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VISUAL HISTORIES OF A CITY
BOMBAY/MUMBAI

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This essay furnishes a broad outline of a new hybrid visual culture, which can be compressed within the term 'calendar art', that emerged in the city of Bombay – with special reference to how it became a mirror reflecting simultaneous pre-modern, colonial and post-colonial cross-currents flowing through the city's commercial, civic, cultural and social life, during the late nineteenth century and the whole of the twentieth century.

In this eventful period India witnessed several major technological transformations in the sphere of the visual – through the pedagogy of colonial art schools; exposure to European pictures circulating in the Indian market; advent of techniques of engraving, lithography, oleography and offset printing; emergence of oil painting, photography, proscenium theatre and cinema – that led to the growth of a new popular imagery. The colonial art schools' emphasis on perspective and realism endowed idealized, traditional imagery with a more tangible and sensual presence. In combination with influences from the proscenium theatre which used powerful iconic and narrative formations – from photography which depicted intensified corporeality and individuality, and from cinema which spectacularly animated and heightened the amorous and the devotional – a new class of popular cultic, mythological and nationalist imagery was engendered. Mass production and circulation of this imagery became a cogent instrument in creating and negotiating interstices between the sacred, the erotic, the political and the modern.

The eclectic visuality resulting from a piling up of these images from diverse sources on one picture plane, which brought into play an ambivalent language of montage and citation, facilitated manipulation of aesthetic and cultural meaning. In Indian cities today, the images seen on billboards, calendars, product labels, magazines and posters, in television broadcasts and films, at restaurants and shops, on the roadside and on façades of buildings, provide us, more than just a history of the images, a history and social construction of the city as shaped by them. They fashion people's identities and mould their values, thereby forging ideological conceptions of the nation itself.

This essay focuses on the city of Bombay/Mumbai as it is constructed by its visual archive. Bombay/Mumbai in the twentieth century witnessed the rise and fall of its cotton and opium trades, and a vast proliferation of its textile mills; its resultant expansion and development as a major cosmopolitan and financial centre; consolidation of its commercial and industrial infrastructure and financial institutions which attracted Indian and European entrepreneurs, as well as labour from the towns and villages of Maharashtra and Gujarat; migrant labourers settling in its chawls and slums, carrying with them their beliefs and customs, and their visual and performative traditions; the arrival of advanced printing technology which caused an explosive proliferation of printed images and pictorial journalism; an enormous inflow of European and American visual imagery on product labels, postcards, posters and publicity material for the theatre and cinema; the rise of western and later, indigenous publicity agencies, both private and government-run; the city's premier art school introducing 'commercial art' courses in its syllabus; the foundation of an intellectual infrastructure through the establishment of universities, research institutes and libraries; nationalist movements and independence struggles with sectarian and secular predilections, including swadeshi, and the re-invention of tradition as a

response. All of these went into the shaping of a hybrid popular visual culture in the city, of which the most evident forms were 'calendar art', theatrical practices (Gujarati, Marathi and Parsi), and eclectic cinema productions. As observed by Christopher Pinney, 'these different visual fields crossed each other through processes of "inter-ocularity" – a visual inter-referencing and citation that mirrors the more familiar process of "inter-textuality"'.[1]

'CALENDAR ART'

Most scholars writing on India's printed imagery, mass-reproduced by lithography from the last quarter of the nineteenth century right up to the 1950s, and subsequently through offset printing, use the term calendar art within inverted commas. The coinage probably comes from certain types of bazaar images that were repeatedly reproduced on Gregorian calendars,[2] at least from the beginning of the twentieth century but in all probability from the last decades of the nineteenth century – and published mainly by manufacturing and marketing companies to advertise their products or to serve as new year gifts to their clients. Taking into account the wider use of such 'calendar' images on product labels, 'god posters' and advertisements, the term calendar art may have been adapted to refer to a broader image-field that invoked a genre. The inverted commas however also caution against the generalization and simplification that might occur while defining a wide arena of imagery that is diverse, complex and fluid in terms of its iconographic and aesthetic content. They point to the historical and formal nuances that constitute this field of imagery, which cannot be wholly captured by a blanket term that loosely originates from its use in calendars.

Scrutiny of other cognate or analogous terms such as bazaar art, mass art, mass culture, vernacular art, etc., may not provide a more definite alternative, but alerts us towards 'an understanding of the diversity of different popular imaginaries'.[3] For example, the term bazaar art was first used by W.G. Archer[4] to refer to nineteenth-century Kalighat paintings from Calcutta as these were literally produced and sold in the bazaar around the Kalighat temple; but later, with mass reproduction of the printed image and its complex marketing network, the term acquired a wider connotation to refer to 'an arena of circulation',[5] and 'the relational nature of the bazaar's vernacularity and the particular form taken by the bazaar as a part of the colonial economy and its post-independent legacy'.[6] Similarly, in terms of the aesthetics and sociology of bazaar art, 'judgements about "modern" and "traditional" styles, about "refined" taste as opposed to the "common" and "vulgar" need to be historically situated in the particular social and ideological milieu in which they were produced'.[7] Cheap mass reproduction and indiscriminate[8] circulation were important criteria for such images to be given the disparaging label of calendar or bazaar art; as was thought in the case with Ravi Varma's paintings, for example, 'that these distressing pictures vulgarized by cheap and popular oleographs, should reign in every Indian home is a commentary on the degenerate perception of the time'.[9]

For the purpose of this essay, I use the term calendar art in its broader sense as described above, to include the entire visual field of mass-produced colonial and post-colonial images in product marketing, textile labels, advertisements, postcards, calendars, magazine illustrations, god posters and other framed pictures, as well

1 Christopher Pinney, Photos of the Gods, New Delhi, 2004: 34–35.

2 Before the arrival of the Gregorian calendar in India during the colonial period, use of the almanac was in vogue, which basically provided astronomical data, besides the day, date and year according to various lunar calendars. Eventually, the almanac incorporated the solar Gregorian system.

3 Pinney, Photos of the Gods: 61.

4 W.G. Archer, Bazar Paintings of Calcutta, London, 1953.

5 Kajri Jain, Gods in the Bazaar, Durham and London, 2007: 16.

6 Ibid.: 15.

7 Tapati Guha-Thakurta, 'Women as "Calendar Art" Icons: Emergence of Pictorial Stereotype in Colonial India', Economic and Political Weekly, 26 October 1991: WS92.

8 Except for the cost factor, the consumption of these images was not class-bound. Cost-free mill labels adorned the palatial living rooms of Shekhavati merchant princes as much as homes of the poor.

9 P.R. Ramachandra Rao (1953), Modern Indian Painting, Madras, 1953: 9.

as the narratives of inter-visuality between these and the performative practices of Parsi, Gujarati and Marathi theatre, photography, publicity for cinematic productions, etc., in twentieth-century Bombay/Mumbai.

VISUAL CULTURE IN COLONIAL BOMBAY

RAJA RAVI VARMA AND 'PRINTED GODS'

Raja Ravi Varma died in 1906 but his Fine Art and Lithographic (FAL) Press, which came under the ownership of his former German partner Fritz Schleicher, continued to issue lithographic prints of Ravi Varma's paintings at least until 1935, the year Schleicher died, and perhaps for a few years later. Anant Shivaji Desai (Moti Bazaar, Bombay) were appointed the sole agent for prints produced by FAL Press in 1913, after cancellation of the licence of A.K. Joshi & Co., the earlier agent. Anant Shivaji Desai also undertook the work of dressing up the deities and mythological characters depicted in the prints with fine silk cloth, imitation salmasatara and pearl ornamentation, which made them more traditionally acceptable. Besides the officially marketed prints, it appears, a number of plagiarized prints too were in circulation – as is evident from a complaint made by Schleicher to the Legislative Department: 'Ravi Varma Press is suffering a great deal of unfair competition and loss from the absence of a protecting Copyright Act.'[10]

Ravi Varma's cultic and mythological images were so deeply entrenched in the minds and hearts of Hindus in India that these unconsecrated images of gods became the dominant images of worship, much more even than the bronze and stone images – based on the shilpashastras, or canons of sacred architecture and iconography – ritually enshrined in temples or domestic shrines. Be it his portrayal of the heroines of classical Sanskrit drama, or of the romantic couples Radha–Krishna, Shiva–Parvati and Arjuna–Subhadra, or the disrobing of Draupadi, it was Ravi Varma's renderings that gave meaning to these texts – almost as if the texts were built around the paintings.

A number of Ravi Varma's mythological scenes are enacted against Mughal/colonial architectural backdrops marked by massive gateways, arches, balconies and colonnaded halls, and adorned with velvet curtains, carpets and richly upholstered furniture. The colourful landscapes or palatial interiors that provide a background to the vivacious figures of deities and mythological characters set within them enhanced the charm of his prints to the picturesque. This religious imagery, mounted and framed, then shifted from its cultic space of shrines to the exhibitionary space of the living room, jostling with other framed pictures of European ladies, the British royal family and leaders of India's freedom movement – all indiscriminately receiving auspicious vermillion marks on the occasion of annual religious festivals like Diwali.

Ravi Varma appropriated a range of heterogeneous scenes and images from across visual genres, and recontextualized them in an overall schema of Hindu cultic and mythological painting. This technique of archiving elements from different visual sources was a hallmark of his painting. He worked in the days of black-and-white photography when portrait studios used monochromatic (sepia or indigo) backdrops of scenery rendered in hazy, subdued tones, letting the figure of the sitter emerge clear-cut, detached from the background and rarely casting a shadow, almost like a montage. The renowned Indian photographer Raja Deen Dayal, a contemporary of Ravi

10 **Quoted in Rupika Chawla**, Raja Ravi Varma: Painter of Colonial India, **Ahmedabad, 2010: 285.**

Varma, was known to use painted backdrops of palace or garden scenes, leaving an uncluttered area in the middle against which the face of the sitter would be adjusted so that its contours stood out. Ravi Varma also used photography to achieve a more realistic rendering of the body in action; his Mohini, Ahalya and There Comes Papa are some examples of this method of working.

One of the greatest sources of Ravi Varma's inspiration was pictures of European women in seductive dresses and postures. His personal archive was full of such clippings and prints from European magazines. For example, his Tilottama is clearly based on Venus de Milo. The complexion of many of his heroines (even as he shows Parvati as a Bhil tribal woman) is as fair as that of the ladies in the European prints.

Bombay's theatrical performances were another source of inspiration for Ravi Varma, even as his costumed gods equally prompted the theatrical characters on the city's stages. The published diary of C. Raja Raja Varma makes specific reference to Ravi Varma and his brother making it a point to see such performances whenever they were in Bombay.[11] If photography was about posing, as in Ravi Varma's Vasanta Sena (FIG. 3), theatre was about action and gestures, as in his Ritudhvaj and Madalasa (FIG. 4) and Arjuna and Subhadra.

A remarkable feature of Ravi Varma's cultic and mythological paintings is the clothing and ornamentation of his characters, especially the female figures. This is not merely an issue of ethnographic or cultural detail, but is central to his conception of the ideal woman, and notions of tradition, Indian-ness, Hindu-ness, morality and sexuality. Among other factors, it is the dressing up of the heroines in his mythological paintings that sets his work apart from the next generation of calendar artists in Bombay, such as S.M. Pandit, Raghuvir Mulgaokar, Dinanath Dalal, Ramkumar Sharma and J.P. Singhal. Besides lighting, figuration and atmospherics, genres and manners of draping the sari were what made artists like Ravi Varma and the aesthetics of Gujarati/Parsi/Marathi theatre distinct from the cinema and calendar aesthetics that followed, especially between the 1940s and 1960s.

'FINE ART' IN THE BAZAAR

Mahadev Vishvanath Dhurandhar (1867–1944), trained in 'fine' art in Bombay's Sir J.J. School of Art, belonged to the first generation of academic realist artists from that School, along with M.F. Pithawalla, Pestonji Bomanji, Abalal Rahiman and the sculptor Rao Bahadur Mhatre. Dhurandhar was equally comfortable with the dual, though conflicting, agendas of the School: 'traditional Indian ethos' and 'realistic style'. No other contemporary artist from J.J. was so celebrated and showered with honours and awards as Dhurandhar. His large oils illustrating themes from Hindu mythology as well as traditional wedding rituals of the Pathare Prabhu caste, to which he belonged, made him a favourite of every elite Maharashtrian home in Bombay.

