

The Story of Early Indian Advertising

EDITED BY JYOTINDRA JAIN

- 20 Introduction
JYOTINDRA JAIN
- 22 From Craftsmanship to Commercial Art:
The New Dispensations of “Art in Industry”
TAPATI GUHA-THAKURTA
- 34 The Visual Culture of the Indo-British Cotton Trade
JYOTINDRA JAIN
- 44 The Graphic Art of Almanac Advertisements in Colonial Calcutta
ASHIT PAUL
- 50 Commodity Aesthetics:
Soap and Cigarette Advertising in Colonial India
JYOTINDRA JAIN
- 60 Publicity and Advertising in Early Indian Cinema
VIRCHAND DHARAMSEY
- 66 Matchbox Labels and the Stories They Tell
GAUTAM HEMMADY
- 74 Brand-Name Advertising and the Making
of the Modern Conjugal Family
DOUGLAS HAYNES
- 88 Early Publicity in India: Trademark, Branding and Advertisement
ARVIND RAJAGOPAL
- 100 Exotic India in Global Circulation:
The Case of the Liebig Trade Cards
CHRISTOPHER PINNEY
- 108 The Art of Capturing Stillness: Cinema Lobby Cards
SABEENA GADIHOKE
- 114 From Advertising to Public Education:
Notes on Burmah-Shell in India
RAVI VASUDEVAN
- 120 Book Review
*The Thirteenth Place: Positionality as Critique
in the Art of Navjot Altaf*, by Nancy Adajania
AKSHAYA TANKHA
- 122 Contributors



The images on the inside cover and pages 1–17 feature advertisements from archival issues of *Marg* and trade labels from the CIVIC archives.

Introduction

JYOTINDRA JAIN

THIS ISSUE OF *MARG* PROVIDES A WINDOW INTO THE WORLD OF THE VISUAL culture of early advertising and its role in India's social, economic and cultural transformation. "Early" here is used not as a fixed chronological category but to demarcate genres of advertising during the twilight era of intermediations between the pre-existing vernacular visual practices and the advent of corporate advertising during the first half of the 20th century. This period also coincided with the rise of nationally circulating newspapers and magazines addressed to the fast-growing educated urban middle class, who were also the main clientele of the products marketed by ad agencies.

Between 1839 and 1878, several mechanics institutes and art schools had been established in the Indian subcontinent by the colonial administration, which, along with the agenda of improving artisanship and training in "fine art", eventually introduced full-fledged courses in "commercial art". Here students were trained in lithography, photography, graphic design, colour separation and general printing press work as well as in designing posters, advertisements and book illustrations.

Tapati Guha-Thakurta traces the phenomenon of how the visible success of applied art practitioners in conjunction with the ascent of several multinational companies in the 1940s fuelled the "Art in Industry" movement, which brought about a shift from the aesthetics of the "ornamental" to that of the "modern" in the initial stage of design and advertising in Bengal. In Bombay too, Burmah-Shell Oil Co. had in the early 1940s begun to patronize commercial artists under the aegis of the "Art in Industry" movement and had instituted prizes for designing posters and publicity material.¹ Ravi Vasudevan explores how Burmah-Shell then moved towards public education by establishing a film unit that produced informational films, for instance on weaving, tanning and Indian folk dances.

On the other hand, there was also an earlier and formidable regional advertising scene in the comparatively less organized sector that flourished in the bazaar,² comprising almanacs, pictorial calendars, product labels, handbills, collectible picture cards, posters, billboards, cinema lobby cards, and ads produced for the language press by local commercial artists. Ashit Paul lucidly tells the story of how these almanacs, woodcut-printed and illustrated by traditional artisans-turned-entrepreneurs, became the vehicles for the earliest ads in Bengal.

Using the combined methodologies of compositional interpretation as well as content analysis, Virchand Dharamsey maps the history and growth of early Indian cinema publicity and brings into sharp focus the lesser-known issue of swadeshi-ness that dominated the production and viewing of cinema between 1915 and the 1920s. Sabeena Gadihoke focuses on the early lobby cards of Indian cinema, micro-analysing the comparative codes that differentiate the moving image, the cinema still and the lobby card with select examples.

Several of the essays are broadly framed within the ways that ads “actually shape and influence perception and behaviour which reproduce the existing social system”.³ Douglas Haynes looks at ad campaigns by Feluna, Horlicks and Lifebuoy to show how these accommodated and manipulated the values of an emerging Indian middle class and its conjugal responsibilities. Arvind Rajagopal examines the advertising industry in the Bombay Presidency in the first half of the 20th century, using representative examples to illustrate the relationship between the image, its message of consumption and its social context.

In an essay on commodity aesthetics, I have coupled colonial soap and cigarette advertisements, as both symbolized emergent civilizational values—urbanity, modernity, chivalrousness, lifestyle, prestige and the associated class and gender distinctions. My essay on the visual culture of the Indo-British cotton trade traces the genealogy of imagery on mill and trading companies’ labels and examines their impact on the democratization of Hindu worship, the modernization of lifestyle and the emergence of the new visual culture of the nationalist movement.

