants illustrate, Muslim youth contest their 'otherness' on an everyday basis at various levels.

Once, overhearing a conversation between my informants and their non-Muslim colleague who severely berated them for not having the wherewithal to wear Western clothes with confidence, I realised that even their participation in what may seem as banal contests of consumerist desires inevitably pushed them to take a stand in a way which calls fresh attention to the relationship between consumerist desires and political agency. We were sitting in one of the fast food restaurants famous for pizzas and ice creams, where the young women were particularly keen to partake of the delectable 'hot-chocolate fudge', when while watching on the screens above models sashing Parisian fashion (on the rather provocative Fashion TV), their friend who was a non-Muslim commented, '*tum apni life main aise kapde kabhi bhi nahin pahen pau gi*' [You will never be able to wear such clothes in your life]. The young women let that remark pass and did not stop themselves enjoying the fudge. But their friend continued pointing to their modest *salwar-kameez* with a *dupatta* draped over their heads, '*aur tumko kya koi aise kapde mein kisi multinational mein job dega?*' [Will anyone ever offer you a job at a multinational dressed in such clothes?]. At this point the leisurely mid-afternoon suddenly became tense. Both Farah and Deeba (names changed) looked up from their fudge to speak almost in unison '*job kaam par di jatihai, kapdon par nahin*' [You are offered a job depending on your professional capacity and not your wardrobe]. These young women were students of a diploma course in electronic engineering and finding a job was very much part of their

plan, reflecting a marked shift from previous generations of lower middle-class Muslims. They could not let the skewed perception of their capacities pass uncontested, and Deeba continued in a slightly agitated tone, '*aur tum Sonia Gandhi ko dekho, woh tau Italian hai, woh kya western kapde pahanti hai? Woh tau hamesha saree mein rahti hain. Job keliye education honi chahiye*' [Look at Sonia Gandhi, she is Italian, does she dress Western? She is always wearing a *saree*. Your professional career depends on your education.]. In a heated discussion they went on to defend their style of dressing, their preference for modest Indian clothes, as well as their capacity to find employment in multinational corporations regardless of the ability to wear Western clothes with élan. Emma Tarlo (2013) argues that Muslim women's experimentation with fashion, especially their embrace of the hijab as a fashion accessory to mark their religious identity in Western societies, challenges assumptions about Muslim women as passive. This is simply because their presence stridently announces their politics of difference, in contexts deeply hostile to Islam. Tarlo (2013: 1) refers to Muslim women's personal presentational styles as 'strategic essentialism' which presents a threat to the established order and exposes the hollowness of Western multiculturalism. In the same vein, Farah and Deeba's defence of their sartorial choices reflects their socio-political rationality as they contend with entrenched stereotypes and conceive of a way forward to fulfilling their dreams for new opportunities. And such instances, I argue, become their inadvertent political engagements on an everyday basis.

Scholars like Harvey (2005), McChesney (1999), and Rutherford (2007) argue that the overwhelming rise of neoliberal ideology since the early 1990s has 'transformed the social category of the individual'; and the emancipated individual identity free from constraints and norms of the traditional social and moral order has become 'entangled with commodity relations and the process of capital accumulation' (Rutherford 2007: 6). So much so that the sites of agency, once identified by social movements in the struggle against prejudice and injustice, have been coopted by the market, while the quest for identity has become more of an individualised affair to be defined by the acquisition of 'status-giving positional goods' (Rutherford 2007: 6). Indeed, the contemporary neoliberal economic logic is sustained by the individual subject's need for self-definition within material terms with the end result being that while individuals may feel empowered as consumers because their individual choices in consumption are honoured, they feel powerless as citizens (Rutherford 2007: 6). While conceding to the force of this argument, I contend that an analysis of Muslim youth's consumerist desires further hones this pertinent critique, because Muslim youth's desire for identity in the realms of 'status-giving positional goods' is not necessarily an individualised affair, as proposed by Rutherford (2007: 6). In fact, as the exchange mentioned above indicates, even thinking about participating in consumerist spheres entails them perforce to articulate their politics as members of a community and as citizens of a country.

For members of a minority community participating in the processes of consumption necessitates entering the mainstream of economic and social life, and such a step is necessarily a political one because it calls for the re-examination of the minority identity, politics and the attendant social-economic-political contexts of their lives. These reassessments become critical especially since Indian Muslim youth's aspirations to join the expanding economy and evolving Indian society are stymied by iniquitous contexts demonising Islam. I became acutely aware of how both global and local forces in the wake of 9/11, which marginalised and disinherited a minority population, impinged upon Muslim youth's realities following Dr Haneef's arrest in Australia in August 2007. My informants who were usually happy to talk at length on any topic as we ambled over iced lattes were particularly cagey. Their self-consciousness and the careful weighing of words were due to their inability to trust me or anyone else in those testing times. Sitting in the coffee shop, they were extremely reluctant to discuss the issue of the young Indian doctor's arrest in Australia for fear of being overheard and marked as Muslim in that public place. My informants, irrespective of class and gender, were feeling dejected at the prospects of doors of opportunity closing in their faces as a fallout from the events in Australia and the marking of all Muslims as terrorists. But it was my informant Faras' quiet utterance after a long bout of silence that made me realise the import of consumerist desires not only for thinking (as Canclini 2001 argues) but for impelling people towards concerted positions and actions. Faras, who was working at a blue-collar job at a courier company, had dreams of buying a car, dating an attractive woman and traveling to new places. In his pocket he carried cut-outs of ideals of conspicuous consumption – the world's most expensive watch, a car costing a million dollars, a luxurious villa at a sea-resort and others – and which he said he hoped to own one day. Even as Fuller and Narasimhan (2007) argue that most Indians do not wish to join the new economy to fulfil their desires for conspicuous consumption, the fact is the ideas, motifs, and objects of sumptuous consumption are imbedded in dreams and are therefore not easily dismissed. But suddenly the prospects of attaining his hopes seemed dim to Faras and in a cheerless voice, almost as if speaking to himself, he said, '*aagar yahaan naukri karni hai, tau sabar se, bahut sabar se*' [If you want to work here, then have patience, lots of patience.]. It was evident that he was struggling to come to terms with the challenges that as a member of a discriminated minority population he would have to face. And to achieve his dreams of a good life he was proposing a strategy of coping as well as of compromising. His position was one of engagement with his circumstances and in that simple sentence he had articulated a very different position from the one held by older generations of Muslims.

