

**NEGOTIATING THE NEED: ADVERTISEMENTS AND LANGUAGE  
OF SOCIAL MEDIATION IN KERALA (1900-1950)**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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### DECLARATION

I declare that this PhD thesis entitled “**Negotiating the Need: Advertisements and Language of Social Mediation in Kerala (1900-1950)**” is my original work carried out as a doctoral candidate at the Centre for Media Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, under the supervision of Dr. Sujith Kumar Parayil.

All the sources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this or any other university.

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### CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this PhD thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction**

The print advertisement has always been crucial for the survival of periodicals across India since the initial period, and Kerala was no exception. Robin Jeffrey argues that having a printing house became a profitable enterprise in Kerala since the late nineteenth century as these printing presses could print newspapers that sold advertisements along with textbooks and other literature for religious institutions and governments at a time when there was a growing demand for printed materials (Jeffrey, 2009, p. 470). This shows how advertisements were integral to print media as it helped advertisers to reach out to their consumers effectively, and in return, advertisements financed these print media. Moreover, a considerable volume of advertisements in these newspapers and advertisements show that advertisements were in the survival of these media forms during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Space for advertisements kept increasing that advertisers found this as an effective medium to reach out to their consumers. (Gupta, 2001, p. 82 and Joshi, 2001, p. 86).

Periodicals found advertising as a source of revenue at a time when there was a growing demand for new objects, mostly among the educated middle class. It is evident from previous studies that there was a fantasy for objects of everyday life like soap, toothpaste, watch, fountain pen, clothes, music instruments (Kumar, 2016; Cohn, 1997, p. 76 and Parayil, 2003, p. 102). Advertisements of these products dealt with the notions of desire, pleasure, fashion, comforts and anxieties about physical wellbeing. Advertisements about banks and insurance companies, printing press, and books are also

seen. Advertisements play a crucial role in introducing these objects/services. The advertisement was one of the media through which people got to know about these products/objects. As advertisements often try to present or represent an imaginary (or imagined) life of the society; in this form, they advocate a reconstruction /reinterpretation of the 'present' in order to achieve a better life; thus advertisements question the existing self of the individual to modify, alter or invent a new self.

In the domain of visual culture studies, attempts have been made to study the society beyond the printed texts by looking into the visual medium. Studies on photography and films, paintings, etc. are setting an example of how visual media can be an exciting realm to the study the society (Pinney, 2004; Jain, 2007 and Parayil, 2003). Similarly, the study analyses print advertisement as one of the new visual media, which played as a popular avenue through which people could understand about themselves and their needs. Therefore, these visuals in advertisements are helping us to narrativise the history of that time through the domain of advertisement.

Until late-nineteenth-century, advertisements in the region were mainly in the forms of Government notifications. During that period, people were informed of such notifications put by the authorities through the beating of drums. By the beginning of the twentieth century, more periodicals and newspapers started publishing having advertisements published in them. In this context, the study focuses on the advertisements which were published during the period 1900-1950. Advertisements of medicines, both Ayurvedic and Allopathy, objects of everyday life like soap, toothpaste, watch, fountain pen, clothes, musical instruments like harmonium, violins and also gramophone were seen in the early newspapers and magazines. The aforesaid advertisements dealt with the



notions of desire, pleasure, fashion, comforts and anxieties about physical wellbeing. Advertisements about banks and insurance companies, printing press, and books were also seen widely.

During the initial period, newspapers were not published daily. Most of them started as weekly publications and converted into dailies in a later period. It carried advertisements for different items. Rates of advertisements, both the rates per insertion and for a long duration, were also published in these newspapers. Advertisements appeared in the newspapers during this period were also in the form of descriptive write ups (Gopakumar, 2004).

The *Kerala State Directory*, *Travancore State Directory* and the *Madras State Directory* contained advertisements of various products that were available at Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore. These directories contained pictorial reference regarding historical, commercial and statistical information about Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Advertisements about these directories were seen in various magazines and in the same directories, which tried to make manufacturers aware of the benefits of advertising. These advertisements emphasised on the necessities of making the advertisements sentimental, beautiful, and humorous and not so vulgar and crisp in their appeal.

The advertisement became a tool for the propagation of nationalist ideas, especially in the context of the Swadeshi movement. Newspapers like *Mathrubhumi*<sup>1</sup> gave more space for such kinds of in the advertisement. *Mathrubhumi* had many advertisements that were meant to evoke a feeling of patriotism among people. They

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<sup>1</sup> Mathrubhumi was established by Indian National congress leader K.P. Kesava Menon from Kozhikode in 1923 as a voice against British having Kozhikode as its main office. (Jeffrey, 2000, p. 20).

included a range of products from toothbrushes, biscuits, lanterns, mosquito repellents, cigarettes, to services like life insurance and nursing. Reference to tradition, nationalism, and patriotism were the main strategies used in these advertisements. Symbols and icons that could evoke patriotism were commonly used in advertisements for swadeshi products. More often than not, advertisers resorted to the elements of tradition and culture to reach out to the consumers even with a modern object from the various ideological and market-oriented standpoints.

While advertisement was a potential medium in the new market economy, the potential was used by political power as well. There were instances of the Travancore government denying state advertisements in the pretext of political reasons. Writings against state policies were cited as reasons for the denial government advertisements to newspapers. This indicates that the medium of advertisements possessed bargaining power when it is in the hands of people in power, which continues to be the case even today.

With the coming of new products into the markets, the whole dynamic of the local situations got disturbed. Particularly in the context of medicine, what we can see was the tussle between modern allopathic medicine and indigenous Ayurveda medicine. Ayurveda medicine and other indigenous medicines tried to compete with modern medicine by claiming more efficiency and quicker healing capacity than the former(Haynes,2010). This made many Ayurveda products to refashion in various ways so that they could overcome the challenges posed by allopathic medicine. Medical advertisements hold a mirror to these changes that happened in the realm of medicine.

Moreover, these advertisements had an important role in creating new knowledge about the body, health, and weakness.

Gendered notions prevalent in the Kerala society were also reflected in the advertisements. Though, Kerala model of development gave a picture that the women in Kerala as more liberated and enjoying more freedom compared to the rest of the country due to its high literacy rate among women and better health facilities, etc., the situation was that of a 'gender paradox' that the status of women remained more or less unchanged or refashioned it in a new way which denied a greater mobility to women or expansion of their range of life-choices. Devika (2006) problematised this further by resorting to history, as she argued this was neither coincidental nor incomplete development but this showed how the "women's social space was understood in the community- and social-reformist efforts of the early twentieth century, in which the dominant visions of Kerala modernity were shaped" (ibid,p. 44). Though women magazines<sup>2</sup> were in circulation by the end of the nineteenth century, it carried new ideals of gendered subjectivity by projecting women as a domain which was direly in need of capacities that were specifically 'womanly'– the domain of modern domesticity (Devika, 2006). This idea of modern domesticity, which was womanly, was visible in the imagination of various advertisers, as they designed their products which would fit into these very ideals of modern domesticity. Building on context, the study would further explore the ideals of women and domesticity mediated by the advertisements in colonial Kerala.

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<sup>2</sup> *Keraleeya Sugunabodhini* (1892), one of the earliest of women's magazines in Malayalam, made it very clear in its very first issue that it won't touch upon the realm of politics and narrow argumentation of religion, but only the public/domestic delineation of social domain (see Raghavan,1985). This clearly indicates to the point that though women magazines were in circulation, social space of the women was restricted to certain 'permissible' realms only.

While studying the socio-cultural changes of modern Kerala through advertisement, it is pertinent to ask what is it making advertisements different from other media in this endeavour. Fixing at this juncture, the study looks into the visual and textual properties of the advertisements to explore the interconnected social and cultural meaning as the way these properties and techniques connote the emerging idea of the modern as well as the way how advertisement as a medium enunciates forms of the subjectivities during the late phase of colonialism in Kerala. Beyond the representational schemas of other visual media like photographs and paintings, advertisements made inroads into people through the objects that they use in everyday life. These objects had carried different meanings and values as to the notions about being modern in the context of colonial modernity<sup>3</sup>.

Advertisements played an instrumental role in mediating these meanings associated with object among the public. With the desire to be modern, new needs were created or the existing ones were refashioned. In this negotiation of the new needs or refashioning of the older ones, advertisements developed a visual language that defined the social mediation of advertisement in colonial Kerala. This visual language, although influenced not only by the aspects of pre-existing pictorial traditions but also the cognitive structures of the people, helped them in imagining and negotiating a modern subjecthood in early twentieth-century Kerala. In short, the study is an attempt to understand the intricacies associated with the early formation of the modern subjectivity

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<sup>3</sup> Sanal Mohan has explained the experience of modernity in non-western world which were once colonies in the light of their colonial experience which he referred to as colonial modernity. Unlike the modernity in European context which is a complete breakaway from the previous systems in which tradition, culture and religion all played a role, modernity in non-European regions was predominantly a mix of the old and new. (Sanal Mohan,2015,8)

within the specific matrix of the cultural and political economy of the colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala.

In order to explore the mediated experience of the modern subjectivity or how the idea of modern was becoming an object of various discourses of modernity, I use early print advertisements as one of the cultural technologies which invoke/inform not only the idea of modern subject but also manifest the paradoxes involved the perception a being modern. This paradox of modernity involved here has been discussed in the recent scholarship on Kerala studies in connection with the discourse of the new subject within the new formulations of caste and gender identities (Mohan, 1999, 2006; Kumar, 2016; Devika, 2006).

Sanal Mohan's critical study in this regard held the dominant agencies of modernity like that of state and missionaries as the 'new referents' against which a new Dalit self emerged within the context of discursive practices of modernity (Mohan, 1999, p. 29). While on the one side, modernity had an emancipatory potential within its discourse for Dalits, it had to be in critical engagements with its own tentacles. In addition to this, Sanal Mohan's work also highlighted the emergence of new mentality among the slave castes, especially in Travancore, and argues that 'this new mentality transformed 'the slave perception' of the slave caste and was expressed for their claim for social equality (Mohan, 2015, p. 11). The negotiation of the equality and claim for the recognisable subject of modernity is, according to him, refashioned by the slave caste through various forms of interactions with the discourses of colonial modernity which include the assertion of identity, access of value loaded objects, spaces and education. It is interesting to note that this enunciation of the subjectivity is not something passively

accessed by the slave subjects; instead, there are various actions and reactions involved in the process such as reading, listening, sounding and congregational practices through embodied performances and practices. Though Mohan places this subject position within the broader discourses of colonial modernity, his work through the explorations of sites, spaces and practices attempted to present a 'becoming subject' which often differ from the normative subjectivity of the colonial modernity. Hence, it opens up possibilities to understand paradoxes in the modernity in connection with the formation of modern subjectivity.

In his work on autobiographical writings of modern Kerala, Udayakumar (2016) traced this paradox within the genre of autobiographical writings which was one of the prominent media through which modern individuals of that time could express themselves. While he reiterates that most of the autobiographical writings endorsed enlightened modern values and flaunted the ideas of progress and freedoms in its narratives, the element of past came into the narrative-if not intentionally but most often as a slippage (Kumar, 2016,p. 19). This invisible element of past which the very self-narratives wanted to escape from with their efforts bulges out as yet another way in which the paradox within the discourse of modernity is exposed.

The paradox of modernity was evident in the imagination of a new subject in the domain of print advertisements as well. While advertisements promised a modern subjectivity, elements of past and tradition were evoked most often which leaves a space for an ambivalent conception of the idea of modern it promised. It is this ambivalence in the formation of a modern subject in modern Kerala that the study is trying to address through the decoding of social mediation facilitated by the print advertisements in

modern Kerala. As a medium, on the one hand, advertisements at the surface level mediated the normative ideals and rationales of modern subjectivity that were attributed to the modern objects and bodies as the perception of modern, and, on the other hand, the same medium through the specific strategies—both verbal and visual-- of inclusion and exclusion projected forms of negotiations, desires and fantasies of the subject who were in the processual formation. Hence, advertisements and its mediating cultural strategies always have visible and invisible apparatuses (ideological, cultural, institutional and technological) which had the power to recruit or fantasise the historical subject as a subject of the specific political economy of colonialism and modernity. It can be said that it is through the medium of advertisements that the modern subject came into contact with the logic of colonial capitalism. Therefore, advertisements and its language—visual and verbal—invent new signs and signifiers to idealise the imaginary subject of modernity. Print advertisements invent this language not only as the signifiers of modern but also it attempted to incorporate histories and sensibilities of the tradition and the past through its cultural technologies of representations. The strategy of this representation, which included inventive visual and verbal codes and signifiers, can be considered as the constitutive of traditions of visual literacy. This study, therefore, attempts to analyse this visual literacy, its denoted and connoted meanings, inside and outside the frame of advertisements.

### **Background of the study**

As the study would look upon the advertisements that appeared in the late nineteenth and early Twentieth century, it is imperative to give a background of the contemporary Kerala society so that the study can be located in the regional context. The late Nineteenth and

first quarter of the twentieth century, the period known as the high colonial period in Kerala witnessed a series of transformation. This breakaway from the traditional social and economic structure, which came to be known as a period of Kerala modernity, was a peculiar feature of this transformation. Waves of transformation were visible in different walks of Kerala Society like changes in economic relations, caste organizations, political structures, matrilineal kinship and marital relations. Much celebrated 'renaissance' in Kerala during this period was seen as a point of departure from an old-Kerala which was pre-modern and feudal, divided into several local chiefdoms and ridden with casteism (Aloysius, 2004, Bose and Varughese, 2015). The period witnessed macro-economic changes caused by plantations, social and spatial mobility, and the assertion of different social groups, mainly by the elite sections of the society to claim social dominance (Jeffrey, 1994). Activities of Christian missionaries had brought tremendous change in the social sphere of colonial Kerala, especially in the field of education (Kawashima, 1998). Reforms in the education field both by the missionaries and the state brought in hopes especially for lower castes and women towards social mobility and challenging the social norms which were traditionally put aside these groups at margins (Kawashima, 1998). At the same time, lower castes, especially Pulayas and Parayas, articulated a new self that was invented and formulated in the course of their engagement with colonial modernity. They negotiated with the traditional power structures and made claims on social spaces that were generally closed to them (Mohan, 2015).

With the coming of new public institutions like schools and courts of law, things changed radically by questioning the dominant casteist social structure. Socio-religious movements among the lower castes challenged the dominant notions of body and space,



especially in the case of untouchability and access to public spaces like road, market place, temple, etc. Colonial modernity kept on problematising the caste and gender domination and broke the shackles of traditional power relations from everyday life which paved the way for new habits and tastes in food; clothing (Devika, 2002). In the Kerala context, the notion of colonial modernity was used to explain the colonial cultural process that privileged modernity and progress across social groups (Osella and Osella, 2000).

The proliferation of print, one of the major factors fuelled the transformation, in the context of colonial modernity paved which the way for an unprecedented circulation of information and formation of a 'public sphere' in modern Kerala (Bayly, 1998 and Arunima, 2006). Missionaries were the major facilitator in this regard, which brought out radical changes in the sensibility of natives. There was a gradual emergence of a reading public, which was evident by the increasing circulation of newspapers and magazines in Malayalam (Priyadarshan,1994; Raghavan, 1985). These newly emerged genres of literature were of the self-evaluation and refashioning of the everyday life of the new middle class emerged in the context of colonial modernity in Kerala (Pillai, 1974). By the late nineteenth century, groups of modern-educated men formed 'reading clubs' and 'debating societies' to gather and discuss the topics of 'general interest' (Devika, 2006).

Although British during their initial years of colonial rule in India tried to study the colonial subjects so that the governing task will be eased, at a later stage, tried to impart western colonial knowledge upon the natives as part of the cultural colonialism strategy. Efforts by Macaulay and William Bentinck in introducing English education worked towards the same thrust. As a part of the colonial agenda, they aimed to shape a

group of Indians who were English educated and also were Indian in look and appearance but English in tastes and sensibilities (Cohn, 1996; Viswanathan, 1989). Concomitant arrival of print culture contributed to this process as the concept of leisure was changed from group activities to individual leisure activities like that of reading novels. New literary genres as novels were the products of modernity which was facilitated by print culture (Panikkar, 1995).

Various colonial legislatures dismantled the matrilineal system of inheritance and the joint family system during the early twentieth century Kerala (Arunima 2003, Saradmoni, 1999; Jeffrey, 1976). Demand for reforms in the matrilineal system from the English educated men hastened the decline of matrilineality, which was prevalent in Travancore and Malabar. With more opportunities for English education, upper caste elites enjoyed more freedom and mobility which gave them a new sense of individuality (Parayil, 2003). With the reforms in matrilineality, men from Nair elites were ascribed new roles as husbands and fathers which gave them much power and status unlike their previous role of *Karanavars* in the matrilineal joint family system (Kodoth, 2004).

The intervention of the colonial state at various junctures had a lasting influence on the life of people in the country. The introduction of western medicine has been one of the realms through which the power of the colonial state was interpellated (Arnold, 1988). Coming of western medicine was seen as threat by practitioners of indigenous medicines across India. It was in this context that attempts were made to revitalise indigenous medical tradition of Ayurveda medicine under the leadership of P.S. Varrier. With the influence of western medicine, indigenous medicine practitioners diversified their fields by adopting various aspects of western medicine. The professionalisation of

indigenous medical traditions resulted in the establishment of training institutes in indigenous medicines, modern marketing techniques like advertising (Panikkar, 1995).

In the context of these transformations, the emergence of a modern subject was evident to which print advertisement had contributed in greater length in formulating and articulating the idea of modern, visually and verbally. However, there has been a void in scholarship in addressing this particular process in the field of Kerala studies to which the study would contribute. In this context, the study poses the following questions as to the technical as well as the socio-cultural significance of the medium are concerned.

### **Research Questions**

These following questions open up a discussion about the coming of advertisements as a new medium and the mediation process that was enabled by advertisements.

- Firstly, the study explores how advertisements can be studied as a text that visually or verbally enabled the imaginations of people in a given society, especially the modern Kerala, in the context of this study.
- The study further explores the early perceptions of the medium of advertisement in Kerala. How did people conceive the promises of advertisements as a new medium at the social, economic, and political level, and what does it say as to the medium of advertisement is concerned in modern Kerala.?
- How advertisements produced knowledge and shaped the notions about body, health, weakness, woman-hood, masculinity, new domesticity within the discursive context of modern Kerala?
- How advertisement refashioned the need and habits and created new ones in the context of colonial modernity? How advertisement negotiated the desire for being modern while enabling imaginations of a new subject in modern Kerala?

- Lastly, the study explores how advertisements offer a visual language in studying the socio-cultural history of modern Kerala.

## **Methodology**

Methodologically the study has used various methods to analyse the primary sources, i.e., advertisements in magazines and newspapers, which were in circulation during the late Nineteenth and early decades of Twentieth colonial Kerala. Historical and analytical methods are used to get narratives about the Kerala by looking into the advertisements. As advertisements are coded with various visual languages which include forms of social signifiers and technical aspects of the medium, the study has used a semiotic method to understand these aspects of the advertisements. Within the broader context of media discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, the study has used content analysis and textual analysis.

Advertisements use a whole range of signs and symbols in the process of meaning-making, and therefore, decoding those signs and symbols is a crucial part of any study on advertisements. Conceptually, this study made use of various theoretical insights drawn from the semiotic analysis, discourse analysis, textual analysis and post-structuralist and Marxist understanding of images and visual media in the discursive context of colonial capitalism. Works of scholars like John Berger, Sut Jhally, Raymond Williams, Judith Williamson, Robert Goldman and Erving Goffman give an ample idea about how to decode advertisements in understanding the nuances on effects of advertising process on society and its underlying ideological, racial and gendered messages.

While following semiotics and textual understanding the study attempts to decode connoted cultural, social and political signifiers and contextual meanings which help us to understand the specific formation of the subject in tune with visual culture. In this process of analysis, body, materiality of objects, idea of commoditisation, things and its entrenched forms of power-knowledge are also explored in this study. As mentioned earlier, the study locates print advertisements within the larger discursive structure of colonialism and related perceptions of modernity. Hence, advertisements have been analysed within the larger historical and cultural understandings of the colonial Kerala whereby questions of caste, gender and temporalities were studied while drawing insights from the discourse analysis and critical perspectives of Frankfurt school. In short, this study does not attempt to theorise advertisements for the sake of theories, but it makes use of insights from a set of critical theories as the way the object of the study demands. However, methodologically speaking, the study attempts to open up a framework to understand print advertisements and its mediations within the purview of historical *long duree*.

As a part of the fieldwork, I collected materials from various archives including Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum; Regional archives, Calicut; various libraries including Appan Thampuran Library; Kerala Sahitya Academy library, Thrissur; Kerala University Library, Trivandrum; Sri Chithira Thirunal Public Library, Vanchiyoor and Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

### **Chapter Scheme**

This thesis has been divided into six chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. The Introductory chapter gives an overview of the thesis with an account on the

discursive realm of colonial Kerala in which the subject of this study is also located. This chapter primarily delves into intermediary domain of the advertisement as a medium and the specific question related to the formation of colonial subjectivity and hence, the attempt to bring the idea of how advertisement can be used as one of the cultural technologies of the time to understand various conjectures related to the idea of modern during this period. In addition to this, a section on the methodological aspect explains the methodological journey that the thesis undertook. Research questions are addressed in the last part where chapter scheme is given in detail.

Chapter two titled ‘Ways of reading advertisements: a conceptual introduction’ provides a detailed account of the theoretical ruminations on the advertisements. Looking at various studies on the advertisement, the chapter analyses various theoretical and empirical approaches that will help us to understand the advertisement as a medium and as an object of culture. The chapter further analyses various signifiers-visual and verbal- epitomised this medium, to argue that the medium of advertisement can be treated as an assemblaged media text which is constitutive of the both the cultural and technologies of power inlaid in the specific context of colonial Kerala. Hence, the chapter conceptualises the significance of the visual literacy-the history of visual signifiers-embedded in the specific forms of the articulation of becoming or imagining ideals of the modern, which is a significant trope of the medium of advertisement. Advertisement here as a generative and intermediary site encompasses ideals, desires and fantasy associated with the specific time of the history.

Chapter three, ‘Early advertisements in Kerala: a historical outline’, discusses the early perceptions about advertisement in Colonial Kerala using writings about

advertisements, advertisements of advertisement and archival sources that had references to advertisements. In the first section, early perceptions about print advertisements in Kerala were discussed by looking at one article that was published in *Mangalodayam* magazine published from Thrissur. A historical reading of this article offers a compelling account of how people in Kerala received advertisement as a new medium. Secondly, the chapter discusses how various traders and manufactures used advertisement as a potential medium in advertising their products. As the culture of advertising was new to them, why and how one should advertise their products were the main concerns for them. These concerns were reflected in the advertisements that came in various publications that offered avenues for advertising their products. While looking at advertisements for advertising, this section offers an account on advertising practices in Kerala during the early twentieth century Kerala. Thirdly, this chapter discusses how advertisements were featured in the political discourse of that time. Consulting the archival sources of the Travancore government, this section discusses how the advertisement was involved in the political discourses in contemporary Kerala.

Chapter four, 'Body, health and weakness: Advertisement and its promises of well-being,' discusses how advertisements generated ideas about a healthy body and how these ideas reflected in generating knowledge about new women-hood, masculinity, and new ideas of domesticity, life, and death. Medical advertisements that catered to the health of women, men and kids are discussed in the first part. In the second part, advertisements for life insurance are discussed so to get the idea of life and death that was mediated through these advertisements in modern Kerala. While looking at the visual and textual properties of these advertisements, this chapter narrates how advertisements

visual contributed to the notions of family, life, death, physical weakness, and healthy life, masculinity, and women-hood in the discursive realm of early twentieth-century Kerala.

Chapter five, 'Conjectures of the modern: Soap, cloth and watches: Soap, cloth and watch,' discusses the emergence of a modern subject in the domain of print advertisement. Analysing advertisements of soaps, clothes and watch this how imaginations of a modern subject were evolved through the advertisements. While advertisements lured people into new habits and needs, it also refashioned the old ones and presented them. Refashioning the needs and habits were done in by offering a new subjectivity within the discursive realm of modernity. Advertisements of soaps carried the new notions of clean and hygiene body which were portrayed as the essential qualities of a modern subject. While traditional methods of the cleansing of the body were deemed to be archaic and a reason for body odour, with the European sensibilities soaps, introduced new notions of the body which is clean, hygiene and fragrant according to the standards of modern sensibilities. The clean and fragrant body of a new subject had to be dressed in the same manner for which advertisements of tailoring house offered new clothes that matched with European sensibilities. Advertisements that offered coat and suit instilled a desire for modern outlook that these new clothes promised. The visual presentation of the modern outlook in the advertisements lured people into imagining modern outlook. Once the grooming practices were done, the modern subject had to be disciplined in tune with the new notions of time brought by various colonial apparatuses. Advertisements of watches brought the notions of time within the discourse of modernity.



Watches were presented as an object for self-fashioning which again give anyone who uses it a modern outlook.

Chapter six conclusion, with a summary of the study, puts forward the idea of how advertisements invariably highlight the constitutive elements of the modern subject, its dialectical existence and becoming within the multiple temporalities of technology, colonialism and culture. The concluding remarks emphasise the relevance of print advertisements in the context of the emerging field of media studies. Moreover, it also emphasises how advertisement as a medium, showcases and mediates generative forms of negotiations, which on the other hand, the study treated as signifiers to understand the cultural and social meaning of its language: advertisements has a language which is inventive and imaginary, however, integral to the social and cultural histories of the medium as well as the region.

## Chapter 2

### Ways of Reading Advertisement: A Conceptual Introduction

Advertisements have generally been studied in connection with the growth of capitalism, the emergence of middle class and consumption practices, etc. In the South Asian context in particular, advertising has been studied to understand the history of South Asia by various scholars concerning the history of global capitalism, history of medicine, history of consumption, history of sexuality and emergence of middle class, etc. (Sharma, 2009; Hynes, 2012; Berger, 2013; Kember, 2003; Srivatsan, 2000). Apart from these studies, how to read or decode advertisement has been a central theme for many studies on advertisements where verbal and visual languages used in advertisements were studied in much detail (Barthes, 1977; Messaris, 1997; Williamson, 1978; Berger, 1972).

Early advertisement filled with more linguistic messages compared to the later ones which incorporated drawings and images by making use of technological advancement of the time. Later on, images began to dominate the content of advertisements though it was supported by captions as well. These advertising images pervaded the society in its all spheres and advertisements proved to be an important medium that influenced consumers' choices and attitude. In this context, aforementioned studies brought the visual aspect of the advertisement as well to the fore and called for a semiotic interpretation of advertisements so as to get into the persuasive and manipulative aspects of advertisements. This approach did bring out a new understanding to look into advertisements as it discussed a visual literacy along with linguistic literacy where images played a significant role in the meaning making process.

By looking through various studies on advertisement, this chapter explores how advertisements can be studied as a historical text which can talk to us about the life in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala. Advertisement as a media text engages with its audiences in various ways. Photographic images, drawings and painting, captions, etc. constitute the elements of advertisements at different junctures in the society. It adopts the most suitable ways of engaging with its audience according to the requirement of the time with available technological support. Graeme Burton (2010) has explained this evolving aspect of media texts.

He argues;

“Media texts are constantly appearing and changing-street posters come and go. Media texts are continually produced and renewed. Media texts intend to engage people, to convey some kind of information, and to produce reactions in their audiences which justify their continuing production.” (Burton, 2010, p. 5)

Like any other media texts, advertisement in Kerala too had undergone changes over the period of the time. According to the necessities of the time, advertisers have adopted for changes in its forms with available technological support. If earlier print advertisements were seen with verbal messages with a detailed description of the products advertised, later on, long descriptions gave way for short captions and drawings. With the photography, images too began to appear in advertising messages.

### **What is Advertisement and how does it work?**

Before going to the discussion on how advertisements can be studied to understand the underpinnings of the advertising process and its effect on society, it is important to specify what is meant by advertisement. Origin of the term ‘advertising’ is traced back to

the medieval Latin verb *advertere*, which means “to direct one’s attention to” a product or service by means of some public announcement (Danesi, 2015,p.1). Malefyt and Moeran in their book *Advertising Cultures* explained advertising as market communication of goods and services by various sellers. In a capitalistic society initially advertisements were perceived as a means to generate demand by focusing on specific aspects of the goods and services in a persuasive manner. However recent researches moved beyond this approach and saw advertisements as a vehicle of social communication (Leiss, Kline, &Jhally, 1990).

“...the ways in which messages presented in advertising reach deeply into our most serious concerns: interpersonal and family relations, the sense of happiness and contentment, sex roles and stereotyping, the uses of affluence, the fading away of older cultural traditions, influences on younger generations, the roles of business in society, persuasion and personal autonomy and many others.” (ibid., p. 1)

It is in this sense that advertisers resort to factors like gender identity, celebrity endorsement, happiness and culture, nationalism to sell their products, whereas these factors necessarily need not to have any tangible connections with products advertised (Malefyt and Moeran, 2003, p.2). Moreover, advertisements work in a subtle way that one can’t even realize how some advertisements make inroads in a most deceptive and manipulative way. Advertisements are penetrated in the most personal way - in the form of advertisement you see in the newspaper or magazine you read at your home or the place you go for leisure time activities. Robert Goldman has discussed about the need to read these ads socially so as to critically look at its functioning. He pointed out the way how advertisement works in subtle way;

“Advertisements saturate our social lives. We participate, daily, in deciphering advertising images and messages. Our ability to recognize and decipher the advertising images that confront us depends on our photographic literacy and our familiarity with the social logic of advertising and consumerism. Yet, because ads are so pervasive and our reading of them so routine, we tend to take for granted the deep social assumptions embedded in advertisements. We do not ordinarily recognize advertising as a sphere of ideology.” (Goldman, 1992, p.1)

Manipulative and deceptive aspects of the functioning of advertisements were the central concerns in early studies on advertisements. Prominent media scholars like Marshal McLuhan (1951), Vance Packard (1957) and Raymond Williams(1980) have talked about the deceptive and manipulative power of advertising. McLuhan’s critique of advertisement, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, was published in 1951 at a time when only one out of ten American households had a television. Yet, his compelling work touched all aspects of how advertisements intruded the then US society in various media forms. In this work, he examined a range of advertised material culture as a social mirror, from film posters, comic strips, magazine covers, newsprint and advertising, and showed how ads were intended to ‘get inside’ the collective public mind. In analysing the content of media, deciphering what the subliminal messages are saying to people unconsciously, he postulated mass media’s role as creating ‘the folklore of industrial man’. He calls mass media as ‘folklore of Industrial man’ because people who consume the mass media contents passively accept whatever is narrated by the anonymous advertising agencies or people from Hollywood whose sole motive is to maximize their profit like what folklore made by tribal chieftains, medical practitioners, religious heads had done during earlier times to control their people (McLuhan, 195, pp. x-xi). Although he was later criticised for his over emphasises on technological aspect of

media<sup>4</sup>, this work which detailed the persuasive techniques of advertising in forming a consumer culture inspired further studies on advertising as a form of cultural critique.

Yet another media scholar and social critic, Vance Packard, who has written extensively about consumer culture in America has explained in his work *Hidden Persuaders*(1955), how advertisements manipulate modern society into consumerism by changing habits, choices of consumption and thought processes in a hideous way. He calls the advertisers as *hidden persuaders* as the manipulation, the appeal for consumption, is most often done at an unconscious level (Packard, 1955, p. 6).When it comes to Raymond Williams, he called ‘Advertising as a magic system’ in which products turn into objects with social and cultural significance and thereby makes the one who buys the product a consumer rather than a just a user. As consumers, people not only use the products, but also they consume the product culturally so that their position will be elevated in the society. (Williams, 1980, pp. 184-187). Given the kind of social meanings attached to goods through advertising, Williams argued, that we cannot really call ourselves materialist who are too much dependent on material goods. To quote him;

“If we were sensibly materialist, in that part of our living in which we use things, we should find most advertising to be of irrelevance. Beer would be enough for us, without the additional promise that in drinking it we show ourselves to be manly, young in heart, or neighbourly. A washing-machine would be a useful machine to wash clothes, rather than an indication that we are forward-looking or an object of envy to our neighbours.”  
(Ibid, p. 185)

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<sup>4</sup>McLuhan is one of the pioneering figures in media studies who theorized how the mass media technologies shape and influence people en masse. McLuhan’s seminal work *Understanding the Media: the extension of man* puts media technology in the central place in the human communication system. His idea of ‘medium is the message’ put the technology aspect in the mass communication over the content the content aspect. Though this technological determinist approach made him unpopular among the cultural critics of media studies, McLuhan still remains as a tall figure at a time many more communication technologies are taking control of life in modern society. For further details, Nick Stevenson (2002) *Understanding Media cultures*, 118-146.