Dhurandhar's popularity was also due to his involvement in mass reproduction of his works. Scores of postcards based on his miniature watercolours of Indian ethnic types, such as 'Bombay fisherwoman' or 'Kerala beauty', were printed in Germany and distributed in Bombay. He is also known for more than 7,000 drawings and illustrations he published in the city's Gujarati, Marathi and English magazines.[12] His paintings regularly appeared in magazine-format fascicles called Suvarnamala brought out by Purushottam Mavji, a Bombay-based collector and promoter of the arts, and owner of

11 Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelberger, eds, The Diary of C. Raja Ravi Varma, New Delhi, 2005.

12 Besides, Dhurandhar published dozens of his drawings and paintings in the Gujarati journal Vismi Sadi published from Bombay; he designed the cover for the first issue of this journal, which became a mark of its identity for years. His paintings were also reproduced in Gujarati Sharda and Suvarnamala, both popular in Bombay in the 1920s.

Lakshmi Art Printing Works in Byculla – originally founded by Dadasaheb Phalke under the name of Phalke Engraving & Printing Works.[13] Mavji published these issues, which also included works by A.H. Mueller, D.K. Mhatre and others, periodically between 1910 and 1920. In the 1930s, several of Dhurandhar's paintings based on the theme of child Krishna appeared on product calendars of Woodward's Gripe Water.

M.G. Rajadhyaksha, former dean of Sir J.J. Institute of Applied Art, has written an interesting account of how Dhurandhar and Ravi Varma developed a friendship, which eventually led to Ravi Varma's FAL Press producing prints of Dhurandhar's paintings.[14] Dhurandhar had done a painting of the renowned Bombay-based Goan singer Anjanibai Malpekar, of the Bhendibazar gharana. Ravi Varma, who had a special attraction for Malpekar, purchased the painting. Following this, Dhurandhar would often meet Ravi Varma when he was in Mumbai.[15] In later years, the Ravi Varma Press in Karla–Lonavala published several of Dhurandhar's paintings, such as Vishwamitra–Menaka (FIG. 5), Rama's Marriage and Shivaji and the Subedar's Daughter (FIG. 6). One of Dhurandhar's large canvases of that time, entitled Satkar (Reception), depicts the reception held in Bombay's Town Hall for the visiting British emperor George V and his empress. The painting, which shows upper-class ladies of Bombay from different communities honouring the royal couple with garlands, flowers and gifts, faintly invokes Ravi Varma's Galaxy of Musicians: the ethnic identities of the women marked by their clothing is common to both paintings, though in Dhurandhar's work the main objective would be to highlight the cosmopolitan spirit of the city rather than the 'unity in diversity' theme in Ravi Varma's.

In a unique and little known artwork created for an advertisement to raise 'war loans' (bonds issued by the government as debt securities for financing military operations), Dhurandhar personified Bombay (Mumbadevi) as a Maharashtrian woman performing a dance in front of the cosmopolitan gentry of the city. This iconic image of Bombay incorporated aspects of both performance and patronage, which defined the ethos of the city for decades (FIG. 1).

Two other Bombay-based artists whose paintings were mass-reproduced in Germany are R.G. Chonker and V.H. Pandya (who often signed as Vasudev H. Pandya). Both had their studios in the Tardeo area of the city, and both were active in the 1930s and 40s. Surprisingly, however, though a large number of their German prints is available in the popular prints market of Mumbai, little else is known about them. Stylistically, their works bear some resemblance to each other. Both predominantly depicted the amorous liaison of Radha and Krishna (FIG. 2). A strong shadow of the Nathadwara idiom looms over their works, occasionally localized by the Maharashtrian drape of the sari for some of the female figures. Chonker's mythological paintings also strongly invoke the Marathi theatre of the time (FIG. 7).

Kanu Desai, a Gujarati artist trained in Bengal's Santiniketan, who specialized in book and magazine illustrations, moved to Bombay in 1947. A large number of his paintings which were based on the romantic relation between Radha and Krishna, executed in mixed idioms of the Bengal School and Indian miniature painting, were thematically grouped and printed as albums. These became exceedingly popular as wedding gifts in the city in the 1950s and 60s. Kanu Desai also did art direction work for Bombay's film industry, including for V. Shantaram's blockbuster, Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje.

Below: FIGS. 1, 2
Facing page: FIG. 3

13 Jaya Dadkar, Jaya (2010), Dadasaheb Phalke: Kala ani Kartritva (Marathi), Mumbai, 2010: 36.

14 M.G. Rajadhyaksha, Srijangandha (Marathi), Mumbai, 2005: 123. The meeting between Ravi Varma and Dhurandhar and the above incident are also referred to by his daughter Ambika Dhurandhar, in Majhi Smaranachitre (Marathi), Mumbai: Majestic Publishing House, 2010: 93–94.

15 Rajadhyaksha, Srijangandha: 122–23.


Ravi Varma.
1896


R.S. Chonkar
C. DRAUPADI-VASTRAHARAN.

Facing page, clockwise from top left: FIGS. 4, 5, 6, 7

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF 'COMMERCIAL ART'

In the early decades of the twentieth century, private patronage of the so-called fine arts in Bombay was dismal. While some of the artists who passed out of the J.J. School were engaged to create murals or architectural sculpture for public buildings, most of the School's fine arts graduates either remained unemployed or took to commercial work. As spheres such as the textile industry, export and import trade, publication of newspapers and periodicals, the film industry, Parsi Theatre, photo studios, advertising, public welfare departments for literacy, prohibition, rural upliftment, etc., established themselves in the city, there arose a demand for what was then called 'commercial art', later upgraded to 'applied art' – and many artists trained in fine arts turned to jobs in applied art. According to the records of the J.J. School, the renowned artist

> Rao Bahadur Dhurandhar had over four thousand drawings reproduced. Mr. Dixit did some very beautiful posters for the Prabhat Films. He was a past student of the School. Mr. Shirur, another past student, had joined the Art Department of the Times of India. Mr. Gurjar and Mr. Adarkar were working for the Ravi-Uday and Times of India respectively.[16]

The fast-growing film industry of Bombay too absorbed a large number of artists. 'Anandrao, and later Baboorao Painter from Kolhapur, created a tradition in which scores of famous men were supplied to films, and to the dramatic companies – Saheb Mama, Palnitkar, Kale, Dixit, Arolkar.'[17]

In 1936 the J.J. School, under the initiative and guidance of its deputy director Charles Gerrard, introduced a full section devoted to the study of commercial art. Here, training was provided in lettering, poster and advertisement design, layout and composition, as well as in photography, block-making, lithography and printing. The newly emerging printing industry of Bombay, which produced calendars and advertisements apart from newspapers and magazines, absorbed J.J. graduates who had specialized in printing technology. In 1938, when a third year was added to the School's course, label design, airbrush work and cinema slides were added as subjects, which reflected not only the increasing demand for product advertising, especially textile mill labels, but also for calendar and film artworks of heightened sensuality attained by airbrush work, and for local advertising with lantern slides in cinema houses. Training in airbrush work was to dominate the aesthetics of Bombay's calendar art for decades to come. When obtaining advertisement material from abroad for foreign firms located in Bombay became difficult during the war, Burmah Shell Oil Company started the 'Art in Industry' movement, and instituted cash awards for design of posters and advertisements. A major part of this prize money went to students of the J.J. School of Art.[18]

Other factors that contributed to shaping the new commercial visual culture of the city included the growth of international and local advertising agencies, the emergence of the Commercial Artists Guild (CAG), and the rise in print journalism. Besides illustrated Gujarati and Marathi magazines, Bennett Coleman & Co. – the house of Times of India – published Illustrated Weekly of India and Dharmayug, both magazines with colour pages, in which works by S.M. Pandit, R.V. Mulgaokar, Ramkumar Sharma and J.P. Singhal were regularly carried. Times of India also had a major art department which employed artists like Walter Langhammer, D.G. Godse, V.N. Adarkar, Ravi Paranjape, Shiruz, Bhai Patki and Ram Kumar Sharma.

16 Story of Sir J.J. School of Art (n.d.), Mumbai: 170.
17 Ibid.: 175.
18 Ibid.: 172.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PERFORMERS AMONG PORTRAITISTS

Here, in the context of the rise, in conjunction, of the practices of theatre, cinema and photography in Bombay, I would like to insert a note on two distinguished photographers of the city: Shapoor N. Bhedwar and Jehangir Tarapor. At a time when most of the photo studios of Bombay – Raja Deen Dayal & Sons and Clifton & Company at Hornby Road, Devare Art Studio at Opera House, Hamilton Studios at Ballard Estate, Narayan Vinayak Vinkar at Girgaum Road, and D. Nusserwanji, P. Gomes and EOS at Kalbadevi Road, to mention only a handful – were occupied with portrait work, Bhedwar and later Tarapor engaged themselves with imaginary theatre stills. Both photographers were deeply involved in the theatre activity of the city. The display of mood, postures of sitters and compositions of figures in their photographs were highly theatrical, but the very medium of photography and its special use of high-contrast lighting made these appear equally cinematic.

Shapoor Bhedwar, who ran a successful commercial studio in Princess Street around the 1890s, practised photography as an art form. He became known for series of photographs that look like theatre stills – the Feast of Roses and Tyag (Renunciation) series, for instance. The former comprised photographs of beautiful young women, single or in a group, wearing sentimental expressions and dressed in flowing garments reminiscent of Art Nouveau – often with their long tresses hanging loose over the shoulders and casting highly performative stances, holding flowers in their hands or weaving floral garlands or with flowers in vases or scattered on the floor (FIG. 8). The postures and gestures of the models, and the play of light and shade in the photograph were such that the overall effect was of a theatre still. The Tyag series comprised performances of mysterious rituals of initiation, black magic or invocation of spirits. An old sanyasi appears in every photograph, posing as if he were casting a spell on his female adherents (FIG. 9).

Both these series, which brought Bhedwar international fame and awards, seem to reflect aspects of his personal life. It has been recorded that in the later years of his life Bhedwar developed an interest in spirituality, and that he shifted his residence in the city from the noisy Malabar Hill area to the quieter Bandra, where he spent his time in the company of sadhus and spiritual gurus.[19] His wife passed away during this period of renunciation. His interest in spirituality accompanied by a sense of futility of life may have inspired Tyag, while Feast of Roses connects well with his love of flowers – they stood for a beloved's face and body, as expressed in some of his ghazals and poems.[20] The performative aspect of Bhedwar's work needs to be seen in the context of his interest in the theatre of the time. He was an accomplished theatre critic; and when his review of a contemporary theatre production, titled 'Jugal-Jugari', was published in Jam-e-Jamshed, Bombay's Parsi newspaper, the paper is said to have sold 30,000 copies.[21]

On account of his relationship with a young Parsi girl which was unacceptable to the Parsi community of Bombay, Bhedwar finally left the city and settled down in Madras.[22] His studio was acquired by Jehangir Tarapor, who later moved it to Dhobi Talao. Tarapor, like Bhedwar, practised 'art photography', and made a series of mood portraits of women dressed in costumes and posing with romantic expressions, with titles like Past Memory, Dwindling Hope, Flaming Heart and Flame of Separation. He made these photographs in candle-light, which gave the images a dramatic and sentimental

Facing page: FIG. 8

19 Ravishankar Rawal, Gujaratma Kalana Pagran (Gujarati), Ahmedabad, 2009: 228.

20 For example, his ghazal 'Mazedari Hamari Chhe' (Gujarati), published in Vismi Sadi, June 1916: 205. His photographs of women in romantic poses titled Nargis and Rose (nargis is the lily flower) and Rose Flower, and of a reclining woman with an exposed breast titled A Flower Laden with Sweet Frangrance, were published in an article by 'Bulbul', 'Hindna Chitrakaro: Mr. Shapoor N. Bhedwar' (Gujarati), Vismi Sadi, April 1916: 51–54.