The older generations of Muslims had withdrawn into their segregated spheres when faced with the disdain and hostility of the majority Hindu population. However, as Faras' heartfelt utterance shows, and as my informants' defence of their sartorial preferences reveal, Muslim youth's aspirations to be

successful consumer citizens precludes them from pursuing obscurantist or evasive politics. They have to perforce contend with their realities. And even as I write this chapter, my argument that practices and/or desires of consumption, in the instance of an impoverished and discriminated population, can be points of interjection into public politics is reinforced by this instance of consumer grievance that I report next (see Kumar 2016). A young Muslim woman, wearing a hijab, was denied permission to ride the Delhi Metro train for supposedly security reasons. The young woman as a consumer of public services challenged her eviction from the metro train on the grounds that she was no different from other consumers or riders. Asserting her rights as a citizen she contested the exception made in her case on account of her hijab and sought an explanation from the Delhi Metro authority so to why she was prevented from riding the metro when she, like all other consumers/riders, had complied with the security check by allowing the frisking of her person and even removing her hijab. Her very vocal protest was aired on social networking sites, from where the story having gained traction, was picked up by mainstream news media forcing a response from both the Delhi Metro Authority as well as the Central Security Forces. Her protection of her consumer rights pushed her into the public sphere, and as a consumer she evoked her constitutionally protected rights of freedom of religion and diversity, while also defending fundamental human rights. I relate this story as an example of myriad such struggles taking place in the public sphere (see also Jalil 2008) and to contemplate how the compounded effects of these everyday struggles may create an impetus for new political posturing among the minority Muslim population.

Discussion

My research with Indian Muslim youth has foregrounded India's middle class's inherent diversity which is constructed not only across a range of economic parameters and circumstances (Fernandes 2006) but also differentiated in accordance with the intersectional realities of religion and culture that indicate particularities of marginalisation, impoverishment, as well as historical relationships to the Indian nation. These complexities are integral to any analysis of emergence of both identity and politics within contexts where discourses of consumerist agency are overwhelmingly powerful, and from where consumerist agency is projected as being responsible for propelling all Indians into new realms of access and opportunities.

In the examples I have discussed above, I attempted to show how Muslim youth's engagement with consumerism, while questioning euphemistic projections of agency (see Canclini 2001, 2005; Tomlinson 1999), suggests that it is in the realm of consumption that such marginal constituents do get politically engaged. Moreover, the focus on the experiences of Indian Muslims and their emergence as consumers is important not only because their experiences have been overlooked in the discussions about relationships between consumerism and citizenship, but also because their experience

problematises the dichotomous debate exploring the imbrication of youth in consumer culture. The vast body of research on the meaning of consumption and the consumer society for youth, and whether engagement with consumption discourages political engagement, is divided. Jean Baudrillard ([1970] 1998) and other cultural studies scholars (see Canclini 2001, 2005) present consumption as linked to identity-building and have qualified consumption as a resource of symbols – a view that is largely supported by anthropologists like Liechty (2003) and Miller (1998) – of recent consumerist engagement within South Asian contexts, especially the Nepalese and Bengali societies. Marxist scholars have taken a much dimmer view of the relationship between consumption, agency and youth culture (see Harvey 2005; McRobbie 2009; Rutherford 2007). Indian Muslim youth's engagement with consumption in an emerging consumerist society presents an interesting interjection as they do not disconnect themselves from politics. Indeed, as members of a marginalised minority population it is their desire to become fully fledged consumers which first draws them with renewed force into the political sphere. Appropriating the rights and entitlements discourse so closely associated with Indian politics, these middle-class Muslims are increasingly vocal and through their consumption practices they draw attention to the discriminations they face by challenging their exclusion from spheres demarcated by the consumer citizens of the Indian middle class (Khan 2015). Their increased engagement in characteristically middle-class consumption practices gives them a certain visibility, which in turn supports their claims for inclusion. This is because if, as Clarke (2003: 5) argues, 'the processes unleashed by consumerism are ultimately responsible for reconfiguring society, space, and time in ways that we have not witnessed before', then what would the Muslim population's claims for middle-class visibility entail for minority politics in India?

Notes

- 1 The cinema of Bollywood presents, as Rachel Dwyer (2011) says, a *zarahatke* or slightly different cinema, that recognizing the ascendancy of India's middle classes reflects their interests and preoccupations. The cinemas of Yash Chopra and Karan Johar, Dwyer argues are emblematic of the globalised, urbanised spaces of consumerist modernity.
- 2 The commotion and fracas in the Parliament and the public sphere at the filing of the Sachar Committee Report are itself reflections of the silences that are imposed on the Muslim identity. Political parties with right-wing affiliations raised questions as to why it was important at all to investigate the state of affairs of Indian Muslims, notwithstanding their acute backwardness compounded by a lack of any ameliorative affirmative action policies.

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10 Consuming credit

Microfinance and making credit markets at the bottom of the pyramid

Sohini Kar

Pratibha lives in the northern part of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), close to the city's airport. Once rural, the area has slowly become engulfed in the sprawl of the city.¹ In mid-September 2010, just ahead of Durga Puja – the city's biggest festival – I was accompanying Samit, a loan officer with a microfinance institution (MFI) that I call DENA. Samit was conducting his regular rounds of group meetings to collect repayments for small loans. The last meeting of the morning was held in Pratibha's house. As we headed there, Samit explained that this is a very lovely (*khub shundor*) group, as if to apologise for some of the more rancorous groups we had visited earlier.