Swadeshi imagery dominates the entire popular visual culture of the first half of the 20th century—on a large and small scale. Gautam Hemmady, in his article on matchbox labels, chronicles their depiction of nationalist symbols as well as Hindu mythological forms, royalty and courtesans, to highlight the common man’s new consumption of the visual.

In his scrutiny of the Liebig trade cards of circa 1872, which were aimed at marketing Liebig’s beef extract popular in the West, Christopher Pinney perceptively sifts through the visual representations of the exotic orientalized world of India depicted on them. He lays bare the eclectic inter-visibility of these cards that drew upon Theaker’s illustrations of Indian legends, Grimms’ fairy tales or the Daniells’ *Oriental Scenery*.

In sum, this issue explores how a sociological analysis of the visuals of early Indian print advertisements (as well as the changing nature of the copy itself—from product description to exaltation of its social value) serves as an efficacious instrument for understanding the transformation of social values and the country’s progression into the “modern”.

NOTES

- 1 Anonymous, *Story of Sir J.J. School of Art: 1857–1957* (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, n.d.), p. 172.
- 2 For a detailed account of this, see Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).
- 3 John Harms and Douglas Kellner, “Towards a Critical Theory of Advertising”, quoted from <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/Illumina%20Folder/kell6.htm>, accessed on January 17, 2017.

art in industry

number four



rupees three

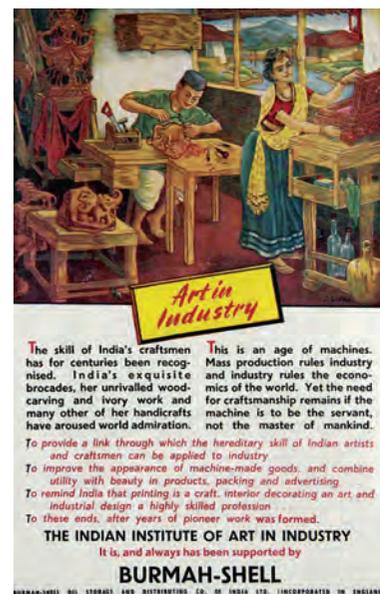
From Craftsmanship to Commercial Art: The New Dispensations of “Art in Industry”

TAPATI GUHA-THAKURTA

TO PROVIDE A LINK THROUGH WHICH THE HEREDITARY SKILLS OF INDIAN artists and craftsmen can be applied to industry; To improve the appearance of machine-made goods, and combine beauty with utility in products, packaging and advertising; To remind India that printing is a craft, interior decorating an art, and industrial design a highly skilled profession...¹

These were the objectives with which the Indian Institute of Art in Industry was founded in Calcutta in 1945, as a follow-up to a series of successful annual commercial art exhibitions, held from 1941 onwards at the Government School of Art in the city. One of the exhibitions even travelled to London in January 1944, where the accolades came as ample proof that India’s new industrial arts and designs were of “international standard” and that Indian commercial artists were “already equal to the finest to be found anywhere” in the world.² With its prime intention of raising the standards of commercial art all over India, the “Art in Industry” movement was driven by a twofold imperative—of “acquainting artists with industry’s requirements” and of “illustrating to industrialists the art talents that were available in the country”.³ Equally at stake were two other claims—one, that sought to make the new practices of industrial and graphic design a modern artistic profession in its own right; the other, which continued to highlight the country’s traditional handicrafts as an unequalled resource pool for the new practices of commercial art. So it was that this movement launched itself at the very centres of modern art pedagogy and practice—the Government School of Art, and Artistry House, Calcutta—in a city that was still one of the reigning centres of the nation’s modern art. At the same time, the advertisement of Burmah-Shell, one of the main industrial firms supporting the “Art in Industry” forum chose to play on the image of ornamental wood- and ivory-carvers and their “art of the hand” as a key national heredity for Indian commercial design (figure 2).

This twin invocation of the prestige of modern art and lineage of traditional craftsmanship within this forum of “Art in Industry” sets the context for this essay. Taking its vantage position in Calcutta in the 1940s, it looks back at the critical transition in the discourse of design in colonial India, over the course of the early 20th century, from the realm of handicrafts and the artisanal arts to a new social space of middle-class training and practice. It explores the way the matrix of design comes to occupy a median space between the “fine arts” (of painting and sculpture) and the many older and new skills of fabricating prints, patterns and ornamental objects



1. Cover by Annada Munsri, *Art in Industry*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1947. Courtesy Visual Archives, ccssc.
2. Burmah-Shell advertisement for the Indian Institute of Art in Industry, *Art in Industry Magazine*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1–6, 1946–47. Courtesy Visual Archives, ccssc.