21 Ranjitlal Harilal Pandya, 'Gujaratma Sahityaane Kalano Vikas' (Gujarati), Vismi Sadi, March 1920: 518.

22 Rawal, Gujaratma Kalana Pagran: 228.

Facing page: FIG. 9

effect.[23] Tarapor also photographed tableaux of theatrical performances. A series based on the Gujarati play Sneha Sarita, in which Jayshankar Sundari played the main role, was published in a Gujarati journal in 1916.[24] In the same journal, he illustrated a short story titled 'Govalani' (Cowherdess)[25] by creating dramatic tableaux of its characters and photographing these.

These very individualistic works of Bhedwar and Tarapor reflected the unique scenario of creative experimentation that was transforming the aesthetic ethos of the city of Bombay, drawing from theatre, photography, cinema and literature.

VISUAL CULTURE OF INDO-BRITISH TEXTILE TRADE

By the beginning of the twentieth century, a new industrial economy had begun to take root in the major cities of India, ushering in an era of commodity-as-spectacle. Driven by the dominant forces of mass production and mass consumption, these 'created an uproar, not only of things but of signs'.[26] Fierce market competition between the British and indigenous cotton mills and textile-goods marketing agencies, combined with Gandhi's crusade in favour of khadi, engendered a new visual culture – in the form of product labels, calendars and advertisements – which transformed the conventional visual aesthetics of the bazaar, and constructed itself through multiple representations in print, theatre and cinema.

The range of commodities produced by the post-industrial revolution, capitalist mode of production became intertwined with images from the new visual culture generated by trade practices of labelling, trademarking and advertising. This colonially engendered visualism emerged in India, among other things, with British exports of surplus cloth from the advanced cotton processing and weaving mills of Manchester, Glasgow and Liverpool.

RISE OF BOMBAY'S COTTON TEXTILE INDUSTRY AND TRADE

During the American Civil War (1861–65), President Abraham Lincoln announced a blockade of his country's southern ports. This meant that the flourishing trade in American 'King Cotton', mainly comprising exports to Great Britain, came to a halt, and threatened to render idle the cotton processing, spinning and weaving mills of Lancashire. Britain started looking to India for much higher imports of Indian cotton than the 20 per cent it stood at before the disruption caused by the American Civil War.

As observed by S.M. Rutnagur, 'members of the various communities in Bombay, including wealthy merchants, bankers, brokers and traders invested their all in cotton exports and thought of no other business or commodity in the frenzy of the huge profits from them'.[27] By 1865, when the Civil War ended, Bombay had earned 70 million pounds from the boom in exports of cotton to Britain. With this, the city entered the era of a new economy that saw a rise in banks, reclamation companies, joint-stock companies, and companies dealing in cotton processing, shipping and insurance.

However, when the supply of American cotton to Britain resumed at the end of the war, Bombay's cotton trade with Britain collapsed. The surplus cotton that had arrived in the city from different regions of the country encouraged the establishment of indigenous spinning and weaving mills in Bombay. Thus a number of mills came up in Bombay in the 1870s and 80s, which earned profits both by catering to the

23 For images, see Ramniklal A. Mehta, 'Vikhyat Kalanipun photographer Jehangir Tarapor B.A.' (Gujarati), Vismi Sadi, September 1917.

24 For images, see Mansukhram Atmaram, 'Aajna Natako: Sneha Sarita' (Gujarati), Vismi Sadi, April 1916: 57–64.

25 For images, see the short story 'Govalani' (Gujarati), Vismi Sadi, February 1918: 89–97.

26 Anne McClintock, 'Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity racism and imperial advertising', in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., The Visual Culture Reader, London and New York, 2002: 507.

27 S.M. Rutnagur, 'Bombay Industries: The Cotton Mills', The Indian Textile Journal Ltd., Bombay, 1927: 13.

domestic market and by exporting yarn to China; though the latter declined in later years due to competition with Japan. In the decades that followed, right up to the First World War, the fortunes of Bombay's cotton spinning and weaving industry witnessed several ups and downs. Even as the surplus yarn produced by the city's mills began to be diverted to newly established weaving units in both Bombay and Ahmedabad, a hindrance caused by the First World War in the supply of weaving machinery brought about a temporary downturn in the weaving industry. At the same time the indigenous textile industry received a boost – when the supply of cotton textiles from Britain was affected by the War.

By the 1920s and 30s, Bombay's textile mills had vastly improved their production, enough to substitute British piece-goods with indigenous products in large measure. British textile exports to India suffered a further blow when Gandhi launched his massive movement of boycott of British cotton goods and advocated its replacement by khadi: an estimated 16 million yards of khadi were produced in India at the time. The boycott of British goods led to the closing down of nearly 75 mills in Lancashire and Blackburn within a period of four years.[28]

BOMBAY'S MILL LABELS

All the bales of mill cloth coming to India from Great Britain used to be carefully trademarked and labelled. These mill labels, mostly rectangular in format, had ornate margins on all four sides and a main image in the centre. The images were mostly Indian mythological scenes, or of deities or saints; of members of the British royal family; of jugglers and belly-dancers, nautch girls, artisans and service renderers; scenes of rural Indian life, or Indian flora and fauna. On the margins were printed the name of the mill or of the marketing agent, generally in English, Gujarati and Bengali. Besides Indian imagery, titillating images of European beauties were also a part of the range of labels used in the packaging of British textile goods. The indigenous mills were quick to adopt this practice of imaged labels. Initially they used religious imagery on their labels, but symbols of swadeshi and Indian nationalism were soon incorporated. Some Indian mill labels and publicity cards had images of 'Mother India', while others depicted nationalist leaders like Kamala Nehru (FIG. on page 500), Sarojini Naidu (FIG. 19), Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya (FIG. 21).

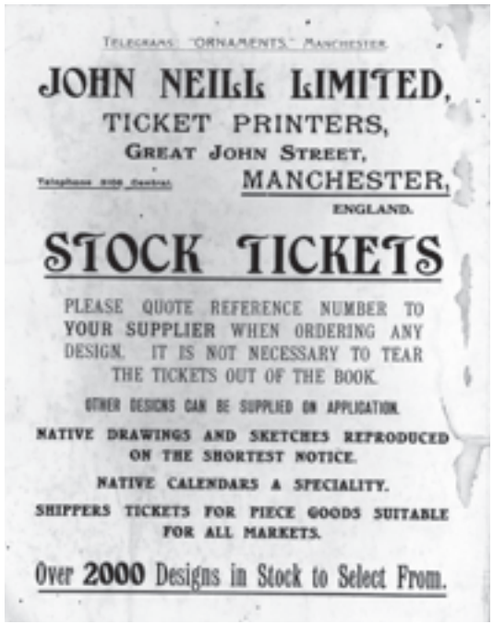
Competition between the indigenous mills and their British counterparts politicized the registration of labels and trademarks. Despite a demand made in 1877 by the Bombay Mill Owners Association that the government introduce a Trade Marks Act for India, the government proposed, in 1881, that all Indian trademarks and labels should be registered in London. Bypassing this proposal, the 'Bombay Mill Owners Association decided in 1886 to register the marks and labels of different mills in the books of the Association and refer the disputes to arbitration'.[29] This led to the first phase of the explosion of popular imagery in Bombay, with indigenous socio-political concerns such as swadeshi getting addressed through a new visuality in the culture of mass consumption.

The mill labels, both British and Indian, were called 'tickets' or tikas – from the French etiquette, meaning a 'little note, or a certificate, license or permit', and applied to labels in an extended sense. One of the labels even portrayed a ticket dalal (agent) sitting on the floor, displaying an array of labels for sale. It has long been a dilemma

28 http://www.bbc.co.uk/nationonfilm/topics/textiles/background_decline.shtml, accessed on 24 June 2013.

29 Rutnagur, 'Bombay Industries: The Cotton Mills': 533.

FIG. 10



for researchers of Indian mill labels and calendars to determine where these were produced – in Britain or in India. A large number of labels showing Indian subjects were based on the paintings of Ravi Varma or those produced by various Calcutta studios, or on Indian miniature paintings from the Mughal, Pahari or Rajasthani schools, or on the Tanjore (Thanjavur) and Kalighat idioms. However most of them were done in a generalized 'Indian idiom' derived by hybridizing various styles of Indian painting, and often combined with influences from lessons in perspective and realism from the colonial art schools. The artworks for the labels were most likely prepared by amateur Indian artists, but it appears that sometimes European commercial artists too were engaged in this work. This can be surmised from the orientalist manner of depiction of some of the Indian subjects, and from the rendering of inscriptions in Bengali, Gujarati or Hindi that appear to have been mechanically copied by persons not literate in these scripts. Undoubtedly, all the labels depicting European women were produced in Europe.

From a striking discovery of two albums of labels and calendars in a private collection in Delhi,[30] intended as books of commercial samples of companies in Britain engaged in printing and publishing mill labels, it becomes clear that at least around the turn of the nineteenth century, such labels/calendars were produced in Britain. One of the albums is from 'John Neill Limited Ticket Printers', based in Manchester. The frontispiece, titled Stock Tickets, announces: 'Native drawings and sketches produced on the shortest notice / native calendars a speciality. Shipper's tickets for piece goods suitable for all markets over 2,000 designs in stock to select from' (FIG. 10). 'Native' stands for India/Indian, as evident from some of the Indian images in the album. The John Neill album contains about 25 assorted Indian and oriental images, and around 60 images of European women in enticing postures, for possible use on labels, calendars and textile-swatch folders. The label images include a tiger hunt with an Indian maharaja, a British sahib flirting with an oriental woman (Egyptian–Turkish–Middle Eastern all rolled into one), European women in oriental attire, etc. Quite often, the Indian images are wrongly identified; for example, an image based on a Ravi Varma painting, Indrajit presenting to his father Ravana the trophies of his conquest of Swarga (or Triumph of Indrajit), is erroneously titled Draupadi – indicating that as long as the image was 'native', correctness of its identification did not matter. The images of European women are based on fashion models, painted photographs, Art Nouveau and neo-classical paintings.

The other album in the private collection is from Maclure, Macdonald & Co., Glasgow. It has a handwritten inscription which reads: 'Stock Ticket / Babu Milapchand Jammarah / PO Sardar Shahr / Jila Bikaner / Rajputana / B S R Y / Collection of Commercial labels'. This company of engravers and lithographers was established in Glasgow in 1835 by Andrew Maclure and Archibald Gray MacDonald. It later opened offices in London, Liverpool and Manchester. The company was sold in 1992. The album has 92 images of product labels and calendars depicting European women and Indian subjects – including Hindu deities and mythological scenes.

A number of swatch folders and calendars of Lancashire mills, collected from Mumbai and other Indian cities, have identical or similar images as found in these albums, which points to the fact that these labels and calendars were being produced in the late nineteenth century and first quarter of the twentieth century. By that time,

Indian presses such as Ravi Varma's Fine Art and Lithographic Press had begun to produce labels for Indian products, as evidenced by examples.

Another early foreign publisher and agent of lithographs and postcards, based in Bombay and London, was B. Rigold & Bergmann (1895–1916). This company produced and marketed monochromatic postcards depicting Indian views in large numbers (FIG. 11). It also marketed lithographs and porcelain figures of Hindu religious themes, as well as large prints of European beauties (FIG. 12). The postcards, lithos and porcelains were all produced in Germany. A porcelain figure of the Hindu god Kartikeya, found in Mumbai, bears a branded seal that reads, 'B. Rigold & Bergmann, Made in Germany, Registered in London'. It may be noted here that Germany was a European leader in the printing and printing machinery industry during the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Early lithographs of Ravi Varma were printed in Germany, and his press later employed German machines and technicians.

The ownership and management of textile mills in Bombay has a peculiar and complex history. Among the foreign companies based in the city – such as Finlay-Muir, Arbuthnot Ewert, Forbes Forbes and Campbell, James Greaves, Miller Higginbotham, William Stirling & Sons, John Orr Ewing & Sons – some were manufacturers and traders in cotton and textiles from Great Britain, while others were only trading companies. Some of them went on to become brand names for several other products like tea, jute, piece-goods, dyes, timber, etc. Some of these companies opened mills or trading houses in Bombay dealing in imports as well as exports.