However, this argument by Raymond Williams was critiqued by SutJhally who emphasized on the point that symbolic aspects of things, apart from its material utility, have been important in linking things with people. He put it;

“The recognition of the fundamentally symbolic aspect of people’s uses of things must be the minimum starting point for a discourse that concerns object. Specifically, the old distinction between basic (physical) and secondary (psychological) needs must be superseded.” (Jhally, 1990, p. 4)

Advertisers always wanted an uncritical, passive and easy reception of the content they produce in their advertisements. They most often deep dig into the lives of their potential consumers so as to know them better. And thus they present themselves as a folklore or as a magical system or sometimes makes appeal in a certain way that even their consumers don’t even realize that they are being manipulated into buying something.

### **Advertising and its socio-cultural meanings**

Having said advertisements are manipulative and deceptive, it is not to be assumed that advertisers could easily manipulate and deceive their potential consumers to serve their interest by persuading these consumers into consumption. This has been done in a tactful way that people could easily fall for the advertising campaigns these advertisers do. While it is a known fact that advertisement is a medium that inform about something, most often a product in the market, over the period of the time advertisement got much importance beyond just informing about a product or a service. Advertisement plays as crucial role in connecting these products with certain social and personal values attached along with commodities advertised. It is generally used to create a value beyond its use

value by giving the advertisements a social meaning. Here, use value of the product doesn't matter much as long as the consumer is happy with what is shown in the advertisements. Thus, the consumer is not buying the product for the material utility of the product alone, but also or more than the former, for the social meanings attached to products. Here, an advertisement becomes a site for this meaning making process.

In Arjun Appadurai's (1986) edited work, Davenport pointed that the value of a commodity cannot be seen in its material value alone but the mystic, spiritual and other social attributes due to their interaction with society at various levels and thus it eventually separate the commodity from the realm economic commodity (Davenport,1986,p. 108). This ultimately gives the commodity a meaning beyond its material utility. In this transformation process, advertisements play a pivotal role as it helps the producers to communicate the value of the commodity more than its material value by various techniques that they use. While Marx explained commodity as an economic material which has to be understood in connection with a capitalist mode of production and to be found where capitalism is penetrated, Appadurai's idea of 'social life of things' was meant to elevate the commodity status from just being an economic commodity to things which have some social potential which can exist in non-capitalist societies too (Appadurai, 1986, p.6-7).

Social potential of commodity was not very much discovered in the early capitalist phase. Throughout eighteenth century commodity was just an object to be bought and used, a 'trivial thing' in Marx's words. However, things changed in nineteenth century as the commodity took a privileged place not only as the fundamental form of a new industrial economy but also as the fundamental form of a new cultural



system for representing the social value (McClintock, 1998: 506). Middle class domestic space began to fill a whole range of objects that were associated with modernity and high social status. A new kind of being called consumer and new kind of ideology called consumerism were born. Anne McClintock in her work on imperial advertising critically looked at Pears soap advertisement which carried the ideals of Britain's new commodity culture and its civilising mission (ibid, p. 507). In the nineteenth century Britain, soap as a new commodity came out to be an object that carried Victorian ideas of cleanliness and hygiene. Imperial advertising as cultural form played an instrumental role in spreading these ideas attached to the commodity in every corner of the empire in Asia, Africa and elsewhere. (ibid.). This shows how advertisement gets socio- cultural meanings attached to it since colonial times.

As to the contemporary period is concerned Robert Goldman (1992) in his work *Reading ads socially* by using Marxian and semiotic theoretical framework critically looks at how advertisements had penetrated the society in America during 1980s. His main argument is that in a capitalist society when we buy commodities, we don't buy the commodity alone but also various commodity signs attached to it with the process of advertising. These signs are attributed to the advertisements by the advertisers by mining into the cultural life of people in that given society. Thus, advertisements function more than being a mere medium to pass information about the products advertised. Advertisements inform the consumers not only about certain products but also with certain ideas, thoughts and fantasies that advertisers or manufacturers use to introduce and sell their products. Goldman brought Morris and Frame's concept to explain how symbolic messages are attributed to product in advertisements. Thus, when the consumer buys the

product s/he also buys the symbolic values associated with that of particular products, knowingly or unknowingly. This makes the advertisement as powerful medium that influences people. In the case of historical advertisements, these symbolic values encompass various social imaginaries be it real or fantasy.

Precisely due to this reason, advertisements are often been taken as a valuable source in understanding the prevailing social environment, values and lifestyles. In fact, the products and services advertised indicate, to a large extent, how people lived and aspired to live. Advertisements have an evidential force which records the time of the particular imagery and photographs used in the advertisement. This makes advertisement an important source in history writing, as it reflects a supplemented real.

In the context of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala, with the onset of colonial modernity, a modern individual self was imagined in various ways. Modern new self was represented in various media forms like novels and photographs (Kumar, 2002 and Parayil, 2003). In Kumar's reading of *Indulekha*, one of the early Malayalam novels, he narrates how there were two modes of visibility that is being initiated by the western sociability that were introduced with a whole range of objects attached to colonial modernity and the visibility from subject position of a colonized self in colonial Kerala. Two types objects were identified in *Indulekha*, one that of Suri's, one of the characters in the novel, collection of objects which were of golden and silver component in them, like golden shawl, mundu, etc. which he collected to take along with when he wanted to go to meet, Indulekha, the main protagonist in the novel . At the same time, Indhulekha's room was full of objects that were associated with a new sense of interiority foregrounded in English/western sensibility. These were round tables, reclining chair,

painted mirrors, embroidered covers, glass lamps, carpets and, sometimes in the centre, glass cupboards of books in English and in Sanskrit, beautifully bound and embossed with golden letterings.

Another prominent site, mentioned in this work, where the subject and the object get intertwined was that of clothing (Kumar, 2002, p. 165). Practices of clothing were significantly different from one another, where Suri Nambuthiri represented the tradition of wearing glittery golden and silver coloured dresses, Indulekha followed a more of a simple and elegant way of dressing in which you will see golden and silver linings only in the whole cloths. While gold occupies a position of substance in Suri's dressing, it becomes just a sign in Indulekha's dress, which was white in colour bordered with golden linings.

It is clear here that how objects and collection of objects became an integral part of the self-fashioning in colonial Kerala. If these objects had evoked a modern sensibility, advertisements of objects would mean to evoke a new sense of domestic interiority or English/western sensibility that was emerging in Kerala during late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Advertisement visualized or facilitated the manifestation of this new modern sensibility.

Thus, print advertisements proved to be historical site which reflected the various aspects of life in colonial Kerala. Advertisement is important in this period thanks to the transformation happening in the realm of socio-cultural life in which various new objects played a central role. These objects, which were identified with the trends of self-fashioning and making of modern subjects in the context of colonial modernity, had a

significant bearing on print advertisement as these advertisements introduced these new objects in a more presentable way than any other genres of popular media texts.

Advertisements leave its trace among people with its peculiar way of signs and symbols in expressing their messages. This leads to the formation of a visual language which shapes people's mentality and mindset. This visual language of advertisement can be unpacked by looking into the various visual signifiers and referents used in the making of these ads. Advertisers used various techniques in the process of making meaning to the products beyond the material utility of the product and thus created a social meaning for the product. This was made possible through the use of various signifiers in the advertisement which informed more than about the commodity itself, but about the society to which the product is intended. This actually had developed visual literacy, a language, which shaped the perception and mentalities of in colonial Kerala. What kind of notions about life it gave like notions about modern, health, hygiene, purity, domesticity, womanhood, etc.

### **Creation of new (false) needs**

Most common criticism of advertisement is that it creates false needs for a hike in sale and consumption by diverting consumers' attention from genuine and real needs. Here, advertisements play an instrumental role in creating new needs for the interests of a capitalist economy where profit is the main concern. Herbert Marcuse has argued in his book, *One Dimensional Man* that,

“Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs.” (Marcuse, 1964, p. 7)

At the same time those who defend advertisements promote advertisements as inevitable one for the economic well-being of a society. With the proliferation of mass produced goods and publicity through advertisements made things easier for people in their life. And they went on defending that people are conscious and intelligent enough to ignore and neglect advertisements that do not satisfy their needs. As a proof to this argument, cases of failed advertisements campaigns are shown by the champions of advertising. (Dyer, 1982, p. 30). Since false need is the issue of discussion here, it is pertinent to throw some light upon what is this concept of need and how it has been theorized by various scholars. Karl Marx's understandings of 'true needs' have been central to his idea of 'false needs' in a consumerist society.

As to the question of creation of new needs or false needs through advertisements, Timothy Burke (1996) in his study on Consumption practices in Colonial Zimbabwe, he saw this as way of making colonial domination possible through inculcating new tastes and habits. He asked some pertinent questions in his study;

“How do new needs develop? What makes a luxury into a necessity? What causes 'tastes' to 'transfer'? What changes the relationships between things and people? How do people acquire deeply felt and expressed desires for things they never had or wanted before?” (Burke, 1996, “pp. 2-3”).

Colonial entanglement at different parts of the world, be it in Africa or Asia has reshaped the cultural worlds of those places through dress, architecture, manipulation of the spaces and the consumption of new objects.

Creation of false needs and advertisement's role in it has been theorized from psychoanalysis perspective. British Cultural analyst Stavrakakis citing Lacanian problematic of enjoyment (*Jouissance*) explained how to understand the need or desire produced in the realm of advertisement. The desire is generated out of a situation when one is made to feel loss of something (enjoyment) which can be regained by procuring the *object peti a*, in Lacanian vocabulary or the miraculous product advertised. Here, the advertising fantasy creates a desire in the lacking subject to ultimately cover up the 'lack' by having access to the product advertised (Stavrakakis, 2000, p.89). Jean Baudrillard called this lack as the reason for the insatiable desire that modern man is obsessed with (Baudrillard, 1998: 77). This feeling of lack or penury has been noted as one of the characteristic features of modern societies. In the introduction of Baudrillard's book the *Consumer Society: Myth and Structures*, George Ritzer explained the difference between dialectic of human relationship in pre-modern societies where people shared whatever resources they had among each other and the dialectic of penury where modern man had an ever insatiable desire (Ritzer: 1998, p. 11).

John Berger too emphasized on the point of 'lack' as a critique of advertisement in his seminal work *Ways of Seeing*<sup>5</sup>. He tried to bring about a semiotic understanding of advertisement, which he called 'publicity images', by comparing it with art. He says the advertisements often borrow the visual language of oil painting. While oil painting is the celebration of the happy present which the owner is enjoying, the advertisements make

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<sup>5</sup>John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* is one of the important works which gave a neat insight on how to make sense of images around us.

the consumer feel unhappy about the present and always make the consumer look into the bright happy future by buying the product. It offers the consumer an improved alternative to what he/she is. And it proposes to the consumers that their lives are not yet enviable until they buy and use these products (Berger, 1972, pp130-154). Here again what is being generated is a desire to change and this desire is generated by inculcating a sense of lack in the consumers as to their present life is concerned.

**Decoding advertisement: Understanding the language of advertisement.**

Understanding the language of advertisement, both literal and visual, has been central many studies on advertisement. Advertisements use a whole range of signs and symbols in the process of meaning making process and therefore, decoding those sign and symbols is a crucial part of any study on advertisements. Works of scholars like Guy Cook, John Berger, Judith Williamson, Erving Goffman, Robert Goldman, N. Srivatsan, Paul Messaris and Roland Barthes give us an ample idea about how to decode advertisements to get to know the nuances on effects of advertising process on society and its underlying ideological, racial and gendered messages.

The question of decoding primarily is to understand the advertisements in its all entirety that is to say what is advertisement, what its functions are and how it is fulfilling its functions, etc. Guy Cook in his book *the Discourse of Advertising* tried to address these questions with a social semiotic approach. While studying advertising as a discourse he took the text and context together to understand the advertisement. One of the main contentions he discussed in this work is what an advertisement is. He approached to this question differently unlike many others. He objected to the idea that confining the function of advertisement only to sell a product or promotion of a product

or service. For Guy Cook, advertisement is much more than a communication medium used to sell products. It can be something which amuse or inform or misinform, warn or worry you. If ads were to persuade it's viewers into consumption, then advertisements of liquor which can quite be irrelevant to someone who does not drink or someone who can't afford to buy it (Cook, 1997).

As Guy Cook discussed, advertisement do indeed influence people beyond a medium of communication to sell or promote a product. Malefyt and Moeran in their book *Advertising Cultures* argue in the similar line. In its broader sense Advertising can be seen as market communication of goods and services by various sellers. In a capitalistic society initially advertisements were perceived as a means to generate demand by focusing on specific aspects of the goods and services in a persuasive manner. This Marxist approach gave its way to recent approach which saw advertisements as a vehicle of social communication (Malefyt and Moeran,2003, p. 2). It is in this sense that advertisers resort to factors like gender identity, celebrity endorsement, happiness and culture, nationalism to sell their products, whereas these factors necessary need not to have any tangible connections with products advertised.

As put by Marietta Baba in the world of global production, there is no other way for markers to succeed than to develop and use knowledge and information (ibid, p. 9). The knowledge which at times is inaccessible or out of reach for many is put in to information which can be easily accessed by anyone. This is an interesting point as to how we see advertisement as text which contains information and knowledge. In writing the similarities between anthropologists and advertisers they pointed that one of the main attributes of these is that they both try to make sense of something which otherwise is



not easily understood by the audience/viewer. The findings of the both these parties are meant to refashion or reinforce the systems of belief whether as systems of power and resistance or as belief and ideas about brand values. (ibid, p.13) Same as the similarities there are a few differences between these two. If anthropologists write about culture, advertisers produce culture. Once the advertisements are made by observing the people, the same people will watch and see, read and listen and bring about debates and discussions. Whereas this happens hardly with anthropology (ibid, p.15)

Advertising can be event and season centric, regionally or territorially based, alert to product advances and apologetic of failures, attuned to scandals and successes of public officials running for offices, and to more gradual shifts in target market demographics or sudden changes in a nation's emotional climate like that of 11 September incident in America. In this sense, advertisements negotiate time, place and occasions, and precisely due to these reasons advertisements become irrelevant after some point of time unlike the works of anthropologists which is supposed to last for ever. (ibid, p. 16)

Steven Kember in his chapter titled *How Advertising Makes its Object* sees advertisement as a text which produces knowledge - as the process of advertising is considered as a kind of ethnographic work by the advertisers. He argues advertisers study the society like anthropologists study the society, but the knowledge that anthropology produces is reduced to journals, lectures and books in a way, is an esoteric form of knowledge. The knowledge that advertising produces is very different from this (Kember, 2003, pp. 35-54).

In his study of society in Sri Lanka he noticed advertising and ethnography moved in opposite direction, ethnography from villages to town, whereas advertising from town to hinterland. If anthropology is understood as writing culture, advertisements are seen as producing culture. But this is an unintended results of the motives of advertisements that are commercial not representational. But advertisements create libidinal images of themselves placing good and services in the display zone, motivating desire and fear.(ibid, p. 37) While anthropology advocates for the rights of the communities who have some sense of the community identity, advertisers make segments of community to make this fictive community in to a consumption community. Here they use tropes like gender, race, and ethnicity class so that the consumers can relate themselves easily with the ones shown in the advertisements. (ibid,p. 38).

While Judith Williamson in her work '*Decoding advertisements*' exposes the techniques that advertisement used by inviting our attention to the underlying ideological meaning associated with advertisements. In order to make the meaning making process in advertisement more comprehensible, she takes us to the semiotics of the advertisement by explaining signifier and signified in the advertisements. To make meaning for the product, the signified, various other objects and the signifiers, are used in advertisements. Thus, correlation with these signifiers give meanings to the products advertised which otherwise are meaningless. That is to say, the advertisement transforms use value of products to exchange value in commodities. The process gets completed once the spectator, the consumer, also becomes a part of it with his/her cultural understanding about the knowledge system in which the products are advertised (Williamson, 1978, p. 43).Erving Goffman critically analysed the gendered notions that are prevalent in the

society which get reflected in advertisement. He effectively exposed how the visual images of men and women presented in the same advertisements reflects and reinforces the gender discriminatory social structure of the time (Goffman, 1979).

### **Images, captions and visual literacy**

Works of Paul Messaris (1995 and 1997) give a lucid picture as to how images play a persuasive role and also how images are involved in the making of a visual literacy. In his work on role images in visually persuading the consumers, Messaris (1997) has outlined three roles that images play in advertisements. Firstly, it can stimulate an emotion by showing the image of a person or an object, secondly, it can serve as photographic evidence to something really happened and lastly, it can establish a link between an object or a product and other images in the society (Messaris, 1997, p. vii). Visual properties of the advertisements are instrumental in all three roles mentioned here so as to make the visual persuasion possible in an advertisement.

The idea of visual literacy explained by Paul Messaris deals with how visuals alone constitute a set of knowledge in a society and how do people make sense of something by simply looking at images without the help of words or captions. In his experiments with his students, parodies of mass mediated images had high recognition rates compared to the relatively less mass mediated images of high art (Messaris, 1995, p. 54). He puts forward his argument here that images alone can make communication possible without the aid of language. Why visual literacy should be a part of the school curriculum was the main point that Messaris wanted to emphasize in this article. He argued, knowledge about images can be helpful in many ways, firstly, it helps students in

resisting the manipulative and deceptive images in advertising, secondly, it functions as an easy way to know about culture and thirdly it gives a good idea about history. He cited the image of little girl, Kim Phuc, fleeing Napalm attack in Vietnam (ibid, p. 52). This image in itself talks volumes about US attack on Vietnam in 1972. It became an iconic image that shocked the entire world by showing the brutalities of war carried out by United States in Vietnam. It also became an iconic image in the construction of national memory (Miller, 2004, p. 261).

In a passing remark, Messaris talked about the importance of why one should be aware of the knowledge about images so as to understand the knowledge it produces. W J T Mitchell's contributions in the field of visual culture and visual studies would further help us to understand the concept of visual literacy. Mitchell's trilogy on Images, *Iconology* (1986), *Picture Theory* (1994) and *What do Pictures Want?* (2005) called for an approach to look at picture as a separate domain which needs to be studied separately as a field. In communication, word and image work differently. Image was central in all these works so as to argue that images could convey meanings in a better way with the coming of more media forms through which images can be circulated. This understanding initiated the idea of a picture theory, Although, something like an idea of picture theory and visual literacy was seen as gibberish when *Iconology* was published in 1986, images started gaining prominence slowly which Mitchell called *Pictorial turn*. The concept of pictorial turn and visual literacy is very important in this study as well. To quote Mitchell,

“...the idea of a “turn” toward the pictorial is not confined to modernity, or to contemporary visual culture. It is a *trope* or figure of thought that reappears numerous times in the history of culture, usually at moments when some new technology of reproduction, or some set of images associated with new social, political, or aesthetic movements, has arrived on the scene.”(Mitchell, 2009, p. 15)

This indeed opens the possibility of looking at early print advertisements as something which came along with the emergent print culture in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala. Advertisements which were published in newspapers and magazines are very much connected to the new modern sensibility emerging at that point of time by being medium that introduced varieties of products associated with modern selfhood in late colonial Kerala. Print advertisements, with its textual and visual components in it indeed had put forth a new sensibility that was associated with being modern.

Unlike Barthes, Srivatsan is looking for a visual literacy theory/image theory in which the image seen as the relay of the text. Srivatsan is more interested on looking into the implicit text than what is written there, but not by devaluing the written text. He does this by unpacking the interplay between the text and image. This play between the text and image need to be found out for the successful reading of the photograph. His point is to find a way to read images in a way that does not norm the literate viewer thus by subtly delegitimizing the image literate but linguistically illiterate (Srivatsan, 2000, p. 21). Here he brings two categories of viewer, one is linguistic literate viewer, who is basically constitute the majority, to him is the majority photographic genres are produced for and the visual literate.

How much does the caption matter in an advertisement? This is a very important question pertaining to any study on advertising. If we look into the early advertisings in Kerala in particular and India in general, we can see use of more captions in the advertising than that of images which we see in the later print advertisements. Srivatsan in his book titled *conditions of Visibility* problematizes this very thing by taking up an advertising of SAIL (Steel Authority of India), in which the caption reads “there is a little bit of SAIL in everybody’s life”.

Words in a caption actually determine advertising by evoking different feelings among the viewers which will have the potential to bring the consumers close to the product advertised. An advertisement becomes more effective when it evokes an affective bond among the consumers with its products. Srivatsan tried to unpack the aforesaid advertisement of SAIL in a way that it tried to build an affective bond, which is actually imagined by using certain selected words like *sail* and *everybody*. As the *sail* evokes whole lot of history of voyages that European travellers had made to different parts of the world, especially to Indian continent in the wake of Industrial revolution in late medieval Europe. It also marks the superiority of the steel in making ships to make these voyages happen and it is also an attempt connect to authority of India, a recently emerged modern state (Ibid, pp. 2-4).

When it comes to the word *everybody*, Srivatsan tried to bring concept of *order-word* propounded by Gilles Deleuze and Guattari by explaining how order-word structures the politics of our daily lives. By this theory, they tried to say that the language is a system of assemblage of order –word. In this system the language functions within a structure/hierarchy which decides its meaning, as these words itself give certain

commands to those who read/listen to it. Srivatsan tried to see the word *everybody* in this caption in the light of theory as in how the reader is bound by default to accept the collectivity associated with the word which has no pre-existence (ibid,p. 5).The subject who gives this command is there in everyone as the advertising is trying to associate/appropriate anyone who engages with the advertisement. The faces of two innocent kids become crucial here as it lures everyone to think that their kids also look like them and be a part of the bright future of the country.

From the captions, the author takes you to the mechanism of using face in advertising to attract the seer (the person who observe visually) into certain realm that the advertiser/manufacturer want him to take. This tradition of using mesmeric face is being traced back to use of Christ's face in renaissance art of capitalist industrialist European society. If it was Christ in Medieval Christian Society, Rama or Krishna will figure in Indian context. The combination of visual and the text somehow satisfy the viewer as it establishes a sense of who he/she is. (ibid, p. 13)

Srivatsan's whole argument is how images in these advertisements change the process of engagement that advertisement does with its viewers from what it is usually done in text based advertisements (ibid, p. 129). Images in these advertisements are used as an entry point for the potential consumers or the viewer to the advertisements. The way images are ordered will talk about the potential customers or viewers that the advertisement or the product is seeking. Especially, in the case of the advertisement of fan in which the image of women is used as an entry point by assuming that the viewer or the one who buys this fan is designated to be man.

Advertisement does not always demand a logical completion of the process from the viewer by getting into consumption due to the arguments in an advertisement like it happens in any normal linguistic texts which hold the viewer till the end. (ibid, p. 128) So, the question here is what if the viewer does not want to buy or can't afford to buy the product advertised. Is that advertisement a failure in such situations? Here, Srivatsan argues that "advertisement exceeds the bound if its immediate brief of selling" (ibid,p. 129) Apart from persuading the viewer into consumption, the advertisement is important for sellers to promote the consumers goods as objects of desire so as to make these goods an object of consumption. The desire has to be maintained alive so that those who could not buy this product can buy it some other time (ibid). This desire is inculcated by the exchange of aesthetic values in these advertisements to the viewer like the image of a beautiful woman in the fan advertisement, the urge for a new car which is more fashionable and reliable in the Asian paint advertisement and the passion of belonging to a new India put forth in the cigarette advertisement.

### **How advertisements make meanings?**

Messages in advertisements are encoded with combination of textual and visual components in it. Advertisers make best use of these components available to them so as to create most convincing meaning in advertisements. Barthes (1977) tried to answer questions like how meanings get into the image and where does it end and what is beyond there? Here he takes advertisements to prove his point as the images in advertisements are used to make certain signification intentionally. Barthes tried to unpack the different meaning that one could possibly make out of the advertisements. He has taken an example of advertisements to prove his point that images can carry meaning like the



language carries. He categorized the messages in this advertisement into three, the linguistic message, coded message and non-coded message. In order to understand the linguistic message one need to know the writing and the language written in it. However, this linguistic messages itself can be denotational and connotational. Simply knowing the language may help the reader to understand the texted message, but at times to understand the assonance in some words may need certain level understanding of that usage like the Italian assonance of the word *Panzani* used here. (Barthes, 1977,p. 33)

Whereas, in the case of coded message, the image used in the advertisement, one needs to know the cultural background in which the coding is set. Here, various signs will help the viewer to make sense of various euphoric values that the signifiers are intended to evoke in her/him. If these signs are taken away from the advertisement still this will carry certain meaning and messages on its own. This is the third category of message, non-coded, that Barthes talked about in a pictographic advertisement.

However, it is not yet to say that images have taken the center stage in information structure. The writing and speech occupy the top most important positions as to the informational structure is concerned in communication field. He says, all images are polysemous in which there will be many signifieds facilitated by the signifiers, of which the readers pick a few and leave a few others (ibid,p. 39). This is where the cultural background of the readers comes into the fore and advertisers make use of this point to their advantage. The confusion that a viewer faces when s/he sees a polysemous image is cleared once a linguistic text is attached along with the image to make a sense of what it is exactly. This text will help the viewer to have the correct level of perception. However this anchorage is not intended to the totality of meaning attributed to the icons

used in the image. It takes something and leaves some others. Anchorage is a control, by the one who does it, over the image-text interplay happening in the particular advertising. The text actually decides or determines how the image is going to be read or viewed, though it is not necessary that it will be understood and viewed in the same way. In this case, the anchorage is of a repressive nature to the signifieds in the images as it takes away the liberty of the signifieds in the image (ibid, p. 40).

Then comes the relay, where the image and text work complimentary to each other like the one we see in cartoons and comic strips. In some cases the images takes over the control of the scene so as the lazy/hurried reader will be spared of the boredom of going through the descriptions, but only looking at the image which is a lesser laborious work.

### **Tracing history through advertisements: An Indian case**

Historians have approached advertisement as a source to study history of south Asia, especially in terms of analysing the history of global capitalism, history of medicine, history of consumption, sexuality, visual culture and emergence of middle class. However, the growth of advertising industry in South Asia in general and India in particular can be mapped from these works as Raymond Williams correctly puts it,

“The real business of the historian of advertising is more difficult: to trace the development from processes of specific attention and information to an institutionalized system of commercial information and persuasion; to relate this to changes in society and in the economy; and to trace changes in the method in the context of changing organizations and intentions.” (Williams, 1980, p. 325)

In tracing different aspects of life in colonial period in India, various scholars have looked into advertisement as a historical source. Advertisements of various types

are carefully chosen and critically looked at, to get into the underlying meaning of that time and space. In the following section we will discuss colonial tea advertisements to medical advertisements

When we talk about new objects and commodities during late nineteenth and early twentieth century India, we cannot move on without discussing about colonial entanglement. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, changing the cultural taste and habits of Indian society was one of the main areas that colonizers attempted to influence. Moreover, Colonial advertisements had clear racial ideologies attached to it. Theories propagating racial ideology were quite explicit in various media forms like photography, film, etc. tried to establish white supremacy over Africans and Asians where they had colonized were visually manifested through various media forms like photography, film, the music hall and all other available mediums including advertising (Ramamurthy, 2003,p. 7). Anandi Ramamurthy in her study on advertisements of Lipton tea and PG tips problematizes the use of different metaphors used by colonial tea manufactures (Ramamurthy: 2012). She tried to decode these advertisements to expose the embedded meaning of these advertisements which tells us about the gender and racial discrimination that the colonial manufactures had executed through the medium of advertisements. Here, Ramamurthy takes advertisement as a text to study the racial and sexist agendas of colonial tea plantation and the also the kind of exploitation that the colonialized had undergone during the colonial regime. Use of metaphors like *tea garden* and *smiling tea picker women* were used effectively by the colonial tea manufactures to make the advertisements more appealing and lure the consumers to buy these products. Use of these two metaphors is significant as it gives the consumer a feel good emotion by

looking at these ads. These ads conceal the production relation in the tea estate which is very exploitative as the *garden* always represents a place of leisure and comfort. Moreover, the *smiling face* of women who work in the plantations hides the sweat and blood which was invested in the process of tea manufacture by these women.

Medical advertisement was one of the prominent sites where notions about hygiene, sexuality, masculinity and women-hood were all mediated. Works of Rachel Berger (2013), Douglas Hynes (2012) and Madhuri Sharma (2009) are important in this aspect. Rachel Berger discussed about medical advertisements, with a special focus on Ayurvedic medicines and Ayurveda, and discusses how it pervaded the literary public sphere in North India during the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Along with the exclusive writings on Ayurvedic medicines and Grihinis, which targeted the women-folks of the reading public, Berger analysed advertisements which informed the public on health, gender and body (Berger, 2013, p. 76). Advertisements concerning the sexual health of men and the ones catering to the health of babies were analysed in her work. Dominant male body was brought under discussion through the moral category of strength and physical category of reproduction. The signs and symbols used in these advertisements spoke volumes about the notion of strong men, healthy babies and ideal family and the various other discourses in play during that period in India.

One can observe that the category of strong and masculine men is quite dominant in the discussions on medical advertisements. Douglas Haynes in his paper on Masculinity in western India used newspaper advertisements to unearth the notions of about masculinity prevailed in western India during first half of twentieth century (Hynes, 2012). Moreover, he also discussed how advertisement medium changed over the

period in terms of its content and presentation. He has taken three types advertisements in his study; firstly, Bazar ads, wherein he discussed how these ads produced notions about men sexuality by evoking anxieties about sexual health and issues around impotence, sperm reduction, etc. Various aspects of advertisement, from its visual and verbal narratives were discussed in this section. This section does not talk about sexual health of women. Woman is brought in these advertisements only to show how shameful it is for men to be impotent in front of women. Secondly, the article discusses corporate ads where he talks about how professional advertising agencies had sprung up and how it impacted the overall field of advertising. Thirdly, the paper discussed about happily married life. This theme connects sexual health of man/his ability to please his wife with the marital happiness. Ads discussed in this section predominantly relied on drawings and catchy captions unlike other two genres that had resorted to lengthy details and descriptions. These representations often reflected the romantic scenes of Indian cinema. Though reproduction comes in the course of the discussion in these ads, these ads, mostly suggests the potentials of non-procreative sexuality. This section also tells how these ads intentionally or unintentionally brought out objects and things, styles that can be called as markers of modernity. For instance, the dress they were wearing, telephonic conversation between two women in one of the advertisement, other visual markers like furniture, etc. all belong to a new modern sensibility of that time.

Medical advertisements undoubtedly dominated the advertising spaces in newspapers and magazines in the early phases. Challenges faced by indigenous medicines with the introduction of western medicine were visible in the domain of advertisement as well. Western medicine which was initially introduced for the benefit of

Europeans in India and later on Indians became beneficiaries of it. Introduction of western medicine was seen as a 'tool of empire' and mostly it was done by discrediting the indigenous systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and folk medicines. However, there was a concerted effort from Indian intelligentsia to counter this onslaught on indigenous knowledge structure by reviving indigenous medicines. (Panikkar, 1995, pp. 145-147).

Medical advertisements reflected this tension between indigenous and western medicines. Madhuri Sharma's intervention is important in this aspect. She discussed in her paper (2009) how western medicine manufactures used advertisement to find their consumers and subsequent attempt by indigenous manufactures that of Ayurveda and Unani, to compete with newly arrived western medical products. Looking at the volume of advertisements that came in *Times of India*, *Journal of Association of Medical women in India* and *Abhyudaya*, first Hindi weekly published in 1907 by Madan Mohan Malaviya, Madhuri Sharma explained how Indian and European manufactures found newspapers as an effective medium to reach out to their potential consumers through advertising. She pointed out, how advertisers used various techniques in proving their genuineness like drawing upon local cultural codes. Initially British products were advertised predominantly in English newspapers which proved to be a disadvantage for English manufactures as it catered only to English literate consumers. To overcome this crisis, English manufactures started advertising in vernacular periodicals as well. However, the English terminologies were used even in advertisements in vernacular periodicals as a mark of superiority for the reason it was the language spoken by colonialists. So the presence of English language or anything associated to be English had

great leverage in terms of being most authentic and genuine product. English captions were used with an intention to create English sensibility among the consumers (Sharma, 2009, p. 216) Moreover; they had used local cultural codes as a technique to reach to more consumers. Sanskrit language was used with the same purpose by evoking the purity concept and superior caste notion prevalent then. These Sanskrit words were used especially when indigenous medical practitioners accused that English medicines had beef and alcohol in its contents. English manufactures also used signs and symbols from local culture, including Hindu mythological Gods and Goddesses in prominent roles in their advertisements. As a response to this attempt by English drug manufactures, Indian counter parts too ventured into local cultural codes and symbols in their advertisements so as to create and hold their own customers.