Microfinance loans have been popularised in the development discourse as offering the poor, particularly women, opportunities for economic and social empowerment (Karim 2011; Rankin 2001; Sanyal 2009). With the small 'productive' loans, poor women are meant to be able to start or run their own small businesses to raise economic capital.² Meanwhile, the meetings are meant to offer space for borrowers to build social capital among the women belonging to a borrower group of 10 to 30 members. Both these forms of increased economic and social capital are, in turn, meant to empower women.

Even in this 'very lovely' group, however, few of the women spent their loans on starting or sustaining their own businesses. More often, loans were for consumption purposes or to sustain a husband's or son's business. On paper, Pratibha had a loan for her 'woollens business', selling sweaters and other winter wear in the neighbourhood. She was nearing the end of her current loan and was hoping to get a larger loan in the next cycle. The loan, however, would not go towards her stated business purpose. At the time of the meeting, Pratibha explained that she did not have any work related to selling woollens, as it was not yet winter, and customers would not purchase winter clothes. But Pratibha also had other expenses to attend to: her daughter's wedding and religious obligations.

In fact, Pratibha had promised to sponsor a puja, or religious ceremony of worship, at the small neighbourhood temple.³ Asked by one of the other borrowers when she could do it, Pratibha responded that it would have to be after February. 'I've just arranged her wedding for January', she explained, nodding her head towards her daughter, who was cooking with earphones

plugged into her mobile phone, listening to music. ‘You’ll want a loan sooner than’, one of the other borrowers chimed in. Pratibha laughed, ‘You couldn’t even boil water for a wedding with that amount [from the loans]! I’ve been saving up for the wedding separately.’

Further, Pratibha had only recently moved into the house that she now owned. ‘It was easier living in a rented house [with shared living space]’, she joked. ‘You had to rush to get everything done in the rented place, because you were competing with everyone else in the building to use the bathroom and things. So, you had to finish everything on time.’ Even as she spoke dismissively of her new home and the ‘laziness’ it enabled, there was a clear note of pride in her voice about her new found comforts. While we sat on the floor for the group meeting, as was required by the MFI, Pratibha also pointed out the new sofa bed, draped with a yellow bed sheet, that they had just purchased, explaining in detail to the other members how it worked.⁴ For Pratibha, commodity consumption was at the heart of various life projects, from buying and furnishing her new house to financing rituals and her daughter’s wedding. These aspirational practices confirmed her role as a good mother and her reputation in the neighbourhood. Success in her business – the purported productive purpose of her loan – was, in comparison, a marginal concern.

Microfinance loans have helped working-class women like Pratibha to aspire to a better life (see Appadurai 2004). Debt becomes a way for poor households not just to make ends meet but also to attain markers of middle-class respectability. On the one hand, such sources of credit were previously only available to the poor through the informal sector, such as moneylenders (Gregory 1988), or through rotating credit associations, such as ‘chit funds’ (Smets 2000). On the other, consumption practices of the poor have dovetailed with the growing attention to the ‘bottom of the pyramid’ as a profitable sector. As with mortgages and credit card debt for the middle class (Mathur 2010; Searle 2016), these aspirational desires of the working class are now a source of speculation and profitability for the formal financial sector.

This chapter draws on 14 months of fieldwork on commercial or for-profit microfinance in Kolkata, India. I conducted participant observation with an MFI that I call DENA, following loan officers and branch managers on their daily rounds of group meetings and lending-related work. I also conducted interviews with MFI staff at various levels, borrowers, as well as banks and policymakers. I argue that most urban poor borrowers like Pratibha have, at least on paper, a business for which they take loans. However, the ‘need’ that microfinance loans address is related to everyday consumption rather than production-based activities of borrowers. The poor consumer, is not, however just an aspirational one, desiring a middle-class lifestyle in an easy narrative of modernisation. Rather, as I show in this chapter, microfinance has explicitly sought to capitalise on the poor through new forms of credit. Thus, the rapid proliferation of commercial microfinance in India has helped to produce poor women as consumers of credit and to expand their integration into financial markets at the bottom of the pyramid.

Microfinance for production

Microfinance as a development strategy has proliferated globally in the twenty-first century. Proponents of microfinance have argued that the small loans enable those who lack material resources to have the opportunity to start or run their own business. Unlike welfare-based anti-poverty programmes, microfinance operates on ‘pure market principles’ (Balkenhol 2007: 4). Offering credit to the poor as a means of social and economic empowerment through entrepreneurship, microfinance fits readily with neoliberal regimes of small government and market efficiency (Roy 2010; Weber 2004).

In India, microfinance programmes have coincided with the longstanding practices of social banking or the use of the banking sector for developmental ends (Joshi 2006), as well as an emergent policy of financial inclusion to bring the poor into the fold of the market. While there are programmes in non-profit microfinance such as Self-Help Groups, commercial or for-profit MFIs in India have grown rapidly in the twenty-first century (Ghate 2008). Regulated by the Reserve Bank of India as non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), MFIs seek a double-bottom line of financial profits and improving the social welfare of borrowers. At the time of fieldwork, loans from DENA ranged from Rs 5,000 to Rs 20,000, and were repaid (both principal and interest) on a weekly basis over a year, with an annual interest rate of 24 per cent. These small loans were provided only to women and would ideally enable them to start, sustain, or expand a small business.

At the heart of the microfinance project is a productive principle of credit; that is, capital from the loans should be invested in small businesses to generate additional capital (Banerjee and Duflo 2011), enabling the poor to become entrepreneurial subjects (Brown 2015). One of the assumptions about microfinance is that it will help to overcome the market failure of formal credit allocation, which largely excludes the poor working in informal economies and lacking in material collateral (e.g. property). The materially ‘unbacked’ microfinance loans allow those who would typically be unable to access formal credit to do so by forming small groups of 10–30 women, who provide ‘social collateral’ (Schuster 2015; see also Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Yunus 2003). That is, in the absence of material capital, social capital between borrowers provides an alternative form of assurance to the MFI.