The identities of these companies underwent a change as they expanded their trading practices through mergers or fresh partnerships. The labels and calendars issued by them stand testimony to this, as for example the company labels of the house of Finlays. As far back as 1750, James Finlay established James Finlay & Co. in Glasgow, which manufactured and traded in cotton. His son, Kirkman Finlay, expanded the cotton trade to Bombay in the nineteenth century, having persuaded the British government to break the monopoly of the East India Company over trade to India. The company, which made huge fortunes in trade of finished cotton goods, set up an agency in Bombay in 1816. In 1861 John Muir joined as a partner and eventually became the owner. In 1871 the company, now known as Finlay Muir & Co., entered the tea business in India and became a world leader in this trade. It continued to exist until 1983, when it finally sold its holdings to the Tatas. Product labels and calendars issued under the names of James Finlay & Co., Finlay Campbell and Finlay Muir & Co. testify to the company's changing profile in the city of Bombay.

The composite names on the trade labels of other Bombay-based companies, such as Arbuthnot Ewert & Co. (FIG. 17) and Gillanders Ewert & Co., or James Greaves & Co. and Greaves Cotton & Co., or Forbes & Co. and Forbes Forbes and Campbell & Co., suggest similar mergers and partnerships. Several of these played a major role in the development of the city of Bombay. One such is Forbes & Company Limited. Ever since its founder, John Forbes, landed in India on 6 December 1764 with a small but highly profitable cargo, the house of Forbes has not looked back and it remains in business till date. Cotton trading made the fortunes of this company, so much so that there was a time when the entire cotton crop of Gujarat was cornered by it. Eventually it entered shipping and then went into ship-building. The financial stability of the company led to it being appointed as banker to the government of Bombay and 'from there arose

Below: FIGS. 11, 12

what today is the State Bank of India'.[31] Institutions and landmarks in Mumbai which 'owe their existence to the association and involvement of John Forbes' include the Rajabai Tower, the Town Hall, the Royal Asiatic Society Library, the Turf Club, the Bombay Chamber of Commerce, the railway line between the city and its suburbs, and the Bombay Reclamation Project.[32]

Similarly, a large number of labels have been collected from Mumbai of John Orr Ewing & Co., which specialized in importing cotton cloth from India and exporting red dyed fabric (popularly known as Turkey Red) to India. In 1898, John Orr Ewing & Co., Archibald Orr Ewing and William Sterling & Sons amalgamated to form the United Turkey Red Co. Ltd, which continued large-scale trade with Bombay. Product labels of the Bombay-based firms owned by the Baghdadi Jew David Sassoon and his family – leading traders in cotton and opium with China, and agents for several Lancashire textile firms – give evidence of the Sassoon trading empire that made a significant contribution to the development of the city by establishing libraries, schools, hospitals, synagogues, docks, technical institutes, banks, old peoples' homes, etc.

The role of wealth generated from the cotton and opium trade (especially the latter, with China) in the civic and industrial development of Bombay is well known. Some of the families trading in opium and cotton, such as the Sassoons, Jeejibhoys and Amichands, who became leaders of the financial infrastructure of the city in the early nineteenth century, also contributed towards its urban social development. The product labels of the house of Sassoons, Forbes & Co, Remington Crawford & Co., as well as the Chinese-inspired 'Parsi embroidery', are some of the surviving visual remnants of these huge enterprises.

LABEL IMAGERY

A general survey of the visual imagery of mill labels prompts several possible groupings based on their thematic typology and functions. For the purpose of this essay, I shall examine the imagery of these labels under the broad and somewhat overlapping categories of 'cultic and mythological', 'imperial', 'orientalist' and 'sensual'.

CULTIC AND MYTHOLOGICAL LABELS

The largest number of surviving labels appears to belong to this category. The appeal of reconstructing the religious and the mythological in every encounter with a new visual genre in India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seems to have had a long trajectory. Be it in the pathbreaking Kalighat paintings of Calcutta, early Indian experiments in oil painting, reproduction of 'god pictures' by litho presses, new forms of advertising for marketing commodities, adapting plays on the proscenium stage, or the early engagements in cinema – deities and mythological characters were conceived in the image of ordinary people. This is not to say that secular imagery associated with commodity consumption, domestic life, fashion, entertainment and scenes from everyday life did not appear on labels, calendars and advertisements; or that social, political, historical or romantic subjects were not dealt with in theatre and cinema. However, transformation of the religious into the modern through contemporary media technologies fired the imagination of adherents as never before. Though the mill labels had a small number of images that drew from Sikhism or Islam, Hindu deities, sages and mythological characters predominated. Early colonial representations of

31 Quoted from Forbes & Co. website: www.forbes.co.in/history.htm, accessed on 28 May 2012.

32 Ibid.

India as a Hindu majority country may have had an impact on the general perception of India as 'Hindu land' (Hindustan) and on the later consolidation of the ideology of a Hindu nation (Hindu rashtra).

Most of these images depicted scenes from the Krishna Lila, Ramayana and Mahabharata, or deities like Vishnu, Siva, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Ganesh and Kartikeya (FIGS. 13, 14, 15). The appearance of these images on mill labels made them easily accessible to the common man, thus endorsing the product to the consumer on the one hand and becoming accessible personal objects of veneration on the other. The presence of vermillion marks on the glass of framed labels is evidence of their having become objects of worship. The deities themselves, as much as the products they endorsed, became commodities, and together they entered homes, restaurants, shops and work places in every nook and corner of the country – irrespective of caste, class, location and ritual canons.

Facing page, clockwise from top left:
FIGS. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

IMPERIAL IMAGES

The cloth labels of both British and Indian companies often carried images of the British royalty (FIG. 18). This imperial endorsement acted as a seal of approval for the authenticity and high quality, as it were, of the product. Faith in British standards ran so deep in India that even tribal people in remote parts of the country got necklaces of British silver coins made for themselves because they could trust the quality and content of silver. It was for the same reason that the image of the 'clean and chivalrous' British 'Tommy' (soldier) had a talismanic effect on the marketing of 'Sunlight' soap in early twentieth-century Britain, as we shall see later. Queen Victoria, whose image frequently appeared on cloth labels, was referred to in contemporary folklore as 'Mother'.[33] Following this impact of credibility of the ruler's endorsement of products, several Indian companies began to put images of maharajas on their product labels.

ORIENTALIST OVERTONES

A large number of label images were orientalist, depicting Indian jugglers, circuses, rope dancers, snake charmers, nautch girls, tiger hunts, maharajas, washermen, elephants, etc. (FIG. 16). These labels had a special appeal for British officers, traders, entrepreneurs, sailors and other travellers, as images of an exotic land and as proof of their having been there. On the other hand, this imaged identity of certain traits of Indian culture in the west became the basis for formation of Indians' own self-image. These orientalist visual archives began to produce and play out their new identities both in India and abroad.

'SWADESHI' IMAGINARIES

At the peak of the Indian freedom movement while countering British goods with the weapon of khadi and village industries, a notion of revival of Indian clothing traditions began to gain ground in elitist circles around Nehru, particularly through Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Rukmini Devi Arundale, which led to the birth of 'handloom fabric': mill-spun yarn woven on hand-operated looms, as against khadi which was hand-spun and hand-woven. Traditional genres of the Indian sari, such as the brocade, Jamdani, Kanjeevaram, Patola, Paithani and several others, were revived with mill yarn but using handloom weaving.[34]

33 'Where are you, Mother Victoria? . . . I don't even get two full meals; what's the use of roads?' Quoted in Sumanta Banerjee, The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta, Calcutta, 1989: 115.

34 'The lovely weaves of Paithan, Baluchar and Tanchoi and the rich, heavy jamawar shawls of Kashmir were revived and placed on the market.' Quoted from Jamila Brijbhushan, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya: Portrait of a Rebel, New Delhi, 1976: 145.


BEST TURKEY RED
Wm STIRLING & SONS GLASGOW


FINLAY, MUIR & Co CALCUTTA & BOMBAY


ESTLINER & Co MANCHESTER
HENRY BARNECK & Co CALCUTTA


MAHARANI CHHAP
CHIKA
CHIKA LTD, BOMBAY
MADE IN INDIA


WELCOME INDIA
LUDHA GALLIANJEE BOMBAY
FAST COLOR
ARBUTHNOT, EWART & Co.
MANCHESTER.


ARYODAYA SP. W. MILLS.
AHMEDABAD.


कुमारी त्रिशुला दरु
Miss Trisula Daru.
Phoenix P. Works.
Copy Rt 215


THE JACOB SASSOON MILL
E.D.SASSOON & Co. LTD AGENTS
THE SPINNING WHEEL
THE E.D.SASSOON UNITED MILLS LTD

Facing page, clockwise from top left:
FIGS. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23

Women nationalist leaders, especially of the Congress Party, adopted these revived traditional saris as 'indigenous', 'traditional' and therefore 'nationalist'. Gandhi himself endorsed mill fabric as swadeshi if it used indigenous factors of production. Some of the Bombay mills flaunted images of hand-spinning on their labels (FIG. 23). Soon after independence, under the very first Five Year Plan of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the All India Handlooms Board was established for development of handloom fabric in the country. In line with this, the mill labels of Aryodaya Spinning Mills, Manecklal Harilal Mills, etc., displayed portraits of leaders like Kamala Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Leelavati Munshi, Kumari Trisula Daru and other Congress women on their product labels and publicity materials (see FIGS. 19, 20, 21, 23).

Interestingly, princely India generally kept away from khadi and handloom, continuing to be charmed by chiffons and georgettes. Many of the princely states had summer homes in Paris from where they obtained specially commissioned saris in these fabrics.[35] A number of India's princely families regularly entertained the European aristocracy in their homes, and are known to have supported western modernizing projects such as universities, colleges, medical institutions, public schools, museums and railways. The women of these families adapted crêpe fabrics such as chiffon to Indian saris which, on account of their slight stretch and sheerness, lustre and smooth texture, became popular as evening wear, especially as an overlay that lent a graceful and flowing demeanour to the wearer. The drape of these saris combined with blouse-styles adapted from European gowns and frocks, and held in place over the torso with a brooch, was an acceptable compromise between the 'Indian' requirement that the female body be covered from head to toe and the 'western' delight in exposure, as against the 'sharp and cutting angularity of khadi'.[36] The flow and sheerness of the fabrics were also close to the Art Nouveau and Art Deco idioms that were becoming popular in Bombay towards the beginning of the twentieth century.

It may be noted that in Bombay cinema too, as it moved from its early mythological genre to social entertainers, albeit not in linear sequence, the Ravi Varma-esque, ethnic clothing of Sita/Shakuntala/Urvashi/Damayanti/Draupadi began to give way to a more fashionable urban milieu of female clothing comprising chiffons and georgettes – and so too the Sanskritic heroines in the calendar art of S.M. Pandit, Raghuveer Mulgaokar, J.P. Singhal and others. More on this later.

COLONIAL COUNTERFLOWS: ALBUMIZING THE WHITE WOMAN

A mercantile mansion in Rajasthan displays framed pictures of scantily dressed European women casting seductive glances amidst religious oleographs of Hindu mythological heroines, construed as Indianized white women. A raja of a small princely state in the former Bombay Presidency meticulously maintains an album of photographic postcards with provocative images of European women and Indian nautch girls. A descendant of a nineteenth-century cloth merchant in Mumbai steals a weekly peep into a pile of trade folders containing swatches of British textiles adorned with steamy images of white women. The colony seems to have reciprocated the gaze.

British and Scottish mill and product labels had their share of Indian religious and mythological images, and pictures of oriental beauties and courtesans on the one hand, and of European women ranging from seductress to performer – 'the chaste

35 For example, Princess Niloufer of Hyderabad is known to have commissioned such saris from French designers including Jeanne Lanvin: http://www13.fitnyc.edu/museum/Exoticism/Niloufer.htm. Maharani Suniti Devi of Cooch Behar apparently started a sari trend of her own by making chiffon and pearls the 'uniform of India's royal ladies': http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2011-05-09/news/295.

36 Nirad Chaudhuri, Culture in the Vanity Bag, Mumbai, 2009: 128.

maiden in England'[37] – to fashion model, on the other. If an album of images of Indian women formed an imaginary harem for fantasizing about oriental beauties, there was an equal counterflow of images of white women to be 'haremized' for the fantasies of Indian importer-merchants and their consumer-clients. The images of European women were generally printed on thick and glossy paper, and placed within an ornate frame in a cardboard folder containing swatches (FIG. 24). Often encased in wreaths of flowers, dressed provocatively and looking straight into the eyes of the beholder, the 'solo girl' of the label became an irresistible object of desire for Indian men (FIG. 25).