Both Douglas Haynes and Madhuri Sharma had noted the change in the form of advertisements over the period. If the early advertisements were in the form of an announcement about a product, later on advertisers used persuasive techniques like images, drawings and catchy captions instead of lengthy detailing. From the works of Berger, Haynes and Madhuri Sharma one can argue that the medical advertisements were instrumental, along with other writings on medical practices and knowledge, in developing a medical literacy across the country during late nineteenth and early twentieth century India.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter provided an account of various theoretical and empirical premises in which advertisements have been looked at and studied. It addresses some important questions

like what is advertisement to how advertisement functions and what are advertisement's constituent elements and its manipulating and persuasive effects. The chapter also tried to give a comprehensive account of how advertisements have been studied and looked at from various viewpoints. While historians predominantly used advertisements as a valuable source material in historical writings, especially as to the history of emergence of capitalism and consumer culture and associated socio-cultural impacts it had on society, scholars interested in visual culture probed how images and text together made meanings in advertisement and how it played a distinct role in producing knowledge at the realm of the visual. This dual role of advertisement is what I am exploring in my work as well, by keeping the early print advertisements in colonial Kerala as an example. While it is already said in the earlier part that the period I am looking into, late nineteenth and early twentieth century has witnessed various transformations in socio-economic and cultural levels. What is common among these transformations is the coming of a modern self which represented whole lot of changes happened during that time. As a media text, advertisement embodies different layers of reality which often mediates notions about being modern, about new tastes and habits, and attitude.



## Chapter 3

### Print and Advertisement in Colonial Kerala: A Historical Outline

#### Introduction

Emergent print culture in nineteenth century Kerala paved the way for publication of various literary genres like textbooks, religious literature, novels, newspapers and magazines. These literary genres have had significant influences in various walks of the then Kerala society and Newspapers and magazines/journals had contributed to the development of print culture by inculcating a reading habit and a scope for debate and discussion during the late nineteenth century Kerala (Arunima, 2006,p. 70). To an extent, survival of these newspapers and magazines were depended upon the revenues generated out of the advertisements published. Moreover, with the rising demand and fascination for more objects of everyday life and proliferation of British imperialism, advertisements became an imperative for various manufactures.

In this context, this chapter discusses how advertisement as a medium was received socially, economically and politically during late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala. To a large extent, advertisements indicate how people lived and/or aspired to live (Padgaonkar, 1989). Huge volume of print advertisements in newspapers and magazines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala help us to understand how the medium of advertisement had a deep impact on the life of people. Hence, in the first part, the chapter would give an account on how advertisement was received by the common mass during that period. The discussion is carried out by taking up various narratives/writings published in magazines about advertisements and people's

initial responses<sup>6</sup> and perceptions<sup>7</sup> about the medium of advertisement. At the same it is also important to explore how advertisements had played a crucial role in financing many newspapers and magazines in India which were in short of revenues and one can see a scrambling for advertisements among some magazines and newspapers during the late nineteenth century (Gupta, 2001,p. 82 and Joshi,2001,p. 86).

Hence, second section discusses how magazines and newspapers exhorted through their advertisements so as to get more advertisements in their respective publications in Kerala. Moving from social and economic realm advertisement had been featured in the political discourses during this period. Various archival sources indicate that advertisements played an important role in the political realm of colonial Kerala. Therefore, the third and final part of the chapter discusses how advertisement was featured in the political discourses<sup>8</sup> in colonial Kerala. Using archival sources including the letters and confidential reports from various departments of Government of Travancore, this part brings forth a discussion on how various groups used the medium of advertisements within the domain of politics. Overall the chapter discusses how the evolution of advertisement as a medium in this process of mediation by advertisements, pondering upon the forms of those advertisements, with regard to the signs and referents used in these advertisements as part of the marketing strategy.

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<sup>6</sup> Here, I don't use a reception theory analysis, rather, how the medium was conceived by the people of Kerala.

<sup>7</sup> Perception is the act of understanding something from within the subjective experience of the Individual.

<sup>8</sup>This is not about advertisements with political ideology *per se*. Rather, how various issues related to the advertisements, like who should be given government advertisements to, question of favouritism in allotment of government advertisements, etc. resulted in serious political debates as to the advertisement practice in Travancore state during early twentieth century will be discussed in this section.

### **Advertisement: A medium of expression?**

Development in the fields of printing culture and photographic technology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century India had brought enormous changes in the way people understood about their life, culture, society and so on. As a result of this development, mass produced printed and visual materials that were imagined elsewhere came home to India as well. These materials, both visual and literary, helped the people to understand and articulate about themselves in various ways (Freitag, 2002, pp. 371-372).

Advertisement had a ubiquitous presence in these printed materials as well, be it newspapers or magazines. For these publications local people were subjects, readers and advertisers (Jeffrey, 2000, p. 1). While manufacturers/business class used advertisement as a medium to reach out to its consumers, newspapers and magazines found advertisement as a revenue generating medium. Simplistic way of understanding advertisement is to consider it as a medium that communicates certain message for advertising purposes. However, scholars like Robert Goldman have studied advertising as a social practice, in which advertisement has a materiality of its own (Goldman, 1992, p. 34). If advertising can be looked at as a medium with its own materiality a probe into its embedded social and cultural meaning will give us a better picture as to what was this medium's meaning to the people of Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While advertisements on the one side showcase its materiality effect it plays as a dematerialising medium as well. The promises made in advertisements are most often seen only in advertisements, let alone in reality. Here, advertisements function as a medium which detaches the human body from the reality by simply mediating certain

emotions and experiences. References on the arrival of advertising in Kerala can be seen in various literary forms. In such a writing, titled 'Art of Advertising' (*Parasya kala*) (Unnaman, 1944, p. 553) came in *Mangalodayam* published from Thrissur, Unnaman critically writes about the art of advertising.

### **Fascination for advertisement**

The writing gives us an idea about how advertisements as a medium evolved historically and the impact it had on the lives of people and how it was received by the people. Throughout the writing the author had analysed critically the medium of advertisements and also the products advertised in these advertisements. While the medium of advertisement can be seen as something which is pretty much related to the industrial capitalism gaining momentum in India with British imperialism, the author tries to unpack the capitalistic logic of these advertisements. Advertisement has been seen as an inevitable part in a capitalist economy. However, the urge to make money by advertising is nothing new as it came along with industrial capitalism. It has been there in the human society since time immemorial. People used various forms of advertising forms from rock edicts, drum beatings, wall posts and print materials to visual media communications and even performance of various types.

“Fascination for advertisements is in everything in this universe. Even before man-why to blame man? Don't Devas have it? If not, why do they have annual fests and rituals? Why do they perform while moving around sitting on top of elephants? Why don't they sit at temples only and bless whoever comes there? So, they want to increase the revenue which that they get through offerings and rituals by showing the greatness of deities.” (Unnaman: 1944, 553)

Here, the author is also pointing into the performative aspect of advertisement by satirically citing the case of *Devas* (deities) at the occasion of annual festivals and rituals in temples during the early twentieth century Kerala. A non-living entity like the idol of *Deva* is imagined to be publicising his/her worthiness to be worshipped and sacrifices offered to him/her by devotees. It is a common thing in any part of India to have processions as part of annual festivals and celebrations in temples, shrines, and as part of any other religious or cultural festivals. Most often one can see that the deities or other historical figures<sup>9</sup> will be leading or being a significant part of those processions. Here, these forms of processions, especially the one mentioned above, are critiqued as another form of advertising so as to increase the popularity of *Devas* and generate more revenue to the temples or shrines. Although this analogy is purely an imagination of the author, with this he meant to highlight the tendency of advertising for making money during that particular time in Kerala. As a society closely knit in terms of religion and culture, the author found, an event or character related to religion as an easy way to communicate with people in Kerala during the early twentieth century.

### **Religion and myth in advertisements**

Religion and myth were used by advertisers in their advertisements as an easy communication tool. The author is critiquing such tendencies among advertisers in Kerala during the early twentieth century. To make the advertising more appealing and sell their products, it was very common among Indian entrepreneurs to resort to the myth and local cultural codes (Sharma, 2009, p. 217). In the case of Kerala, Unnaman writes;

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<sup>9</sup> Procession led by *Maveli* (Mahabali), the benevolent king of erstwhile Kerala, is one of the main attractions of Onam celebration among Keralites across the globe. In a way, an image of a *Maveli* will be omnipresent in market places across the globe wherever Keralites are present. *Maveli* becomes a big marketing icon during Onam celebration.

“See, another advertisement! ‘Panacea for all types of abscess from pimples to piles! Buy and use our *Kouravasamhari* ! It will cure instantly’. How cunningly the word ‘Kouravasahmari’ is being used here to give a meaning to the medicine as it can eradicate the entire clan of Kuru? <sup>10</sup>.” (Ibid.)

Here the author is critically looking at the use of local cultural code and referents in the advertisements by analysing the advertisement of *Kouravasamhari*, a medical product which claimed to have the effectiveness in curing all types of abscess from piles to pimples. Techniques and strategies are very important in moulding advertisements as appealing and to increase its reach to the public. And this is the stage where the maximum manipulation and distortion of facts occur. Here, the use of this term *Kouravasamhari* itself can be seen as the use of a myth to make an easy entry into the consumers’ minds without being much questioned and critically looked at. This uncritical reception is what advertisers are looking for. This is made possible when the myth is seen as, like Barthes had said, ‘an unexamined assumption rooted in prevailing political (or social) order’ which will be consumed uncritically (Barthes, 1957,p. 108). There is a certain element of force of tradition in such instances. Habermas, in the context of the enlightenment tradition of thinking, explained the functioning of myth as “an authoritative normative tradition as opposed to the way historians use where an ‘unforced force of better argument’ is used to establish the truth elements and convince the people.” (Habermas, 1987,p. 107)

In the above mentioned case, the author’s scathing critique is on the same issue. He is referring to the usage of the term *Kourava* and *Kuru* which was used in the advertisements to denote that the medicine is capable of eradicating the entire clan of *Kuru* or abscess. Clan of *Kuru* and *Kourava* belong to the Hindu epic Mahabaratha in

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<sup>10</sup> Kuru in Malayalam means abscess.

which the *Kurukshetra* war between *Pandavas* and *Kouravas* were narrated over a dispute on the throne of *Hastinapura*. While both *Pandavas* and *Kouravas* hailed from the *Kuru* clan, the *Pandavas* had come victorious at the end. Here, *Kouravas* from the *Kuru* clan stays defeated and the advertisement, it is asking the consumers to take the role of *Pandavas* and defeat and eradicate the *Kouravas* of *Kuru* clan. In the course of making advertisements, the advertisers have used religion and local culture into the domain of advertisements.

Similar pattern is continued in the same advertisements by invoking a feeling of religiosity among its consumers. As the author puts it in his own words;

“This advertisement also has a blatant lie written in it. It is a note about the one who prepared this medicine. ‘Swami Deshanandan’, he was known by this name then and was a devotee in charge of *Thruppuka*<sup>11</sup>. Aswani Devas who were regular for *Thruppuka* were impressed by his devotion and called him inside the temple after all other devotees had left the premise to advise him with this medicine as a livelihood for him” (Ibid.)

Here the author is criticising how religious sentiments are targeted in the advertisements to influence the potential consumers by bringing the elements of religion into it. While calling this advertisement strategy as a blatant lie, the author once again exposed the hollowness in the promises made by advertisements.

### **Art and Modernity in advertisement**

While this writing gives an idea about how the art of advertising had evolved like any other art forms over the period, it also brings the very notion of perceiving advertisement

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<sup>11</sup> *Thruppuka* is the last one among the daily rituals practiced in Kerala temples, especially in Vadakkunatha temple, Thissur. . It is believed that all *Devas* from the nearby temples come together, sometime in disguise as common man, for this ritual.

as an art under severe criticism. Having evolved from the initial form of drum beats to seeking attention of people in advertising a particular commodity or an event, to neat and clean wall posters using nice colours and brushes, the medium of advertisements became an art form for making money in the capitalist economy newly emerged in colonial Kerala (ibid, p. 553). Newspapers and magazines provided the ground for this transformation of advertisements from being an art to the medium that emerged out of greed for money. Newspapers and magazines were filled with advertisements similar to how the two third of earth is full of water, newspapers were filled with advertising having only quarter of its total space actually left for news reporting.

“If art is for making money, it can be used in business also. In such case, the intention of art is not the representation of the truth, like all other art forms; rather it is the representation of falsehood in the form of truth. It is not the beautiful manifestation of ideas; it is filling pockets with money.” (Unnaman, 1944, p. 554)

During the late nineteenth century with whole lot of changes in the sphere of literature and art in Kerala, there was a new desire for the representation of truth or real world in writings and art manifestations. Influenced by European style of painting, people had begun to opt for oil paintings, water colours of men, animals and objects. (Udayan,2016,p. 129, Menon,1997,p. 294). Puranic tales that were told by older generations were begun to be seen as boring and repetitive. True representation of things brought respect for the artists as well. It was in this very context, novel like *Indulekha*, the first proper Malayalam novel, by O. Chandumenon was written which was characterised by the element of realism in it. Chandumenon had made it a point that the novel should not be a mere translation of some other work with which Malayalam reader cannot relate in any way. (Menon, 1997,p. 294). Efforts like that of Chandumenon stand



as a vivid testimony to the insistence of representation of the true world in writings as well as in any art forms.

While representation of the truth was the prerequisite for any art during that time, the author in this article critically looks at advertisement as an art used to propagate falsehood in making money by exploiting the desire of people for the true representation of the world. Although he criticises the advertisements for showing falsehood in the form of truth and reality, it actually discloses that there was a demand within the field of advertising that advertising should be seen as a representation of the real world. And it was this very notion that made the medium of advertising a saleable commodity.

Claims of being an art and the representation of truth can be seen a strategy by the advertising agents and newspapers or magazines to find a space in the newly emerged modern sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala. These representations are made possible by advertising certain products with the promises of modernity and change. Art element of advertisements comes into play here while showing the change and offering a reality that people do not possess at the time of consumption. Here advertisements play a dual role, unlike any other art forms, by showing the reality which is not so modern and offering another one, which is of course modern, with the consumption of the advertised product. This is what is making the art of advertisement different from other forms of representations like that of novel mentioned above which represented the real world. John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* had made this distinction clear that how artworks are different from advertising. While art of work like oil painting represented the happy present which is real, the advertisement offered a bright future by consuming the commodity advertised (Berger, 1972,p. 142). It is in way

making the viewer unhappy and dissatisfied with the present life and making them dream about bright future.

“What will you feel seeing an advertisement in which a village man with wooden *paduka*<sup>12</sup> and a tuft is transforming into modern man (*pachaprashkari*) with shoes and cropped hair after consuming *bhavabedhini basmam*?” (Unnaman, 1944,p. 554)”

These words are referring to many changes that were happening during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala. Encounter with colonial modernity introduced so many new things into the life of people in Kerala. In the first instance the author, and the medium of advertisements itself, is conversing with the ones who sees and makes sense of advertisements during days. The term *pachaprishkari* denotes someone who has undergone drastic changes and transformed into a well fashioned modern man. Wearing shoes and suit makes one modern according to this advertisement. This can be read in the context of colonial modernity in the late nineteenth and early twenty century Kerala where a variety of objects were newly introduced to impart a new modern sensibility. Moreover, this also represents the change that had happened with the introduction of modern medicine in colonial Kerala. The transformative ability of the medicine is the central component in this narrative. Here the advertisement projects a newly emergent modern visuality against the indigenous way of representation. While it shows the representation of modern visuality, it is done by contrasting with the old indigenous way of representation.

To prove his point he brought two advertisements as examples. The first one is *Bhavabhedini basmam*, a medicinal powder which claimed to have the power to change

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<sup>12</sup> *Paduka* is ancient Indian footwear which had references even in Hindu Mythology like Ramayana. Later , this was used by saints and the priestly classes. In Kerala, this was a part of the attire of upper caste Namboodiri Brahmins.

one's total appearance. The term *Bhavabhedini* literally means something which can change your appearance. The advertisement pictured a man having a potbelly and a traditional look, which is generally seen as archaic and this man turning to be a modern gentleman soon after consuming the powder. Citing this advertisement, Unnaman asked sarcastically which of the two, the advertisement or the product, is more effective in showing a change (ibid, 1944,p. 554).

He further exposed the crooked logic of advertisers by explaining what if a consumer goes to court against the product for not getting the effect from the use of product as it was offered in the advertisement. In such cases the advertisers would resort to the lame arguments like the product could change the spot of an abscess from one place to another or one type of abscess to another. Here the reference of court is interesting as it opens up further possible questions on how advertisement was a subject for legal discourses at that point of time (Ibid: 555).

While coming of western medicine and science was seen as a part of cultural engineering by the colonial state to cure and govern the colonized in colonial Kerala (Burtein, 2007, p. 12), advertisement that were to sell western medical products were very much part of it by inculcating certain notions about sciences, health and hygiene. The author here tried to critique such knowledge about science and modernity that were imparted through these advertisements. His critic of medical advertisements in this article exposes the hollowness of the promises that advertisements offered to the readers/consumers.

In newspapers, most clever advertisers put their advertisements close to important news so that the attention of readers would fall upon it. He is citing another advertising in this fashion to prove his point with an example of a news story on M K Gandhi's hunger strike for 21 continuous days. Below to this news was an advertisement of a medical product, *Makkunarasayanam*, which tried to reach out to people saying that you starve (read hunger strike) for the reason being you not finding food being not so tasty. This is happening because your taste buds are facing serious problems, which can be cured by taking this particular medicine. So here while on one side Gandhi's hunger strike news is given and whoever reads this news would be thinking of how it is difficult to sit on hunger strike, and the advertiser tried to exploit this very feeling to sell their product. This is very important as to how the advertisement tried to negotiate with the real. He went on explaining how poems, short stories and 'Kathakali', traditional performance art in Kerala, were used for the purpose of advertisements (Unnaman, 1944,p. 555).

An array of issues like tendency to advertise, advertisement and representation of truth, advertisement and being modern, and how advertisement evolved over a period of time were discussed in this writing. While discussing these aspects of art of advertising in early twentieth century Kerala, this writing brings forth an interesting account on how advertising as a new medium was received among people of Kerala. As we go by this narrative it can be argued that people in Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was fascinated about the medium of advertisement so much so that there was as an insistence that advertising, like other art forms, be more realistic. However, what is evident throughout this narrative is how advertising industry uses this

fascination, religious symbols and also the desires of being modern in advertisements so as to create consumers in the newly emergent market economy of that time.

### ***Advertising Advertisements***

Previous discussion throws light on how advertisement was received and perceived by people in Kerala. This section discusses how advertisement was made to be a revenue generating medium for magazines and newspapers and a new platform for marketers to advertise their products in the newly emerged market system during the nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala.

Advertisement has been seen as a prominent part in culture industry in which desire, fantasy or false needs are produced to sustain the interests of capitalist forces. Advertisement serves as a meeting ground for the capitalist economy and culture. Commodification of social and cultural objects and events facilitates the penetration of capitalism in to the daily life by distracting the consumers from their real needs. (Adorno and Horkheimer, p. 1944). Advertisements published in newspapers and magazines plays instrumental role in this commodification process. Newspapers and magazines published advertisements on behalf of advertisers or manufactures to advertise their products among larger viewers. In return, newspapers and magazines were benefitted with profit that they incur from these advertisers.

Robin Jeffrey argued that with the strengthening capitalism, media technology necessary to facilitate consumption among various groups was invented or acquired (Jeffrey,2009, p.215). In the case of Kerala, pervasive of British capitalism found its hope in print newspapers and magazines to carry their consumption drive into the people of

Kerala. For British government, it was inevitable to have heaps of printed materials for the administrative functioning of the empire. Indians, be it religious groups or commercial groups, who wanted to benefit from this new economy of print had quickly adopted to this print culture (ibid,p. 216). Huge number of religious texts and newspapers magazines that were printed during late nineteenth century Kerala would stand as a testimony to this development (Arunima, 2006,p. 62). The emergent British capitalism which was looking for new markets for the sale of machine made goods naturally used the print media to advertise and sell their products (Jeffrey, 2010,p. 216). Here, the growth of print culture or print newspapers has to be seen along with the proliferation of British capitalism. Newspapers and magazines played a pivotal role in introducing various goods and services, which were new to the indigenous society, came along with colonial modernity fuelled by the British capitalism. In return, advertisements proved to be great source of revenue for the survival of these newspapers and magazines (Gupta, 2001,p. 82 and Joshi, 2001,p. 86, Jeffrey, 2010,p. 223).

Beyond a medium of cultural expression, printing proved to be a financially profitable venture across India with proliferation of print culture by late nineteenth century. Printing presses that printed religious literature, texts books, government publications and newspapers that sold advertisements initiated an economy around print by late nineteenth century in Kerala. (Jeffrey,p. 2009, 470). In such a scenario, it is pertinent to probe how advertisement was seen as a way for revenue making by the newspapers as well as the businessmen/manufacturers. It is also worth discussing why advertisers chose medium of advertisement over others to advertise their products and

how advertising agencies including various newspaper and magazines convinced manufacturers and business class about the worthiness of advertising.

For newspapers and magazines advertisements were important because print advertisements were contributing enormously for the financing of many newspapers in colonial India since early days of their publications during the late nineteenth century (Gupta, 2001, p. 82 and Joshi, 2001, p. 86). This was made possible because businessmen and manufacturers found this as an effective platform in marketing their goods and services so as to reach to a wider public to maximize their sale and profit. If we consider one of the early newspapers (fig 3.1), first advertisement one can see would be that of the advertisement about advertising. Most often this advertisement included details regarding the rates for advertising according to the size of advertisements that needed to be advertised and also subscription rates of the newspaper. While seeking the attention of both the consumers as well as sellers these advertisements, on the one hand, tried to showcase their ability to seek the attention of the potential consumers and to prove how their newspaper or periodical is the best medium for advertising the respective goods and services within the nascent modern market space in early twentieth century Kerala. Moreover, these advertisements were meant to be exhortations by convincing the consumers about the benefit of buying products advertised in those advertisements.

Advertisement (fig 3.1) from *Malayala Manorama*, one of the early newspapers in Malayalam shows this pattern. In the first page of Malayala Manorama published on 5<sup>th</sup> January 1901 one can see this advertisement about the advertisement on the left side of the newspaper. Among all other advertisements given in this page this advertisements comes the first. It is about the rates of the newspaper subscription as well as the rates for

advertising in the newspaper. This too was given on the left side of the newspaper. After giving the details about the newspaper subscription rates, rates for advertising were also given below which reads as;

“Rates for advertisement.

Per line,

For the first time – four anna<sup>13</sup>.

For the second time- three anna,

From third time onwards- two anna.

Special rates for longer period”. (*Malayala Manorama* 5<sup>th</sup> January 1901)

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<sup>13</sup> Anna is one of the currency units existed during British India. 16 anna is one rupee.





Three decades down the line nothing much seems to have changed as to this pattern in advertising is concerned. In *Kesari*, which started as a weekly newspaper like all other early newspaper in Kerala, the advertisement (Fig 3.2) came on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1930 gives the details of rates for advertising depending on the various sizes of the advertisements. Placement of advertisement in the newspaper is significant here as to the importance of advertisement for a newspaper is concerned. Here, this advertisement is placed on the top left of the newspaper's first page just below where the newspaper's name is given and it reads as;

“For one time advertising,  
Three anna per line.  
Special rates for longer period”. (*Kesari* 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1930)

This placement is given for this advertisement so that one can't ignore it easily without seeing it as this would be the first advertisement that any reader will be encountering in that newspaper. This is what the newspaper wants one to see at the first before entering into news reports.



Figure 3.2 Kesari 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1930

These ads had its most important objective as to convince the advertisers why they should use advertisement in the first place and why they should choose their medium for the same. In this process, so many things get unpacked as to the advertising process in Kerala during that period was concerned; like how advertisers and consumers were lured into this process and advertisement was made to be a normal practice among the business class in Kerala during that period.

Advertisement (figure 3.3) by a Thrissur based advertising agency, West Coast advertising & and commission agency is telling the business class about the importance of advertisement for the survival for their ventures. The words are wilfully used in this advertisement as it is giving an ultimatum to its viewers (sellers/manufacturers) as they have no option but to choose to advertise. Thus in a way this advertisement indicates that how much this medium penetrated to the market place during those times to the extent that one cannot think of any business without advertising. This competitiveness makes

the process of advertising an inevitable part of the economy of that period. This particular advertisement also shows a shift in the market place that had happened with the coming of British imperialism. The *To-day* caption is communicating aloud with the advertisers or business community that *Yesterdays*, where one could manage without advertisements, have gone and hence the situation too has changed.

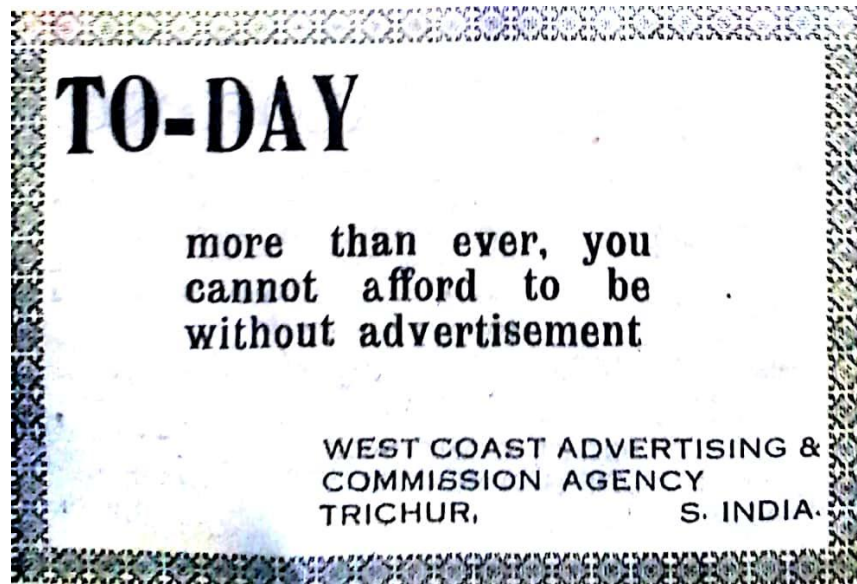


Figure: 3.3. Lokaprakasham Annual Souvenir 1934.

This *Today* marks the period of modern which is characterised by a whole lot of changes in the social, cultural and economic realm of colonial Kerala. Life in colonial Kerala witnessed a dramatic change with the coming of colonial modernity. These changes were visible through various transformations in the domain of kinship, economic relations, political structures, religion and caste and marital arrangements, literature (Arunima, 2003; Panikkar, 1989 and 1995, Menon, 1994; Mohan, 2015, Devika, 2006; Kumar, 2016). Here advertisement too becomes a part of this new

sensibility where contours of the market place were redefined according to new forms and visions of modernity.

Dilip menon discussed how English education opened up doors of opportunities for lower castes in colonial Kerala. By taking Potheri Kunjambu's novel *Saraswativijyam*, Menon argued that English education that came along with colonial modernity and conversion to Christianity empowered the lower castes like *Pulayas* to achieve a social mobility and equality that were not imaginable within the Hindu religious tradition. (Menon, 1997). Arunima in her book *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and Transformation of Matrinity in Kerala, Malabar c 1850-1940* analysed how Indo-Anglo legislations like *Malabar Marriage Act* (1856) and *Marumakathayam Act* (1933) altered the matrilineal family set up existed among the Nair community during nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala. These legislations redefined the notions about women sexuality, femininity, masculinity and conjugal space in modern Kerala. (Arunima,2003). Udayakumar's work on autobiographical writings in modern Kerala *Writing the First Person: Literature, History, and Autobiography in Modern Kerala*, discussed the ways of self-articulation and writing the history through autobiographical writings in modern Kerala. He saw these autobiographical writings as attempt to portray an 'inner' world that is inscribed on the surface of things and objects in the modern world (Kumar, 2016).

A modern subject was emerged in this process of transformation, in which one could see an increased level of social mobility for the lower castes, and the access to education accelerated the social reform movements and life world of a modern subject in

colonial Kerala began to evolve into a new level. It is in this context the advertisement (figure 3.3) given above becomes relevant.

Udaykumar's discussion on early Malayalam novels explains how there was a fascination for new modern objects among the English educated middle class during late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala (Kumar, 2002,p. 161). While these objects were perceived as props vis-à-vis their status for self-fashioning in modern Kerala, the familiarity with these objects shows how these objects were gaining a space in the socio economic domains of modern Kerala. Here, advertisements play a significant role in familiarising the objects to a wider public. When these objects are used for self-fashioning among modern subjects in Kerala, advertisements that introduces these objects plays a crucial role.

**WRITING**  
AN  
**ADVERTISEMENT**

"Advertisements make both a conscious and sub-conscious appeal and should be beautiful, sentimental or humorous, not blatant or vulgar, crisp in their appeals, whether of wording or design, not too highly coloured metaphorically, and with a reason given (wherever possible) that appeals to the practicable mind; a mere statement of the name of an article or place is insufficient."

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*Get your Advertisements written up by*  
The Manager, Advt. Dept.,  
**Madras States Directory.**  
**COCHIN.**

Figure 3.4 : Madras State Directory 1929.

If the above advertisement was to tell the merchants or manufactures why one should advertise to survive in the emergent market system, the advertisement (figure 3.4) came in *Madras State directory* of 1929 tells the advertisers how an advertisement should be. It explains;

“Advertising make both a conscious and sub-conscious appeal and should be beautiful, sentimental or humorous, not blatant or vulgar, crisp in their appeals, whether of the wording or design, not too highly coloured metaphorically, and with a reason given (wherever possible) that appeals to the practicable mind : a mere statement of the name of an article or place is insufficient.” (*Madras State Directory* 1929)

This description reflects the pressure that the particular historical period had put upon advertisement practices as to how the culture of advertising should be. This should also be read along with the whole lot of changes that were happening during late nineteenth and early twenty century Kerala. One thing that is striking in this advertisement is its insistence on the need of being reasonable and appealing to the practicable mind. That quality of the advertisement has to be attained by incorporating a number of features in to the domain of advertising that is like being beautiful, sentimental and humorous and not so vulgar. Studies on early Malayalam novel also point to this urge for a sort of realism in their presentations among the educated middle in the discursive domain of colonial modernity (Kumar, 2002 and Menon, 2007). Advertisements too seems to be under the pressure of that time in which it demanded certain level of reality in their presentation rather than being so detached from the reality of the time.

Another advertisement by the West Coast Advertising Agency (figure 3.5) carried a message seeking the attention of advertisers to the railway advertising. This advertisement claimed to be reaching every individual in the country where the 3000 miles of railway was connected to. Here, railway as a new mode of transportation in colonial Kerala is portrayed as a perfect medium to advertise various products and



services. Advertisements which were mostly seen in periodicals and newspapers now have found another medium, i.e., railway. Advertisers have always adopted the best medium available to them to present the commodity they are advertising. This is very important, as Robert Goldman had argued, to transcend the medium of advertisement from being just a medium to transit some message about the commodity to a material object similar to what we handle in shops (Goldman, 1992,p. 340).

Here, advertisers are invited to consider six crore of passengers who were availing south Indian railway services as potential consumers. Railways were seen as an agent of modernity in colonial India (Marian, 2011) and also were perceived a testimony for the ninetieth century cultural ideas of progress; called for new kinds of modern subjectivity; radically altered perceptions of time and space and triggered for new forms of representations in art and film ( Bear, 2007, pp. 4-5). When the railway made the way easier for the movement of goods and people within British India, it turned out to be a place where capitalist minded advertisements could occupy a significant space in it. Here, advertisers try to use it as a potential medium for advertising purpose. Moreover, advertisements become a part of the entire experience of railways that these many people had to go through. Here, advertisement gains a materiality rather than being a tag of a commodity. Newer forms of media most often reshape the relationship between the older forms and its public by doing something beyond just complimenting to the older forms (Malefyt and Meoran, 2003, p. 39). With train, advertisers could get access to much larger audience and hence a reach for their advertisements. In this sense, advertisements in trains were set to alter the experience of the viewers who were familiar with other forms of advertisements like that of advertisements in newspapers and magazines. If the

targeted audience of advertisements in newspaper and magazines were reading publics, here that is changed to anyone who travels in trains. Moreover, as it was argued by Cook in his book *The Discourse Advertising* that “advertisements on trains and platforms often have a longer copy, or demand reflection, on the assumption that their receivers, in the enforced idleness of awaiting or riding on a train, are like to scrutinize the advertisement more carefully” (Cook, 1992,p. 14).