The evidence that microfinance has led to the creation of new entrepreneurs, however, is limited. As a recent economic study of MFIs in India found, most women who already had businesses before microcredit rolled out in their area were likely to gain, while newcomers struggled (Banerjee et al. 2015). This is not to say that women were never successful in building a business around microfinance loans. Yet it appears that the extent to which microfinance made women more productive remains minimal. In my fieldwork, borrowers often complained that the loans offered were too small to actually start or sustain a business. As a woman who operated a small grocery store explained: ‘I have a store, you know, so Rs 8,000 really doesn’t go that far when you buy things

to sell and all.' In other words, what was offered as capital for business did not match the amount needed. Similarly, other borrowers raised the problem of inflation in India, whereby continuous rising costs could not be easily balanced by access to microfinance.

This is not to say that women were never successful in building a business around microfinance loans. Yet the extent to which microfinance made women more productive remains minimal. The entry of microcredit did not suddenly enable the poor to enter new markets; rather, it reflected the ability of those already engaged to expand. However, given that many of the women I spoke to did not consider the amounts offered by DENA to be sufficient for starting or sustaining a business, the question remains, for what purpose were they borrowing? As with Pratibha, in the introduction to the chapter, I argue that microfinance enabled poor borrowers not so much to expand production but to engage more readily in consumption practices, which are enabled by expanding credit markets.

Credit and consumption at the bottom of the pyramid

With economic liberalisation in 1991, consumer markets in India exploded, making the country one of the most embattled markets for consumer goods in the global economy. Liberalisation reshaped the relationship between consumer identities and citizenship (see Appadurai 1996). In particular, the emerging new middle classes have been hailed as both the beneficiaries and drivers of changing consumption practices and market relations (e.g. Donner 2008; Fernandes 2006; Lukose 2009; Mazzarella 2003). Commodity consumption enabled middle-class consumers to engage with global modernity, which they felt had bypassed them during the post-Independence era of the developmental state. Such consumption practices have, however, solidified middle-class hegemony and class-based identities (Fernandes and Heller 2006).

Consumption practices produce and sustain class distinction (Bourdieu 1984) and new forms of consumption are here, as elsewhere, ways of maintaining class boundaries. In the Indian context, middle-class participation in what is considered to represent global modernity has celebrated a form of consumer citizenship that simultaneously marked the working class, or the poor, as different, backward, and undesirable. This has been most apparent in the quest for new urban spatial politics, with middle-class desires for a modern city leading to the displacement of others, including street hawkers and slum dwellers, as cities are restructured to meet the needs of new consumption patterns (see Anjaria 2011; Chatterjee 2004; Fernandes 2006). These new spaces of consumption have created some forms of employment for the less affluent. However, the jobs in malls and shopping centres do not pay well, with entry-level sales assistants making around Rs 6,000 per month even in high-cost cities like Mumbai (Rao 2015). Further, these forms of employment

train young people in neoliberal articulations of capitalism, including entrepreneurialism and individualism (Gooptu 2009).

Thus, it is not only the middle classes and elites who participate in India's new consumption practices; rather, all socio-economic groups now engage actively with emergent consumer cultures. This may be interpreted as attempts by those less well-off to capture cultural capital by participating in similar consumption practices as the middle class (Bourdieu 1984). That is, it can be understood as a process of emulation. However, I suggest that the aspirational consumption practices of the poor are not just an attempt to keep up with the Joneses, but they are also the result of concerted efforts on the part of corporations to create profitable new markets. In other words, aspirational desires are met with new supplies of formal credit, particularly in the form of microfinance.

In the 2010s, corporations increasingly sought to profit from the consumption practices of the poor in India and beyond. The Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP) approach reconfigures the poor from being dependent on the state to being market-based consumers and has been increasingly harnessed in neoliberal development policy (Elyachar 2012). The BoP concept, championed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the United Nations, among others, has been now popularised globally (Cross and Street 2009). In 2007, the World Bank affiliated International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) estimated that the global poor – even when they were earning less than US\$2 per day – constituted a US\$5 trillion market (Hammond et al. 2007). In India, the Boston Consulting Group estimates that the 'next billion' (i.e. bottom of the pyramid) consumers now constitute 45 per cent of the population (Singhi et al. 2017). The report encourages corporations to consider the different consumption patterns of the elite and wealthy from the 'aspirers' and 'bottom billion' in order to position themselves effectively.

In pioneering the BoP concept, C.K. Prahalad (2010) challenged the predominant logic of multinational companies (MNCs), which bypassed the poor (including lower middle-class consumers) who were not seen as potential customers. Prahalad (2010: 35) suggests that 'by virtue of their numbers, the poor represent a significant latent purchasing power that must be unlocked'. However, as these sections of the population cannot spend in the same ways as the elite or the middle class, Prahalad (2010: 40) argued that companies must be prepared to 'create the capacity to consume'. This meant first and foremost that their products had to become appealing and indeed affordable and accessible to the poor in places like India.

Furthermore, for Prahalad (2010: 44), the poor should be seen as consumers, rather than passive recipients of aid and be offered the 'dignity of choice'. Within this framework, the democratisation of consumption practices enables businesses to become agents of developmental change (Blowfield and Dolan 2014) and as in all neoliberal policy making, consumption 'in its ideological guise – as "consumerism"' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 4) becomes

the driver of progress as it transforms commercial interests into a common good. Or, as Ananya Roy (2012: 106) has suggested, there is an ‘ethicalization of market rule’, giving moral weight to profit made by capitalising on the lives of the poor. Within this context anti-poverty programmes are no longer simply in the domain of the state; instead, there is ‘a global economy where poverty is a frontier of profit and accumulation’ (Roy 2012: 106) for corporations. Today, the poor are no longer considered to exist outside of profitable market relations but are seen as a latent market ready to be tapped.