As the return journey of the magic carpet from Britain brought along with its cargo of textiles and piece-goods, an array of images of exotic, sultry and amorous white women on their product labels, they in turn began to shape the social values of urban Indians in various ways. Men began to dream up wives and mistresses in the image of the white woman. Women responded by sensualizing their attire and wearing short hairstyles – while so pleasing their men, they also relished the newly found freedom to allure and entice. Artists began to cast images of goddesses and heroines from Indian epics and mythology as 'Indianized' white women on the posters and calendars they created. The European label girls provided visual reference for modes of dressing and make-up, though adapted and 'localized', for enacting urban social themes in the contemporary theatre, cinema and advertising.

BOMBAY'S CALENDARS: THE COLONY'S CLEANLINESS AND HEALTH

Besides British textile giants, shipping magnates and financial institutions, major consumer goods companies from Europe started operations in India by the 1930s with Bombay as their headquarters. These included Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (established in 1928/30), pharmaceutical multinationals like Woodwards (in the 1920s) and Glaxo Laboratories (in the 1930s), the petroleum products multinational Burmah Shell, and the safety match company Swedish Match (whose subsidiary WIMCO was established in India around the 1930s). Apart from product labels and collectible cards, most of these companies issued large-sized calendars with the Gregorian system of fixing the year's beginning, length and sub-divisions. This solar calendar coexisted with the traditional Indian lunar calendars, known as the panchanga or almanac. By the 1940s calendars with pads consisting of 365 small leaves, one for each day, came into vogue, especially in Bombay. These combined the Gregorian system with various Hindu and Islamic dating systems. The vertical cardboard base of the calendar with its central image would continue to be in use for several years, while a new pad was affixed at the bottom for each new year.

The single-sheet Gregorian calendar with images and product advertisements probably became popular in India in the last decade of the nineteenth century, as can be surmised from surviving examples. A 1912 calendar of Maharaja Cigarette issued by the City Tobacco Company Bangalore (FIG. 26), and another one dated 1913 reproduced on the cover of the price list of Anant Shivaji Desai, sole agent of Ravi Varma's FAL Press, show that the basic format of the modern calendar had already been established. Allowing two preceding decades for stabilization of this format,

Below: FIGS. 24, 25
Facing page: FIGS. 26, 27, 28

37 Seher Agarwala, in an unpublished workshop note.

38 Anne McClintock, 'Soft-Soaping Empire: Commodity racism and imperial advertising', in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., The Visual Culture Reader, London and New York, 2002: 508.

39 Ibid.: 506.

40 Advertisement for Sunlight Soap in the English war magazine, The War Budget, 30 December 1915, page ii; courtesy Wikipedia.

one can therefore say with reasonable certainty that such calendars began to be produced in India towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Hindustan Unilever's most famous soap brands, Sunlight and Vinolia, became household names all across India from the 1930s onwards; for promoting these, the company brought out handsome multi-chrome, single-sheet calendars with images of Hindu divinity, such as Vishnu riding his vehicle Garuda, flanked by his two consorts, by Ravi Varma. Lever's 1933 calendar sported the image of the sun god Surya flanked by two female chauri bearers riding his chariot pulled by seven horses and Arun the charioteer – an iconographic essential (FIG. 27). A 1938 Sunlight Soap calendar shows a four-armed Saraswati standing in a lotus pond and playing the vina, the drape of her sari mutating her into a proto-Bharat Mata. Lever's Vinolia Soap calendar too reproduced Ravi Varma's Saraswati. Woodward's Gripe Water calendars almost always used images of child Krishna (FIG. 28). Gripe water being a home remedy for infants suffering from colic and gastrointestinal discomfort, and Krishna being the only Hindu deity whose childhood is described at length in the sacred literature, these images were well-suited to the company's product. Glaxo, with its slogan 'Builds bonny babies', also used Hindu divine images on its calendars. A large number of these calendar pictures were framed and hung in or around domestic shrines or in living rooms, and ritually tended. Swedish Match marketed its safety matchboxes in India by using Hindu images (mainly by Ravi Varma) on the cover labels.

Visual marketing campaigns for soap especially came up in wide and complex social, economic and political contexts. Until the late nineteenth century, soap was hardly used in Europe as a cleaning agent. By the 1890s, however, Victorian England was consuming 260,000 tons of soap a year, and soap advertisements emerged as a central cultural form of commodity capitalism.[38] Notions of clean and un-clean gained ground in terms of soap-using cultures vis-à-vis other cultures, premised on hierarchized class and cultural barriers leading to class control (cleansing the great unwashed: labourer, miner versus the white-collar collar) and the imperial civilizing mission (washing and clothing the savage: clean colonizer versus unclean colony).[39] Soap symbolized cleanliness, purity, honesty, rationality, social superiority, civility, chivalrousness and power.

The advertising campaigns for soap in Britain and its African colonies were secular in nature rather than religious as they were in India. The British Pears Soap campaign in Africa emphasized the value of cleanliness and the superiority of fair skin. An advertisement for Sunlight Soap appearing in a British journal in 1915 compared its qualities with 'the clean, chivalrous, fighting instinct of our [British] gallant soldiers [which] reflect[s] the ideals of our business life'.[40] The copy further stated that the characteristics of the British soldier as the 'CLEANEST FIGHTER IN THE WORLD' have equal repute for British goods. Here the soap stood for the clean business practices of the empire, and the high moral ground of the empire was equated with the qualities of the soap and the character of its soldiers. The qualities of courage, courteousness, gallantry and trustworthiness endowed in the British soldier were shared by Sunlight Soap – the soap thus did not remain a mere commodity but became a sign.

Another advertisement campaign of Pears Soap in Africa mooted the slogan 'Soap is Civilization', again underpinning the modern/secular values the empire brings to its colony along with its soap. The idea of soap being an embodiment of civilization was

so deeply imprinted in the psyche of the colony that no less a person than Mahatma Gandhi himself subscribed to it in the early years of his life:

> Through sheer folly I had managed to get ringworm on the boat. For washing and bathing we used to have sea-water in which soap is not soluble. I, however, used soap, taking its use to be a sign of civilization, with the result that instead of cleaning the skin it made it greasy. This gave me ringworm.[41]

In India too, soap advertisements were soon to enter the complex web of market, religion, caste and politics. A 1940s' publicity campaign for Godrej Turkish Bath Soap and Family Soap (a Bombay brand) launched an aggressive drive against foreign soaps, alleging that they were impure as tallow from dogs, cats, cows and pigs was used in their manufacture, as against Godrej brands made from pure oils (FIG. 29). The advertisement quoted Annie Besant, Theosophist, crusader for the independence of India and Ireland, and a great believer in vegetarianism, as saying: 'For the last two years, I have been using only Godrej soaps and request the general public to use it.' It also cited a 'government scholar' (sarkari shastrajna), Major Dickinson, endorsing Godrej soaps for their 'canon-based purity' (shastra shuddha) and 'purity of processing' (kriya shuddha).[42]

The advertisement, in its drive, for its own market gain, to dissuade consumers from using foreign soaps on the ground that they used animal fat, invoked rumours dating back to the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny that cartridges used in the Enfield rifles supplied to sepoys were greased with beef and pork tallow, which incited Hindu and Muslim sepoys to desert the armed forces. It also valorized vegetarianism as a tenet of the Hindu canon by repeated reference to the shastras. Vegetarianism was practised by upper-caste Vaishnavas and Jains in India, and by recalling it in the context of the soap, the company hoped to gain superior social status and acceptance for its product. Further, as Annie Besant was a leading figure of the Indian National Congress and the independence movement, through her testimony the soap aspired to be an instrument for India's freedom from foreign rule and foreign products, echoing the Swadeshi movement, and thereby became a producer of ideology.

Even in twenty-first-century India, in the imagination of the country's so-called 'untouchable' castes, soap is regarded as a cleansing agent to wipe off the alleged pollution caused by a lower-caste person touching an upper-caste person. On hearing that Rahul Gandhi had visited Dalit homes during his 2008 election campaign in Uttar Pradesh, his political adversary and then Chief Minister of the state, Mayawati, said in a statement: 'I have also come to know that when this prince returns to his home in Delhi after meeting and eating with Dalits, he is given a bath with a special soap and he goes through purification rituals.'[43] Here, soap conjures up the painful experience of caste 'untouchability' on the one hand, and becomes an instrument for caste-based political propaganda on the other.

Broadly speaking, until the end of the 1930s, most of the Bombay-based companies that issued religious calendars selected images from pre-existing cultic pictures made by renowned artists like Ravi Varma or Dhurandhar which followed 'correct' iconographic conventions and 'traditional' manners of clothing, making them worthy of worship; these were then suitably altered to accommodate texts and images publicizing the concerned product. The reproduced images of deities were frontal with sharply addressed gazes. One such frontally seated Sai Baba poster published in the

FIG. 29

41 M.K. Gandhi, An Autobiography, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, reprint, 2005: 42.

42 The full text of the Marathi advertisement, translated into English, reads: 'Economical, pure and high quality soap is manufactured not in Europe but in India itself. The reason is that soap is made from oils and fats and such oils are produced in India in much larger quantity than in Europe. A large number of European companies manufacturing soaps use fats derived from such animals as dogs, cats, cows and pigs. Godrej Turkish Bath Soap and Family Soap being made from pure oils is economical. Dr. Annie Besant writes that for the last two years, I have been using only Godrej soaps and request the general public to use it. Government scholar Major Dickinson writes that Godrej soap is pure as per the shastras (canons) and in processing (kriya shuddha). Sole agents, Nadirshah Printer & Company, Esplanade Road, Fort, Mumbai.'

43 'Rahul bathes after visiting Dalits, says Mayawati', Hindustan Times (online edition), 7 April 2008.

1960s has the following line printed at the bottom: 'If you look to me I look to you. Sai Baba of Shirdi.' This complicity of gazes was considered a mark of divine presence in the image. The erotic complicity arising from the frontal posture and addressed gaze of female characters too triggered a 'living' relationship.

There were several reasons for the instant popularity of printed gods. Their easy availability and their visual appeal, emanating from a combination of the picturesque, the iconographic and the erotic, enhanced their 'exhibition value' – that oscillated between cultic and exhibitory spaces. Cultic and mythological subjects legitimized the erotic overtones of male consumption. A legitimizing defence was often put up by the artists, critics and consumers of these images where the erotic often verged on the lustful. Commenting on the depiction of women as *sringara nayika*s and *raga-ragini*s, one critic wrote: 'despite the women's red cheeks, titillating figures, attractive faces, a slightly displaced sari, emotive expressions on the faces ... and presence of infatuation and eroticism, the painting was not allowed to slip into vulgarity'.[44] It may be noted here that several of the renowned calendar artists and especially cinema publicity artists of Bombay, in their years of retirement, returned to 'fine art' or spirituality as a kind of expiation for their earlier engagement with 'amoral' visual productions: 'Cinema's status as guilty pleasure in India was mirrored not only in its relative absence from mainstream intellectual discourse but also in its absence as a respectable field of study.'[45] The same was true of popular visual culture studies.

The Bombay calendars of Hindu themes were designed to be framed, put behind glass and worshipped. These glazed and framed pictures became complete domestic altars wherein the glass not only received ritual vermillion marks, but also acted as a liminal wall between the sacred and the polluted. The glass facilitated such 'corpothetic' practices as the devotee touching the framed picture, having physical contact with the image while asking for a blessing or favour, but without touching the actual image. Moreover, the glass allowed physical segregation of the sacred from the polluted without obscuring the image from *darshan* (vision/gaze). These unconsecrated images could be bought and worshipped by anybody, which also reflected a loosening of the caste hierarchy by diminishing the position of brahmin priests whose services for consecrating images even for domestic shrines were considered a canonical requirement. Instead these images became 'living presences', for they 'continue to accumulate potency as they become accreted with the marks of repeated devotion' (Pinney 2004: 197). Their picturesque charm also allowed them to be displayed in living rooms, business premises and even bedrooms at strategic vantage points.