Fig: 3.5. Lokaprakasham Souvenir 1935.

If the above advertisements were meant to seek attention from business class to advertise their products, there advertisements which offer benefits for the consumers also. Advertisement (Fig 3.6) came in the *The Lokaprasam Pooram souvenir* resorts to exhortation by offering prompt attention from the seller, given that the costumer make it a point to mention the name of the souvenir in which they saw the advertisement. This is meant to claim a credibilty/legitimacy for the magazines from both ends, the consumer

who is a reader for the magazine and the seller who pays the magazine for publishing their advertisements.

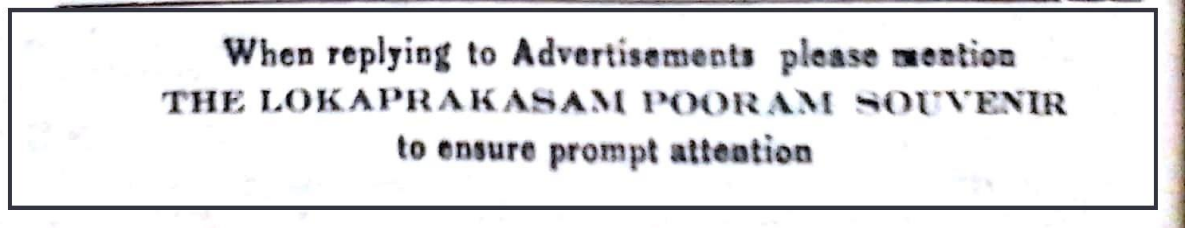


Fig: 3.6 Lokaprakasham Souvenir 1935.

This legitimation advertisements, as Goldman had called it, used to gain the confidence among the manufactures as well as the consumers in the effect of the advertisements. However, Goldman had argued that “legitimation ads are an outgrowth of the culture industry’s mass marketing of wish-fulfillments within a societal system fundamentally antagonistic to their realization”.

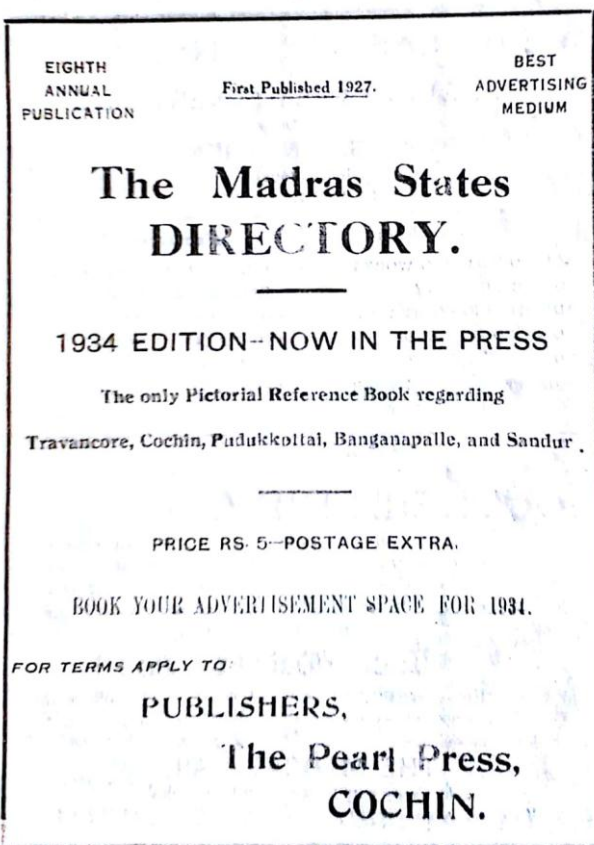


Fig: 3.7 Lokaprakasham Souvenir 1934.

Figure 3.7 and 3.8 are advertisements of *the Madras States Directory* and the *Lokaparakasham* itself. Both these advertisements are claimed to be best medium for advertisements. In order to validate their claims, the popularity and reach were projected in the advertisements in with special mentioning in it. While the *Madras States directory* claimed to be “the only pictorial reference book regarding, Travancore, Cochin, Pudukottain, Banganapalle, and Sandur” , *The Lokaprakasham* claimed that it is “the long-standing and premier Anglo-Vernacular newspaper of south India-largest reading population- latest news with trenchant views”.

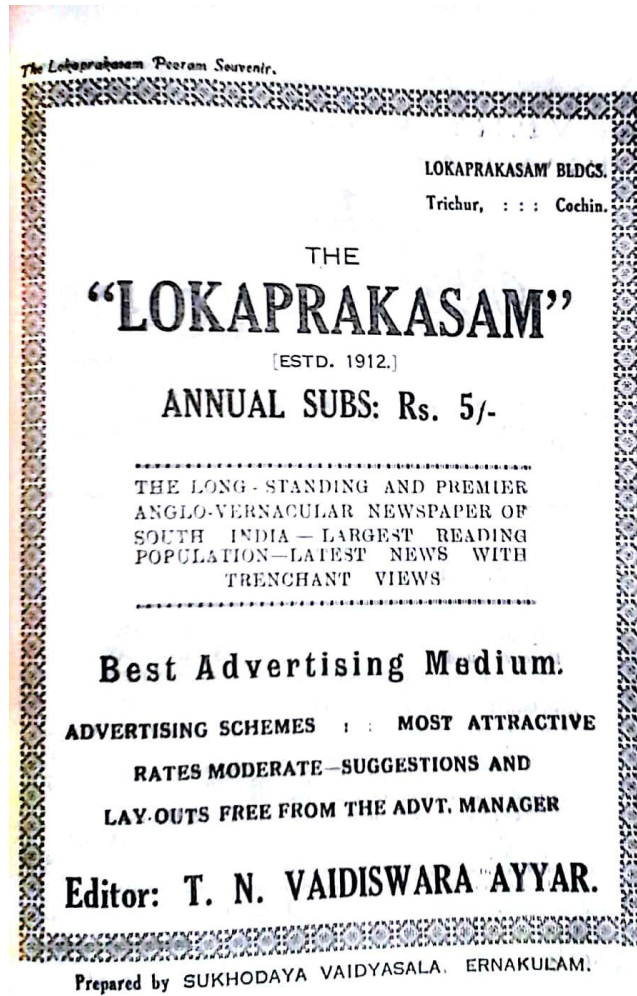


Fig: 3.8 Lokaprakasham Souvenir 1935

It is clear from this discussion here that advertisements played a crucial role in the survival of many newspapers and magazines as advertisements proved to be a major source of revenue during that time. It proved to be a classic example for how local language newspapers flourished under the Print capitalism. It also gives us an idea how the medium of advertisement emerged and its early forms in the new economic set up under the colonial system emerged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is also pertinent to note how advertisers find new places for advertisement. Along with print advertisements there was an attempt to explore other forms and avenues for

advertising, like it has been discussed here in the case of railway advertisements. While seeking attention of wider public was the prime motive behind advertisement, anything that can fetch this motif proved to be a medium worth advertising in.

### **Advertisement and political discourses in colonial Kerala.**

Although advertisement is studied as a powerful medium in the cultural and social realm which can mediate people in many ways, however, it is true to state that when it is in the hands of state authority, it becomes a much powerful medium to interpellate the masses. Today we see how advertisements, especially state advertisements, become a yet another tool for government in manipulating the contents of media house in favour of the government policies<sup>14</sup>. Apart from Government agencies, there are business groups<sup>15</sup> who resort to this move of denying advertisements to certain media groups citing reasons like to safeguard public interests. Here, the following section is probing how advertisement as a media form was used by princely state of Travancore for their own political interests.

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<sup>14</sup> State is also known for using their power to muzzle their political opponents by denying government advertisements in Kerala. Recently, Kerala government stopped giving government advertisement to Tejas, one of the Malayalam dailies published from Kerala on the pretext of alleged communally divisive contents of the newspaper<sup>14</sup>. P. Chekkutty, editor of Thejas daily refuted all the allegations and said if the newspaper is found spreading communal venom and antinational messages, the editor should be imprisoned and newspaper should be closed down, let alone denying government advertisement. While any such allegation is a serious matter of concern as to the peaceful environment of the state is concerned, Government should be investigating it further and take necessary steps to stop its publication. Since that is not the case till now, Government's move to deny advertisements to Thejas daily looks to be vindictive and partiality on political line. Indian Express, "Constitute a Committee to Assess Thejas daily content: Kerala HC tells State Government", 10<sup>th</sup> July 2015. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/constitute-a-committee-to-asses-thejas-daily-content-kerala-hc-tells-state-govt/>.

<sup>15</sup> Of late, Bheema, a known jewellery group from Kerala stopped giving advertisements to Mathrubhumi, one of the oldest media institutes in Kerala, for publishing a controversial novel, *Meesha* by S. Hareesh. This novel irked many on the right wing side for apparent reference to its characters' sexuality. Scroll.in, "Kerala: Jewellery company withdraws advertisements from Malayalam media group after row over novel" 5<sup>th</sup> August 2018. <https://scroll.in/latest/889317/meesha-row-jewellery-company-in-kerala-withdraws-advertisements-from-mathrubhumi>

## **Travancore state and print advertisement.**

By the beginning of twentieth century there were significant numbers of Malayalam periodicals in Travancore with a ratio of four newspapers for every thousand people in the state. These newspapers and periodicals were at times were very critical about state policies and hence had invited the wrath of ruling dispensation of Travancore at that time. (Jeffrey, 2009,p. 474). Legislations were made to control and regulate the contents of newspapers as and when Travancore state government found it distasteful for them. A newspaper like *Sawadeshabimani* edited by K. Ramakrishana Pillai<sup>16</sup> was closed by Travancore state in September 1910 for its scathing critique of corrupt state officers. Ramakrishna Pillai was accused of taking money from wealthy adversaries of Travancore *dewan* to write against the state and its officers (Ibid,p. 477). Similarly Malayala Manorama was closed down by Travancore state for allegedly inciting people for disobedience of law (Koshy, 1976,p. 632). These incidents point into the murky side of the relationship between Travancore state and print newspapers in early twentieth century colonial Kerala. Contents of the newspapers were strictly monitored and anything critical of the state was not tolerated in any way. Confronting phases between newspapers and state also brings out the censorship rules that Travancore had adopted during their regime to suppress the dissenting voices.

While most of the studies talked about the critical contents as reasons for the strict regulations and various actions by the state on many newspapers, advertisements that came in these newspapers and periodicals also were scrutinized and regulated during

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<sup>16</sup> Ramakrishna Pillai is known to be one of the pioneering journalists, political and social activist who worked tirelessly for free press in Kerala since early twentieth century.

reign of princely state of Travancore in Colonial Kerala. Advertisements were subjected to various political discourses during this period. The medium of advertisement was used by the state to suppress political dissent and to muzzle views that were critical to government policies and to do favouritism on several occasions.

### **Government advertisements and question of favouritism**

It was quite common for Travancore State Government to give government advertisements to various newspapers and it was also one of the important sources of revenue for these newspapers and publications. This did open up a space for the Government to manipulate the contents of newspapers in their favour. This section would be discussing this very issue as to how the Travancore State used its discretionary power in allotting print advertisements to various newspapers who would write in favour or against the government policies.

A confidential letter issued from the office of department of Information, Travancore state on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1946<sup>17</sup>, addressing the registrar, Huzur Secretariat ordered that no Government advertisements should be given to the Deepika Newspaper from any Department of the state. The reason here is being mentioned as the Newspaper reportedly had written in their recent issues against the educational policies of Travancore Government and the arrest of some catholic leaders by the government. This clearly indicates Travancore government had used advertisement as a medium to bargain and manipulate the content of newspapers.

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<sup>17</sup> Department of Communication, Government of Travancore, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1946, D. Dis. 158/46/C-50. Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram..



In another confidential letter<sup>18</sup> from Division Peishakar, Quilon, addressing the Chief Secretary, Travancore State on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1945 raised the issue of an advertisement (Figure 3.9) of Swarajyam press published in a journal called Malayalam. The press which was owned by V.R. Nanoo of Poovasseril, Puthupallyy, Kayancolam was a staunch supporter of the state congress<sup>19</sup> and he was convicted for political offences. State congress was formed as party with the support of Indian National Congress in the year 1938 in Travancore with an aim to protest various Travancore state policies which excluded people of Travancore. State congress was seen as political opponents by Travancore government and hence, any activities of them were keenly observed with suspicion and doubts.

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<sup>18</sup> Confidential Letter, Government of Travancore, D.Dis. 1102/45. (e.803/45/es) Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

<sup>19</sup> (Travancore) State Congress was established on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1938 against the anti-people measures by Travancore Dewan Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy. This was formed after dismantling Joint Political Congress, a political platform associated with Indian National Congress. Political leaders from Travancore felt that the Joint Political Congress was largely unsuccessful in addressing the problems of people of Travancore and formed Travancore state congress with a primary objective of a *Responsible Government* based on adult franchise. Sumathy, M (2004) *From Petitions to Protest- a Study of the Political Movements in Travancore, 1938-1947*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Calicut University, 65-95.

# പരസ്യം

അച്ചടിക്കുപി മുടക്കം കൂടാതെയും ശരിയായും തരവാൻ തയ്യാറുള്ള ഏതു പത്രവും മാസികയും സ്റ്റേറ്റ് കോൺഗ്രസ് കക്ഷിയെന്നോ കോൺഗ്രസ് വിരോധിയെന്നോ, എസ്. എൻ. ഡി. പി. കക്ഷിയെന്നോ യോഗം വിരോധിയെന്നോ ഗണിക്കാതെയും അപമാന അപ്രമാദാനങ്ങളും ഗണിക്കാതെയും എപ്പോഴും അച്ചടിച്ചുകൊടുക്കുവാൻ തയ്യാർ.

മാനേജർ,

സപ്താഭ്യുദയം, കരയംകുളം

Figure 3.9 Advertisement of 'Swarajyam Press' Published in 'Malayalam' Journal

Here in this case, what was the matter of concern for the State government was the way V.R Nannoo gave the advertisement of his press in Malayalam journal? Usually, no printing was done in any of the presses at Kayanacolam with political character in it. However, V.R. advertised about his press, Swarajyam, by saying that content of any nature will get printed in Swarajya Press. This was a matter of concern for Travancore state, given his state congress background and political activities.

However, it was found out after the due enquiry by Inspector General of Police, Trivandrum, that the owner of the 'Malayalam' journal in which the advertisement was printed had no political motive as the owner himself possessed pro-government views.

The letter sent by Inspector general of Police Trivandrum addressed the Chief secretary of Travancore Government, noted that the advertisement was just another strategy to attract more customers, let alone any political motive behind<sup>20</sup>.

Another Confidential report from Government of Travancore dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1945 sheds light upon the controversy erupted on the issue of Government advertisement being given to certain newspapers on unfair means. This was an allegation from Mr. A.N. Satyanesan, the editor of newspaper 'Bharathi' that advertisements are distributed to newspapers supporting State propaganda citing the case of a tender published by District Magistrate on special duty in 'Powradhwani'<sup>21</sup>. He demanded a fair and equal allocation of government advertisements through the department of Information, Travancore Government and he asked further why government can't distribute government advertisements through the Department of Information for those newspapers who have no connection with subversive political parties.

However, in a letter<sup>22</sup> addressed to the chief Secretary, Mr Ramakrishna Pillai, the District Magistrate on special duty clarified his part on the issue raised by the Bharathi newspaper and denied all allegations put forth against him. Advertisement which the newspaper was referring to, came on his name was actually done by the depot officer without his consent and knowledge. He accused the newspaper of levelling baseless allegations against him without checking the real facts and requested the government to

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<sup>20</sup> Police Department 30<sup>th</sup> April 1945, D.Dis. 1102/45. (e.876/45/es), Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

<sup>21</sup> Confidential Report, Government of Travancore February 1<sup>st</sup> 1945, D.Dis. 1448/45. Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

<sup>22</sup> Urgent and Confidential letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 1945, From the District Magistrate on Special Duty to the Chief Secretary, Government of Travancore, D.Dis. 1448/45 (e.266/45/es). Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

take adequate action against the newspaper for this gimmick to get government advertisements. He also observed, government should not encourage those newspapers with subversive political inclinations by giving government advertisements to publish in their newspapers. However, he further continued, it is not to be understood that no newspapers should be given any type of preference in terms of giving government advertisements to, simply because they don't support state congress propaganda. He further added that advertisement should be distributed by looking into the ability of newspaper into the intended larger audience which can get through only those newspapers which possessed much bigger circulation.

### **Advertising on electric Posts**

Moving on from print advertisement, I would like to take the discussion to another genre of advertising, advertising on electric post, during the rule of Princely State Travancore. Electric posts were given to interested parties on lease. A series of letters<sup>23</sup> between electric engineer, Chief Secretary, Travancore Government and a private contractor, P. Fernandez, gives an interesting account on how leasing out of electric post for advertising purpose were carried out during that period.

In the course of the conversation, a lot of detailing were evident as to the advertising practices in the then Travancore is concerned. Advertisements were entrusted by the interested traders to a contractor who had taken the right to advertise on electric post from the Government on a stipulated amount as lease amount. These advertisers did not have a direct connection with Government, instead, the contractor used to be the one

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<sup>23</sup> Letter from Electrical Engineer to the Chief Secretary, Travancore Government, S.Dis. 29/40 .PWD. 05/01/1945, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

with whom government had any deal in this matter. So, many rules were applied to this practices as per the government order, especially as to the content of the advertisements were concerned. Advertisements were to be gone through a thorough scrutiny by the government and advertisements in any case should not feature any publication that would go against the law or anything that government would find objectionable. In such case government had the full right to disapprove or withdraw any advertisements. Moreover, any failure in the payment of lease amount would lead to the cancellation of the lease and withdrawing and confiscation of the advertisement boards by the government<sup>24</sup>. From the entire discussion one thing is understood that advertisements were subjected to heated debates and discussion in the political realm and it was seen as an important factor in the political discourses during the reign of princely state of Travancore.

## **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, this chapter discussed different ways that advertisements as a medium was received and used in three different spectrum of the early twentieth century Kerala. In the first section, this chapter discussed how advertisement was perceived by common mass from the different point of view. While The author of the article discussed how advertisement reflects the desire for a self-fashioning among the English educated elites in Kerala during this period by consuming certain products like health and cosmetic items and saree and suit for women and men respectively, so as to look modern (*pachaparishkari*). Moreover, the article discussed above itself was a testimony to the new subjectivity, who were critical and rational, which could be seen as a distinct feature

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<sup>24</sup> Electrical department, Government of Travancore, 228/37, P.W, dated 21-01-1937, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

of colonial modernity. In second section, the chapter discussed how advertisement became a desirable medium for newspapers and magazines who published these ads, for those sellers and manufacturers who wanted to market their products and for consumers who were newly introduced to this world of new goods and commodities. From the socio-economic and cultural realm, the last section discussed how this medium stirred controversy in the political realm of the then Kerala society by specially looking into the political discourse that triggered by the advertisements. Advertisements were seen as powerful tool among the ruling so as to control the dissent and critique of the state and also to favouritism for state.

## Chapter 4

### **Body, Health and Weakness: Advertisement and its Promises of Well-being**

#### **Introduction**

Early print advertisements in Kerala, as mentioned in the previous chapter, often addresses everyday life of the people while bringing image, objects, ideas and practices, which were directly or indirectly connected to them. Between the people and the material world, it is the advertisement that creates an imaginary relations to recruit people to the ideological apparatus of the modes of the capitalist mode of production, entrenched in the world views of modernity (Prasad, 1998). Advertisement through the act of introduction and familiarisation of new objects, things or commodity and lifestyles bring a language—visual and verbal—to interpellate the colonial subject as the subject of modern capitalist order. There were omission, selection, alteration and often modification of the existing social order so as to create this generative language of the advertisement. Hence, the medium—coded or assemblaged text of advertisement—always meant to create a productive rupture in our everyday perception.

As pointed out by Stuart hall (2007), whether we decode it correctly or not, it is through this rupture that one makes sense of the advertisement and, therefore, the subjective position of the viewer or reader (subject) in relation to material world in which it is has a position. In other word, various forms of advertisements enact the sensibility of the viewer which often affects them. It is through this action and affect principles that advertisements generates desires and imaginations. It should be borne in mind that it is not only the power of the advertisement or its techniques which create these affective

intensities but also the power/knowledge and discursively anticipated meaning and value of the object, thing or idea portrayed in the advertisement are significant tropes of such meaning making sense. It may be termed as advertisements represents fetishised commodity and constructs false consciousness. However, it was also used as a tool to penetrate the discursive formulated knowledge of specific ideology or dominant classes. This knowledge, as observed by Foucault, used to construct the docile subjectivity. In this context, the epistemic content of advertisements can be seen as an ideological apparatus which used to create—aesthetically apprehendable and imaginary—subject, in tune with the specific mode of production of colonial modernity.

In this context, the chapter begins with epistemic content in meaning making process of medical and insurance advertisements as one of the prominent genres of early print advertisements. Medical advertisements are one of the inevitable parts of advertising sections in the early newspapers and magazine in modern Kerala. Here comes the obvious question, why is it so? Why medical advertisements got much prominence among the early advertisements? The question is served the much obvious answer that it could be because of the growth of the medical field and growth of medicine manufacturing industry and the advancement in the marketing. However, beyond these obvious questions and answers, can we see these advertisements as a medium that offered a new vision as to the ideas about body, health and well-being are concerned? Furthermore, how this new vision contributed to the traditions of pictorial narratives of modern Kerala? These are the questions that the chapter would like to explore.

By looking through the visual and verbal narratives of the advertisements, the first section in the chapter explores the kind of discourse that medical advertisements had



initiated around the weakness and physical well-being and how it functioned as an educating tool in communicating specific ideas about body, sexuality, health in colonial Kerala. Here, the discussion would be carried out by looking into advertisements of three different categories, advertisements explicitly addressing the health issues of woman and advertisements of medical products that were about the health of babies, advertisements of medical products that were for the various ailments of men. These advertisements are taken from two magazines *Mathrubhumi* and *Arogya Vilasam*. *Mathrubhumi* is one of the leading magazines until today, which deals with various issues of socio-cultural importance. *Arogyavilasam* started predominantly to discuss matters about health issues by the proponents of indigenous medical medicine in central Kerala. Secondly, the chapter also discusses the body in the context of the idea of death put forth by the advertisements of Insurance companies in early twentieth-century Kerala. How notions about body, life and happiness were negotiated within the domain of advertisements of insurance is discussed in detail in this section. This chapter is opening up the discussion further on how issues related to health; body and sexuality are used in the domain of newly emerged markets in colonial Kerala and how its visual and verbal narratives made this mediation possible. The advertisements came in *Mathrubhumi* and *Manorama* weekly are used in this section to explore the knowledge that advertisements of insurance had put forth in modern Kerala. This discussion was happening at a time when new practices in terms of consumption came into the fore in which goods, services and objects began to be playing a central role and started to influence the material and social world across colonial India (Mcgowan, 2006,p. 32).

## **Narrativising through pictures**

Early print advertisements featured more drawings and captions, unlike the latest ones with gleaming photographs. However, the print advertisements with its visual and verbal properties provided new mediated experience in early twentieth-century Kerala. While the pictures used in early advertisements drew from the already existing pictorial traditions in Kerala, the verbal addition to the narrative made print advertisements different from the other pictorial traditions that were prevalent.

In order to understand how pictures made meanings to Indians during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is essential to go through various pictorial traditions of India during the colonial period. Sandria Freitag (2000) has mapped the discursive mode of the emergence of new forms of perception and communication in India by the end of the nineteenth century. The discursive mode of a new perception of new visual communications, according to Freitag, was shaped by the materials conditions of technological production especially with the print culture which enabled mass consumption and the visual vocabularies that the previous modes of vision had offered (Freitag, 2000, p. 53). Jyotindra Jain's (1998) edited work provides an enthralling account of the pictorial narration of India, which discussed various genres pictures from art to paintings that shaped the visual imaginations of people in India historically. He suggests that the mechanical reproduction of the image has its historical lineages connected to the visual imagination of the society to early paintings and lithography. The visual vocabularies that underwent through various cultural practices and historical conjectures as well as influences by forms of pictorial traditions and conventions. Advertisement in this context is not an exceptional medium which invariably indebted to the early pictorial

traditions and cultural imaginaries and hence often represents an unequal flow of signifiers such as tradition/modern, rational/irrational, west/east and the likes.

Early advertisements had adopted visual vocabularies from the existing modes of visual genres, be it paintings or mass-produced printed pictures or calendar or pavements art. Demand for printed pictures and other materials in print coupled with the technological advancement in the printing resulted in a significant shift in the field of art. Efforts of artists like Raja Ravi Varma were quintessential in the shift from 'high art' to mass-produced forms of art in modern India. Ravi Varma's lithograph press, one of the earliest lithographic presses in India, printed most of his mythographic paintings into thousands of copies (Oberoi, 1990,p. 43).

Works of Christopher Pinney (1997 and 2004) help us to understand not only the history of pictures and social biography of images in India since colonial times, but it also persuade us further to explore the history through images. Pinney called for a visual history using images and chromolithographs that could talk about the popular perceptions better than the histories written using literary sources which were more or less gave state-centred narratives (Pinney, 2004, p. 2). Pinney, while explaining about Indian images during the colonial period, has pointed out the significance of pictorial advertisement to Indian society who were likely to be illiterate. Citing the United States Government Department of Commerce Special Consular Report on British India, published in 1915 and designed to enable American entrepreneurs to 'enter foreign trade preparedly' Pinney argued that pictures of Hindu deities, tiger, other animals and dancing girls were used in advertisement so that the visual communication using the pictures is made easier (ibid, p.17).

Pictures of Gods and mythic figures were discussed by Kajri Jain (2007) as one of the essential visual genres in colonial and post-colonial India which made meanings through their circulation and exchange in the bazaars rather than mere technological production and consumption. Jain argues that pictures of deities in calendar arts and advertisements during early twentieth-century India were used not just to draw the attention of consumer but also were to invoke the religiosity and sacrality of those images and attribute them to the products and its uses although there was nothing in those images that could talk about the qualities of products advertised. This was to position the pictures or images beyond the usual representational schema framework to an object that could animate as things produced, circulated and used in bazaars (Jain,2007, p.117).

Medical advertisements during early twentieth century Kerala adopted techniques from the pictorial tradition already existed by using the visual tropes that were available and conducive to the discursive realm of that time. While one of the main concerns of the medical advertisements was the body of a new subject, the visual trope that medical advertisements used was that of a modern subject, who is a wife/woman, child and husband/father. Representation of the modern subject in the domain of print advertisement visually animated the historical imagination of a new subject in modern Kerala.

### **Medicine and discourses of health in colonial Kerala**

With modernity, disciplines of arts and science were further explored and redefined. These changes were facilitated by the enlightenment rationality which shook the base of knowledge formation by the end of the eighteenth century across the globe (Peerson, 1995, pp.106-07). In this context, knowledge around medicine had acquired

another level in tandem with a whole lot of changes brought by modernity. With the coming of western medicine and associated fields of medical science, a new set of knowledge developed as to the human body, diseases and several meanings associated with the field of medicine were concerned. Older medical practices were delegitimised with a new set of knowledge in the medical field. Foucault (2003) in one of his seminal works, *the birth of a clinic*, explained how these changes in the medical field, especially the birth of the clinic, changed people's perspective on diseases, health and the human body. Here, it is important to note that, according to Foucault, this newly generated institutionalised knowledge not only implanted a sense of new modern being but also ingrained into the knowledge structure of modernity and hence part and parcel of the conditioning and disciplining order as well as the rational principles of the modern subjects. Birth of clinics paved the way for clinical gaze wherein seeing became an essential thing in the medical field, especially with the growing importance of diagnosis of the diseases. In the meanwhile human body was studied with greater importance than the diseases. While these ideas were originated in Europe, Colonialism and Christian missionaries took these ideas outside Europe as a part of their civilising mission and messages of Gospels<sup>25</sup>. By Early nineteenth-century, Indians too began to experience the ideals propagated by the Western medicine though it was restricted in its initial years to colonial enclaves away from vast majority ordinary people(Arnold, 1993,p. 8).

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<sup>25</sup> For many natives in colonies, conversion was not just switching their religious identities, rather it was seen as “a dynamic process that can create an ideal system that converts aspires”, as Gauri Vishwanathan argued in the context of conversion to Christianity in Colonial Kerala(1998, p.122), Koji Kawashima too upheld this by looking at conversion as means for social emancipation. Kawashima further had stressed on the role of missionary activities in the field of education, healthcare in Travancore during late nineteenth and early twentieth century ( Kawashima, 1998).

In the case of colonial Kerala, activities of Christian Medical missionaries were instrumental in instilling awareness about health and hygiene among the rural poor, especially in the Travancore, though their preliminary intention was to spread the messages of Christianity among the local population and ultimately get them converted to Christianity (Burton, 2007,p. 20). With the missionary activities in Kerala ideas of cleanliness was closely linked with notion of salvation especially when this concept of cleanliness was envisaged to take one the unclean mind and body of the untouchable Dalits in Kerala (Mohan, 2006,p. 14). Nevertheless, attempts made by the colonial state in institutionalising Western medicine in colonial Kerala were crucial in making Western medicine accessible. Intentions of the colonial state in introducing western medicine were always contested. Scholars like David Arnold studied how the body in colonial India became a site of colonising power and contestation between the colonisers and colonised within the discursive domain of western medicine (Arnold, 1993). Coming of western medicine and science was seen as a part of social engineering by the colonial state to cure and govern the colonised indigenous people in Kerala. At the same time, these indigenous people were seen as ‘weak’, by the colonial state, in terms of health and thus to be cured of various diseases that indigenous medicine, which was witchcraft or magic according to the new notion of science and medical knowledge, could not heal (Burton, 2007,p. 12). In this context, it is essential to see how advertisements portrayed these colonised weak bodies.

While the healthcare system was much better in Travancore and Cochin compared to Malabar, hospitals and dispensaries established in Malabar gradually, diseases like elephantiasis, malaria, plague, cholera, leprosy and smallpox were treated in these

hospitals (Mamatha, 2014, p.853). British had established mental asylums in Malabar and Travancore as well by the late nineteenth century. Due to the particular interest, the British had taken in the healthcare system; western medicine had got much popularity by the early twentieth century across Kerala (Innes, 1908). This popularisation of western medicine under the patronage of the colonial state was seen as a threat to indigenous systems of medicines. Moreover, the approach that educated Indian intelligentsia had towards western medicine made things difficult for indigenous medical practitioners. The intelligentsia saw western medicine as a way to embrace modernity by rejecting the older tradition to be part of the new cultural order set by the colonial modernity (Panikkar, 1995, p. 148).

With the challenge posed by western medical practitioners, indigenous medical practitioners resorted to various strategies to revive and rejuvenate the indigenous traditions. Indian medical practitioners saw this as a period for looking for fresh opportunities new knowledge (Kumar, 1997; Kumar and Shekhar, 2013). New methods were adopted in professionalisation and marketing of the indigenous medicines. It was in this context that one could see advertisements of these products which were featured in almost all printed newspapers and magazines published during that period. Publications like *Mathrubhumi* weekly gave much space for the advertisements of various indigenous medicines that had its centres in major cities in Colonial India like Madras and Bombay. Publications like *Arogyam*, *Arogya Vilasam*, *Sukhashamsi*, *Dhanwanthari* and *Arogyacharitram* from the proponents of Ayurveda medical tradition too advertised indigenous medicines. These publications, which were published from different parts of Kerala in Malayalam during the early years of the twentieth century, exclusively dealt

with various health issues. These were also instrumental in disseminating the knowledge about indigenous systems of medicines, in a way can be understood as a strategy from the Ayurveda medical practitioners to reach out to its consumers in the background of the threat posed by the introduction of western medicine, which propagated indigenous medical practices are unscientific and black magic (Panikkar, 1995,p. 165). The indigenous tradition of Ayurvedic medicines, dealing with issues concerning child care, pregnancy, menstruation, diseases like malaria and cholera, even Hindu understanding about evolution, etc were discussed in these magazines. Since all these come from the indigenous tradition of Ayurvedic medicine, one can see discussions about the ritualistic aspects of maintaining hygiene and healthy life in these publications. These publications also had featured writings about many indigenous ways of curing diseases which were more or less rejected by the proponents of modern western medicine in the beginning. While these magazines were instrumental in the revival of the indigenous Ayurvedic tradition by disseminating the knowledge about the same, the marketing of these medicines was essential in making medical products of the indigenous system accessible. This is where people like P. S. Varrier come into picture whose attempt in the professionalisation of indigenous medicines was applauded widely. Establishment of Ayurveda Vaidyasala at Kottakkal was an important step in this regard. Apart from this, like western medical practitioners, advertisements were also widely used in marketing these medicines (Panikkar, 1995,p. 169).