While sellers of consumer goods have tapped into this market by adjusting their products to be affordable to the poor (e.g. small sachets of shampoo), there remain hurdles to offering financial products such as loans to the same population. As noted earlier, the poor in India, as in other contexts, lack access to formal sector credit because they lack material collateral. In the absence of material collateral, MFIs use social capital as a form of collateral. Thus, in addition to making the financial product smaller, MFIs have had to create a new mechanism of collateral in order to lend to the unbacked BoP.

Consumption and creditworthiness

As it has grown in outreach, commercial microfinance in India raises capital from a number of sources, including loans from commercial banks, as well as public and private equity, in order to lend to the poor. Lenders to and investors in the microfinance sector do so, in part, because of the high rates of loan recovery and, relatedly, high rates of return. To ensure these returns, MFIs in turn manage the risks of lending to the poor in new ways (Kar 2018), including through the assessment of individual creditworthiness. The way in which loan officers understand creditworthiness is less in the assessment of potential for business (i.e. the productive principle) than through signs of wealth through consumption.

For instance, one morning I was accompanying Putul, a branch manager at DENA, on a ‘house verification’. This takes place after the initial application and consists of the branch visitor visiting the borrower’s home to confirm the details of the application. With her first loan almost repaid, the borrower, Dipali, had applied for a second loan. A migrant from the neighbouring state of Odisha, Dipali lived in the grounds of an abandoned mansion in North Kolkata. Just behind the main house was a row of shacks, one of which was Dipali’s. Entering the small house along with Dipali, we met a young woman cooking in a makeshift kitchen, while Dipali’s husband and three young children lounged on the bed watching television. ‘Is that your *bou* [daughter-in-law]?’ asked Putul. ‘No, it’s my daughter. She lives in Odisha but is visiting with the children’, Dipali replied.

Getting down to the business of verifying the loan application, Putul asked what kind of business Dipali had. ‘Sarees’, Dipali replied. ‘Can you show me some samples?’ queried Putul. For certain businesses, the loan officer or branch manager may ask to see ‘stock’ or evidence of the business. Quite

often, borrowers would keep some kind of evidence at home to show during a house verification. For instance, those applying for a saree business will bring out a new saree or a woman who received funding for a catering service will show empty tiffin carriers. Asking to see samples or stock was a strategy that DENA staff used to determine whether a person had the business they put on paper, though the absence of stock often did not disqualify a borrower from a loan.

Dipali, however, had no stock at home: ‘Not right now,’ she responded to Putul, ‘but I can when you come the next time.’ ‘You don’t have even one piece?’ Putul persisted. ‘We had gone to Odisha for the [Durga Puja] holidays – we just came back yesterday. All our stock is at a friend’s place – the bugs would have eaten it if we left it here,’ answered Dipali. Putul then probed: ‘What does your husband do?’ to which Dipali answered, ‘He teaches.’ Dipali’s husband, however, was not a salaried teacher, but a precariously employed tutor. This meant that there was no confirmed regular source of repayment, further diminishing Dipali’s chances of securing a loan.⁵

‘I don’t think you really have a business,’ said Putul brusquely, as we stepped out of the house. ‘I do!’ Dipali insisted. ‘As I said, we’ve been away so we left the stock with other people.’ Putul then proceeded to ask for any books [with accounts] to which Dipali shook her head. During my research borrowers very rarely had formal documents related to what were informal sector businesses and bookkeeping was not a formal requirement for getting a loan. ‘But I got Rs 6,000 for the first loan. The last Madam [branch manager] said I would get Rs 12,000 for the second,’ said Dipali.

Putul, who was left without any evidence of a business, then argued that, in line with the idea that the domestic condition should improve through the loan, ‘We give first loans to people who may not have businesses, but we would expect you have something by the time of the second loan.’ Her reply indicated that Dipali would not get another loan. As we walked back to the branch office she said, ‘I believe she may have been away, I can even believe she’s just come back yesterday, but do you think someone would really not have any stock at home? Or that someone would leave all their things with someone else?’

Inquiries into stock served as part of the formal process of ‘due diligence’ that MFIs used to ensure that loans were serving the productive principle. However, even as stock served as evidence of a business, it was also an ambiguous one. As another loan officer had explained to me, ‘anyone can have a new saree at home’, which, in his view, was the reason so many women claimed to run a saree business. Thus, while MFI staff was willing to accept these as signs of a business, they often expressed doubt when asked if they thought borrowers actually had these businesses.



Beyond the survey of stock during a house verification, there was never an attempt to assess a business’s success or failure by the MFI. Yet having stock at home was not necessarily a sign that a business was successful. It is not surprising that a borrower at the end of her loan would need a new line

of credit to acquire stock for sale. Of course, Dipali's claim that she had her stock at a neighbour's would make this claim less tenable. Nevertheless, MFIs capitalised on this ambiguity about stock and used the rhetoric of the productive principle to extend or withhold loans to borrowers regularly.

In comparison, Pratibha, from the opening vignette, was seen as a perfect customer and as creditable, regardless of her proclamation that she did not have a business at the time of inquiry. As MFI staff confided to me on a number of occasions, they were less concerned about the businesses that were given on paper than in reading other signs that in their view constituted a 'borrower's creditability'. Rather than casting women like Pratibha as budding entrepreneurs, they were interested in assessing her and her family's living standards and surveyed their homes to find out about their spending habits (Kar 2017). In other words, they were assessing whether the loan had made their clients into modern, aspirational and desiring debtors/consumers. In order to assess this, they looked for changing levels of material investment. In Pratibha's case, the new house, the sofa-bed and the planned expenses for her daughter's wedding all indexed integration into the consumer market, disposable income and therefore the borrower's ability to repay a loan. It is in this sense that Dipali failed to convince the staff concerned with the house verification: her consumption levels had not visibly risen, casting doubt on her creditworthiness. Without material signs of success, Putul doubted Dipali's reliability and her suitability as a borrower.