CIGARETTE ADVERTS: BETWEEN THE NAUTCH GIRL, THE SOLDIER, THE SWEEPER AND THE WHITE BEAUTY

One of the earliest surviving cigarette advertisements produced in India was issued by the City Tobacco Company, Bangalore in 1912, advertising their brand of Maharaja cigarettes. The vertical single-sheet calendar shows the Maharaja of Mysore in his full regalia with the prominent caption 'Maharaja Cigarette' arching over his head. The calendar, when located in an old furniture shop in Mumbai in the 1990s, was framed and behind glass. The same shop had another cigarette advertisement, this time of a 'modern' Indian woman in a fashionably draped sari with sleeveless blouse,

44 Dinanath Dalal, in Rajadhyaksha, Srijangandha: 39.

45 Neepa Majumdar, Wanted. Cultured Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s–1950s, New Delhi, 2010: 10.

flaunting a box of cigarettes prominently marked 'Bombay Special' in one hand and stylishly holding a lit cigarette in the other (FIG. 30). The picture of the woman, with her provocative gesture, frontal and directly addressed gaze intended to lure smokers to the brand, was placed in an ornately cut mounting board and framed.

Yet another shop had on display an album of 'cigarette cards' (playing cards, each 6 x 3 cm) pasted in pairs on each page. Each card had a multichromatic image on the obverse and the advertisement of the cigarette company on the reverse. The images, from various picture sources, were of oriental beauties, persons from different Indian occupations (such as sweeper, water carrier, soldier, etc.), nautch girls, film stars and European women in seductive poses (FIG. 31). These cards had apparently been issued in India between the 1890s and 1920s by Tiger Cigarettes and Pedro Cigarettes, both brands of the British-American Tobacco Company Ltd. Around the same time, Universal Tobacco Company, Madras, and Scissors Cigarette of W.D. & H.O. Wills supplied similar picture cards within their cigarette packets. One of the Scissors Cigarette cards had an image of a devadasi (temple dancer) or Bharatanatyam dancer with an inscription reading 'India'.

Generally, cigarette manufacturers avoided using religious images for their publicity material. An exception was Peninsular Tobacco Co. Ltd, which used images of Hindu deities and mythological scenes – mostly reproductions of paintings by Ravi Varma and other artists – on cards for their popular brand, Hawagarri Cigarette.

In one example collected in the 1990s from an affluent Parsi family of Mumbai, a couple of hundred cigarette cards representing oriental beauties (Indian, Thai, Burmese, etc.) were organized in different series and sewn together with ornate lacework to make an interior door curtain (FIG. 32). The image on each card was printed from a painted sepia photograph in which the clothing of the figure was brightly coloured while the face and limbs were lightly tinted – a device that added to the physical and individual presence of the model.

Collecting and creating albums of cigarette cards was a well-organized project in Europe in the 1930s, following the trajectory of the western enlightenment. For example, several German cigarette manufacturers issued cards under various thematic series such as 'German history', 'German artists', or 'Flags of Nations of the World'. These cards were collected as and when found, and then pasted together in albums specially printed for the purpose, with each page having empty boxes for specific cards and a related caption printed below. The collector strove to complete the album by filling up the empty boxes, and in the process educated himself/herself about the histories and cultures of the world. The project was so streamlined that specialized publishing houses brought out these thematic albums, in line with what cigarette companies supplied in their packets.[46]

On the other hand, European and American cigarette manufacturing companies based in India supplied cigarette cards with religious or sensual imagery as collectibles. Theirs was not a systematic intellectual endeavour or knowledge-building exercise, for India was seen as a more passive, feminized/juvenile client. Available evidence shows that in most cases albums of cigarette card beauties (as also in the case of postcard collections) were kept by Indian men as a private, voyeuristic world to invoke personal erotic fantasies.

An apt visual illustration of the association of erotic fantasy with cigarette smoking

Facing page, left: FIG. 30
Facing page, right: FIG. 31

46 Cigaretten-Bilderdienst, Hamburg-Bahrenfeld and Massary Zigarettenfabric, Berlin, were prominent publishers specializing in such albums.


These Pictures are
used with the
CIGARETTES
MANUFACTURED BY
STAR
TOBACCO
TRADE MARK
COMPANY.
Sole Proprietors
BOMBAY.


THESE PICTURES
are packed
IN THE
BRANDS
OF
CIGARETTES
Manufactured
BY
THE AMERICAN
TOBACCO CO.

Facing page: FIG. 32

is an advertisement of the Bombay-based Panama Cigarette which appeared on the cover of the April 1946 issue of Film India magazine (FIG. 33). The artwork for this was prepared by the artist S.M. Pandit. The silhouette of a man reclining in an armchair is shown at the bottom of the page; through the cloud of smoke issuing from his mouth he is watching a fantasy scene of 'Heaven on Earth' where a group of bare-bodied young fairies are engaged in a drinking spree. The captions read: 'The Panama, a way to Heaven' / 'the complete story of Heaven on Earth'. The sensuality of the female figures in the advertisement is in line with Pandit's other Film India covers of the 1940s and 50s, marked by the new cinematic aesthetic – at once celluloid, liquid and glossy.

WINDS OF CHANGE

As mentioned earlier, Ravi Varma's legacy in terms of the iconography of Hindu deities, and, to some extent, the conceptualization and figuration of mythological characters, continued to have a significant impact, even after the closing down of his press in 1935, on the work of calendar artists all over India – and Bombay artists were no exception. But one must hasten to add that the setting in of winds of change in the production of popular visual culture in Bombay was at a much faster pace than elsewhere in India. The influence of Ravi Varma had begun to fade by about the 1940s in Bombay, and a new aesthetic order was getting established in the production of calendar art which derived its elements from diverse visual sources – but particularly from developments in Bombay's film industry.

The first two decades following India's independence were a time when the project of modernizing India, according to Nehru's vision and as reflected in the first series of Five Year Plans, took shape. On account of the severe paucity of foreign exchange, industrial production and infrastructure development had to be 'indigenous', and, in the longer run, based on a policy of transfer of technology rather than imports. Indigenously produced but branded consumer goods – radios, compacted gramophones, bicycles, primus stoves, toasters, ceiling fans, shoes, cigarettes, clothing, typewriters, cameras and the like – began to define modern urban living. The introduction of stainless steel utensils into the kitchen became the ultimate sign of domestic modernity, with exhibitionary dimensions acquired through their display on kitchen wall-racks, as tellingly flashbacked in installations by the artist Subodh Gupta at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Associated Cement Company (ACC) began to determine the dream of middle-class housing with its advertisements showing a simple ground-plan and elevation, consolidating into what was to become the habitat of the newly emerging middle class of Bombay.[47] Pharmaceutical and cosmetic companies introduced notions of bacteria and hygienic living, hair care with shampoos, and beautiful skin with soaps and creams. Calendars and advertisements for these products reflected the aspirations of Bombay's everyday modernity in the post-independence era and constituted its representative archive.

Bombay's new and enchanting inter-visuality, predominantly governed by the emergent cinematic aesthetic that reconceptualized the mythological calendar imagery, god posters and magazine covers, brought into the market scores of artists whose styles were often indistinguishably intermingled. I end this essay describing the artistic trajectories of three – namely, S.M. Pandit, R.V. Mulgaokar and J.P. Singhal –

47 I am thankful to Charles Correa for drawing my attention to these images.

who typically represented the trend as they had one foot in the lucrative calendar art business and the other in the film industry.

S.M. PANDIT

Sabanand Monappa Pandit (1916–1991), known as S.M. Pandit, was born in Gulbarga, Karnataka, to an amateur artist father. It is symptomatic that this boy, who was to emerge as a famous super-realist painter in Bombay in the decades of the 1940s and 50s, was exposed to German prints which he copied to train his hand in realistic works.[48] In the 1930s, a cinema banner painter of Gulbarga, Shankarrao Alandkar, let Pandit use his studio and observe the art of banner painting, thus introducing Pandit to the idiom of cinematic realism at an early age. His later training in painting at the Madras School of Art, and then at Nootan Kala Mandir and the J.J. School of Art in Bombay, made him a diehard realist painter, particularly under the influence of Gladstone Solomon, then director of the School. Much before he came in contact with Pandit, Solomon had developed a hobby of going to see the realistically painted theatre and cinema banners, backdrops and posters in the city. It has been recorded that he saw and admired hand-painted cinema posters by the Kolhapur artists Baburao Painter and Sahib Fattehlal at Dhobi Talao corner and at Balivalla Theatre.[49]

By 1938, Pandit had entered the commercial art world of Bombay. An early commission that brought him recognition was creating posters and possibly lobby cards for MGM films showing at Metro Cinema at Dhobi Talao. It is said that Pandit broke the convention of painting film banners in oils and instead began to use poster colours, which made the details more accurate and the printing more lustrous and sharp.[50] The possibility of play between opaqueness and transparency afforded by poster colours brought in a new charm that was not possible with oils. The first major Indian film publicity commission Pandit received was from Himanshu Rai and Devika Rani of Bombay Talkies: the responsibility for the entire studio's publicity work. Pandit's fame in cinema work attained its peak with his highly sensual, dramatic and photo-realistic designs for the covers of Baburao Patel's Film India magazine from the 1940s to 60s (FIG. 34); by then the name of the magazine was changed to Mother India. He also undertook publicity work for some of the films of V. Shantaram, Raj Kapoor and Sohrab Modi.

Gradually, Pandit started reducing his work for cinema and began to work for advertising agencies such as Ratan Batra, where he designed publicity material for textile mills. For a few years, he also worked at Express Blocks. He then decided to undertake freelance work. He came in contact with Dhanvate of Shivraj Fine Arts of Nagpur and Dhote of Bombay Fine Arts, who were among the largest calendar-producing firms of Maharashtra. They published thousands of copies of Pandit's artworks based on Hindu mythological subjects, such as Siva and Parvati (FIG. 36), Rama and Sita, Dushyanta and Shakuntala, Urvashi and Pururavas (FIG. 35), Vishwamitra and Menaka, Radha and Krishna, Sita teaching archery to Lava and Kusha, Nala and Damayanti, and Sita pointing at the Golden Deer. The last two images also appeared on biscuit tins of Bombay's Parle Products, which were a popular collectible in middle-class homes. Interestingly, Pandit's rendering of Siva in Siva and Parvati is almost a literal copy of Michelangelo's Adam in the Creation of Adam fresco of the Sistine Chapel. From Ravi Varma to Bombay's Pandit and Mulgaokar, calendar artists developed an

48 Rajadhyaksha, Srijangandha: 57.
49 Story of Sir J.J. School of Art: 91.
50 Rajadhyaksha, Srijangandha: 57.

eclectic idiom that evoked multiple visual references, which was also common to the theatre and cinema of the time.

As pointed out by M.G. Rajadhyaksha in his biographical essay on Pandit, 'Gradually, Panditji's heart turned to spirituality. Devotion towards Kalimata sprang up in him. His attitude towards life changed. He began to see divine visions. In the Kali temple of Gulbarga, he re-consecrated the images of Kali and Siva. There itself, he built a house and an art gallery.' Around this time Pandit was commissioned by the Vivekananda Memorial Committee to paint a portrait of Swami Vivekananda. The portrait he made, which became 'immortal', was based on a divine vision of Vivekananda.[51] Rajadhyaksha compares him to Norman Rockwell, the popular twentieth-century American painter. The contrast between Pandit's spiritual leanings and his highly eroticized conception of female characters in his Hindu mythological paintings is intriguing. According to some, his provocative, almost lascivious rendering of Vishwamitra and Menaka – where 'heavenly apsaras descend with bared breasts to bearded sages who resembled Pandit himself' – could 'represent allegorically the artist's own inner struggle between temptations of the material world and a more elevated spiritual existence'.[52]

In Pandit's calendars based on mythological themes, one notices a faint shadow of Ravi Varma in some of the figurations and compositions. For example, his depiction of the desertion of Damayanti by Nala and Urvashi's departure from Pururavas are obviously borrowed from Ravi Varma's treatment of these subjects. In fact the contouring of figures, their postures and gestures, and the manner of composition in the mythological paintings of Ravi Varma were so deeply ingrained in the minds of the next generation of artists, including Dhurandhar, that their works often appear to be visual improvisations on themes rendered by Ravi Varma.

