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THE FILM ADVERTISEMENT IN 1960S INDIA

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Abstract: This article looks at the production of visual affect generated by film advertisements as they circulated widely through magazines in the 1960s when film publicity depended largely on billboards, posters and printed advertisements. The film advertisement catered to diverse film publics depending on the readership associated with specific magazines. The article focuses specifically on a collection of film advertisements published in English language magazines like *Filmfare*, *Blitz*, *The Illustrated Weekly*, *Star and Style* and *Filmworld*. These advertisements became part of a vast reservoir of visual culture that spilled out of magazine pages, catering to an order of perception that was quite different from that of posters or billboards.

Historian Carlo Ginzburg's approach to the writing of history has been centrally concerned with how people view the world they live in, the methods adopted by them to access and organize forms of knowledge, and the different frameworks that are used to classify and process information, beliefs and observations. Ginzburg's strategy results in deep engagement with a variety and range of knowledge systems that are both formal and informal. There is also a desire to document popular culture through an intricate interweaving and dialogue between verbal and visual components. A historical method of this nature would necessarily have to engage with material that ranges from literature to photographs, architecture, court depositions and many

other kinds of sources.¹ In the field of visual culture, art, literature and cinema, Ginzburg's method has brought about a series of significant influences. In the study of cinema, an entire body of material outside of the film text has come to the fore – these include posters, song books, trade papers, photographs, studio histories, star profiles, scripts, lobby cards and more.² This print material produced in excess of cinema has become central to the study of cinema, operating as historical clues to the circuits connecting production, circulation and the reception of cinema. In this article, I take one such filmic artifact as the object of analysis – this is the film advertisement published in magazines in 1960s India. The aim here is to magnify the advertisement's content, form and design to see what they tell us about the relationship between films and their imagined audiences.

Cinema in India has always had a dynamic culture of film publicity, which, in a diverse and hierarchical context, can take an intriguing direction. While the film poster as an aspect of modern visual culture has been the subject of some academic enquiry, the film advertisement printed in newspapers and magazines has largely gone unnoticed.³ These advertisements were single page block prints that functioned according to a unique set of rules, addressing diverse publics, depending on the readership associated with specific magazines or newspapers. Integral to the formation of a vast reservoir of visual culture that spilled out of magazine pages, the advertisement catered to an order of perception that was quite different from that of posters. The closeness to the reader's eye as opposed to the larger than life colourful street poster allowed for an unusual play with details. Line drawings were combined with photographic embellishments in the advertisement while the posters were paper reproductions of original hand painted canvas images. The posters too sometimes used text to evoke dramatic elements of the film being publicized; they were, however, bound much more by the idea of a distracted street form where colour and stardom had to be spectacularly displayed.

The magazine advertisement, as I will show, was far more adventurous, complex, layered and creative, sidestepping regulatory practices set forth by both state institutions and invented moral economies. At the same time, the advertisement catered to an imaginary notion of a cosmopolitan reading public. I focus primarily on a specific collection of film advertisements of the 1960s published in English language magazines like *Filmfare*, *Blitz*, *The Illustrated Weekly*,



Figure 1

looked decidedly elegant, cool and stylish. There was a desire for distinction as opposed to the poster. The advertisements were also black and white photographic prints that generated a unique aesthetic constellation at a time when cinema was making its transition to colour.⁴

Ramanand Sagar's *Ankhen*, released in 1968, was made in the aftermath of the wars with China and Pakistan – staging a narrative of spies, intrigue, deception and action. In this advertisement (Figure 1) we see the stylized use of the eye with film star Mala Sinha's close-up dominating the frame. The actor Dharmendra is shown holding a gun in the foreground. Mala Sinha was a major star of the 1960s and Dharmendra had just entered the industry. A close look at the image shows soldiers in the background – the caption says “story of a brave batch of patriots who fought on

Star and Style and *Film World*. I am interested in the way the film industry imagined and conceptualized its middle class audience as different from its larger mass audience. The role of the magazine advertisement becomes critical in this imagination. While drawing on the techniques of advertising that were prevalent in the 1960s, and trying to circulate in the midst of advertisements for cigarettes, household appliances, home décor, and soaps, the film advertisement clearly had to do much more. Line drawings and black and white photographic elements were not viewed as effective when compared to the arresting blocks of colour available in the street poster. The advertisements were minimalist in layout with some that

the merciless battlegrounds of spying”. When we compare this to the four posters of *Ankhen* (Figure 2, 3, 4, 5) the differences become very clear.



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

In figure 2 we see the two stars, a strong sense of masculinity and a generic action film iconography. Figure 3 could well be a B-grade horror movie poster with a tiger in the foreground and a mysterious fortress in the background. Figure 4 is similar to figure 2 while figure 5 could pass off as a poster for a female oriented melodrama. All these posters were meant for wide circulation catering to a large audience base. None of them engage with the theme of spying which is articulated quite clearly in the magazine advertisement. The middle class reading these English magazines was also drawn to crime and spy novels, to James Bond books and films.⁵ The spy theme would not have made sense to a mass audience in India; it would to an educated middle class. The same middle class was also the most deeply entrenched in nationalist war rhetoric and thus the theme of patriotism plays itself out in the advertisement.