Writing of due diligence in off-shore banking, Bill Maurer (2005: 491) argues that 'people are not simply verifying the identity of a client. They are engaging in a form of practice that always has the potential to fold back on itself and is provisional, probabilistic, and open-ended.' What is at stake is not simply the quantifiable but also that which requires ethical judgements of the client's character. The assessment of stock was not simply about confirming the existence of a business, but about a more extensive, qualitative form of inquiry undertaken by the MFI staff on whether a borrower could sustain a loan or not. Signs of wealth through consumption in many cases outweighed the productive principle of microfinance lending. There is, of course, a sense of irony in the use of consumption as a sign of wealth. Too few signs of consumption – as with Dipali – can lead to doubts about a borrower's creditworthiness; at the same time, too much consumption – such as during the holiday season – can hinder loan repayments.

Debts of celebration

From the perspective of supporting a business, loans can help to buy stock in bulk. Therefore, it would make sense to lend to borrowers at times when demand for their goods is high and to sustain them when business ebbs. This logic, however, is met with precaution by DENA. During a visit to a different group meeting in mid-September, two women came up to the loan officer, Gopal, to ask whether they could get their next loan sooner than would be

allowed by DENA (i.e. before they had paid off their last loan). The two women said that they had a business selling ready-made clothes. They wanted to get the next loan as soon as possible, saying that they had to get their stock before Durga Puja, when demand for clothes would be up. 'What's the use of getting a loan after the Puja?' one woman asked, 'This is when we need it.' Gopal, strict in his approach, was unwilling to negotiate. Similar to Dipali, the women insisted that the previous loan officer had said that this would not be a problem. The women explained that they were the cashiers of the group and that they made sure everybody paid and kept everything running smoothly. Their hard work in keeping the group running smoothly, they thought, should be reflected in the loans they could get. Gopal, however, remained unmoved and steadfast in his opposition to the possibility of giving an early loan.

As we were leaving, Gopal explained to me his resistance to the request: 'It's problematic to have these loan requests around Durga Puja. People want to take large loans, but they're not able to pay them back after the season. So we try to avoid giving too many loans simply because of Puja.' Given these concerns, MFI staff members are cautious: if Durga Puja season is good for business, it is also a time of high expenses that stem from family and neighbourhood obligations. Faced with the consumption demands of the festival season, borrowers can, in the view of the MFI, become overburdened with debt.

During the holiday period, schools and many offices are closed, while neighbourhoods come alive with brightly decorated *pandals*, music and performances.⁶ Like other annual festivals, for example Eid for Muslims or Christmas for Christians, Durga Puja is not only an occasion for religious celebration for Bengali Hindus but also one of intense economic activity. Special clothes are bought as gifts, foods are consumed, and magazines, music, and movies are released around the holidays. Stores meanwhile compete to attract customers and offer massive sales. So-called puja bonuses together with puja shopping, particularly for new clothes and household goods, as well as eating well, mean that Durga Puja has long stood as a 'business barometer' (*Economic and Political Weekly* 1954: 1089) to assess consumer confidence and the state of local economy.

The Durga Puja season is expensive for those who celebrate in Kolkata. New clothes, particularly for children, who may get multiple sets, are a basic gift, expected even in poor households. These expenditures of Durga Puja were reflected in the exchange with Meeta, a borrower, and Samit, a loan officer with DENA. Meeta was also hoping to get a loan sooner rather than later, since Durga Puja was coming up and she would, she suggested, need to get more stock. Overhearing her request for a new loan, another borrower asked why she needed extra funds for the pujas, given that she ran a medical business. Meeta, the prospective borrower laughed along sheepishly, acknowledging that the loan was intended not as an investment into the business but for consumption during the festive period.

As is apparent from the discussion above, times of high expenses can take an unexpected toll on repayment schedules. Moreover, most MFIs would take holidays over the Puja period and collections would be on hold for a week. In order to combat the fallout from this practice, some MFIs took what was known as a ‘double payment’ the week before or after the holidays, which meant that borrowers paid two weeks’ worth of repayment in one week. This practice in itself created a significant debt burden at a time when these borrowers needed cash for other expenses. For households that had small businesses or depended on day labour, it was particularly difficult to gather two weeks’ worth of repayment at once. When I asked a group of borrowers directly about the loans given during the festive season, one woman piped up: ‘We should have festival loans!’ Joking at first, she then turned towards the loan officer and enquired whether such a scheme existed, and if not, whether the MFI could come up with one. ‘That’, she stated resolutely, ‘would be very helpful.’

For the poor, consumer credit exists both in the informal sector, such as moneylenders, and now increasingly through microfinance. MFIs like DENA, however, must manage the risk of lending to the poor through strategies of caution, including limiting lending around Durga Puja when consumer demand is high. The poor are included as consumers cautiously and often with exclusions at times that might warrant need, such as the festival season.

Financialising consumption

Microfinance has enabled poor borrowers to bridge gaps in income, to make ends meet and to fulfil life projects. Yet, the growth of the microfinance sector points to the growth of a different market: that of consumer credit. It is a strategy that compels an increase in a supply of credit by reframing development as a question of access to financial services (Weber 2004). Thus, what has been produced through the rhetoric of financial empowerment and inclusion is now a growing market for debt.

In recent years, overall consumer lending (i.e. personal loans) has increased rapidly in India. In 2016, the Reserve Bank of India reported that personal loans had increased by 18 per cent in a year, up from 16 per cent the year before. The market for personal loans has been one of the key areas of expanding credit markets. Even as India faces a slowdown in the corporate sector, banks are targeting the massive and not yet saturated consumer markets: currently only 0.5 per cent of the population have credit cards, while unsecured personal loans account for 4 per cent of all loans (Reuters 2015). This expansive credit market in India includes commercial MFIs, which are part of the overall financialisation of everyday lives (see Martin 2002).