This said, it must be added that Pandit's range of mythological works marked a clear departure from the past and ushered in a new era of calendar art in Bombay – at a time when the expanding fields of printing, publishing and advertising were opening up new markets – which largely derived its aesthetic nuances from cinematic productions. Pandit's involvement with publicity work for cinema led him to explore forms of fleshly and lubricious sensuality – an essential requirement in Bombay's commercial cinema market. Besides his artworks for posters, booklets and lobby cards, Pandit's cover designs for Baburao Patel's Film India exemplify his engagement with eroticization of the female body. The newly introduced cinematic lighting accentuating the seductive carriage of the body; diaphanous, clinging and perpetually slipping saris, the liquid, celluloid gloss of the skin; and the ecstatic and rapturous facial expressions in close-up deployed by Pandit in his film publicity work partially determined the aesthetics of his cultic and mythological calendars as well. Here he had to attain a strategic balance between the popular appeal of the sensual female body, and acceptable iconographic and religious conventions, so as to appropriately locate his calendars in a market governed by duplicitous moral standards with regard to women, sexuality and religion.

As we have seen earlier, the portrayal of male deities in calendars in the initial decades of the twentieth century had a strong impact on costuming and ornamentation in Marathi and Parsi mythological theatre. With the entry of Pandit, this changed. His male deities flaunted robust, sculpturesque bodies, ready to swing into action. His Sivas, looking sideways (away from the camera), were postured such that every well-built muscle of the chest, shoulder, arms, thighs and legs displayed masculinity

51 Ibid.

52 Rajesh Devraj and Paul Duncan, eds, The Art of Bollywood, Cologne, 2010: 70.

par excellence. As brilliantly observed by Kajri Jain: 'The influence of Hollywood film posters, particularly the style associated with MGM, is evident in the treatment of his characters' faces and expressions, in his depiction of Siva as a bluish, muscular Tarzan-type hero clad in a leopard skin ... and in his Disney-like detailing of flowers and animals.'[53]

Facing page, clockwise from top left:
FIGS. 33, 34, 35, 36

RAGHUVIR MULGAOKAR

Another artist who dominated the scene of popular calendar pictures, magazine covers and film publicity work in Bombay from the 1940s onwards was Raghuvir Mulgaokar (1922–1976), a household name in the elite Marathi society of the city in those days. Mulgaokar was born in Portuguese Goa in 1922, into a family of artists. His father Shankarrao was a locally known painter, and so was his brother. Raghuvir received inspiration and encouragement from A.X. Trinidade, who lived nearby and who was instrumental in getting him sent to Bombay around 1940. In the early years of his career Mulgaokar worked in the studio of S.M. Pandit, under whose name several of his paintings seem to have been published. A story goes that under the pretext of writing a biography of Pandit, Mulgaokar managed to get a working space next to his desk in this studio, which gave him the opportunity to learn from Pandit's method of painting.[54] So be it, but Mulgaokar's style and technique were quite different from Pandit's in all respects.

When he first arrived in Mumbai, Mulgaokar lived in Bhatwadi, the hub of Marathi literary publishers including Kulkarni Granthalaya, Keshav Bhikaji Dhavle and G. Parchure. He began to do cover designs for these publishers and since books authored by several eminent Marathi writers were brought out by them, Mulgaokar's name entered elite Marathi circles. This was also a period of proliferation of Diwali annuals such as Ratnaprabha, Vasant, Alka, Deepalakshmi, etc.; later Mulgaokar started his own Diwali special, Ratnadeep, where some of his best known works appeared (FIG. 37). Nayikas, women depicted in a romantic mood, deepalakshmis or women carrying lamps, and the romantic dalliance of Radha–Krishna were the main themes of these covers. He also regularly published his mythological paintings in Dharmayug, from the house of Times of India, which brought him fame in northern India. Mulgaokar is said to have produced more than 5,000 paintings, often completing nine calendars in a single day, which fetched him the title of 'the artist whose brush never dried'.[55]

Though he was best known for his calendar and magazine cover paintings, he also did publicity work for Bombay's film industry, designing posters, booklets and advertisements for films like Milan (FIG. 38), Milap, Teen Batti Char Rasta, Chandni Chouk, Asha and Meri Surat Teri Ankhein, between 1952 and 1970.

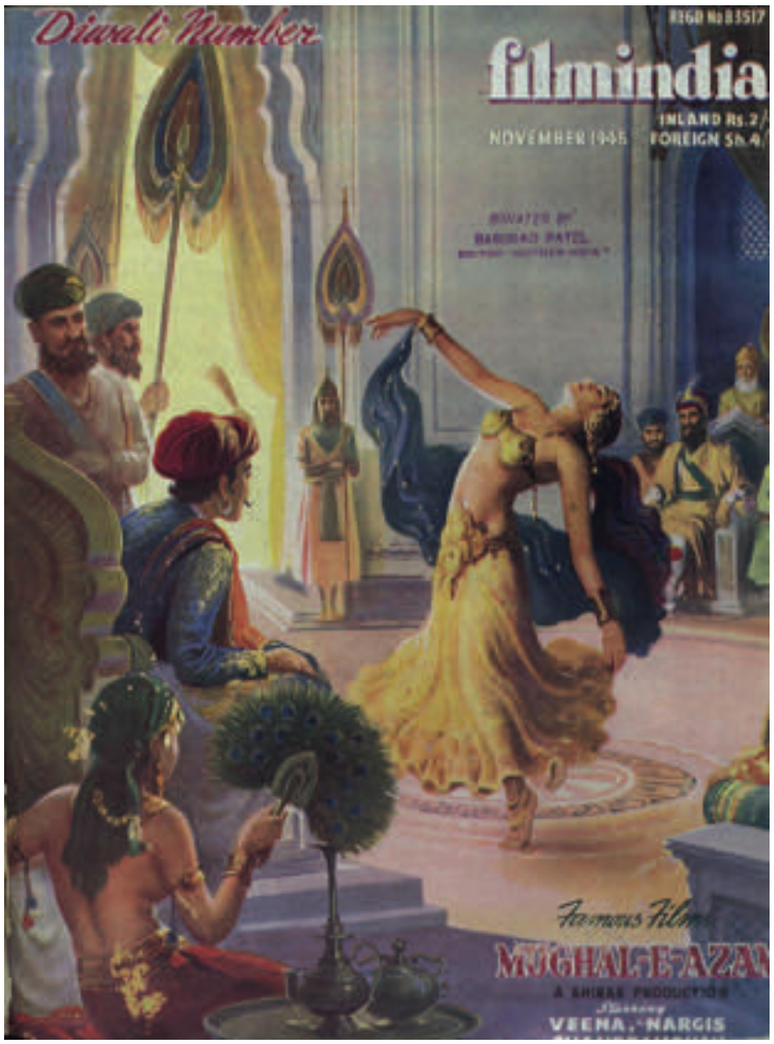
Mulgaokar's name is often clubbed with that of S.M. Pandit as he initially worked in the latter's studio. However, from the bulk of his surviving paintings it is evident that Mulagokar evolved an individualistic style of his own. In comparison with Pandit, his treatment of figures was plainer, more burnished, soft and silken – an effect he attained by using the technique of airbrush or fine spraying of pigment. He usually smoothened out the muscular build of the body in favour of rounded curves, which lent a feminine effect to his female characters and a somewhat effeminate look to their male counterparts. The wavy tresses of his heroines and divine consorts hanging loose and adorned with fresh flowers, venis or gajras, the collyrium-filled dark eyes

53 Kajri Jain, Gods in the Bazaar, Durham and London, 2007: 158.

54 Rajadhyaksha, Srijangandha: 16.

55 M.G. Rajadhyaksha, in an interview with the author.


filmindia
APRIL 1946
The Panama way to Heaven!
Panama
20
CIGARETTES
The Complete Story of Heaven on Earth


Diwali Number
filmindia
NOVEMBER 1945
INLAND Rs.2/
FOREIGN Sh.4/
Famous Film
MUGHAL-E-AZAM
A SHIRAZ PRODUCTION
Starring
VEENA, NARGIS


वसंत


SUNIL DUTT
NUTAN
JAMUNA
PRAN
MILAN
L.V. PRASAD
A. SUBBA RAO
LAXMIKANT PYARELAL

Facing page, clockwise from top left: FIGS. 37, 38, 39, 40, 41

and bindis on the forehead, the middle-class Maharashtrian drape of the sari, and the overall 'girl-next-door' look made his pictures highly popular in Marathi homes.

Mulgaokar's cinema publicity work influenced the mythological paintings he did for magazine covers and calendars in many ways. The most common technique used in artworks for banners, booklets and lobby cards in those days was montage. Photographic as well as hand-painted images from different narrative sequences of a film were montaged so that the faces, busts or full figures of characters, with minimal indication of background architecture or landscape, appeared on a single picture plane – each with its own colour scheme, chiaroscuro, placement and dimensions. Geometric perspective was abandoned in favour of conceptual perspective where the more important characters were shown larger than the rest. Dream or memory scenes were depicted as fading images in the background. Some of these effects were used by Mulgaokar in his mythological calendar pictures too. For example, in one of these, a sharp image of a meditating Siva with full iconographic attributes is shown in the foreground, while Parvati's large face emerging from the sky beside him is depicted as light and faded, almost monochromatic, like a dream image and an object of Siva's meditation (FIG. 39). The treatment of Parvati's face here, a device Mulgaokar used quite regularly, is definitely derived from his cinema publicity work.

One of the sources of Mulgaokar's inspiration was the British artist John William Waterhouse (1849–1917), who worked in the pre-Raphaelite or neo-classical style. Mulgaokar appropriated not only the spirit of Waterhouse's highly romantic and sentimentalist renderings of female figures from classical Greek and Roman mythology, but also directly expropriated some of them and remodelled them as Indian mythological scenes. One of the best examples of this is his 1974 Ratnaprabha image of Gopi Vastraharan (FIG. 41), which is directly based on Waterhouse's Hylas and the Nymphs (FIG. 40).

J.P. SINGHAL

One of the most prolific producers of calendar art in Bombay, also having the most visible formal connections with the aesthetics of the city's cinema, was J.P. Singhal. Born in 1934 in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh,[56] Singhal came to Bombay in 1959 and from then onwards, dominated the city's calendar and film publicity work for nearly four decades. By his own estimation, more than 2,700 of his paintings have been published, and there are 800 million reproductions of his work.[57] One of his early calendars titled Shiv Pooja sold 600,000 copies, establishing him as a major calendar artist. Before coming to Bombay, Singhal trained under Ram Kumar Sharma, a renowned calendar artist of Meerut. At that time Singhal used to paint religious and mythological subjects, which he gradually abandoned after he arrived in Bombay.

Singhal also did publicity design and photography work for more than 60 films between 1965 and 2001, including Gadar: Ek Prem Katha, Lal Badsha, Zameer, Judwaa, Bhai Bhai, Prem Granth, Suhaag and Roop ki Rani Choron ka Raja. According to Singhal, Raj Kapoor 'wanted his heroine Roopa, Zeenat Aman's character in the film Satyam Shivam Sundaram "to be sensual without being vulgar"', and asked Singhal for help. 'Roopa was based on my painting of a Dang (tribal) girl', he said (FIGS. 42, 43).[58] Elsewhere, Singhal recalled that on a trip to Nasik soon after he arrived in Bombay from Meerut, 'I met two adivasi girls bathing in the rain. Their innocence and beauty

56 Around this time Meerut was home to some very renowned calendar artists, such as Ram Kumar Sharma, Yogendra Rastogi and H.R. Raja.

57 J.P. Singhal, 'Introduction', in J.P. Singhal: The Impressionism of a Realist, exhibition catalogue, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, 2010.

58 J.P. Singhal, 'The Man Who Painted Time', as told to Manjula Sara Rajan, Open magazine, 2010, www.openthemagazine.com/articles/arts-letters/the-man-who-painted-time.

struck me. ... I started doing a series of works with the girls and with market scenes.'[59] Subsequently, Singhal profusely painted bare-breasted women, reproduced on scores of his calendars. He 'travelled the entire length and breadth of the country', to amass an archive of thousands of photographs of tribal women, who were unaware of his libidinous low-angle camera, as visual reference for his calendar and cinema work.