While the advertisement had a prime intention of marketing these medicines, a mere description of the advertisement was not enough in fetching their goal of making their medicines popular. It had to have a narrative in itself to connect with the people who



were its potential consumers. While the early advertisements were simple descriptions about the medicines, by 1930s advertisements came with a narrative in itself which informed more than about the medicine alone. This narrative in the advertisement had come along with much fetishism in it wherein mostly they were reminded of the lack in themselves, which was related to the health as they were medical advertisements having the body as its primary site of expression. When medicines promised health and well-being, advertisements showed weak bodies that were seemingly in need of these medicines to cure themselves. Visual and textual components of these advertisements were carefully weaved together in making this attempt successful. In the meanwhile, bodies of individuals were in a way disciplined and tuned in these advertisements according to the social roles assigned to them in the discursive realm of Kerala during the early twentieth century. Thus, the narratives that these advertisements put forth played contributed significantly as to the evolving of new notions about family, womanhood and masculinity.

The family was one of the institutions which had undergone drastic changes during early twentieth century Kerala due to various legal measures as well as pressure from the society. Matrilineal system of inheritance which was a joint family in set up, was disintegrated with various colonial legislation during the early twentieth century. Demand for reform in the matrilineal joint family system from the English educated elite men hastened this process. This transformation in the family set up had paved the way for new notions about the roles that men and women had to play in the new system. These new notions had played an instrumental role in shaping new ideas of masculinity, womanhood, domesticity and sexuality. This section of the chapter explores how these

transformations were reflected through medical advertisements and how the advertisements contributed to disseminating these notions among the public.

### **Advertisement and Making of an 'Ideal Womanhood'**

During the nineteenth century, much of the women-folk in Kerala were seen as freer and possessed more autonomy in their life matters compared to women in other parts of India due to the matrilineal system of kinship<sup>26</sup>. In a matrilineal system her identity was not considered in relation to her father or husband, but through her belongingness to her *taravad*, which was a joint family system in which the property inheritance was followed through the female ancestor of the family (Saradmoni, 1999, p. 68 and Renjini, 2000, p. 78, Arunima, 1995, p.158). However, with the dismantling of the matrilineal system by early twentieth-century things started to change as far as the freedom enjoyed by women is concerned. Scholars have discussed in great length about the position of a woman of this period and argued that women were restricted to specific areas in the public domain which were popularly seen womanly spaces like nursing, teaching, etc. which required soft emotions like patience, kindness and care. (Devika 1999, 2007, Arunima, 2003, Saradmoni, 1999). Ezhava women of lower caste enjoyed less freedom of movement by 1944 compared to their mothers (Ayyappan, 1944, p. 122).

A glance through early Malayalee women writings published in the early decades of the twentieth century tells that women in Kerala were most often called *abala*, which can be translated as *she who lacks strength*. For the apparent reason, lacking the strength

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<sup>26</sup> In nineteenth century nearly fifty percent of the total population, of different castes and communities were matrilineal, Joseph Tharamangalam and Elzy Tharamangalam, "Capitalism and Patriarchy: The Transformation of the Matrilineal System of Kerala, (paper presented at the International Congress on Kerala Studies, 27,29 August 1994, Trivandrum, Kerala)

of woman, here means is in comparison with the men in Kerala (Devika, 2005, p. 22). Strength in the first place is understood as physical robustness, and sometimes it has been understood as intelligence too. When the history and present prove that the women are no less weak in these both aspects, how did it became a norm to write women as *abala*, the weak as compared the ‘strong’ men. Here, the study probe this question, as to how the weak women category was created through both the visual and verbal narratives of medical advertisements in early modern Kerala

When it is about physical strength, medical advertisements becomes an ideal site of enquiry as the narratives of advertisements in the form of visual and verbal description about the product advertised communicate to the reader about the weakness and reasons of the weakness and its promises of well-being through the remedy these products put forth. The painting was one of the visual genres which mediated the social changes in colonial Kerala, especially the changes in the family structure was concerned. Sujith Parayil has further discussed how family photographs mediated the transformation in the family structure in early twentieth-century Kerala ( Parayil, 2014,p. 1)

Here, these advertisements produced a particular set of knowledge which, in a way imparted knowledge about health, be it physical, mental or sexual health, of women in Kerala. This, I believe, was done not for the sake of educating the people, but purely for a reason, that is, to sell their products. Keeping the agenda of selling the product as the priority, these factors were used to inculcate a sense of weakness in their present lifestyle and hence it had to be changed. The knowledge produced through this communication had contributed to the forming and shaping of perceptions about what is to be an ideal woman-hood. The woman's body becomes the site on which the culturally

coded and socially sanctioned images of the 'perfect woman' are inscribed (Sheeba, 2002, p. 5). Medical advertisement becomes yet another medium through which this image of the 'perfect women' was produced and perpetuated.

Women in these advertisements were seen as weak and hence were asked to consume the products advertised to be a good woman who will make everyone happy in the family. To inculcate a sense of weakness among woman or the construction of weak woman image, what was needed is to initiate a discussion on the subjects like menstruation, beauty, womanhood, pregnancy, postnatal period. Menstruation was depicted as an illness to be cured and all the reason for the unhappiness and weakness that womenfolk do suffer. Hence, it is worth discussing what are how the weakness of woman was articulated in these advertisements, like how its images were shown in a particular way, what was the language used in these ads to seek attention and make meaning are.

To begin with the discussion, the chapter takes two different (figure 4.1 & 4.2) advertisements of the same medical product from the same drug manufacturer. It is an indigenous Ayurveda product came from Madras, one of the main seats of British colonial state in India. These two ads are talking about women's health, although it is not directly addressing women, but, their husbands. It is seeking the attention of men on how important it is to keep an eye on their wives' health as they might always look happy, but they might not necessarily be as happy as they appear. They might be going through some problems related to menstrual issues. Looking at these ads, we can notice certain things like a woman's health is explained in relation to the happiness of man, the kid and overall happiness of the family. Besides this, the ad, by addressing and seeking the

attention of the husband, it denotes that the reader was a man and also the one who buys on behalf of women are their husbands.

**നിങ്ങളുടെ ഭാര്യയിൽ തെല്ലൊരു ശ്രദ്ധ വെക്കുക.**

പുറമെകാണുന്നതു ചിലപ്പോഴെല്ലാം ശരിയായിരിക്കുകയില്ല. അതുകൊണ്ടാണ് നിങ്ങളുടെ ഭാര്യയിൽ തെല്ലൊരുശ്രദ്ധ വെക്കുവാൻ പറയുന്നത്. കരുണയം അവർ നടിക്കുന്നത്ര സന്തോഷം അവർക്കുണ്ടായിരിക്കുകയില്ല. അവർ കരുതലില്ലാതെയിരിക്കുമ്പോൾ നിങ്ങൾ സൂക്ഷിച്ചു നോക്കുന്നതായാൽ സന്തോഷസൂചകമായ ഒരു ഭാവം അവരിൽ നിഴലിച്ചു കണ്ടേക്കാം.

ഇവിടെ നോക്കുക, ഇവരുടെ കാമനക്ഷത്രി കളിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നുണ്ടെങ്കിലും ഇവർക്കു സന്തോഷമില്ല. അവർ നിങ്ങളെക്കുറിച്ചാണോ വ്യസനിക്കുന്നത്? അതോ അവരേക്കുറിച്ചുതന്നെയോ? കരുണയം നിങ്ങളെ ആരോഗ്യമില്ലാതെ കാണുന്നതുകൊണ്ടായിരിക്കാം അവർക്കു സങ്കടം തോന്നുന്നത്; അല്ലെങ്കിൽ അവർക്കു ആത്മവസംബന്ധമായ വല്ല തകരാറുകളും ഉള്ളതുകൊണ്ടായിരിക്കാം. എന്തായാലും അവരുടെ സന്തോഷത്തെ അകറ്റാനായി അവർക്കു ഒരു കുപ്പി ലോഗ്യ കൊടുക്കുകയും നിങ്ങൾ ഒരു കുപ്പി അമൃത് സേവിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നതിന്നു എന്താണ് വിടരാധം.



**കേ സ രീ ക്ക ടി രം**  
**Indian Chemists & Druggists,**  
**EGMORE, MADRAS.**

Figure 4.1 Mathrubhumi weekly 1934 September 3

The caption reads as “Keep an eye on your wife” (figure 4.1). And the text reads as;

“What you see outside may not always be true. That is why it is told to keep an eye on your wife. They might not be as happy as they appear. If you observe them when they are not conscious enough, you can notice their gloomy face. Look here (at her face), although her beloved kid is playing in her hand, she is not that happy. Is she worried about you? Or

is she concerned about herself? Perhaps, she is sad because of your ill health situation; or she might be suffering from menstrual issues. Anyways, what is the harm in giving her a bottle of *lodhra* (the medicine advertised here) to drive away her weakness and you taking one bottle of *Amrit*, (another medicine from the same chemists which are especially for men)”.

The woman and the baby duo are coming very often in medical advertisements of these kinds. On the one side, this is used to depict the emotions explained in the description of the advertisement, i.e., the unhappy woman holding her child who is in a playful mood. The woman is seen holding her child in her hand and looking at the child with a sad face. At the same time, her weak body is not letting her smile and play with her kid, who seemingly is in a happy mood. This, in one way, is trying to communicate to the one who sees the ad, who is also a man, that taking care of the kid is also at stake as his wife is not well. Here this visual representation aims to catch the male gaze and also sends a message to them as to the overall happiness of the family is at jeopardy and he needs to act by buying the product.

Moreover, as the ad was addressing the men readers and asking them to take care their wives, it reflects the coming of a new conjugality in which the husband had the responsibility of the care of his wife and the happiness of family which places men in a dominant position. On the other hand, the image in the advertisement resembles the visuals of a nuclear family that was articulated in the famous painting by Indian painter from Kerala; Raja Ravi Varma called “*There comes Papa*”. Here advertisements adopted the pictorial narration which was already familiar to people in Kerala.

# ഒരു ഭർത്താവിനും സൗഖ്യമുണ്ടാവില്ല!

തന്റെ പ്രിയതമ രോഗിയായും ക്ഷീണിച്ചവളായും കാണപ്പെടുന്നുവെങ്കിൽ—അവരുടെ സുകുമാരമുഖത്തെ ഉദ്ദീപിപ്പിക്കുമാറുള്ള ഹൃദയമായ പുഞ്ചിരിയോടുകൂടി അവർ നിങ്ങളെ വീട്ടിൽ സ്വാഗതം ചെയ്യാതിരിക്കുന്നുവെങ്കിൽ യാതൊരു ഭർത്താവിനും സൗഖ്യമുണ്ടാകുന്നതല്ല. തീർച്ചയായും അവരുടെ അസംഖ്യം സുഖക്കേടുകളെ പുറത്തുവിടാതെ ഒരു കൃത്രിമ പുഞ്ചിരിക്കൊണ്ടു എപ്പോഴും മുടിവെക്കുമെന്നു ഭർത്താവിനു പ്രതീക്ഷിക്കാവുന്നതുമല്ല. ഭർത്താക്കന്മാരെ, ഭായ്കൂടാ എന്താണു് സുഖക്കേടുള്ളതെന്നു് കണ്ടുവീടിക്കേണ്ട ഭാരം നിങ്ങളുടെതാണു്. ഒരുപക്ഷെ അതു ആത്മവസംബന്ധമായ ചല്ലതകരാറുമായേക്കാം. അതിനാൽ എപ്പോഴും ആത്മരോഗങ്ങൾക്കും സിദ്ധലക്ഷ്യവും നിങ്ങളുടെ കടുബ്ബത്തിന്റെയും സംരക്ഷണത്തിനായി പരമമായ പയ്യപ്പായുമായ “ലോഹ്ര” ഒരു കുപ്പി അവർക്കു നൽകുക.

എല്ലാ മരുന്നുവ്യാപാരികളും വിറ്റുവരുന്ന  
 അല്ലെങ്കിൽ

കേ സ രീ ക്ക ടി ര ഞ്

Indian Chemists & Druggists.  
**EGMORE, MADRAS.**

figure 4.2 Mathrubhumi weekly 1934 Nov 5

The caption reads as “no husband will be happy” (figure 4.2), “If the beloved wife is sick and weak and if they are not there at your home to elate your mood with their smiling faces, no husband will be happy. Husbands cannot expect that they (wives) will always be able to fix a fake smile on their faces by hiding many ailments they are suffering from. Hey, husbands, you have the responsibility to find what disease is your wife suffering from. Perhaps, it could be menstrual issues. Therefore, give them a bottle of ‘lodhra’ (medicine’s name), which can cure all menstrual diseases, and spread happiness in the entire family”.

In both these advertisements, the weakness of the woman is explained as a reason for the unhappiness of her husband and hence, the unhappiness of the entire family. It is

communicated to the reader here that woman's health is instrumental for keeping the woman's husband and her entire family happy, if not to make her happy herself. Health and well-being of a woman is observed through the lens of a man, i.e., her husband.

Here, discussion about the health of women is discussed in the backdrop of a new modern conjugal space in Kerala, which was a nuclear set up in nature. The domestic space of Kerala had transformed due to various colonial legislatures like the Malabar Marriage Act in 1896 and the Madras Marumakkathayam (Matrinity) Act in 1933 (Arunima, 2003). With these legislations family set up slowly changed into a nuclear system from the erstwhile joint family system and also male members could inherit property, unlike older system where the property inheritance was happening through the female members in the family.

Here, we have three characters in this advertisement, the wife, kid as we can see in the image given in the ad and the husband to whom the advertisement is addressed. The weakness here is articulated as a reason for the interplay of emotions among these three characters. Images in figure 4. 1 and Figure 4.3 look similar to that of Raja Ravi Varma's painting *There Comes Papa*<sup>27</sup>, which was understood as a clarion call for matriliney in Kerala and the beginning of new femininity and patrilineal sensibilities (Arunima, 2003). While Ravi Varma portrayed the middle-class Nayar woman with her baby on her hip

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<sup>27</sup> G. Arunima (2003), "In 1893, Raja Ravi Varma, the well-known Malayali artist, depicted his daughter in a painting called *There Comes Papa*. It shows a young Malayali woman, with a plump baby on her hip, pointing towards an approaching figure who is out of the frame. ...The painting radiates a curious sense of expectancy, and subtly draws the audience into a triangular space of viewing between the model and the invisible approacher, demanding an urgent participation". She further argues, an audience viewing this painting in 1893 would have seen conjugal domestic setting, at a time Nayar matriliney, which was known for its joint family system called *Taravad* under the headship of a female of the family. .. "The fact that Ravi Varma chose to celebrate conjugal domesticity and the nuclear family at a time when these were comparatively unknown among large sections of matrilineal population reveals his growing patrilineal sensibilities." Page no.1.



waiting for her husband, here, this advertisement follows the same picturisation, wherein the mother is holding the baby who is in a playful mood. While the woman in the painting was expecting her husband, here, the advertisement sought to seek the attention of husbands into the sorrow plight of their wives due to physical weakness. In a critique of the portrayal woman in much-acclaimed Kerala model, Devika has written how the women health was always discussed as maternal health and how a healthy female was maternal one which was devoid of sexuality (Devika, 2009,p. 24). These advertisements further extend this argument by taking the picture decades backwards.

The health of woman, as maternal health, was very often evoked in these advertisements. Moreover, to talk about the baby is also about woman or mother. The image in the advertisement (figure 4.3) of a baby product called *Balamritam* comes with the mother-baby duo. This image, mother holding baby, was in tandem with the new notions of family and domesticity wherein the woman was entrusted with affairs with the domestic as opposed to the space outside home which was controlled by men. As it was shown in Ravi Varma's painting *There Comes Papa*, the image of a baby was an inevitable one in the burgeoning imagination of nuclear family in the early twentieth century. Similarly, as rightly pointed out above, manufacturers of these medical products too missed no chance in bringing this into their advertisements to make their product a saleable commodity. Thus, we see the discussion on the necessity to focus on the health of babies. Weak baby in no way fit into the imagination of the ideal modern conjugality they imagined. The notion of weakness is evoked in many ways. The urge for an ideal healthy baby is being usually exploited in these ads. Qualities such as the robustness, intelligence and beauty associated with the ruling race were implicitly 'accessible' to the

children of the Indian consumer as well (Sharma, 2009, p. 216). Moreover, as Patricia Oberoi had argued, picture of the baby was very much part of the nationalist iconography which shaped the idea of ‘imagined community’ through arts forms like alender arts (Oberoi, 2003,p. 197).



Figure 4.3 Mathrubhumi Weekly 1933 July 17

Dongre’s *Balamritam* (figure 4.3), a health drink for babies, offered the future generation of the country a healthy life as the caption reads “ To make the future citizens more healthy” from all sorts of diseases and weakness. The text in the advertisement reads as;

“Our *Balamritam* (the health drink) is an ideal drink to provide energy and strength for weak and clumsy babies. We guarantee that you will admit that this *balamritam* which has forty years of reputation across India is capable of making your kids healthy, energetic and strong.”

This advertisement of the medicine is offering the younger generation of the country a way out from all kinds of ailments and weakness. Here the weakness of the baby is juxtaposed with a number of elements within this ad, firstly the term *balamritam*,

literally means ‘amritam’ for babies or nectar for kids. The amritam or nectar has an important place in Hindu mythology as it used to be a divine drink for being immortal. By choosing that name for their product the manufactures tried to evoke an emotion which is closely attached with their tradition among the Indian consumers. And also by placing the product name in this fashion, the manufacturers are trying to convey a message that the baby is in need of something like *amrith* which has a divine power to get the baby out of this weakness. Moreover, here the consumption of medicine also becomes a part of their belief and tradition. Secondly, the advertisement tried to make use of the existing political situation, where the people are still under the colonial rule and imagining a nation ruled by themselves. The advertisement is telling parents to bring up their babies healthy, as they are the future generation of India that they are all imagining. Thirdly, advertisements are seeking the gaze of parents of the country with the message given there and more importantly with the picture of a happy mother holding her kid who is presented as a pleasant baby with a smiling face. Here, the advertisement is offering a happy life to the baby and her/his mother and a bright future for the nation with a healthy and promising young generation as opposed to the clumsy and weak spectator of the advertisement.

While this advertisement sets a perfect plot for the ideal nuclear family by bringing the notion of a healthy baby with the mother into the picture, the advertisement also carries the message that medicine has transformative power which the proponents of western medicine had offered. This idea that western medicine brings magical changes is adopted by practitioners of indigenous medicines too which is reflected in these advertisements. While this advertisement (figure 4.3) of *Balamritam* puts forth an

imagination of a future citizen, it goes in tandem with the narrative that the western medicine was putting forward about the colonised body which is weak and hence needed the transformative power of the medicine. Here this advertisement gives a vocabulary to that colonial understanding about colonized body.

Praveena Kodoth(2004) has examined the legal and social frame that gave new authority to father or husband with the reforms in matriline by the colonial administration. New legal discourse around the abolition of matriline and system of inheritance made the marriage the basis for property inheritance. Within this newly system man was imagined to be more accessible and responsible, unlike the dictatorial karanavar in joint family system, to the interests of his wife and children.

While the advertisements had a narration with a triangle relation in a newly emergent domestic space of family, the husband or father figure is actually invisibilized in it. Although it is invisibilized in the advertisement, the presence of the absent authority is brought in through the textual narrative of the advertisement which explains the power position that men enjoyed with the whole lot of changes in the family structure. Here, on the one side the power of the absent father is established, on the other side, by showing the bond between child and mother, it tried to establish further that the childcare is inherently a female activity.

### **Advertisement and making of 'Masculine Men'**

One can see the debate on Masculinity as diverse as some study focus on singular masculinity and other on plural/multiple masculinities (Connell, 1995). Indeed, it is understood that ideas of masculinity and femininity are more often seen as socially and

historically constructed ideas. These notions are mostly fluid and keep changing from societies to societies, individual to individual, from period to period, and even within an individual itself, the ideas of masculinity tend to be changing over a period of time. Here I would like to shed some light on how advertisements in colonial Kerala contributed in constructing the idea of a masculine man in Kerala and how this idea contributed to the making of new domesticity and conjugal space in early twentieth century Kerala.

With the dismantling of matriliney, educated Nayar men sought for claim in their ancestral property and slowly gained much power in the society unlike before. The transformation from the joint family to the nuclear family set up put men in a dominant social position that is the head of the family who is supposed to take care of the family while women were supposed to take care of space within the family (Arunima, 1995 and 2003). While various legal discourses played the instrumental role in fuelling this transformation, on the cultural level, advertisement visualised it to the common public. One can notice that advertisements about the health of men were equally pervaded in any newspapers and magazines in colonial Kerala. If at all, an advertisement talks about the time it existed, we can say that physical well-being and health of men was given utmost importance during that time. These advertisements predominantly discussed issues pertaining to sexual health like virility, impotence, wet dreams, etc. These discussions about men's health were meant to evoke a sense of weakness among the men during those times and henceforth manufactures used it as an entry point to sell their products. The aspiration for a new self among the men in the early years of the twentieth century Kerala was reflected in these advertisements too.

Douglas. E. Haynes has studied medical advertisement concerning sexual health of man as a critical social space where the idea of masculinity is constructed in the context of western Indian in the early twentieth century (Haynes, 2002). Advertisements marked the traits of manliness in a certain way that they urged their consumers to make sense of their manliness by looking at these traits. Dominant images of masculinity are perpetuated not merely in the form of institutions and social conventions but through cultural representations, which claim a powerful hold on the fantasy life of both the coloniser and the colonised (Nair, 2013,p. 26). Here, advertisement becomes yet another cultural representation which had a powerful hold on the life of both the coloniser and colonised.

**ഒരു പുരുഷനായിരിക്കുക.**

നിങ്ങൾക്ക് തികച്ചും പൗരന്മാരുള്ള ഒരു ജീവനും, ബലവാനായും, ഉൾക്കൊള്ളിയും ദീനമില്ലാത്ത ജീവിക്കാനുള്ള ശക്തിയോടുകൂടിയും ജീവിക്കുവാൻ കലശലായ ആഗ്രഹമുണ്ട്. ശക്തികുറവ് തന്നെ ശക്തികുറവ് എന്തെന്നും അങ്ങനെ ശക്തി കുറവുമ്പോൾ എത്രത്തോളം പരിഹാസ്യവും, വെറുക്കപ്പെടുകയും അനാദരിക്കപ്പെടുകയും ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ടെന്നുവെന്നും നിങ്ങൾക്കു നല്ലപോലെ അറിയാം.

# ജീവമൃതം

**ആരോഗ്യത്തെയും ശക്തിയേയും പുനരുജ്ജീവിപ്പിക്കുന്നു**

ഇതു അനേകായിരം ബലഹീനരെ ബലവാനാക്കി തീർത്തിരിക്കുന്നു. നല്ല ആരോഗ്യവും പൗരന്മാരുമായും സിദ്ധിക്കണമെന്നാണ് നിങ്ങളുടെ മോഹമെങ്കിൽ—അതിന്നു ആദ്യം മോഹമുണ്ടാകാതിരിക്കുക. നിങ്ങൾക്കു ഉൾക്കൊള്ളിയും ധാരാളമായും വേണമെങ്കിൽ, ബലമുള്ള ഒരു സ്ത്രീയോടൊപ്പം വേണമെങ്കിൽ ഇതു അതുതകരമായ കാര്യം. സേവിക്കുകയോ വേണ്ട, അതല്ല നിങ്ങൾക്കു കൈവരും. ഇതിന്നും പുറമെ മലബാറും, മേന്മകുറവ്, പരിശ്രമം, ക്ഷീണം, ഉറക്കമില്ലായ്മ, രക്തക്കുറവ് മുതലായവയെല്ലാം ഉപദ്രവം തീരെ ശമിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യും. എത്ര പ്രായക്കാരും സ്ത്രീകളും ദേഹമെന്തെല്ലാമുള്ളവരും ഉപയോഗിക്കാം. 3 ക. 4 ന. യും 1 ക. 12 ന. യും വിലയുള്ള രണ്ടു തരത്തിൽ എല്ലാ മരുന്നും അടങ്ങിയവയും വില്ക്കുന്നു.

നിഷ്കാശം—

**ആയുർവ്വേദാശ്രമം,**  
തപാൽപെട്ടി നമ്പ് 287, മദിരാശി.

figure 4. 4 Mathrubhumi weekly 1934 Sept 27

It is an advertisement of ayurvedic health product *Jeevamritham* (figure 4.4), and the description of this advertisement is given in two parts. In the first part, the advertisement is urging the male consumers of the product with an intimidating caption “Be a man”. This caption is intimidating to the potential male consumer because the advertisement speaks to them by pointing out a lack in him that he is not manly enough because of the weakness he has. And, the description continues, “Be a man: You are longing to be a masculine man and live a life of strong and healthy man to overcome all illness. You are well aware of the fact, how you will be ridiculed, punished, disrespected and hated for being weak”. While the health products catering to women were mostly

evoked issues like happiness in the family, here the weakness of men is explained in relation to how men will lose respect, being hated and ridiculed in the society, let alone in their family or domestic space. This is because the manliness and masculinity were understood in terms of their position in the society in general if not only about the family as it was the case with advertisements of products catering to women health. In the second part of the ad, it says,

“it has made thousands of men strong. If you want to achieve good health and manliness- there is hardly anyone who doesn’t desire for the same- if you want more vigour and energy, strong nerves, you just have to consume this magical medicine; you will achieve all of it. Moreover, this can cure constipation, indigestion, fatigue, sleeping disorder, and anaemia. People of any age, be it woman or men, can consume this....”

The last part indicates that the medicine can be consumed by people of any age, be it, women or men, whereas the caption and most of the content in the advertisement talked about the health of masculine men. While the medicine is just a health product which can cure many general ailments, the advertisement has used its most of the description to explain manliness and strength a man will get from this product.

Another Ayurveda product, *Manmatha pills* (figure 4. 5), promises to increase virile power and manliness, as it says in the ad, “It makes man a man”. Reference to zamindars, nobility, aristocracy and gentry in this advertisement denotes the power aspect of how manliness is being articulated here. This needs to be understood in the background of changing power equations in the dynamics of gender discourse of early twentieth century Kerala. This was the period when you see the emergence of a new masculine self in Kerala.



Dr. S. P's.

## Manmatha Pills.

This PILLS or life giving nectar has been prepared from the best, choicest and richest vegetable drugs. It has wonderful properties of increasing virile power and it rectifies urinary disorders. In fact it makes man a man. This valuable medicine is used in large quantities not only by our Zamindars and many of the nobility, aristocracy and gentry in this Country, but it is greatly patronized by people in all places of India. It is needless to expatiate upon the magical qualities of this our invaluable medicine. We recommend it especially to those persons who desire to tone the nervous system, to strengthen the body, refresh the memory, and to guard against debility. Suffice it to say that the use of this medicine is recommended to those who have any faith in the Ayurvedic medicines. It works like a charm and the effect is lasting. It replaces lost power and rejuvenates the emaciated. It is that which diffuses fragrance of its own accord.

**Price** per bottle containing 20 Pills **Ra. 2** only.

**Directions:**—Take one pill morning one pill evening with sugar. Every night take thick milk. No diet. Intercourse strictly avoided for 20 days.

### TESTIMONIALS

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M. R. Ry. K. Raja Goundar Avl., Zamindar, Elanagar.  
 " N. Raja Goundar Avl., Zamindar, Manathi.  
 " S. Subbaraya Goundar Avl., Zamindar, Musiri.  
 " C. M. Ranga Rao, Avl., Vakil, B. A, B. L. Namakal.  
 " V. S. Sethumathava Rao, L. M. P., Doctor,  
 Namakal.  
 " J. Sivaramayar, Native, Doctor, Pandamangalam.  
 " M. Sabapathi Mudaliar, Astrolegor, Kattoputhur.

*Apply.*  
**Agent.**  
**AROGYA VILASAM OFFICE.**  
**OTTAPALAM.**

} Sole Agent for Malabar  
 Cochin & Travancore

figure 4.5 Arogya Vilasam January 1926

Here these advertisements played a pivotal role in constructing the idea of masculinity in early twentieth-century Kerala. By highlighting the sexual weakness and offering powerful manhood through the consumption of these medical products, these advertisements contributed to the debate around the masculinity in Kerala in the early twentieth century. Advertisements of these kind put forth an idea that being masculine is an innate character of man, and one who could not claim for a masculine self is

disrespected in family and also outside his family. Masculinity is constructed here which is connected with their social position in the newly emergent social space in early twentieth-century Kerala.

In a nutshell, promises of these medical advertisements encompass various notions about ideal woman-hood, masculinity, the idea about citizenship, new domesticity and conjugality. These promises were offered by pointing out the physical weakness as a lack in them which plays as an impediment in their way to achieve these 'desirable' traits and virtues and lead a happy life. Advertisements were trying to convince the consumers that their illness as a weakness which will affect the happiness in family life in the case of women, which will ruin one's status and reputation in the society in the case of men. Advertisement of products catering to children's health, by bringing an image of a healthy baby, evoked a sense of new citizenship in the domain of health and medicine and also an image of an ideal baby for the modern domestic space in early twentieth-century Kerala. In the process, advertisements set a standard in regard to what it looks like to be a healthy woman who is desirable and ideal, who is a masculine man and who is not and how the future citizens should be.

The binary of strong and weak is being created in the ads to manipulate the consumers effectively. According to such advertisements, the bridge between the strong and weak body is the products that were advertised. If men's weakness is shown here against respect, status and power for him in society, women's weakness is related to the unhappy husbands and unhappy family. This in a way denotes how a modern conjugality and domesticity were formed and shaped during early twentieth-century Kerala. The new masculine self was constructed here as any weakness in men will potentially jeopardise

his status and reputation in the society whereas the weakness in women ultimately affects the happiness within the family. Thus, medical advertisements in colonial Kerala promised women in Kerala during early twentieth-century physical well-being which offered them a new femininity and an ideal woman-hood, which was less ideal as compared to their position in the previous century. At the same time, Kerala men were promised of masculine manhood which gave them much power and position in the newly emerged domestic and conjugal familial set up of contemporary time.

### **Love of Life, not fear of Death**

While discourses on modern medicine were primarily talked about a healthy and happy life, it also talked about death. Advancement in the field of science and medicine had indeed brought new hopes in dealing people's anxieties about death. However, here this section would explore the idea of death in modern Kerala put forward through the advertisement of insurance companies of that time. While the main emphasis was on death, details-like whose death and the impact of the death on others-decoded from the advertisements offers a compelling narrative about the perception about death in modern Kerala. These advertisements warned and advised people on how the inevitability of death should be approached, how it affects the people around and how others should co-op with the death of their beloveds.

Though advertisement of insurance is not endorsing any medicine per se, it deals with the same anxiety that medicine had to deal with that is happiness in life and here in the case of advertisements of insurance, the happiness in life is to be achieved by driving away the fear of death. The fear of death, in the case of insurance, means the fear of death

of the male head of the family, which is nuclear in set up and the death is primarily juxtaposed with the happiness in the life of other family members. However, the difference here is that, it is curing the anxiety about death, unlike what medicine had promised that it would save people from death or minimise the risk of early or unwarranted death. Death is still conceived as an inevitable reality. Here the matter of concern is the anxiety of the person on what is after his death. However, in the context of modernity and enlightenment, death opened up new vistas of knowledge about body and perceptions about the body. Foucault throws more light on this, “With the coming of the Enlightenment, death too was entitled to the clear light of reason, and became for the philosophical mind an object and source of knowledge.”(Foucault, 2003, p.153)

For Foucault, in the context of eighteenth-century France, the medicine changed the perspective about death by bringing the reality to the fore that death is not anymore a single fatal incident, but death or reduced activity of multiple organs, membranes and tissues inside the body at various processes of a disease or more (Peerson, 1995, p.109) And by studying death, prevention of death, curing and treating death were made possible. Heidegger in *Time and being* explained death as a stage with which existence of human being completes its circle. He considers death as part of the philosophy of existence (Heidegger, 1996, p. 221).