As noted earlier, for-profit MFIs raise capital from banks through commercial debt, as well as through public and private equity. In 2010, SKS Microfinance became the first MFI to be listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange, with Ujjivan Microfinance following suit in 2016 for its initial

public offering (IPO). MFIs in India regularly securitise their debts – repackaging loan portfolios and selling them to third-party investors. There is high demand for debt produced through microfinance to be circulated in the financial markets.

Thus, when the poor are using microfinance to pay for consumption needs, they are simultaneously producing the debt needed to sustain India's growing financial markets. However, there are consequences to the unfettered lending to the poor. Starting in 2010, India faced its own subprime crisis, sparked in part by an increasing number of microfinance-related suicide cases (see Mader 2013). With the growing availability of credit options, poor borrowers were indebted to multiple MFIs and facing mounting pressures to repay all of these loans. Even if debt had sustained people's strategies of making ends meet, it was simultaneously a precarious one. Many borrowers were caught up in cycles of debt – using one loan to pay off another one. An illness or the loss of a job could leave a family not only destitute but also hounded by the peer pressure of group members, as well as MFI staff seeking to maintain high recovery rates. Clearly, often the need to produce debt markets did not align with the realities of living in poverty and relying on credit for everyday expenses.

Consumers of credit

One morning, sitting on the veranda of a borrower's house, I chatted with the assembled group members while the two teenage children who lived there got ready for school. Knowing I was doing my doctorate in the United States, the women joked about whether I could get them loans from the United States, since there was so much money there. One borrower laughingly asked whether I could just take her to the United States instead. Another borrower, Kalyani, stated that there were no really poor people in the United States: 'Even the poor have many cars and own big houses,' she noted. On the one hand, Kalyani recognised that there were deprived people in the United States; on the other, she suggested that the experiences of poverty were different because 'even the poor' have access to a significant amount of material possessions. Without addressing the particularities of living in poverty in the United States here, I found Kalyani's comment to be poignant. This was not because it highlighted relative poverty (i.e. poor people in India appear materially worse off than poor people in the United States; see Sen 1999) – but because it pointed to the role of consumer credit in rendering lived poverty less visible to wider publics, while entrenching the poor in cycles of debt (see Williams 2004).

In liberalised India, as in other emerging economies, consumer credit has become an important feature of everyday life among the growing middle class. Indian cities are plastered with billboards advertising new credit cards and loans to buy a home, to finance education, or to buy a car, often against gold. For the poor, who generally do not have access to collateral-based loans, microfinance has increasingly become a substitute form of consumer lending.

The borrowers I worked with saw microfinance as a way to finance household needs. Thus, along with the question of loans during the festive season or one-time expenses like weddings, borrowers consistently asked loan officers if there were other consumption-related loans, particularly for private sector education and healthcare.

As Deborah James (2015) has argued in the context of post-Apartheid South Africa, conspicuous consumption signalled a newfound freedom for the Black middle class. Much of this new consumption was buttressed by an exploding credit market, which marked the end of 'credit apartheid' (James 2015: 3). Credit became a way to access the benefits of a long-deferred promise of inclusion. Showing how people seek credit as a way to fashion the lives they desire, James unsettles certain normative assumptions around being in debt as primarily a negative position.⁷ As James (2015: 237) notes, 'aspiration and indebtedness are intertwined'. Thus, being in debt can provide returns through the establishment of a 'good life' while involving strategies that may 'run counter to their immediate material interests' (Fischer 2014: xi). Microfinance similarly enabled my interlocutors to pursue life projects that fell outside the category of institutionally sanctioned 'production' purposes and furthered their dependence on cycles of debt. They did, however, provide access to goods and services that were fundamental to borrowers' desires for a good life.

Nevertheless, the proliferation of credit options for the poor has not really led to an increase in real choices; rather, given the constraints of poverty, they were simply able to compare the various sources of credit in order to make ends meet (Kar and Schuster 2016). With the consistent failures of state-based provisions of various welfare services, it is increasingly access to the private sector through debts that enables the poor to participate in the promises of the liberalised new India. It is this turn to the private sector for service delivery that has mapped so easily onto the BoP strategies of corporations looking to tap into the bottom billion.

The push to make public goods private by treating the poor as consumers has meant a fundamental shift in development practices. As Julia Elyachar argues, 'there is [now] no need to change poor people. Nor is there a need to change the institutions in which poor people are educated and work. There is no need, as such, for development' (2012: 113). Without attempts at addressing poverty from a structural perspective, BoP-led consumption becomes not only a way for the poor to attain certain goods but also a way for the neoliberal state to sidestep its duty to provide more direct forms of welfare.

Costs of care

We were meeting in the second floor of Tumpa's house. Like many of the homes I visited for loan meetings, the rooms were unfinished: the cement walls bare and largely half done. Some of the borrowers perched on the empty windows, feeling the light breeze of the otherwise hot and humid morning.

Similar to other construction projects for houses in slum neighbourhoods, finishing would take years. Tumpa, a jovial woman in her late 40s, explained that this was her *baaper bari* (natal home), but all her siblings, including her brothers, lived far away. She was here taking care of her mother who was ill. ‘Cancer’, she whispered to me. Tumpa had lived in this neighbourhood for 25 years and explained that the neighbourhood meant everything to her. Tumpa had one son and one daughter. Her daughter ran a beauty parlour, and it was for her that Tumpa had taken the loan. ‘Just a cream is Rs 150. The price of everything has gone up!’ she exclaimed.