Foremost among the companies that patronized his tribal images for their calendars was Advani Oerlikon, a Mumbai-based engineering firm, and Britannia who 'even wanted paintings of bathing beauties for their calendar'.[60] Singhal also worked for the Nagpur-based Shivraj Fine Arts and several Sivakashi calendar presses, as well as for the Bombay Fine Arts and Litho Works. In a personal interview in 2012, Singhal mentioned to me that he has a formidable collection of tribal jewellery and dresses, which are used from time to time by actresses who model for him or for their roles in films. He also said that upcoming actors come to him to get photographed for their portfolios. These photographs show how he used his collection of tribal jewellery and dresses to clad girls striking seductive poses against backdrops of highly romatic landscapes, often an enactment of his calendar beauties. Later, while making prints in the dark room, he would smoothen the bodies captured in the photographs to impart a soft, satiny look, transforming them into celestial dream-girls bathing in misty gloss with semi-nude bodies covered in light and near-transparent saris (FIG. 44). A similar effect was achieved by him by using the airbrush technique; the landscape too would be smoothened so as to transform it into a dream-like world. Thus Singhal, in a way, turned the photographs of these girls into calendar images, and in turn extended his calendar aesthetic to cinema – of which a typical example is the look he created for Zeenat Aman in Raj Kapoor's Satyam Shivam Sundaram, as mentioned above. He said, 'I tried not to make her vulgar and modelled her look on the adivasi girl I knew so well, but Rajsaab [Raj Kapoor] changed it with back lighting, wet saris and no bra.'[61]

Singhal's tribal world is fixed and founded in an invented past, constructed and frozen there through his own imagination in which 'innocent rural and tribal women' move about carefree, 'drenched with simplicity and one with nature'.[62] In his own words, 'My paintings are a humble attempt to present this simplicity and nature, as is, to you. To continue with this effort is the pledge for the rest of my life.'[63] At the age of 72, he made the following statement about his film work: 'I lost more than I gained – my patience, my focus, my artistic inspiration. Soon I started finding my own soul again through painting.'[64] He felt highly gratified when, in 2006, an exhibition of his works was held at the Sir J.J. School of Arts: 'It marked my rebirth as a painter.'[65]

What was a genuine concern (however confused) for Nehru with regard to protecting the aesthetic values and traditions, and the innocence and simplicity arising out of the isolated background of India's tribals, acted as a veneer for Singhal to legitimize his turning tribal girls into pin-ups. Singhal's conception of tribals is sheltered within the larger orientalist and post-colonial angst about their destiny in the face of India's modernizing agenda, strongly voiced by Nehru: 'I am horrified at the picture of these people being made to give up their old artistic attire or even lack of clothes. ... I would rather that they remain museum specimens than become such representatives of so-called modern progress.'[66] In visual terms, Nehru's concerns were largely addressed through the tribal tableaux and folk dances staged as part of India's Republic Day parade, the policy for which was personally drafted by Nehru

Below: FIGS. 42, 43
Facing page: FIG. 44

himself.[67] The 'People of India' tableaux in the parade, even today, are partially descendants of colonial anthropological archives, registers of orientalist photography and colonial museum dioramas, reassembled to dream up a self-image for a nation vying for political and cultural solidarity. The tribals and villagers in these tableaux mimic their own restored and nationally authenticated self-images, as if living in a frozen space isolated from an 'evolving process' and traces of 'conflict and change'.[68] This objectified visual identity, through its multiple quotes and citations in print and electronic media, philately, museums, calendars and cinema, became a powerful tool for imaging India's specific cultural identities and for the national integration of a culturally diverse society.

The second half of the twentieth century saw an explosion of the visual in Mumbai on account of the successively upgraded technologies of offset printing. By the 1990s digital reproduction, with its capabilities of high-resolution scanning, desk-top editing, archival quality registration, and large-size formats for outdoor hoardings and signage, began to become popular for art printing. Digital cameras have made it possible to archive images on memory cards and circulate them through the social media, climaxing the 'visual turn' and 'visual construction of the social'.[69] Digital cinema has made possible immediate and live broadcasting of events. Large-scale and quicker digital photography and printing have replaced the hand-painted cinema hoardings which were once the visual hallmark of Mumbai. Digital storage and circulation of images have made redundant the tangible printed image. With the new technology, a viewer is able to command on the computer screen a plethora of still and moving images from across the globe, to receive as they are, or to edit, montage or strategically manipulate, and transmit.

Digital technology, as it pervades photography, cinema and printing, homogenizes the aesthetics of visual genres to a large extent. With swift and universal circulation of images across conventional genres of art and popular culture, the line between the visual and the social is now thinning to near-redundance.

59 'Ramya Sarma meets painter and photographer, J.P. Singhal', DNA (online edition), 1 December 2006.

60 Singhal, 'The Man Who Painted Time'.

61 'Ramya Sarma meets painter and photographer, J.P. Singhal'.

62 Singhal, J.P. Singhal: The Impressionism of a Realist.

63 Ibid.

64 'Ramya Sarma meets painter and photographer, J.P. Singhal'.

65 Singhal, 'The Man Who Painted Time'.

66 Quoted in Verrier Elwin, A Philosophy for NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency), 1959: 116.

67 See File no. 6-II/52-G,2(A), National Archives, New Delhi.

68 James Clifford, 'Four Northwest Coast Museums: Travel Reflections', in Ivan Karp and Steven B. Lavine, eds, Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display, Washington, 1991: 215, 218.

69 W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture', in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., The Visual Culture Reader, London and New York, 2002: 91.

CAPTIONS FOR FIGURES

page 500 Image of Kamala Nehru on publicity card for New Maneckchock Mills, published by Phoenix P. Works, circa mid-twentieth century. Collection: J & J Jain.

FIG. 1 Advertisement for 'war loan': Bombay personified as Mumbadevi performing in front of the city's gentry, artist: M.V. Dhurandhar, published in Vismi Sadi (Gujarati), vol. 3, no. 5, Bombay, August 1918.

FIG. 2 Raasakreeda, artist: V.H. Pandya, oleograph, printed in Germany. Private collection.

FIG. 3 Vasantasena (heroine of Shudraka's Sanskrit play Mrichchhakatikam), artist: Ravi Varma, oleograph, published by Ravi Varma FAL Press, Bombay. Private collection.

FIG. 4 Ritudhvaj and Madalasa, artist: Ravi Varma, oleograph, published by Ravi Varma Press, Karla–Lonavala. Private collection.

FIG. 5 Vishwamitra and Menaka, artist: M.V. Dhurandhar, oleograph, published by Ravi Varma Press, Karla–Lonavala. Private collection.

FIG. 6 Shivaji and Subedar's Daughter, artist: M.V. Dhurandhar, oleograph, published by Ravi Varma Press, Karla–Lonavala. Private collection.

FIG. 7 Disrobing of Draupadi, artist: R.G. Chonkar, oleograph, printed in Germany. Private collection.

FIG. 8 Feast of Roses, photographer: Shapoor N. Bhedwar. Collection: Alkazi Foundation, New Delhi.

FIG. 9 Tyag, photographer: Shapoor N. Bhedwar. Collection: Alkazi Foundation, New Delhi.

FIG. 10 Cover image on an album of mill label samples, published by John Neill Limited, Manchester. Collection: Priya Paul, New Delhi.

FIG. 11 'Old view of Flora Fountain', postcard, printed in Saxony. Collection: J & J Jain, New Delhi.

FIG. 12 Portrait of a Lady, chromolithograph, published by B. Rigold & Bergmann, London/Bombay. Collection: CIViC, New Delhi.

FIG. 13 Mill label of Stirling & Sons, Glasgow, depicting the god Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi. Collection: Abhishek Poddar, Bengaluru.

FIG. 14 Mill label of Finlay Muir & Co., Calcutta and Bombay, depicting the abduction of Sita by Ravana. Collection: Abhishek Poddar, Bengaluru.

FIG. 15 Mill label of F. Steiner & Co., Calcutta, depicting Narasimha (incarnation of Vishnu) who killed the demon Hiranyakashipu; and punishments being meted out to Prahlada, Hiranyakashipu's son, who became Vishnu's devotee against his father's wish. Collection: Abhishek Poddar, Bengaluru.

FIG. 16 Oriental Circus, mill label. Collection: Archana Hande, Mumbai.

FIG. 17 Trade label of the merged Arbuthnot Ewart & Co., showing King Albert Edward, son of Queen Victoria, on his visit to India in 1875. Collection: Abhishek Poddar, Bengaluru.

FIG. 18 Mill label of Chika Ltd, Bombay, with the inscription 'Maharani Chhap', depicting the Queen of England. Collection: Abhishek Poddar, Bengaluru.

FIGS. 19, 20, 21, 23 Images of Congress Party leaders, Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and Trisula Daru, on publicity cards and labels of textile mills such as New Maneckchock Mills and Aryodaya Mills. Collection: J & J Jain, New Delhi.

FIG. 22 Mill label of Jacob Sassoon Mill, Bombay, showing a woman hand-spinning yarn. Collection: J & J Jain, New Delhi.

FIG. 24 Image of a European woman on a textile swatch folder from Britain. Collection: J. & J. Jain, New Delhi.

FIG. 25 Image of a European woman meant to be pasted on cloth bales/sample folders exported from Britain, published by John Neill Limited, Manchester. Collection: Priya Paul, New Delhi.

FIG. 26 Calendar of Maharaja Cigarette for the year 1912 showing the Maharaja of Mysore, issued by City Tobacco Company, Bangalore. Private collection.

FIG. 27 Calendar of Sunlight Soap for the year 1931 showing the sun god Surya, issued by Hindustan Unilever Ltd. Private collection.

FIG. 28 Calendar of Gripe Water for the year 1928 showing baby Krishna, artist: M.V. Dhurandhar, issued by Woodwards. Private collection.

FIG. 29 Advertisement for Godrej soaps. Collection: Abhishek Poddar, Bengaluru.

FIG. 30 Calendar of Bombay Special Cigarettes. Private collection.

FIG. 31 Top: obverse and reverse of a cigarette card showing an Indian sweeper, issued by Star Tobacco Company, Bombay. Bottom: obverse and reverse of a cigarette card showing a soldier, issued by The American Tobacco Company. Private collection.

FIG. 32 Fragment of a curtain made of cigarette cards depicting oriental women, issued by Tiger Cigarettes. Private collection.

FIG. 33 Advertisement for Panama Cigarettes on the cover of Film India magazine, April 1946, artist: S.M. Pandit. Courtesy Film India and National Film Archives, Pune.

FIG. 34 Cover of Film India, November 1945, showing a scene from the film Mughal-e-Azam, artist: S.M. Pandit. Courtesy Film India and National Film Archives, Pune.

FIG. 35 Urvashi and Pururavas, artist: S.M. Pandit, calendar print. Private collection.

FIG. 36 Siva and Parvati, artist: S.M. Pandit, calendar print. Private collection.

FIG. 37 Deepalakshmi, cover of Vasant magazine, Diwali 1958, artist: Raghuvir Mulgaokar. Private collection.

FIG. 38 Cover of film booklet of Milan, artist: Raghuvir Mulgaokar. Private collection.

FIG. 39 Meditation of Siva, print from a Marathi journal, artist: Raghuvir Mulgaokar. Private collection.

FIG. 40 Hylas and the Nymphs, artist: John William Waterhouse, painting, 1896. Collection: Manchester Art Gallery.

FIG. 41 Gopi Vastraharana, published in Ratnaprabha magazine, 1974, artist: Raghuvir Mulgaokar. Courtesy Kajri Jain, Toronto.

FIG. 42 Image of an adivasi girl which inspired Zeenat Aman's look in Raj Kapoor's film Satyam Shivam Sundaram, artist: J.P. Singhal, calendar print; reproduced from J.P. Singhal, Photography through the Eye of a Painter, Mumbai, 2011.

FIG. 43 Actress Zeenat Aman in Raj Kapoor's Satyam Shivam Sundaram, from the publicity material of the film.

FIG. 44 Actress Rekha on a 1976 calendar, photographer: J.P. Singhal. Collection: J & J Jain, New Delhi.

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