In the case of advertisements of Insurance companies, it is advised not to fear death anymore by taking the insurance policy and start loving life. The happiness, before and after death, is a matter of concern for the advertisements of insurance companies. The one, who is asked to take this insurance, is also advised to be happy by taking this insurance which will drive away from the anxieties that he has about death and on what

will happen to his family after his death. The advertisement for the Guardian of India Insurance company Ltd. (figure 4. 6) is endorsing the insurance policy they offered on the point of love of life over the fear of death. The caption, “love of life-not fear of death” implies, from the perspective of the head-husband or father-of the family that one need not worry in life by thinking what will happen to his family after his death. The love for life is offered against the fear of death by ensuring the safety, security and peaceful mind in the future.

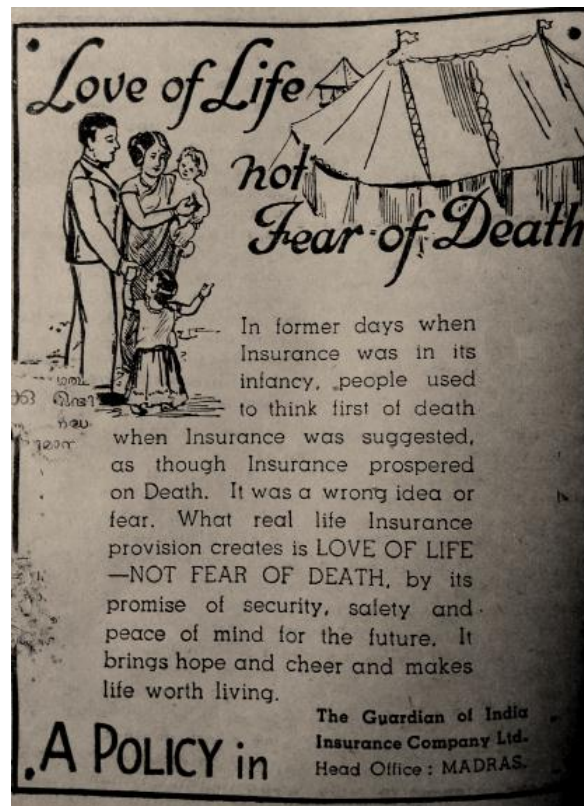


Figure 4. 6 Malayala Manorama weekly 1939

In the case of medicines, death provided the body for pathological anatomy through which the new understanding ultimately helped in curing the diseases and thus

help the life in future for many others (Peerson,1995, p.109). Similarly, an insured body after death helps to fetch the claims of insurance by the incident of the death. This is where the family again comes in the picture. The family becomes the beneficiary at a loss incurred by death. The dead body becomes an object of proof to make specific claims like in the case of medicine, where the body enabled the doctors to make further claims in the field of pathological anatomy.

Advertisement of another Insurance company (figure 4.7) presents Insurance policy as something which will work as help in the old age for the policyholder himself or his family after his death. The main tagline goes as, “a treasure during the old age, or help for the family after the death”. The advertisement reminds of old age, death and also the life of family after his death. Moreover, it also features disability in it as it offered particular scheme which will benefit those with those people with permanent disabilities.

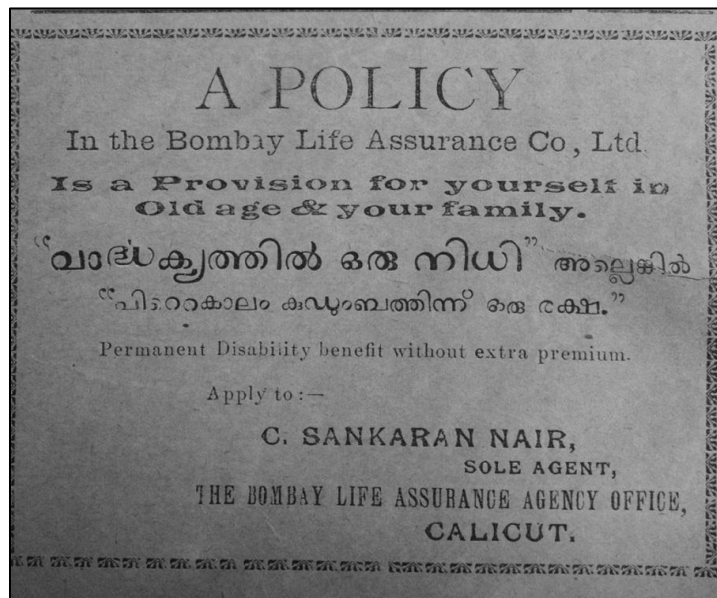


Figure 4.7 Mathrubhumi Weekly 1932 January 18

Heidegger further argues that “Death reveals itself as a loss, but as a loss experienced by those remaining behind” (Heidegger, 1996,p. 222) In the case of advertisements discussed here those left behind are the wife and kids. In another advertisement (figure 4.8) of the same company as discussed above explains the incident of death in connection with the bereaved family. The advertisement with the caption, ‘Stricken, but not stranded’, denotes the loss suffered by the relatives- husband to the wife and father to the kids- of the one who died.



Figure 4. 8 Malayala Manorama Weekly 1939

These advertisements are best examples for understanding how life and death were featured in the new market economy which was full of promises of modernity. Death is an unpleasant thing for anyone who loves life. While on the one hand, the new market economy offered a whole lot of promises as to how to be happy and satisfied with new modern outlook and lifestyle, an accident of death could not have broken the rhythm in the new life. As advertisements of medicine came with promises new ideas of health, beauty and well-being, these advertisements of insurance took a step ahead and used the most certain stage of human being's life as a way to generate anxiety and cash out of it. So, here the advertisement of insurance was curing the anxiety about death, more importantly anxiety about what will happen to the family member after his death. What is common in all these advertisements of insurance is its connection with the family. The death was explained as a loss for the family left behind, let alone for the deceased person himself.

Most importantly, the person who dies in these advertisements was the male head of the family which talks a lot about the new family system emerged in early twentieth-century Kerala. Here, advertisements play out as an essential medium in visually and textually depicting these meanings into the new order of that time.

## **Conclusion**

Foucault has talked about the formation of the conceptual and technical trinity of life, disease and death with the developments of modern medicine (Foucault, 2003,p. 176). Here, by taking advertisement of medicines and insurance as a single unit, the chapter discussed how perceptions about life, diseases and death were formed in the domain of



advertisements and how these advertisements with the narratives they brought notions about family, womanhood and masculinity in modern Kerala. These advertisements provided a language, most often a visual one, in understanding the physical and mental weakness among people. By putting this language into people, these advertisements urged people to make sense of what it is meant to be weak and why one should buy and consume the medicine advertised. To enable them to identify their weakness, various other factors like being an ideal woman, being masculine, happiness and well-being in the family were all brought in to the narrative of advertisements. While enabling the readers to identify their weakness and diseases with its visual language, advertisements enabled reader in developing a clinical gaze as Foucault has argued in the context of the coming of modern medicines and new ways of diagnosis. Seeing had got prominence with a clinical gaze as any symptoms were turned into signs to be seen and identified (Foucault, 2003, p. 196). With the clinical gaze, doctors started asking the patient who came into a clinic, “where is it hurting?” Instead of “what is the matter?” Here, this clinical gaze is carried out by a doctor. However, these advertisements offered a visual language to be used by anyone without any medical knowledge per se.

Moreover, unlike the clinical gaze that Foucault has discussed which took the human part out of the body and saw the organs as individual objects, these advertisements brought the human body into the society with the medical gaze it offered. In that sense, the gaze that these medical advertisements offer is taking the medical gaze beyond what Foucault has argued. Medical advertisements thus function as an extension of the clinical gaze but with a broader impact by disseminating the medical knowledge among the public.

## Chapter 5

### Conjectures of the Modern: Soap, Cloth and Watches

#### Introduction

The chapter intends to explore how advertisements of early twentieth century Kerala, as a modern medium in the context of modernity, envisaged verbally and visually the cultural and social life of the region. With the growing market economy during early twentieth century Kerala, so many new objects were introduced to the everyday life of Kerala society. These objects were not seen as mere things for everyday use, but also as modern objects which brought notions of modern and high status for those who possess and use them. While a market economy was opened with these new objects, advertisements that advertised the new objects became visible in newspaper and magazines.

Advertisements were filled with ideas that these new objects carried. Thus, advertisements were used to communicate the symbolic ideas that the new objects had stood for. This symbolic communication made print advertisement an important material in understanding the imagined histories- which was real and imagined at the same time-of modern Kerala. Drawing from the imagined history approach of R. G. Collingwood (1946)<sup>28</sup>, this chapter attempts to do cultural analysis of these advertisements which will give new insights into the socio-cultural formation of the modern subjectivity during the time of colonialism. Thus, the revision of the advertisements will help us to understand the inner dynamism and intensive negotiations that the people engaged with the discourse of modernity. Modernity having its own heterogeneous characteristics, unfailingly

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<sup>28</sup> Collingwood calls for an approach in which the historian is supposed to use a priori or structural imagination so as to probe if the evidence is saying something beyond it is directly signifying. (see Little, 1983,p.28)

initiated to open up new sites and spaces for the people to invent their modern selves or to articulate the elevated modern selves, which were in the continuous process of its formation. The advertisement has been one of such sites or spaces people got engaged or encountered with the various forms such knowledge, which not only attributed to the formation of consumer habitus but also contributed to shaping the social and cultural perception of the people. Hence, a critical reading of these sites, advertisements, will help us to realise the processual formation of the subject of modernity in Kerala. According to McFall:

“Critical fascination with advertisements as source material is motivated primarily not by what they reveal about advertising, but by what they reveal about societies, cultures and economies.” (McFall, 2004, p. 2)

The chapter would further explore the ways in which advertisement as a new medium in the public sphere of Kerala encompasses different sensibilities of modernity. Modern mentalities are introduced not only through the ideological apparatus of colonialism but also through the circulation of objects or circulation of knowledge associated with the use and exchange value-material and materiality—of these objects. Advertisement, in this context, as what McLuhan (1994) pointed out in the case of media, is a medium which itself illuminates a message of modern or rationales to the invention of the modern subject. Advertisements of these periods are objectified with or dissolved in with these ideological prospects of colonial capitalism either directly or indirectly. In this context, as a spectacle, it creates a language or a mechanism of representation, in which both the real and imaginary are juxtaposed to address the present. While representing or re-presenting the present, it not only addresses and accommodates the socio-cultural real as reality but also try to propose, alter or modify it in order to present a

perspective of the modern mentalities, which is often a futuristic one. In addition to addressing the existing order of the culture and the society, it offers some schemes to imagine the present or the future through its articulation of the desire and fantasy. Undoubtedly, advertisements are the vehicle of the social and cultural reality; needless to say, its role in the creation or invention of a system of social, cultural signifiers and signified meanings. Hence, how it signifies or articulates meaning, which is specific to the medium and the discursive culture in which it operates are some of the questions that call for elaboration. It not merely represents the material object or commodity value of the object or thing but also articulates the human emotions and relations of object- the materiality of the object- it represents. In this context, the chapter will look at advertisements of the early twentieth century Kerala to understand how these advertisements played an instrumental role in creating a desire among the consumers and the public within the context of colonial modernity. In other words, the chapter will explore how advertisements cater to new mentalities among the people in conjunction with the pace of modernity as well as the relevant epistemic structure of the traditions and practices of Kerala. Advertisement, in this context, is a composite site that encompasses various sensibilities related to the socio-political situation of its context.

### **New objects and colonial modernity**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Objects/things or materials acquired unprecedented scholarly attention across disciplinary boundaries in social sciences and humanities. The ‘material turn’ in anthropology and culture studies and the ‘social turn’ in art history looked at the social existence of objects beyond the usual fetishized object approach (Miller, 1998, p. 3-10, Edwards and Hart, 2004, p.3-4).

The history of the new objects would take us to the history of colonialism and its civilising mission across the globe. The new objects had played a pivotal role in the diffusion of the ideology and knowledge of the colonialism effectively to the natives. Comaroff and Comaroff (1997) put it;

“As worlds both imagined and realized, they were built not merely on the violence of extraction, not just by brute force, bureaucratic fiat, or bodily exploitation. They also relied heavily on the circulation of stylized objects, on disseminating desire, on manufacturing demand, on conjuring up dependencies.” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997, p. 219)

The circulation of new objects was profoundly influential in shaping the new perceptions about the body, leisure time, work culture, etc. The everyday life of people was fundamentally connected to the market economy, and the logic of capitalism began to play an instrumental role in tuning the everyday life. The modern objects that carried values which shaped the notions of being modern which were quintessential for a colonial project of modernising its colonies. These objects were introduced as one of the ways that a colonial self was supposed to adapt in order to catch up with the modern sensibilities advocated by colonialist power. These objects were fetishized as objects that could bring magical changes in people especially as to the notion of modernity, and a modern subject was concerned. This fetishisation happened through the domain of advertisements. When objects obtained such a prominent place within the discourse of modernity, advertisement as a spectacle played an instrumental role in introducing or informing about these objects. Guy Debord in his seminal work, *society of the spectacle*, explained,

“The fetishism of the commodity — the domination of society by “intangible as well as tangible things” — attains its ultimate fulfilment in the spectacle, where the real world is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it, yet which at the same

time succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of reality.” (Debord, 1994, p. 18)

Here, advertisement, as a spectacle, shows the consumers a reality which is desirable for them to attain the imagined modern selfhood. Commodities or things are thus turned as objects of desire; a desire to change and be modern. Throughout these advertisements, what was shown is the promise of modernity. This was done with the representation of modern self through various ways in advertisements. Moreover, the reality shown in the advertisement was asserted over and over again as the authentic and real. Like Debord has said while explaining the spectacle, “What appears is good and what is good appears”, Advertisements make their claims most authentic and unquestionable (Debord, 1994, p. 12).

In a consumption cycle, knowing about a wide range of goods and services is very important (Osella and Osella, 1999, pp. 98-99). The advertisement was indeed meant to carry the knowledge of products to the consumers in a way that consumers will fall for it. However, apart from mere passing on the knowledge about the commodities what is important to see here is how the process of sharing knowledge constituted was. Here is the role of advertisement as spectacle comes into the scene.

There was a longing for self-fashioning among individuals in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth-century Kerala. This desire for achieving an ideal self was reflected in the writings of contemporary authors. While this desire was strong, there was a huge gap between the ideal self they had desired for and the reality out there in their lives (Devika, 2007, p. 76). It was in this context that new objects become relevant as these objects were meant to fill those gaps in the ideal self they had desired for and the present self they had. Thus, these objects that were associated with modern sensibility

which was taking shape played an essential role in self-fashioning process during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala.

Studies on novels and photograph have explained the significant role that objects played in the project of self-fashioning among educated elites in colonial Kerala (Parayil, 2003 and Kumar, 2016 and 2018). Sujith Kumar Parayil's work showed how objects were used in colonial photography to get the meaning of being modern and an elevated status among the educated elites in colonial Kerala (Parayil, 2003,p. 103).

“..most of the middle or elite class family photographs show their hegemonic value through a dress code, like wearing an overcoat, holding an umbrella and a watch as objects of dignity and status, signifying the ruptures between tradition and modernity. On the other hand, hats and boots are preserved in the photographs as images of colonial power.” (ibid)

These objects carried meanings that are not its material value alone. These materials signified a higher status and dignity during that period. Early novels reflect the presence of such objects in their presentations as props that would give a modern look and feel in their works (Kumar, 2016, p. 161) In fact, Kumar argued that emergence of novel and unprecedented expansion of objects in peoples everyday life happened concomitantly (Kumar, 2018, p. 75). While having familiarity with new objects brought about a modern sensibility to the plot discussed in the novels, it is also pertinent to note that these objects represented a new visuality that was taking shape then. Taking the example of *Indulekha*, Udaya Kumar has discussed how these objects are understood by translating them into some signs which are familiar to them. Citing the case of a part in *Indulekha*, Udyakumar (2002,pp. 161-162) explains how new objects are understood in their own terms. This specific part in *Indulekha* narrates the ecstasy and amusement of

Suri Nambuthiri, one of the characters, in seeing a spinning wheel and his attempt to understand it in his own familiar surrounding by comparing the factory having its tail to emit the smoke outside as a temple having *homam* to please the deity there. The narration goes on explaining the apprehension of Suri Nambudiri about the factory by comparing the smoke coming out of the factory with the ‘powerful smoke’ of *homam*, which is done in temples. What is important here is how an object of modernity like factory is turned into signs that are familiar to them so as to understand it better. This translation of seeing into reading is explained to denote the confusion and dilemma that traditional subjects faced in a new modern space which is incompatible for them to stay on with a variety of new objects that were unfamiliar to them.

On the other side, cravings for modern objects, with the colonial modernity, among educated middles class in colonial Kerala is also evident in these novels. The desire for new objects and fantasy associated with the seen as an urge of the educated middle class to self-fashion so as to associate with the newly emergent notion of being modern in colonial Kerala. At the same time, references to objects were used in novels to denote the characters and attitudes of the subjects in the novels. This reference to objects is evident in Udaya Kumar’s discussion about two main characters in *Indulekha*, Suri Nambudiri and Indulekha. There, he talked about how selection and arrangement of objects in possession with Suri Namboothiri and Indulekha, two main characters in the novel, represented two sensibilities, Suri Namboothiri’s obsession with golden ornaments and the colour which represented tradition while Indulekha used the golden colour in her dress minimally and also she had in her room many other objects like books and reclining chair which were associated with a modern English sensibility.



Advertisements about such products reflect how consumer products tuned the way how modern should like. This aspiration to be modern and craving for modern object was essential in making the new need that would take them to the new products or objects. Apparently, this is what advertisement of the new object/products did as well as to how to inculcate these desires among their potential consumers. While on the one hand advertisement was instrumental in introducing the various modern objects, it also played out to be a modern object in its own way, an object with a modern sensibility.

The reason was considered to be one of the traits of modernity as it promised to free humankind from superstition and ignorance (Kant, 1949, p. 132-39). Partha Chatterjee has argued in explaining 'our modernity', ".if there is any universally acceptable definition of modernity, it is this that by teaching us to employ the methods of reason, universal modernity enables us to identify the forms of our own particular modernity" (Chatterjee, 1997,p. 9). In this context, advertisement proved to be a site for the manifestation of the modernity in modern Kerala with the logical reasoning in its content as a technique to attract consumers. As a clash between the world of tradition or religion and modernity was a characterising feature of Indian society during nineteenth and early twentieth century, advertisement as an object of modernity has played a role in this process. Experience of V.T Battathirippad, one of the social reformers of modern Kerala, stands as a vivid example for the same. He talked about his experience of reading the letters for the first time in his life. Having been trained in Vedas and in memorising Vedic chants, VT did not know how to read as he did not have proper schooling at his childhood. It was only when a *Tiyya* school girl asked VT some help in getting her school homework done that he realised that he could not read though he could recite *Vedic*

chants. VT saw this as an utterly shameful thing and as a result, learnt to read Malayalam letters with the help of the same girl. First letters he could read was that of from an advertisement of 'Deer Mark Umbrellas' appeared in a piece of newspaper he got from the temple premises (Battathiripad, 1970, p. 105 and Manmathan,2007,p. 244). He has written about his joy in being able to read for the first time (Battathirippadu, 2019). This incident is widely seen as a turning point in VT Battathiripad's life as he decided to learn more and ultimately got involved in many social reform activities for which he is known for today.

What is relevant here is that how come VT could read the advertisement of the umbrella out of all the other letters in that newspaper page? While on the one hand, it can be read as a triumph of modernity over the tradition and religion, it also points fingers to the way how advertisements appealed to the reading public of contemporary time in a most attractive way. VT, who is learnt priest, trained in Vedic chants, clearly represented the past that modernity challenged and his encounter with the modernity while reading that advertisement brings forth an unusual euphoric feeling in him. This clearly throws light into the impact advertisement made in the public sphere of Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

More importantly, the umbrella assumed a significant place in the socio-cultural realm of Kerala during the early twentieth century Kerala. Umbrella was one of the objects that only people from higher castes were allowed to use. If at all people from Sudra castes including Nairs wanted to use umbrella they had to make special payment called *Atiyara* to local rulers or *Naduvazhis*. (Menon, 1967, p. 376). While the early form of an umbrella was made of palm leaves, with the changing scenario in society and

market, umbrellas were manufactured professionally. Like many new objects, carrying an umbrella was also seen as a mark of prestige and status.

Thus, the advertisement of an umbrella has greater significance as to the socio-cultural discourses of that time in Kerala. With the growth of a market economy and the influence of social reform movements, things and objects that were accessible were made to be accessible to everyone. This, with all probability, must have contributed to the overall emotional feeling that VT had gone through while encountering the piece of newspaper with umbrella advertisement. With the aforesaid sight of advertisement, VT was also introduced to the modern notion of 'seeing is believing' from the erstwhile tradition of orality where listening and hearing were central to the knowledge system to which VT belonged.

#### **New objects and a new way of doing things.**

While on the one hand, new products were introduced by inculcating new habits among people, it was also new ways of doing things that advertisers tried to sell. Colonial advertisers had adopted the same in Africa in their market strategies. To introduce new ways of doing things and also to introduce new products, European advertisers had acquired prior knowledge about the society they wanted to marketise their products (Burke, 1996, p. 127). The new ways of doing things have reconfigured the habits of people as it is in the case of dressing; stitched and machine-made clothes were introduced instead of unstitched piece of clothes in Kerala, watches and clocks changed the ways in which people measured time earlier, soaps replaced the traditional body cleaning methods and commercialization of tobacco agriculture altered the habit of tobacco consumption to a different level altogether. These new habits were developed as a result of the process

when these things, otherwise normal objects in the day to day life, were turned as commodities which required a set of people to consume. This consumption had to be rationale and hence satisfactory to their needs.

“To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world-and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know and everything we are.” (Berman, 1982,p. 15)

While the idea of modernity is a complete break from the past, colonial modernity evolves from a ground when there is a negotiation by the modernity with the past. The tradition is not completely ignored or pushed away, but rather there is a refashioning of tradition under the project of colonial modernity. Therefore, the project of colonial modernity included the tradition as well, which is not the case with the modernity.

### **Soap and new notions of body**

The body was one of the realms that cultural apparatuses of the colonialism had prime focus on. Western notions of hygiene and cleanliness were inculcated in various ways that colonialism had its stake on. Modern objects, especially toiletries were one of the ways in which these notions were circulated with much ease. Victorian cleaning rituals were flogged globally packed in soaps proclaiming as the God-given sign of Britain's evolutionary superiority (McClintok, 1995,p. 207). Moreover, as Timothy Burke has argued, these toiletries played a detrimental role in making and re-making of modern body across colonial societies (Burke, 1996,p. 11). Modern values of hygiene, beauty and health were imagined through the print advertisement of modern object of soap during late nineteenth and early twentieth century across the world. Symbolic meanings of these objects were conveyed through soap advertisements. This section is exploring

how these symbolic communications in soap advertisement shaped the new conceptions about body in colonial Kerala.

The soap as an object was new to people across India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and was meant to teach new lessons of caring and curing their body and thus inculcate a new habit in their everyday life. Harminder Kaur's study on soap and corporeal cleanliness in colonial India explains how soap came with new notions of cleansing the body and keeping the body fragrant from the odours. Soap replaced many other traditional ways of cleansing the body like use of gram flour (basen), yogurt, Soap nuts (Ritha) and soap pods (like Shikakai ) which were labelled as unscientific and not recommended that caused body odour and other health problems (Kaur,2010,p. 252). Traditional methods were made archaic and unscientific within the discourse of modernity, though they were not completely discarded.

Kaur argued that the British ideals of corporeal cleanliness towards the end of the nineteenth century have tremendously influenced the turn towards industrially produced soaps in colonial India. Notions of corporeal cleanliness in Britain underwent drastic change in the early nineteenth century. The habit of taking a bath regularly was not there, owing to various reasons like the perception that cleaning body regularly is the habit of decadent and it could also make the body vulnerable to illness. Sponging the body and use of strong animal based perfumes were the methods they used to keep the body clean and fragrant. The scented powder was used for hair instead of washing with water. However, things began to change as the population increased in British towns with industrialization. English elites thought presence of industrial proletariats and their body

odour made it mandatory to have bath regularly so as to be clean and hygiene to keep them away from epidemics (ibid, p. 250).

The idea of cleanliness and hygiene was transfused to India with British officers in India by the end of the nineteenth century. British found Indians too smelly in public spaces due to the oil and other materials they used in their bodies and excessive perspiration. This caused the British to further push their idea of cleanliness and hygiene into Indians. While using modern soap became a British superiority, it also conveyed a message that Indians were inferior, decadent, superstitious and backward. However, taking from the idea of cleanliness and hygiene that British had brought, Indian educated elites during the early twentieth century decided to manufacture modern soap in India only. Gandhi, who was the strongest critic of British items even promoted the idea of cleanliness and hygiene that was brought by British especially in the context of plague epidemics in India during late eighteenth century. Indian national congress in 1906 called for swadeshi in soap making. By 1916, Madras and Mysore governments started their own soap factories and Indian industrialists like Godrej, Tata, Bengal Chemicals and Pharmaceutical works and Swastik Oil Mills, etc. too ventured into soap making. By 1930s Indian companies had a clear edge over imported brands in Soap market (ibid, p. 246-256).

BATHING HABITS OF INDIA-1

**"SHIKAI" in South India**

ഇന്ത്യയിലെ വ്യത്യസ്ത ഭാഗങ്ങളിൽ ഉപയോഗിച്ചിരുന്ന പഴയ ശ്ലീകി അപ്പുതപ്പു (cheenikka podi) ഉപയോഗിച്ചാണ് തമിഴ്നാട്ടിലെ ജനങ്ങൾ (തെന്കിൻ) ശ്ലീകി അപ്പുതപ്പു ഉപയോഗിച്ചുകൊണ്ടിരുന്നത്. ഇന്നു ആ സമ്പ്രദായമെല്ലാം അന്യമായി മാറിയിരിക്കുന്നു. ഇന്ന് ആയിരക്കണക്കായുള്ള ഭവനങ്ങളിൽ ശ്ലീകി അപ്പുതപ്പു ഉപയോഗിക്കാൻ പകരമായി സപ്തീക് കാന്തി സോപ്പ് ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നു.

മികച്ച സപ്തീക് ഉല്പന്നങ്ങളിൽ, പാൽമുളകോൽ ആവണക്കണ്ണി, സപ്തീക് ചേമ്പിൻ സോപ്പ്, വാഷിങ്ങ് സോപ്പ്, ഗോവലിൻ ഇന്ത്യൻ വനസ്പതി മുതലായവ ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നതാണ്.




**SWASTIK'S KANTI SOAP**  
UNMATCHED FOR QUALITY  
SWASTIK OIL MILLS LIMITED, Wadala, BOMBAY.

BE INDIAN - BUY INDIAN

സെഷിൾസ് ഡിപ്പോ: ബെസാർറോഡ്, മട്ടാഞ്ചേരി, കൊച്ചി

Figure 5.1 Mathrubhumi weekly 1947 may 18

The advertisement for 'Swastik's Kanti Soap' (figure 5.1) reflects how other methods were replaced by soap. The description in the advertisement points into the same;

"Many varieties of items are used to cleanse the body in different States of the Indian subcontinent. For example, people from Tamil Nadu (south India) used Shikkakai powder (cheenikka podi) for cleansing their body. Today these methods are fading. Today, sawasthik Soaps are being used in thousands of houses instead of things like Shikkakai powder"

The irony is that today many soap products and hair creams are using shikkakai powder for soft skin and strong hair. However, the above advertisement is clearly indicating the replacement done by the commodity of soap. Commercialization of soaps kept other things outside the scene and soap entered with the new habit and new notions

of about cleansing the body. With more marketization, claims of soaps were also increased. If the cleansing or washing was perceived to be the main objective of the product, soap began to be fetishized with the qualities of good health, look and fragrance. This further extends its significant role in shaping a modern subject since good health and better appearances were the qualities that a modern subject was aspiring to shape her /his new selfhood. Interestingly, there were some advertisements which tried to make their own space by exposing the fetishisation done by some soap advertisements.

The visual setting of the advertisement needs special attention. A woman is seen taking a bath in a pond where you we can see lotus flowers. The woman, whose upper body is only made visible here on which she has worn casually a piece of cloth, wears a seductive gesture which indicates the predominantly male viewership of the advertisement. The pond with lotus flowers symbolises the ponds attached to temples which were a common thing in many temples in Kerala. Here this visualisation takes the viewers into a tradition of temple pond and the sanctity associated with it. While on the one hand the product of soap was replacing the existing traditional methods of cleansing the body, it was still done by holding on the tradition in other ways possible so as to maintain a close bond with the people who belong to this kind of tradition.

Changing the habit of using traditional methods was not sufficient enough in making soap as a household object that people will fondly use. This is where the other qualities that soaps claim with much importance come to the scene. Like any other modern objects, the commodity of soap also came with a whole lot of promises of modernity. Qualities attributed to a modern self-hood, like being rational, scientific, clean and fashionable were all reflected in soap advertisements as well. In another



advertisement of Godrej Soap (figure-5.2), these marks of modernity were given in the form testimonies from prominent figures who hail from different walks of the society. These testimonies might look like mere endorsements by random figures that are known in their respective portfolios. However, going to the logic of selection of these prominent figures and their words used in the advertisement gives us an idea about the intentions of the advertisers.

Out of six testimonies in the advertisement, two are from India, and four are from foreigners. While Ravindra Natha Tagore and Shivprasad Gupta were there as Indians, people like Annie Besant, Carl Lusurts, Morne Joseph Prague and Major Dickinson are there as foreigners. Tagore, whose name was written as Great Poet Ravindra Nath Tagore, endorsed the soap like, “there are no videshi (foreign) soap better than Godrej soap”. This simple statement reveals couple of points. Firstly, this is said against the notion that anything that comes from foreign is best because the one we have here is inferior and it is not up to the standard. The cultural project of colonialism was meant to establish this point that the superiority of the west over the east. Secondly, the statement by Tagore meant to invoke a feeling towards the ‘Indianess’ of the product, by questioning the first point mentioned, and its superiority over other foreign products.

**ഗോദ്രെജ് സോപ്പുകൾ**

8 തരം-8 1/2 അന്ന മുതൽ 1/2 അന്ന വരെ-ഏത് ഷാപ്പിലും കിട്ടും.  
 ഇന്ത്യയിലെ മഹാനാർ മാത്രമല്ല,  
 പ്രസിദ്ധ വെള്ളക്കാർകൂടി അവയുടെ  
 സുതി പാടുന്നു.

മഹാകവി റവീന്ദ്രനാഥ ടാഗോർ. "ഗോദ്രെജ് സോപ്പുകൾക്കു മേന്മയായ വിദേശി സോപ്പുകൾ ഇല്ലതന്നെ".

അനിബെസന്റ മതാമ്മ "ഗോദ്രെജ് സോപ്പുകൾ ലോകത്തെ വെച്ചു അത്യന്തമാണ്. ഇത്ര മേന്മയായ സോപ്പുകൾ ഇന്ത്യയിൽ ഉള്ളപ്പോൾ ഇന്ത്യക്കാർ ഇറക്കുമതി ചെയ്യപ്പെട്ട സോപ്പുകൾ വാങ്ങാനു ദേശാഭിമാനത്തിന്റെ അഭാവം കൊണ്ടാണ്.

ബാബ ശിവപ്രസാദ് മൂർത്തി (കാശിയിലെ കോടീശ്വരൻ). ഇദ്ദേഹം വളരെ കൊല്ലം യൂറോപ്പിൽ നിന്നു തനിക്ക് പ്രത്യേകമായി സോപ്പു ഉണ്ടാക്കി ഉപയോഗിച്ചു വന്നു തന്റെ ആവശ്യപ്രകാരം, മി. ഗോദ്രെജ് പ്രത്യേകമായി സോപ്പുകൾ ഉണ്ടാക്കി ഇദ്ദേഹത്തിനു കൊടുത്തതിൽ പിന്നെ മേന്മയുള്ള സോപ്പുകൾ നിറഞ്ഞു വെക്കുകയും, വില താരതമ്യത്തിൽ ഗോദ്രെജ് സോപ്പുകൾ ഇത്ര വില കുറവാൻ കാരണമെന്നെന്ന് അന്വേഷിച്ചപ്പോൾ എഴുതിച്ചോദിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു.