While there were no objects of conspicuous consumption on display in her home, Tumpa needed loans to manage the costs of caring for her family: for her ill mother and for her daughter’s beauty parlour. As Daniel Miller (1998: 35) argues, shopping is often less about individual subjectivity than about ‘an expression of kinship and other relationships’. Like with expenses over Durga Puja season, borrowers like Tumpa did not always use loans for the ‘productive principle’ of microfinance (i.e. for business purposes). Instead she used these debts to produce and maintain different kinds of relationalities, particularly with kin (see also Han 2011; Roitman 2005). Debt, in other words, was productive of sustaining borrowers’ relational bonds.

These entanglements or the fact that poor households have to take out loans to cover everyday expenses and consumption are not new. However, the availability of credit through institutions like commercial microfinance have inserted the poor more tightly into circuits of global finance, making them a source of capitalist accumulation at the bottom of the pyramid. For many, what constitutes consumption includes basics like privatised medical treatment, everyday food needs, as well as ritual and spiritual obligations. While liberalisation has led to the structural transformation of the economy, producing new consumers and sources of credit (Derné et al. 2014), it has not structurally changed the conditions that produce poverty. Rather, in an age of financialisation, commercial microfinance turns poor people’s expenses into a basis for speculative finance. The consumption practices of the poor are not only their strategies for making do but also increasingly the basis on which to make financialised profit at the top of the pyramid.

Notes

- 1 All names have been changed to ensure anonymity. This chapter is based on research that has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Social Science Research Council and the Wenner-Gren Foundation.
- 2 MFIs like DENA lend to both the urban and rural poor, though the focus of this research is on the urban poor. Typically, though not exclusively, the large commercial MFIs prefer to lend to those who are designated to be above the government-designated poverty line. I use the term ‘poor’ both as the term used in the literature and among those working in microfinance, and in reference to the common self-designation by borrowers as *garib* or ‘poor’ in Bengali (see Kar 2018).

- 3 Pujas are ritual prayers and offerings to Hindu gods. Beyond annual celebrations such as Durga Puja, celebrating the goddess Durga, or Kali Puja, celebrating the goddess Kali, many neighbourhoods have local deities which are worshipped regularly in neighbourhood pujas. In urban poor neighbourhoods, the goddess Sitala is the most common deity, offering protection from illness (Kaviraj 1997).
- 4 DENA required that the borrower group buy a mat and that both borrowers and loan officers sit on this mat during the meeting. This is meant to create a more egalitarian space.
- 5 While premised on women's empowerment, MFIs like DENA required borrowers to have a male guarantor, typically the husband or an adult son (Kar 2017). This extension of existing dependencies was used to ensure that, whether or not a woman had her own business, there was a secure income to repay the loan, stemming from a husband or son's employment.
- 6 Historically, Durga Puja moved from being a household celebration towards a community event in the city in the eighteenth century. The number of puja committees organizing public displays increased from around 300 in 1954 to 2,000 in 2002 in Kolkata alone (Ghosal 2006; Ghosh 2000; see also Östör 1980). Pandalis are temporary structures that are erected during the festivals, often using bamboo poles and cloth.
- 7 Creditors are often seen to be in a more socially powerful position than the debtor (Peebles 2010). Significantly, debt has historically been used for purposes of control and power (Graeber 2011).

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Glossary

- adda** 1. informal gathering amongst friends to chat; 2. habitat; 3. place for assemblage, terminus
- adivasi** 1. lit. indigenous people; 2. tribes; 3. tribal
- astra** type of tree
- avatar** incarnation
- azan** Muslim call for prayer
- baaperbari** a married woman's natal home
- babu** 1. respectful title for a man; 2. office worker
- bangla** Bengali
- bania** 1. trader or merchant; 2. occupational caste
- beeda** betel leaf-wrapped offering of betel nuts, herbs, and condiments
- beedi** see *bidi*
- beeri** see *bidi*
- beri** see *bidi*
- bichar-achar** moral conduct  behaviour, customary practices related to pollution
- bidi (beedi, beeri, beri)** country cigarette (coarse, uncured tobacco wrapped in leaves)
- biliti** foreign
- billa** coffee in compressed tablet form
- bindi** vermilion dot on the forehead of Hindu women
- bou** wife, daughter-in-law
- bunco** cigarette (tobacco wrapped in leaves)
- chaap** official seal or stamp
- cherut (cheroot)** cigar with both ends open
- chillum** smoking pipe
- darshan** 1. auspicious sight, looking at the deity and receiving a blessing; 2. tour; 3. visit
- devi** 1. goddess; 2. honorific title used for women
- dhobi** washerman
- dhoti** long piece of unstitched white cloth used as lower garment by men
- dididi** elder sister
- doxa** common belief; something taken for granted

- dupatta** long scarf worn by Muslim women with salwar kameez
- emni** 1. Like this; 2. everyday
- ganja** marijuana
- gharris** horse-drawn carriage; cab
- goddu** black coffee
- grihalakshmi** 1. mistress of the house; 2. good housewife
- haat** village market
- halwai ki dukan** sweet shop
- hamal** porter
- hookah** water-pipe
- kalanapathirikkai** lit. 'quarter anna journal'
- kandeel** kerosine lamps
- khaddar** Indian homespun cotton cloth
- khadi** Indian homespun cotton cloth
- mela** seasonal fair, Hindu festival
- minsararasam** lit. 'electric fluid'
- pandal** temporary construction used for **large private and public** gatherings
- pikarsantushthoye!** after smoking you w  el satisfied!
- punkah** fan
- punkahwala** person who operates a manual ceiling fan
- ranna** cooking, cuisine
- rannaghar** kitchen
- saghadi (sigree)** stove
- sahib** European, polite form of address for a man
- salwar-kameez** loose trousers and shirt worn by Muslim women across India
- saree** traditional garment associated with Hindu women in South Asia
- segar** cigar
- shoppusaamaangal** shop goods
- swadeshi** anti-colonial movement directed at self sufficiency by boycotting foreign goods and aiming at self rule (swaraj)
- swaraj** self-determination, self-rule
- tendu** Diospyros melanoxylon, East Indian ebony
- thali** plate, tray
- vilambaram** advertising