— ഉയർന്ന പാച്ചുണകളുപാത, അവയിൽ മൃഗങ്ങളുടെ കൊഴുപ്പു ലവലേശമല്ല. —  
 പ്രസിദ്ധൻസി എജൻമാർ:— **ജയഭാരതം കമ്പനി, എറണാകുളം.**  
**ബ്രാഞ്ചുകൾ, മദിരാശി, തിരുവനന്തപുരം.**

കരാൽ ലുസർട്സ് (പ്രസിദ്ധ ജർമ്മൻ രസതന്ത്രശാസ്ത്രജ്ഞൻ). ഞാൻ നിങ്ങളുടെ സോപ്പുകളെ മുടങ്ങാതെ ഉപയോഗിച്ചു വരുന്നു. ശാസ്ത്രീയമായും ഞാൻ അവയെ പലകുറി പരിശോധിച്ചു നോക്കിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ശരീരത്തിന് ആരോഗ്യം നൽകുന്നതിൽ അവയുള്ള ഗുണം മറ്റൊരു സോപ്പിനുമില്ലെന്നു അധികാരത്തോടുകൂടി ഞാൻ പറയുന്നു.

മോൺ ജോസഫ് പ്രാറ്റ് (കോടീശ്വരനായ ഹിന്ദു വ്യാപാരി) എന്റെ തോൽ വളരെ മുട്ടലമാണ്. യൂറോപ്പിലും അമേരിക്കയിലും ഉണ്ടാക്കപ്പെട്ട എല്ലാ ഉത്തമ സോപ്പുകളും ഉപയോഗിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഗോദ്രെജ് സോപ്പുകൾ അവ എല്ലാറ്റിലും മേന്മയായതന്നെ. യൂറോപ്പിൽ വെച്ചു ഉപയോഗിച്ചാൽ ഞാൻ അവയെ ഇന്ത്യയിൽ നിന്നു കൂടെ കൊണ്ടുപോകുന്നു.

മേജർ ടി.കിൻസൻ (ഗവർണ്ണമെന്റിന്റെ രസതന്ത്രശാസ്ത്രജ്ഞൻ). ഗോദ്രെജ് സോപ്പുകൾ സകല ഗുണങ്ങളും പരിപൂർണ്ണമായി തികഞ്ഞവയാണ്.

Figure 5.2 Mathrubhumi Weekly 1932 June 6

As a continuation to what Tagore endorsed, Annie Besant, whose name had a suffix called ‘Madamma’<sup>29</sup>, too stressed on the swadeshi aspect of Godrej soap. Though Annie Besant was a British citizen, she was a strong advocate of self-rule in India, and she was a part of many ventures in Indian freedom movement. Her statement reads; “Godrej soap is the best in the world. When you have such quality soaps here in India, it is because of the lack of patriotism in you that you buy imported soaps”.

<sup>29</sup> Madamma is term used to denote foreign woman.

These two testimonies primarily focused on the swadeshi aspect of the product. Although there is no direct appeal to buy it on patriotism ground, the message is clear here that it meant to evoke patriotism in the minds of people who view and read this advertisement. Soap as a new object came with new notions of cleansing body, and here this advertisement shows how body in a new markets economy becomes another realm for debate on issues of political significance.

The testimony of Babu Shiva Prasad Gupta, who hailed from a wealthy landed family in Kashi, reads, “He used soaps specially made for him from Europe all these period. On his request, Mr Godrej made special soaps for him, and from then on he stopped using foreign soaps. He wrote back to them asking how Godrej soap is available at a cheap cost”. Apart from the quality of Godrej soaps, this testimony adds another reason why on should buy godrej, that it is available at a reasonable price. Similarly, another testimony used here is of Morne Joseph Prague, who is a rich man from France. The testimony reads, “I have very soft skin. I have used all best quality soaps made in America and Europe. Godrej Soap is the best of all. I have taken them along with me to use while I am in Europe”

There was a desire among western educated Indian elites to imitate anything and everything related to European style so as to cover up the inferior status of Indians in front of Europeans and precisely, due to the same reason Indian elites always opted for soaps imported from Europe or America (Kaur, 2010, p. 254). However, these testimonies of two rich men from India and France give a different story. The advertisements have shown elites from Indian and even from Europe preferring Indian product over European and American products. This is done to prove the self-worth of

Indian products by showing how superior is this soap than any other soaps manufactured in the world.

Other two testimonies are from chemists who endorsed this soap on the basis of scientific examinations they have done on the godrej soap. Carl Lusurts, introduced as a renowned chemist from Germany, says, “I use your soap regularly. I have examined the soap scientifically many times. I hereby tell with an authority that the quality this soap has in ensuring good health for the body is unmatched with any other soaps”. Similarly, the other Chemist, Major Dickinson, who is also a government chemist says, “Godrej soap has all the qualities soap should have”. In these two testimonies, science is the common factor that emphasized with great importance. That too it had to be two foreign chemists, and one is serving the government. While the first two testimonies appealed on the ground of soap being Indian and the other two showed even richest in the country and the world are opting this, then why not you? the last two appealed on the question of scientificity of the product.

Another advertisement for Godrej soap (figure 5.3) promised cleanliness, health and beauty. Though the target group is Malayalam speaking people, the advertisement wrote the brand name in Hindi, Urdu and English so as to highlight the pan Indian nature of the brand. It ensured natural beauty of the skin and good health as it was prepared with natural herbs and vegetable oils.

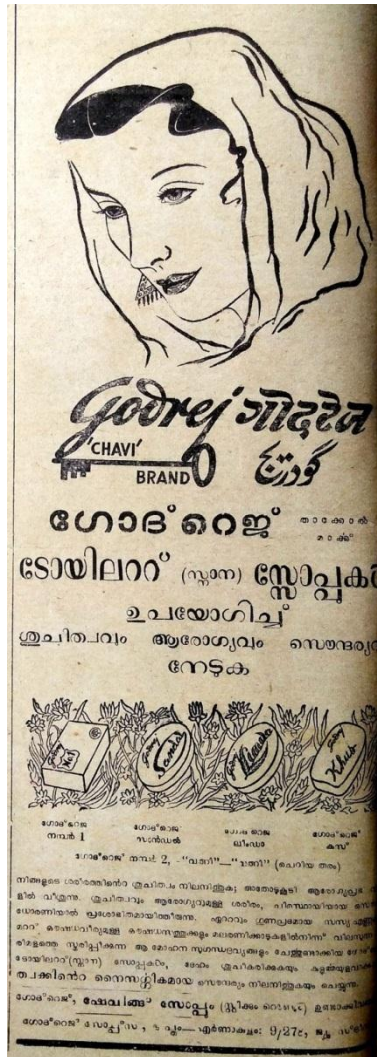


Figure 5.3 Mathrubhumi weekly 13<sup>th</sup> April 1947

However, at the same time, there were advertisements (figure 5.4 and 5.5) which tried to make their presence visible by critiquing tall claims that many other soap advertisements had flaunted proudly. Advertisement like the one discussed above (figure 5.2) had full of claims like being scientifically tested and rational. This new set of advertisements questioned such claims and called them false and unreal. In such an advertisement (figure 5.4) the caption says “this soap won’t cure indigestion”. While it is obvious no soap can cure issue of indigestion, the caption’s intention is a critique of the

other genre of soap advertisements which claimed to have super powers for the soap advertised so as to bring drastic change in the look and health.

ഇതു സോപ്പ് നിങ്ങളുടെ  
ദഹനക്കേട്  
മാറ്റുകയില്ല!

ഞങ്ങളുടെ കാണി സോപ്പ് നിങ്ങളുടെ തപക്കിനെ വെൽവെറെ  
എന്നപോലെ മാട്ടിവമാക്കുമെന്നു ഉറപ്പു നൽകുവാൻ ഞങ്ങൾക്കു  
കഴിയുന്നതല്ല. ഞങ്ങൾ കാണി അപ്രകാരമുള്ളതാണെന്നു  
പ്രഖ്യാപിക്കുന്നതും ഇല്ല. ഞങ്ങൾ അപ്രകാരം അവകാശപ്പെട്ടി  
രുന്ന എങ്കിൽ, നിങ്ങളുടെ ദഹനമില്ലായ്മയേയും കാണി ശമിപ്പിക്കു  
മെന്നു ഞങ്ങൾക്കു ശരിയായി പറയാമായിരുന്നു.

എന്നാൽ ഞങ്ങൾ ഉറപ്പു നൽകുന്നതെന്തെന്നാൽ  
കാണി ഒരു മികച്ചതരം വാസന സോപ്പാകുന്നു.  
അതു ശരീരശുചിത്വം നിർമ്മിക്കുന്നു.  
അതു തപക്കിന്റെ നൈസർഗ്ഗികമായ സൗന്ദര്യം  
യൂതിന്നു ഹാനികരമാകുന്നതല്ല.  
അതിന്റെ പരിമളം തൃപ്തികരവും ആനന്ദമേറേ  
ഉളവാക്കുന്നതും ആകുന്നു.

സുപ്രസിദ്ധ സോപ്പിന് ഉല്പന്നങ്ങളിൽ സുഗന്ധമേറിയവയുണ്ടാക്കി  
ല്ല. മാത്രം സുന്ദരസോപ്പുകൾ, വാഷിംഗ് സോപ്പുകൾ, സോപ്പിന്  
പേരിൽ സോപ്പ്, ഹോംബിൽ ബ്രാൻഡ് വന്നസോപ്പി മുതലായവയും  
ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നതാണ്.

**കാണി**  
സോപ്പ്  
ഇണക്കിൽ അടിച്ചിരിക്കുകയുള്ളൂ.

സുപ്രസിദ്ധ ഓയിൽ മിൽസ് ലിമിറ്റഡ്, കോലംകോ.  
സെയിൽസുഡിപ്പോ: ബസാർറോഡ്, മട്ടാഞ്ചേരി, കൊച്ചി

Figure 5.4 Mathrubhumi 1947 November 23

The description in the advertisement further states that,

“We cannot assure you that our ‘kanti’ soap will make your skin as soft as velvet. Neither do we proclaim ‘Kanti’ is like that.. If we had such claims, we could have said that it can cure your indigestion too. However, we assure you that ‘Kanti’ is a good soap that provides you scent. It helps you keep yourself clean and hygiene. It is not harmful to the natural beauty of the skin. Its fragrance can make you happy and satisfied.”

Another advertisement (figure 5.5) of the same ‘Kanti Soap’ reiterates the same point of what it can promise and what it cannot like other soaps had promised of beauty, good shape, love and sound sleep. While ‘Kanti Soap’ does not promise any of these, it stresses generally on good health and specifically on the fragrance and scent it can offer to one’s body. However, it is ironic that the soap brand name is ‘kanti’ which means beauty in Malayalam. The advertisement is using the visual presentation of the claims that other soaps do have. Although it is criticizing these soap advertisements on the grounds their false claims they have, these advertisements indeed put forth a visual representational schema of the body that other soaps had offered. These visual tropes have contributed in the process of imagining a modern body at least on the visual level, though ‘Kanti soap’ advertisement tried to deconstruct the idea of modern healthy body in a different way.

Unlike other soaps, these soaps promised fragrance and scent to the consumers. The smell became a matter of concern in India with the introduction of British notions of corporeal cleanliness. Indians who used different oils and other methods like yogurts in traditional grooming processes were seen with greatest contempt and disgust by British in India during late nineteenth century. Indian elites in their urge to emulate British sensibilities too bended themselves in making Indians smell better. The smell of yogurt and natural oil was never a problem for Indians during pre-British era (Kaur, 2010, p.

259-262). This notion of smell and hygiene brought the fragrance and smell into the domain of advertisements too. The healthy and beautiful body was imagined to be fragrant too and smell like Jasmine and sandalwood.



Figure 5.5 Mathrubhumi weekly 1947 April 13

So, here these advertisements have brought the product of soap from an object which was fetishized as something that can offer the consumers a change in terms of



having skin as soft as velvet to something which gives good health and fragrance. Here, the advertisement of 'Kanti Soap' is trying to further fetishize the product by de-fetishizing the same in another way. In both cases, it is the body which is at the centre-stage. The question here is all about how the body of a modern subject looks like and smells like. This takes the advertisement into another level of sensory perception, i.e., smell. Though it is not appealing by using the physical presence of the smell, the appeal is solely on the basis good smell it offers.

Advertisements by these two soap companies, Godrej and Swasthik oil Mills Ltd., defined the body in two different ways though there are similarities. With the new sensibilities of hygiene and cleanliness, these soaps imagined a modern body from different perspectives. While advertisements became a site for these different imaginations of a modern body, advertisements of Godrej soap focused more on beauty and health benefits of their soap. Kanti soaps by criticizing such claims exhorted the potential consumers to buy it as a soap which can give good smell and fragrance.

### **Stitching the modernity: Many ways of advertising modern clothes**

Clothing was an important site of enquiry for historians who studied the developments in early twentieth-century India, especially in connection with Indian nationalism and its entanglement with empire and colonial modernity. Gandhi's swadeshi movement and promotion of Khadi became an instant hit as a matter of self-reliance, and a political statement against the decision of empire to import machine made clothes from Britain which ultimately destabilized the local cottage cloth industries in India. In this context scholars like Bernard S. Cohn (1997), C.A. Bayly (1986) Susan Bean (1989) Emma Tarlo

(1996) and Arjun Appadurai (1986) have discussed the crucial role that cloth played in political scenario of that time.

Since the British took over as the rulers of India, British have tried to look separately from colonised Indians physically, socially and culturally. Naturally, they dressed in a way which would clearly indicate their separateness from their Indian subjects (Cohn, 1997,p. 111).The aversion towards Indians in terms of their dressing practices began from the very initial days of their time here in India. British officials arrived at Indian coasts in Madras and Bombay were surprised to see almost nil dressed or semi naked Indian male and women. Indian Hindu men were predominantly seen wearing single unstitched cloth, mostly cotton and occasionally silk dress.

However, later on, Indians especially educated Indians and government officials from Indian origin, started wearing shirts and coats that were associated with notion of modern and this modern consciousness is an integral component of colonial modernity (Tarlo, 1996, p. 9 and Innis, 1915,p. 253). As part of embracing modernity educated elites tried to imitate the western style dress. Though this fascination with western style of cloth was initially among the educated the educated elites and native Indians who were in British government services, various legislations by the colonial Government and the activities of missionary groups have brought about changes in the dressing patterns of lower castes Hindus and other religious communities in Kerala.

### **Dressing practices in nineteenth century Kerala**

By the beginning of the twentieth century, it is evident from many contemporary works that there is a change in the clothing pattern in Kerala. Wearing stitched cloth was not in

practice there. Baskaranunni in his *Nineteenth century Kerala* has written in detail about the dressing practices in Kerala. Religion, caste and status dictated the amount of dress one could wear, be it, women or men, in Kerala until early twentieth century. One could understand at the first instance that to which caste one person belongs to by looking at the dress he or she wore (Baskaranunni 1982, p. 62, Kumar, 2016, p. 4).

While the practice of wearing unstitched clothes was prevalent among Hindus in Kerala, Christians and Muslims wore stitched clothes. Hindu men including elite Nair men and upper caste men did not wear upper cloth. They wore a three piece cloth, covering the lower part with the first piece and shawl over the shoulder and the third piece as the headgear. Lower caste Hindu women and even Nair women to an extent were not allowed to cover their breasts as the Nambudiri women could. While it is already being said that the practise of stitched cloth was not prevalent among Hindus, Muslim and Christian women wore stitched upper cloth called *kuppayam*, a tight fitting jacket. In fact it was required of them to wear shirt or blouse (Devika, 2005a, p. 474).

One of the main realms that logic of commodity and market fuelled by British imperialism in association with missionaries across the globe had focused was the human body. The civilizing mission had its early tentacles on natives by cleaning, housing, curing and clothing their bodies (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997, p. 220). British with the influence of Christian Missionaries who were very active Kerala, especially in Travancore, took proactive steps to bring about positive changes in giving rights to wear decent cloth for lower castes, especially lower caste women from Nadar community in Travancore. This attempt by British officials in association with Missionaries was met with stiff resistance from the Nair elites and from the Travancore State itself. Many

Nadar women were attacked by upper caste men and Nair men in market places when they came out wearing upper clothes like that of upper caste, and Nair women used to wear. This had resulted violent outbreaks in Travancore, and as a result, Government of Travancore had withdrawn the provision given to lower caste women to wear upper cloth like upper caste women. However, they were allowed to wear jackets like Christian and Muslim women used to wear (Cohn, 1997, p. 141) However, the lower castes including Nadar women were not happy with it, and the fight for the right to wear upper clothes continued from 1813 to 1859 which later came to be known as Channar revolt.

Activities of missionaries played a pivotal role in this assertion of lower castes to have rights to wear decent clothes. Opening up schools for lower castes by Missionaries in co-operation with British Government across Kerala, be it in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, had changed the attitude of people towards issues like the right to dress and educate. Often people from lower castes saw conversion to either Christianity or Islam as a window to acquire social mobility and greater status and self-respect compared to their erstwhile social position in the Hindu religious frame. To have a right to dress decently have had significant place in this process of conversion as Christians and Muslims were allowed to wear full dress, unlike lower caste Hindus. Precisely due to this reason that phrases, like *toppi idal* (wearing cap) for men and *kuppayamiduka* (wearing jacket) for women, were popular during those times among the newly converts in Islam (Aslam, 2013, p. 57). In the context of conversion to Islam in Malabar during eighteenth and nineteenth century, work of Stephen Dale throws light upon how wearing upper cloth and cap was a part of the ritual ceremonies of conversion (Dale, 1990, p. 172). New converts' allegiance to the new faith by wearing breast cloth and cap had infuriated upper caste

*Jenmis* in places like Malabar as they could not take the scene that the lower caste tenant who worked in their land came wearing full dress especially women covering their breast. To have seen lower caste women wearing upper cloth was perceived as sign of disrespect by upper caste men. Even Nair women were not allowed to cover the upper part in front of upper caste men. As a sign of respect, Nair women used to take off the upper cloth while they encountered upper caste men.

Nair women resorted to wearing blouses as an act of defiance of tradition and also as the adoption of modern dress. However, Devika argued that women blouses cannot be always read in tune with a social reform; rather, it was also about aestheticisation of female body to make the female appealing to men for whom the woman had to be acceptable in this way in a de-sexualised space of modern home (Devika, 2005a,p. 465)

This revolutionary trend in clothing practices, especially among lower castes, gave way for the profession of tailoring and needlework towards the end of nineteenth century. Although there were communities like *Mannaan* and *Paanan* who were involved in stitching work, they did not stitch cloth but only pillow covers and money purse (Baskaranunni, 1982,p. 62). However, growing popularity and demand for stitched cloth among people in Kerala, especially Malabar, was used by various missionary establishments which were active in Kerala during that time. Weaving mills and tailoring shops were opened in different parts of Kerala. Weaving mills were opened at major centres like Cannanore and Calicut by Basel Mission (Innis, 1915,p. 252-253). Women in Malabar were trained in needlework by Zenana mission, though missionary women from Zenana mission saw this as a way to gain access to native women (Aslam, 2018,pp. 54-55).

Apart from being a social reform, attempts by missionaries and the colonial government clearly had commercial and economic interest. Citing the argument by Reverend Samuel Mateer of the London Missionary, Cohn explains;

“by trying to overthrow the prescriptive rules imposed by the Travancore state, a wider market for machine-manufactured cloth would be created, Mateer argued, so that decency and proper dress would be linked with the expansion of the markets for British Industrialists, and all the this could be done in the name of the advancement of civilization” ( Cohn, 1997,p. 143).

It is undisputedly clear that the whole discourse about clothing and wearing decent and modern dress had market dimension to it. With the growing demand and interest in stitched cloth, marketization too became an imperative factor. The print advertisement came into the scene in this context. Advertisements appealed to the consumers using various techniques by utilizing the trend of the time. As it was discussed earlier, to cloth decently was a part of the project of modernity in which British government and missionaries had taken special interest. Modern dress like that of European style became a trend. This trend was clearly visible in the advertisements as well when advertisers decided to make use of it. Advertisements carried messages like the promises of modern dress like that of western style and look.

While advertisement of machine made, clothes were missing, at least in native newspapers, advertisements of tailoring shops with the promises of stitching modern clothes were seen in newspapers and weeklies run by various local leaders. In such an advertisement (figure 5.6) stitching work of any style- from European and American style to the types of national style for women, kids and men- were assured. This advertisement

was a tailoring shop called ‘The tailoring house’ at Trivandrum. Tailoring shops were opened in various parts of Kerala.

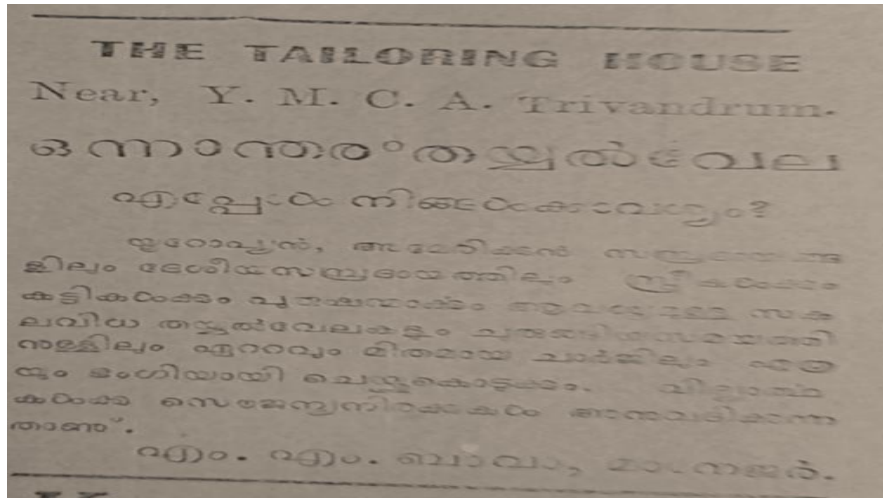


Figure 5.6 Prabhodhakan 1930 July 23

**Coat and suit: Imagining a modern self through dress**

While newspapers like *Mathrubhumi* had promoting nationalism as one of its main objectives and there was an attempt to promote swadeshi items including swadeshi clothes in it, it had also featured advertisements that carried the messages to sell clothes like blazers and suits, which are mostly identified with western dressing sensibility (Figure 5.7). Visual vocabularies attached to these advertisements contributed to imagining a modern self and its attire. Antony Giddens (1990) talked about how an individual self was invented with onset of modernity. In modern societies, the individual self has to make choices as to what should wear and what should be the overall lifestyle. Mass media play a pivotal role as the more mediation changes the situational geography of the social life as media makes people audience to things that are not physically present for them.

Advertisements of ‘The Tellichery tailoring house’ (figure 5.7 and 5.8) advertised exclusively blazers and coats. The picture of a man, visibly a European man, wearing a modern outfit of suit and coat is given in one of the advertisements of this tailoring shop.



Figure 5.7 Mathrubhumi Weekly 15<sup>th</sup> October 1934

While it is already discussed the whole issue about clothing was not just an issue about the right to dress decently, rather it also talks volumes about the discourse of modernity as to how a modern man and woman should dress like. Sujith Parayil has observed “Colonial modern objects such as coats, shoes, slippers, ties, clocks, etc.



certainly had their own aura as power-laden symbols of colonialism (Parayil, 2003, p. 108).” Thus, the project of colonial modernity had always operated through the cultural and social spheres where colonized natives were promised of a modern subjectivity by embracing modernity. Clothing was yet another realm where colonial modernity had its impact.

Bringing a modern sensibility in dressing was about creating an urge and desire for western dressing among the natives which precisely can be seen in the advertisement of clothes and tailoring shops. Advertisements of ‘the Telichery Tailoring house’ (figure 5.7 and 5.8) from the name of the shop to the image and content used in these advertisements reflect the intention of the advertisers to create a desire among the readers to dress like a European subject. The shop’s name in English, The Telichery Tailoring House’ is wilfully kept instead of its Malayalam words. If this shop is from Kozhikode, another shop from Trivandrum (figure5.6) too had an English name for it, ‘The Tailoring House’.

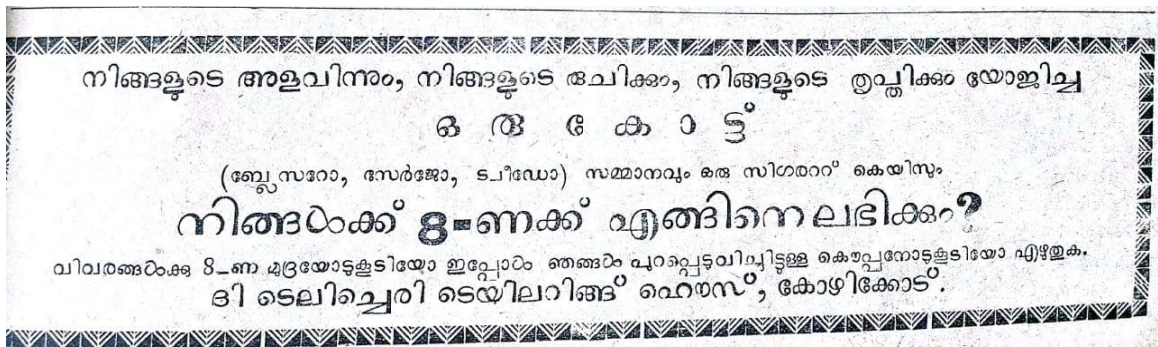


Figure 5. 8 Mathrubhumi weekly 1934 September 3

Apart from the English name of the shops, the picture of a man dressed up in a coat with a hat and walking stick promises a gentleman look of a western man to the

potential customers. Here, this image is contributing to the visual imagination of a modern subject apart from the primary objective of the advertisement that is to sell the product advertised. In tandem with the image, the 'one coat' caption is shown with big letters in the text of the advertisement as it indicates the advertiser wanted to emphasize that it is not yet another garment, but a coat which gives a modern outlook. Though it is the advertisement of the tailoring house where in modern clothes are shown, there is an attempt from the advertiser to bring other objects which were associated with the idea of modern self. Here in the case of advertisement of 'Telichery tailoring shop' (figure 5.7), it came as a package with the notions of about modern style and look. Apart from the coat, it also comes with other signifiers of modernity like shoe, hat and tie he has worn and the stick in the hand which animated the fantasised image of a modern man. The offer of a packet of cigarette as a gift along with the coat completes the image of a modern masculine man.

### **Watches and mediated notions of Time**

Watch is yet another modern object that carried many meanings in it during early twentieth century Kerala. Watches and clocks have been studied as one of the objects which brought in modern sensibility as to everyday life in modern Kerala were concerned. While watches primarily introduced a new notion about time, punctuality and modern work culture it was also about being modern to have a watch worn. This new notion of time and punctuality was introduced to the people in Kerala in various ways in which print advertisements play a pivotal role. This section discusses how advertisement of watch as a modern object carried an important place in the socio cultural domain in late colonial Kerala.

EP Thompson (1967) called watches/clocks as 'Devil's Mill', precisely due to the logic of watches in disciplining the body of the labour force during industrial capitalism by inculcating the notion of time. With the subsequent growth and penetration of capitalism, homogenization of time was introduced and development in the field of transportation and communication like Railway and telegraph during the nineteenth century brought in the standardization of time (Prasad, 2013). Standardization of time became necessary with more people moving from place to another as the transportation and communications systems improved. Thus the social life acquired a new order once the time began to be calculated in a standard fashion (Zerubavel, 1982,p. 2). As the changes in notions of time were essential for urban individuals to co-op up with the mechanised industrial system, the changes were felt in rural societies too. With the Railways and steamers having scheduled timings played as an educating tool for people from rural societies for learning the ethos of punctuality and timekeeping that modern civilisation envisaged. (Mukherjee, 1943,p. 50)

This homogenization and standardization of time paved the way for popularization of the time measuring instruments like clock and watches. Although the clock was in use before also, the time in that clock was always a matter of dispute. Mostly during those times, time was calculated as the direct reflection of solar time which became defunct after the standardization of time. Similarly many other ways of calculating time and day ceased to be relevant with the standardization of time. This new way of calculating time by using precise location of the places in the globe represented rationality and science which were known as the corner stone of modern civilization (Zerubavel, 1982, p. 20). This in a way replaced the older system of calculating time

which was on considering season and changes in nature. This was meant to structure the everyday life where the idea of stipulated work time, holidays and leisure time, etc. were fixed. While the older format had no fixity in these matters, with the clock and calendar, modern societies were tuned into this new order. (Mukherjee, 1943, p. 51).

Time is money concept was spread across the British Empire in the world during late nineteenth and early twentieth century. More than from time keeping, clocks or clock towers symbolized the colonial rule and the whole lot of promises that colonial rule made for the colonized. Christian missionaries' activities in colonies across British Empire played a significant role in disseminating the ideas of empire in the colonies. In the context of colonial Kerala, Sanal Mohan has explained how the new habits of daily prayers and attendance in the Churches and schools established by missionaries brought new conceptions about time among lower castes (Mohan, 2006, p. 6). However, from a different perspective, Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) cite the instance of the London Missionary societies, one of the earliest foot soldiers of the British colonial empire, sending a clock to the first Church in Tswana in South Africa in 1818. Comaroff and Comaroff argued;

“No ordinary clock-its hours were struck by strutting British soldiers carved of wood-it became the measure of a historical process in the making. Clearly meant to proclaim the value of time in Christian, civilized communities, the contraption had an altogether unexpected impact. For the Africans insisted that the "carved ones" were emissaries of a distant king who, with missionary connivance, would place them in a "house of bondage." (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991,p. xi)

Similarly, in the case of colonial India, Clocks and clock towers were constructed as a symbol of colonial rule and the supremacy of the Raj. Thomas Metcalf (1984) has

argued that clock tower was one of the architectural monuments that British built in India after 1857 Mutiny as a mark of colonial ideology and British Empire. While imposing the Victorian notion of time upon Indians, whom British considered as mostly lazy and lethargic, clock towers were also meant to declare the arrival of new conquerors and new beginning (Metcalf, 1984, pp. 55-56). British made it sure that clock towers were there as an important part of colonial architecture in all major cities in India. Clock towers were constructed, as Sanjay Srivastava argues, with in the political and cultural setting which defined and animated the raj for whom the ‘timeless east’ was always a cohort of natives to be disciplined within the discursive practices of colonialism (Srivastava, 1998, p. 41). If Foucault’s idea of panopticon represented all seeing eye of the state power, the clock towers played out, as a reverse panopticon, the opposite function of being seen and attended to so as to animate the colonial power (ibid, p. 42). Thus clock tower can be understood as one of the colonial apparatus through which colonial knowledge and its ideology were manifested.

Ever since time keeping and clock towers gained an important place in the political and cultural domains in colonial India, clock towers became an invincible part of public places in major cities in India. Moreover, control over such clock towers was seen as having control over the time of the city of time was an important part of the discourse about time keeping. The increasing visibility of clocks and watches served this interest effectively. With the standardization of time and subsequent tuning of day to day life, it opened up the possibilities for making the time keeping and having control over the same as an important source of power. For instance, Jim Masselos (2017) narrates the debate in Bombay University Senate during late nineteenth century on who would determine the

time in Bombay university clock tower, the most prominent clock in the city. Masselos argued that whoever controlled this clock tower had control over the city time (Masselos, 2017,p. 283). After a heated debate, Bombay time had the final say. The tussle between standard time and Bombay time had started in the second half of nineteenth century, and it went on till 1955 when Bombay time was officially merged with Indian Standard time. Throughout this period, it was a matter of fight between British Indian government and various institutions in Bombay who followed Bombay time. Any attempt to enforce standard time was met with stiff resistance from people in Bombay who found a feeling of belongingness with the Bombay time. This had indeed created a lot of confusions in various aspects of their life especially on occasions when these two time zones had intersected like it is the case of Indian railways. Bombay time which was calculated as per the geographical location of Bombay in the global map was 38 minutes and 50 seconds behind the standard time (Masselos, 2017,p. 281).

The whole discourse about time and its importance created by British political and cultural apparatuses made ‘being punctual’ as one of the desirable qualities of modern subject imagined in late colonial India. Srivastava asserted that,

“Clock-towers marked, both literally and symbolically, the route the native might take to the realms of modernity; they represented the march of progress, man’s (*sic*) control over the natural environment and, ultimately, the management of human destiny itself.” (Srivastava, 1998, p. 42)

One of the prominent figures in India during the colonial time who were very particular about timekeeping was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi did not compromise on his habit of time keeping and his liking towards watches. Though he was

a strong advocate of Swadeshi products, he still used watches made in England. He wrote, “If the emphasis were on all foreign *things*, it would be racial, parochial, and wicked. The emphasis is on foreign *cloth*. The restriction makes all the difference in the world. I do not want to shut out English lever watches” (Tendulkar, 1951, p. 75). In his early years as a law student in London, he had lived a life of an English gentleman wearing a suit, a top hat, a silver-headed cane, a double watch chain of gold and to improve his artistic abilities, taking lessons in violin, dancing and the elocution (Parekh, 2001, p. 3 and Puri). While watch was an essential part when he adopted an Englishmen’s look, he did not abandon his watch when he adopted a dress code of loin cloth as he entered the arena of freedom struggle. Since he did not have a pocket he had attached with his dhoti with a loop of Khadi string (Martyris, 2014). So, as a student in London, the clock was more of a part of his ‘gentleman’ look, and years later as he was busily involved in politics, time meant differently to him as being punctual was seen as an essential quality for a person like him.

It is understood from the experience of Gandhi that watches and clocks have had many meanings, both symbolic and utilitarian meaning. Print advertisements did indeed always boast about these qualities of watches and clocks so as to appeal potential consumers in different ways possible. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, advertisers use various techniques in making this process of advertising more appealing. As the main intention is to create a desire in the minds of the potential consumers, these advertisements highlight the symbolic values attached to various products including watches. In the advertisement of ‘West End watch’ (figure 5.9) came in Mathrubhumi weekly which has a caption like ‘Occasion of Diwali is also about giving gifts’, gaze of

consumers were invited to see how watch can be an object that can be given as gift. The content went on saying,

“..Select a watch that suits the recipient (to whom is the gift). There is no other thing like a good watch which is useful and good to give as a gift. And if that watch is ‘west end watch’, it would be a more acceptable gift. Because, more than having the utility of a watch, it is also an ornamental piece that can be worn on the hand.”

Here, this piece of content in the advertisement is clearly defines what did a watch mean during that period. While it is not ignoring the time aspect of a watch, it is emphasizing more on watch as an object of fashion and also as an object that can be given as a gift. Diwali is an occasion of gifts and sweets. Although the Diwali celebration is not as grand as it is in north and central India, it has been celebrated in Kerala in as well. The logic of bringing Diwali into the frame could be a result of the particular location from where this watch was coming. The ‘West end watch company’ is located in Bombay and Calcutta, two prominent cities in Colonial India. By using the reference to Diwali in the caption, it is expected to bring a whole lot of nostalgia associated with Diwali celebration. Besides, it brought many people who used to wait eagerly for Diwali into the frame of advertisement and reminded them that Diwali is also about giving gift. However, for the manufacturers of the watch, this idea of giving watch as a Diwali gift is yet another way to create a desire among consumers so as to persuade them into the consumption of the watch. Reference of Diwali is brought to make the watch as desirable object.



- 26 - 1932 ഒക്ടോബർ



**ദീപാവലികാലം സമ്മാനം കൊടുക്കുന്ന കാലമാണ്**

പ്രതിഗ്രാഹകന്മാർക്കു പറ്റിയ ഒരു "വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ്" വാച്ച് തിരഞ്ഞെടുക്കുക!

ഒരു നല്ല വാച്ച് നോക്കുക പറ്റിയ ഒരു കൂടുതൽ ഉപയോഗപ്രദമായ ഒരു സമ്മാനം കണ്ടെത്തുക. "വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ്" വാച്ച് ഒരു "വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ്" കൂടി അതിനോട് അനുബന്ധം ഉള്ളതാണ്. സ്വീകരണപരമായി നല്ലതും. എന്തെന്നാൽ വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് വാച്ച് സൂക്ഷ്മമായ ഒരു വ്യക്തിത്വപരമായ പറ്റികൾ കൊണ്ട് ഒരു അലങ്കാരവുമാണ്.

**ഒരു "വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ്" വാച്ച് നൽകുക.**

വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് വാച്ച് വെറും ഒരു സമ്മാനം അല്ല. അത് ഒരു പ്രത്യേകതയുള്ളതാണ്. അത് ഒരു സമ്മാനം മാത്രമല്ല, അത് ഒരു സമ്മാനം കൂടിയാണ്.

**വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് വാച്ച് കമ്പനി, ബോംബെ, കൽക്കത്ത.**

**WEST END WATCH CO**  
BOMBAY CALCUTTA



മുകളിലെ വാച്ച് "വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ്" വാച്ച്

നിഷ്കല വെള്ളി	₹86
റോമൻ നമ്പർ	₹80
9 പ്ലാറ്റ്ഫോം	₹62
14 പ്ലാറ്റ്ഫോം	₹76
18 പ്ലാറ്റ്ഫോം	₹91

താഴെത്തന്നെ

നിഷ്കല വെള്ളി	₹88
റോമൻ നമ്പർ	₹80
9 പ്ലാറ്റ്ഫോം	₹62
14 പ്ലാറ്റ്ഫോം	₹76
18 പ്ലാറ്റ്ഫോം	₹91

Figure 5.9 Mathrubhumi Weekly 1932 October 31

Here, the consumers are offered the best object that can be given as gift. Why watch should be offered as a gift is an obvious question here. Leaving aside the significance of the occasion like Diwali in the case of advertisement under discussion, it is pertinent to ask what it actually means to gift something to someone. In explaining the social psychology of gifts, Schwartz has argued that “gifts are one of the ways in which the pictures that others have of us in their minds are transmitted” (Shwartz, 1967, p. 1). Taking this argument into account and reading along with the discursive context in which the advertisement is placed gives us a clear picture. In the advertisement (figure 5.9) having the caption ‘diwali is the occasion to give gift’ the description begins with an appeal to the potential consumers that “buy a watch that suits the recipient”. In that case,

going by the argument of Shwartz (1967), the social psychology in which the watch as a gift that suits the recipient is to be unearthed. The watch carries specific symbolic values in the socio cultural context of Kerala during the early twentieth century, in which new objects like, that of watch were presented as a desirable object that would give them a modern outlook and perspective. The symbolic value attached to the watches is presented well in these advertisements. Here, advertisements become yet another medium in defining what an object of fashioning and decoration is. Precisely due to this symbolic value that watch has it has been chosen as an object to give gift for the dearest people in an occasion like Diwali. So, as Shwartz argued that picture of the recipient is reflected in the gift chosen by the gifter, the advertisement is suggesting to the one who is going to gift that watch is the best gift that that suits the recipient, because the recipient along with the one who is gifting is also imagined as a modern subject who has a desire for modern objects like watch.

Moreover, the visual representation of a watch wearing woman makes this advertisement an important one. Apart from the caption, an image of the woman who is in Saree visibly operating a watch with a pleasant face seems meant to give a euphoric feeling in the viewer. Image of woman is a common thing in advertisements precisely to attract the attention of predominantly male consumers at that time. Srivatsan has argued while explaining Indian advertisements during late twentieth century that having an image of woman without making any connection whatsoever with the product advertised reflects that the advertisement is served to appeal male viewer who is seen as the potential consumer by the advertiser (Srivatsan, 2000, p. 128). While Srivatsan analysed contemporary advertisements, advertisements from early twentieth century do not say a

different story. Saree worn woman had been the favourite model in many advertisements throughout that period, irrespective of the product advertised.

**മനോഹരവും ഏറ്റവും വിശ്വാസയോഗ്യവുമായ വാച്ചുകൾ.**

വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് വാച്ചുകൾ മനോഹരമായ കളിൽ അയോക്സൈഡ് കെമിസ്ട്രി ഉപയോഗിച്ചു. അവ ഏറ്റവും വിശ്വാസയോഗ്യമാണ്. മാത്രമല്ല എത്രയും വിശേഷപ്പെട്ട സാമഗ്രികളിൽ ഉണ്ടാക്കപ്പെട്ടതും അയോക്സൈഡ് കെമിസ്ട്രി ഉപയോഗിച്ചതും ആണ്. മികയായ വിലകൾ കൂടാതെ വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് വാച്ചുകൾ ആണ് ഏറ്റവും ഉത്തമം. വാച്ച് ശാസ്ത്രീയമായ ഘടനയിലുള്ളതാണ്. നിങ്ങൾക്കു കൃതികൾ മാത്രമല്ല, ഗുണത്തിലും നല്ലതായ കരുതലും വേണ്ടതായ അയോക്സൈഡ് കെമിസ്ട്രി ഉപയോഗിച്ചുള്ള കമ്പനിക്കാരിൽ നിന്നുമാത്രം വാങ്ങുക.

**വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് വാച്ചുകമ്പനി, ബോംബെ, കൽക്കത്ത.**

**WEST END WATCH CO**  
BOMBAY CALCUTTA

**സ്വപയർ "ഡി" (മുകുളി)**

സ്റ്റേർലിങ് വെള്ളി	രൂ. 42
റോൾഡ് ഗോൾഡ്	രൂ. 48
9 ക്യാരറ്റ് സ്വർണ്ണം	രൂ. 72
14 ക്യാരറ്റ് സ്വർണ്ണം	രൂ. 88
18 ക്യാരറ്റ് സ്വർണ്ണം	രൂ. 104

**ബോമ്പെ "എ" (താഴെ)**

9 ക്യാരറ്റ് സ്വർണ്ണം	രൂ. 64
14 ക്യാരറ്റ് സ്വർണ്ണം	രൂ. 77
18 ക്യാരറ്റ് സ്വർണ്ണം	രൂ. 90

സൗജന്യമായി കേടുമുണ്ടാകാതെ ഉടകാറ്റാലാതിനാവശ്യപ്പെടുക

Figure 5.10 Mathrubhumi Weekly December 26 1932

Coming into another advertisement for the watch from the same company (figure 5.10), the visual representation remains the same. The lady in the Saree is looking at the

watch, most likely checking the time. "This time it is captioned as 'beautiful and reliable watches'. The description goes on saying,

“West End watches have been made in good stock with beautiful models. They are the most reliable ones too. Moreover, this has been manufactured using the best materials available and will last for longer time. It is good to buy a West End watch at an affordable price. Watch is scientifically manufactured equipment. If you want to buy things of good quality and also good in look, you should buy it only from companies who are experienced in the relevant field.”

From the caption to the description of what the advertisement has tried is to emphasize on the scientific aspect of the watch apart from its beauty aspect and persuade the potential consumer to make a rational choice. The choice becomes rational when the one who is going to buy this watch is expected to make her or his choice by looking at the scientificity of the object in its manufacturing which makes it a lasting and reliable object and hence no chance of error in showing the right time. The tag of 'reliable' is a common pattern that is seen in advertisement of watches at this time. When this object is presented as scientific and reliable, this is done against some other system of time measurement which by all probability is not so scientific and reliable and hence, not rational though there is no direct reference to the same anywhere in the advertisement. Prior to clock and watches, the system of time measurement was depended on nature like looking at sun and seasons. Eviatar Zerubavel (1982, p. 19) argued that this shift from nature to rationality was seen as one of the features of modern society. In that case, here the traditional ways of measuring time are discredited so as to make this watch a desirable object, an object that also passes on the ethos of science and rationality.

**താഴോൽ കൊടുക്കാതെ നടക്കുന്ന വാച്ച്.**

വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് "വിൽവേഗ്" വാച്ച് നിങ്ങളുടെ കൈക്കൽ കൊടുക്കുക. അതു താഴോൽ കൊടുക്കാതെ തന്നെ കൃത്യസമയം കാണിക്കുന്നതാണ്. നിങ്ങളുടെ നടക്കുമ്പോഴും എഴുതുമ്പോഴും പ്രവൃത്തി ചെയ്യുമ്പോഴും എന്തൊരു നിമിഷം ഉറങ്ങുമ്പോൾ കിടന്നിരിക്കുമ്പോഴും കൈക്കൽ കൊടുക്കാതെ അല്പമായ ചലനം മാത്രം മതി വാച്ച് സ്വയം നടത്തുന്നതിന്. നിങ്ങളുടെ ആ വാച്ച് ധരിക്കുന്നില്ലെങ്കിൽ അതു സാധാരണപോലെ താഴോൽ കൊടുക്കുന്നതാണ്. അങ്ങിനെ താഴോൽ കൊടുക്കുന്നതിന് അതിനു ഒരു സ്വകാര്യ ബട്ടൺ വിടിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. "വിൽവേഗ്" മോടിയിലുള്ള വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് കമ്പനിക്കാൽ യാണിപ്പുള്ളതും ആയ ഒരു വാച്ചാകുന്നു.

**വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് "വിൽവേഗ്"**  
 തനിയെ നടക്കുന്ന റിസ്ക് വാച്ച്  
 നല്ല വെള്ളി ക. 90  
 18 ക്യാരന്റ് സ്വർണം ക. 250

സൗജന്യമായി കൊടുക്കുന്ന  
 -ക്യാരന്റ് ലാഗിനും ഏഴുതുണ്ട്.

മുൻകാച്ച്. ഒരു ഉറങ്ങുന്നിനുള്ള കാച്ച്.

**വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് വാച്ച് കമ്പനി, ബോംബെ. കൽക്കത്ത.**  
**WEST END WATCH CO**  
**BOMBAY CALCUTTA**

Figure 5.11 Mathrubhumi Weekly 1934 Jan 9

Another advertisement (figure 5.11) from the same company, *West end Watch Co.*, with the title ‘a watch that can run without using key’ brings out watch can be an object that can accompany one at every activity her/him in a day. The description in the advertisement goes on saying that this watch can be used while one is walking, writing, working or even while one is sleeping. The visual components in this advertisement are interesting as it visualises the potential customer, who is a working man, in his different activities. He is seen working in an office like the place, and he is also seen walking and sleeping having the watch worn on his hand. This visualisation along with description

given intend to feed a sense of time that it is important to be conscious about time all through your daily activities. In a way this is structuring the everyday life of people by inculcating the notion of time with constant presence time measuring machine like a watch. This is where the logic of capitalism comes in to the scene as the constant reminder of time about time is precious, and hence it should be used fruitfully.

The value and need for being time conscious are subtly conveyed in all these advertisements citing the reference of a gift on a festival season, sleeping, walking and while writing and working. Although picture of a working man is given in one of the advertisements (figure 5.11), here comes another advertisement of the liver watch from the same company with direct reference of a working man (Figure 5.12). The caption goes like this, “we made this watch for working people”. When the caption said that it is specially made for the working people, it conveyed a subtle message to the one who sees and reads the advertisement. The message is about work discipline and punctuality. EP Thompson has argued that a move towards a mature industrial society requires a working culture in which a work discipline is one of the necessary factors. Work discipline includes following of strict time schedule. It is here the watch and clock play an important role in an industrial society (Thompson, 1967, p. 57).

The description in the advertisement says, “A watch that any working individual can afford to buy. Here it is; one west end watches for 12 annas<sup>30</sup>; it is assured that materials and the machine have no damage. ‘Aftab’ lever pocket watch without a key is very strong. It is also beautiful, reliable and last for longer time.” The whole description intended to create a fantasy about the idea of time within the minds of workers

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<sup>30</sup> Anna was a currency unit in use in India. 16 annas is equal to one Rupee.

specifically. With the opening up of many industries like cashew industry, Coir factory, saw mill, tile factories, engineering workshops, etc. working hour became an important issue. Trade union movements in different parts of Kerala were established with objectives like that of reducing the exploitative time schedule which used to be from 6 AM to 6 PM. (Sathyaseelan, 2011,p. 20 and Ligori, 2014,p. 255). While the idea time was such an issue among workers, advertisements about watches tried to fantasise the watch by highlighting its qualities.

ഈങ്ങിൻ ഈ വാച്ച്  
 കൂ ചിക്കാ കി ദേ ണി  
 ഉണ്ടാക്കിയതാണ്.

ഓരോ കൂ ചിക്കാരനും വാങ്ങുവാൻ കഴി  
 യുന്ന ഒരു വാച്ച്. ഇതാ 12 ക. കെ ഒരു  
 റ്റൈംസ്റ്റാൻഡ് വാച്ച്; അത്രേണിനും സാ  
 മാനങ്ങൾക്കും യാതൊരു കേടുമില്ലെന്നു  
 ഉറപ്പും ഉണ്ട്. താഴെക്കാൽ ഇല്ലാത്ത  
 "ബ്രാഹ്മ്മാസം" ലിഖർ പോക്കറ്റ് വാ  
 ച്ച് വളരെ ബലമുള്ളതാണ്. ഭംഗിയുള്ള  
 ഈ വിശ്വസിക്കാവുന്നതാണ്. അനവ  
 ധികാലം കേടുകൂടാതെ നടക്കും.

വെസ്റ്റ് എൻഡ് വാച്ച് കോ., ബോമ്പെ, കൽക്കത്ത.

**WEST END WATCH CO**  
 BOMBAY CALCUTTA

"അഫ്സാബ്"  
 ലിഖർ വാച്ച്  
 താഴെക്കാലില്ലാത്തത്  
 നിക്കൽ കൂട് ക. 12  
 ഞവൽപ്പട്ടാൽ ചിത്രങ്ങളോടുകൂ  
 ടിയ വലിയ ക്യാരംബോൾ  
 ഞങ്ങൾ ഇനാമയീ  
 അയച്ചുകൊടുക്കും

Figure 5. 12 October 29<sup>th</sup> 1934 Mathrubhumi Weekly

This section discussed how advertisements mediated many meanings associated with the object of the watch in early twentieth century Kerala. E.P. Thompson argued, “A clock or watch was not only useful; it conferred prestige upon its owner, and a might be willing to stretch his resources to obtain one” (Thompson, 1967, p. 69). In the context of colonial modernity, these advertisements visualized the transformation that colonial Kerala had undergone in terms new notions time and space. Watch represented many meanings from being an object of self fashioning to an object that fantasized the time for working people. Mediation of these symbolic values attached to watches was made possible with print advertisements and hence contributed to the shaping of modern subject with new specific roles. Here, these advertisements played an instrumental role in diffusing the idea of time, punctuality, and work discipline in a subtle way. Moreover, advertisements created, through the visual and textual features, a desire and fantasy about the importance of time and time keeping.

### **Advertisement as a story-teller of modern society**

Walter Benjamin has argued that in the modern world, the art of story-telling lost its significance as the opportunity for shared experiences have come down with industrialization, coming cities and other rapid changes associated with modernity. However, did story telling actually lose itself completely with the onset of modern apparatuses or has it re-configured itself is the question that I would like to address here in this section.

Benjamin has connected the end of story-telling with the coming of the novel (Benjamin,1968, p. 87) . With the modern ways of expressions like novel, our ability to



share experiences have diminished or ceased to exist. Because novels required printing to make their presentation accessible to others while story tellers could do that orally. This creates a separation between the one who tells story and the one who listens to it unlike in the case of story-telling as physical presence of the story teller makes the difference when the story teller orally narrates his/her stories. The reader of a novel is isolated whereas the listener in a story telling is in company with story teller (ibid, p. 100). This companionship itself makes the story-telling a collective experience. This collective experience is the characteristics of such a way of story-telling. The stories of one generation are passed on to the next by this way of story-telling. It is this collective experience of sharing story that was lost with the coming various apparatuses of modernity. (ibid,p. 84)

In explaining the nature of stories that story tellers use, Benjamin reveals the crux of his argument. He argues;

“It contains, openly or covertly, something useful. The usefulness may, in one case, consist in a moral: in another, in some practical advice; in another, in some practical advice; in a third, in a proverb or maxim. In every case, a story teller is a man who is counsel for his reader. But, if today “having counsel” is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing.” (Benjamin, 1968, p. 86)

This is where advertisement takes the role of a story teller. Advertisements are indeed full of advices and promises to the one who reads/sees it, although the intentions of such advice and promise can be contested. In that sense, advertisement is the ‘counsel’ of the modern man who constantly gives lessons about what is good for a modern man in whatever he/she does in their daily life. Advertisement tells how to lead a healthy and

fashionable life through the symbolic communication in advertisements of various products. Here advertisement takes the role of a teacher or sage as Benjamin has argued in connection with story-telling, who not only uses the voice in his/her rendering but also other sensory activities like gestures using hand, eye and soul (Benjamin, 1968, p. 108). Advertisement animates the communication by bringing corporeal presence with the visual properties used in the advertisements. It is here the experience sharing part, which is central to story-telling, comes to advertisements as well. With the gestures and emotions that advertisements enact in their representations, advertisement in a way brings forth the experience element into the scene.

Thus, if not in the same way that story tellers did, advertisements too talked about the experiences, of past, present and even anticipating the experiences in future. However, Benjamin had problems with modern communication like novels as it provides information with explanation, whereas the stories were self-explanatory in themselves because it conveys timeless emotion and wisdom (Jurgenson, 2019, p. 17). Benjamin had further argued that “the art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out.” ((Benjamin, 1968, p. 87).

However, is it not the same thing that advertisement had emphasized in their advertisements, i.e., the element of truth or the claims of being real and genuine? Advertisement always keeps its consumers in them without distancing itself from the shared experience of the society it is placed in. In fact, it is the strength of an advertisement to have properly connected with the people and society it is meant to be conversing. In this sense, I argue, advertisements are the story-tellers of a modern capitalist society who claim to be telling ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ stories to modern society.

It is true to the extent that advertisement does not bring its listeners or viewers together as it happens in story-telling. Although having this separation present between the advertiser and the consumers-story-teller and the viewer in this case-advertisements still make it possible to avoid the isolation that is present in the case of novels. Advertisements, through its visual and verbal representations, develop an emotional and affective bond with its viewers. Advertisements discussed above are mostly pictures caricatured with captions. One would ideally think photograph would suit better to show the people in the advertisement which is true in the later advertisements in India. However, early advertisements which were devoid of photos used drawing in them most likely due to the technological limitations. Still, use of caricatures made them more unique in its representation as these caricatures do not restrict the viewers' imagination on a specific point, be it is an object or a human being like it is in the case of photograph. In such caricatures, only the essence will be represented by leaving the rest to the one who sees. Scott McCloud, in his study of cartooning, has called this process as amplification through simplification and this feature makes any medium as one of the effective ways of story-telling (McCloud, 1993, p. 30-31). Simple narration in the form of drawing proved to be very effective in story telling of the advertisement. McCloud argues, "the ability of cartoons to focus our attention on an idea is, I think, an important part of their special power, both in comics and in drawing generally" (Ibid, p. 31). This ability of drawing is evident in the advertisements discussed in this chapter, be it the advertisements of soaps, cloths and watches so as to make the story-telling of advertisements an effective practice in fetching their goals. In the advertisement of Sawstik's Kanti soap (Figure 5. 1) the visualization of a woman taking a bath is intended

to bring the consumers close to the product while introducing a new product to them. The minimalist approach in this drawing keeps the essence in it and tries to convey the message with full impact. While Soap as a new commodity is being introduced, this scene helps the advertisement as a visual aid to hold back its consumers by keeping the tradition intact within the same frame. At the same time, the use of a drawing of a modern man in coat and suit intends to bring forth the imagination of modern man outlook complete. With this visualization the story-telling gets visual form and attains greater reach in terms of building a bond with the one who reads/sees the advertisements.

### **Conclusion**

The chapter overall tried to look at how advertisement as a medium helps us to understand various contours of subjective formation of a modern individual in colonial Kerala. By taking print advertisements of soaps, cloths and watches the chapter attempted how advertisement with its visual and textual language played an instrumental role in making of a modern individual during colonial Kerala. The invention of a modern self through the domain of print advertisement is being explored here in this chapter.

While the coming of new objects or commodities propelled a new market economy, it also invented new habits and new ways of doing things. These inventions were in tune with the larger context of transformation that Kerala had undergone during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Kerala. While advertisements reflected these transformations or the discourse of colonial modernity, they also played the role of a vehicle of colonial modernity. This was made possible by offering a language, most

importantly a visual one, in articulating and understanding the visions of colonial modernity.

The visions of colonial modernity were articulated in these advertisements by showing the making of a modern being at various levels. The look of a modern self was an area of utmost importance while imagining a modern individual. This is where the advertisements play their roles with glittering promises of modernity. Advertisements of soaps promised modern selfhood by teaching the lessons about clean and fragrant body. Grooming practices of modern individual started with the lessons by soap advertisements. The fragrant and clean body had to dress up in same fashion for which the advertisements that talked about modern dress like suit and coat offered a perfect solution. Notions of time brought forth by the advertisements of watches completed the picture of a modern individual who is punctual and time conscious which are essential qualities for a modern individual in the new order set by the colonial modernity. Here a modern self is been invented or imagined with a peculiar physical as well as mental consciousness within the context of colonial modernity. Thus, advertisements, having facilitated these imaginations about new selfhood with its visual language contribute in our attempt understand the socio-cultural history of modern Kerala.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

How do we understand the life in colonial Kerala better through the medium of print advertisement is the question that this study tried to address. The social mediation process carried out by the print advertisements is studied by primarily looking at different advertisements and other sources like literary works and archival materials that could talk about the medium of advertisements in modern Kerala. Print advertisements that advertised objects that were very much part of everyday life in the context of colonial modernity are taken as sources in this study. As the advertisements, with its visual and textual properties, promulgated ideas of life through the objects that were closely associated with the everyday life, it offered an ideal platform in negotiating the selfhood that people in Kerala had aspired within the context of colonial modernity. Representation of the modern subject in the domain of print advertisement visually and textually animated the imagination of a modern subject in modern Kerala.

The advertisement has been studied as a potential medium in studying society in various ways. While historians predominantly used advertisements as a valuable source material in historical writings, especially as to the history of emergence of capitalism and consumer culture and associated socio-cultural impacts it had on society, scholars interested in visual culture probed how images and text together made meanings in advertisement and how it played a distinct role in producing knowledge at the realm of the visual. This dual role of advertisement is explored in this study as well, by keeping the early print advertisements in colonial Kerala as an example. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century have witnessed various transformations in socio-economic and cultural levels. What is common among these transformations is the coming of a modern

self which represented a whole lot of changes that happened during that time. As a media text, advertisement embodies different layers of reality which often mediates notions about being modern, about new tastes and habits, and attitude. Therefore, using the historical and analytical method, the study explored the early perception of advertisement across the socio-economic and political realm and how the print advertisement can be considered as a potential medium that could talk about the various mentalities existed in modern Kerala. Various sources like writings on advertisements, advertisement about advertisements and various archival sources are used in this pursuit.

Critical writings on advertisements and advertising practices bring forth a compelling narrative about the early perception of the advertisement. One of such writings discussed in this study highlighted how advertisement reflected the desire for a self-fashioning among the educated elites in Kerala during this period by consuming certain products like health and cosmetic items and saree and suit for women and men respectively, to look modern (*pachaparishkari*). While the writing discussed the coming of a modern subject on the one side, it also questioned the credibility of advertisements in representing the real by exposing the truth and false aspects of advertisements. In this way, the writing itself was a testimony to the new subjectivity, who was critical and rational, which can be seen as a distinct feature of colonial modernity. Besides, it revealed how the medium of advertisement had undergone for the discourse of modernity in the early twentieth century Kerala. Here, the study attempted to explore the early perception of the medium of advertisements.

The advertisement became a desirable medium for newspapers and magazines who published these advertisements to generate revenue. Sellers and manufacturers who

were introduced to this world of new goods and commodities were lured to advertise in newspapers and magazines so as to persuade their potential consumers into buying their products. Advertisements emerged to be a necessary thing for the survival of any business enterprise in the new market economy of early twentieth-century Kerala. With the competition in the new market, advertisements evolved from the earlier form of simple information about the products to one of the media which had the potential to influence people choice and preferences.

Apart from the socio-economic and cultural realm, advertisements stirred controversy in the political realm of the then Kerala society. Print advertisements were featured in the political discourse of early twentieth-century Kerala as a means of control and surveillance in the hands of the ruling class. Since government advertisements were one of the main sources of revenue for newspapers and magazines, the Travancore government used advertisements as a political tool to control the dissent and critique of the state.

Advertisements as a medium also carried the ideas and notions that discourses of colonialism and modernity had stood for especially in connection with the new ideas of body, health, hygiene, domesticity, women-hood, masculinity and nationhood. Medical advertisements, as a medium that visually and verbally communicated these notions and ideas, played an instrumental role in carrying out the discourses of colonialism. Medical advertisements during early twentieth century Kerala adopted techniques from the pictorial tradition already existed by using the visual tropes that were available and conducive to the discursive realm of that time. While one of the main concerns of the medical advertisements was the body of a modern subject, a visual trope that medical



advertisements used was that of a modern subject, who is a wife/woman, child and husband/father. Representation of the modern subject in the domain of print advertisement visually and textually animated the imagination of a modern subject in modern Kerala. By taking advertisement of medical products and life insurance as a single unit, the thesis discussed how perceptions about life, diseases and death were formed in the domain of advertisements and how these advertisements with the narratives brought notions about family, womanhood and masculinity in modern Kerala. These advertisements provided a language, most often a visual one, in understanding the physical and mental weakness among people. By putting the visual language into people, advertisements urged people to make sense of what it is meant to be weak and why one should buy and consume the medicines advertised. To enable them to identify their weakness, various other factors like being an ideal woman, being masculine, happiness and well-being in family were all brought in to the narrative of advertisements.

The study –by using advertisement as a medium which played a significant role in introducing new needs and new habits through new objects—attempted to understand the contours of subjective formation of a modern individual in colonial Kerala within the domain of print advertisement. By taking print advertisements of soaps, clothes and watches, an attempt is made to understand how advertisement with its visual and textual language played an instrumental role in shaping a modern individual in colonial Kerala. The print advertisement became one of the important media through which the image of a modern subject was invented. The invention of a modern subject was made possible with the creation of new needs that were demanded by the coming of new objects which carried the values of modernity.

While the coming of new objects or commodities propelled a new market economy, it also invented new habits and new ways of doing things. These inventions were in tune with the larger context of transformation that Kerala had undergone during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala. While advertisements reflected these transformations or the discourse of colonial modernity, they also played the role of a vehicle of colonial modernity. This was made possible by offering a language, most importantly a visual one, in articulating and understanding the visions of colonial modernity. The visions of colonial modernity were articulated in these advertisements by showing the making of a modern being at various levels. The look of a modern self was an area of utmost importance while imagining a modern individual. This is where the advertisements play their roles with glittering promises of modernity. Advertisements of soaps promised modern selfhood by teaching the lessons about the clean and fragrant body. Grooming practices of the modern individual started with the lessons by soap advertisements. The fragrant and clean body had to dress up in the same fashion for which the advertisements that talked about a modern dress like suit and coat offered a perfect solution. Notions of time brought forth by the advertisements of watches completed the picture of a modern individual who is punctual and time conscious which were essential qualities for a modern individual in the new order set by the colonial modernity. Here a modern self is invented or imagined with a peculiar physical as well as mental consciousness within the context of colonial modernity. Thus, the study argues that advertisements as medium having facilitated these imaginations about new selfhood with its visual language contribute to our attempts to understand the socio-cultural history of modern Kerala.

Overall, the study tried to bring forth, by using the semiotic and discourse analysis, the medium aspect of the advertisement by exploring the mediation process that print advertisements facilitated in modern Kerala. The study sees advertisement as a media text that encompasses various sense and sensibilities of people that were informed by their experience of colonialism and modernity.

The emergence of a new self was central to the mediation process enabled my print advertisements. This process, by presenting or representing the imagery or imagined society within the domain of print advertisements, helped people to forge new identities in tandem with the trends set by the discourses of modernity. Imagining a new self did not involve a complete rejection of the existing identities, but rather with a critical engagement of their existing selves that resulted in a refashioning and re-interpretation. Visual literacy shaped by the various visual signifiers used in the advertisements helped people in Kerala in their articulation of becoming or imagining ideals of the modern identity. This visual vocabulary or signifiers used in the advertisements help us to understand how people imagined the new self within the discourse of modernity in Kerala.

Drawing from the idea of ‘storyteller’ by Walter Benjamin, the study argues that the medium of print advertisements enables a particular narrative strategy that elates the advertisements into the role of a storyteller of modern society, like the one Walter Benjamin had discussed. Through the symbolic communication of the advertisements that were brought in its narrative forms, advertisements advised of or promised of a modern self. Using the semiotic analysis, the study decoded the signifiers involved in this symbolic communication. As it was in the case of storyteller, advertisement too brought

experience or emotional aspects in the advertisements by using various signifiers to make the narrative of advertisement more real and appealing. Images of woman, child and the 'absent father' in the medical and insurance advertisements, modern body promised by the advertisement of coat, clean and fragrant body offered by the soap advertisement, disciplined and time conscious self in the advertisement of watches were meant to evoke certain sense of emotions in the process of its mediation.

The study further argues that it is through this symbolic communication that advertisements brought subjects into a realm wherein the negotiation happens between objects that carried the notions of colonial capitalism and the subjects who had the desires and aspirations to be modern in the discursive context of colonial modernity.

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