Figure 6



Figure 7

In the advertisement for Devendra Goel's *Dus Lakh*, released in 1966, textual detail is used to provide information (Figure 6). The caption says “adulteration in cement, food and medicine, but no adulteration in entertainment”. A construction site can be seen in the top left box evoking the debate on corruption of building material. This advertisement immediately draws on the existing economic crisis with its ubiquitous world of rationing, hoarding, dilution, shortage of essential commodities and black money.⁶ When you compare the advertisement to the poster (Figure 7), you see the stars with their painted faces and the hint of a circus sequence on the top left corner. This is a generic poster with no thematic build up. The advertisement on the other hand draws us into a story of economic crisis and inequality, highlighting the public debates on corruption, illegal hoarding and food shortages. Why are these magazine advertisements more detailed than the poster? The invocation of a debate on corruption was clearly geared for the reading public of *The Illustrated Weekly* where this advertisement was published.



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

In the advertisement of *Aye Milan Ki Bela* (Figure 8) we see a light, kinetic movement of the two protagonists placed within a loop of western musical notation. This is a tiny detail that adds to the quality of the advertisement which carries the headline – “time stops when lovers meet”. While we recognize this as a light romantic film, the musical notes suggest that music is one of the highlights of the film. Compare this advertisement to the two posters of the film (Figure 9 and 10). Both suggest a triangular story, but while the one on the left conveys some sense of action with the gun in the frame, the other shows us a hill station with one couple on the grass, and another man on horseback. Obviously the posters were meant for a wider canvas with no detail other than the generic use of location and gun. The magazine advertisements were intended for a middle class audience with knowledge of and taste for music.

This advertisement for *Pyar Mohabbat* (Figure 11) also plays with western musical notation along with information on the stars. On the right side of the advertisement the text says, “shot partly in exotic Middle East and enchanting Europe”. Film musicians in the industry started using western notation for their compositional work in the 1940s. Its use here in the advertisements conveys both a sense of familiarity with such notation as well as recognition that the middle class reading



Figure 11

public would understand what it meant. The posters did not carry any of these details that we see in the advertisements.

In 1960s India, tourism influenced popular advertising, and travel became a recurring motif in the marketing of various products. The first film to showcase foreign travel in a lavish manner was Raj Kapoor's *Sangam* (1964) – the story of a love triangle between two men and a woman. Sundar (Raj Kapoor) and Gopal (Rajendra Kumar) are best friends in love with the same woman, Radha (Vyjantimala) who ultimately marries Sundar, the man she does not love because of circumstances beyond her control. The newly married couple then leaves for Europe for their honeymoon. It is towards the end of the film that Rajendra Kumar joins the couple in Europe. The discovery of a hidden letter makes Kapoor suspect his wife and his friend of an affair behind his back. The events spiral out of control leading to an intense and tragic resolution of the crisis.

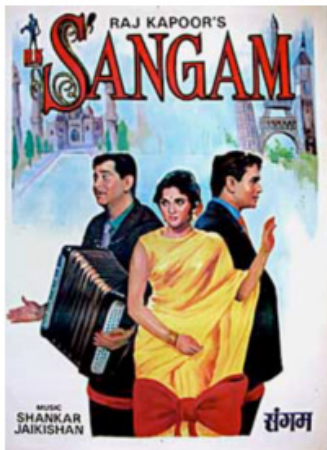


Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

Sangam ends with the reinstating of the married couple's sacred bond even as a homoerotic intensity pervades the screen. I have found eight advertisements of *Sangam* published in different magazines, but before we look at these images, the three main posters of the film need to be examined. This (Fig. 12) is the most well known poster of *Sangam*. We see the three stars in the poster and recognize that it's a triangular story. A red ribbon is placed around all three figures. In the background we see monuments of Europe – not identified clearly. In this second poster of *Sangam* in Hindi (Fig.13) we see the three star faces with snow-capped mountains in the

background and nothing else. The third poster (Fig. 14) shows the three stars again – suggesting a triangular melodrama.



Figure 15



Figure 16

Neither of the posters uses any thematic headline except for one and that too in tiny font. The stars dominate the publicity. Let us now look at the magazine advertisements published in different venues prior to the release of the film. One version (Fig.15) carried the caption “It’s a heavenly combination of art and entertainment – lovely to look at, delightful to hear”. The spectacular visuals and the music of the film are announced in the advertisement and travel is highlighted through the use of iconic monuments placed at the bottom. The next (Fig.16) says “These Three Shared Immortal Love”. All three stars are present in the advertisement and the Eiffel Tower marks the theme of travel quite explicitly. The third advertisement (Fig.17) carries the headline “Ageless as Asia, Exciting as Europe - travel is highlighted through a sketched impression of a boat ride at the bottom. The next advertisement (Fig.18) has the Saanchi Stupa built in the third century (located in the state of Madhya Pradesh) placed on the left and London’s Big Ben, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Eiffel Tower on the right. The three protagonists stand at the centre and the caption again says “Ageless as Asia, Exciting as Europe”.

Here as we can see, ancient civilizational iconography is placed alongside the iconographic imaginary of Western modernity, generating a sensory map using architectural forms.



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

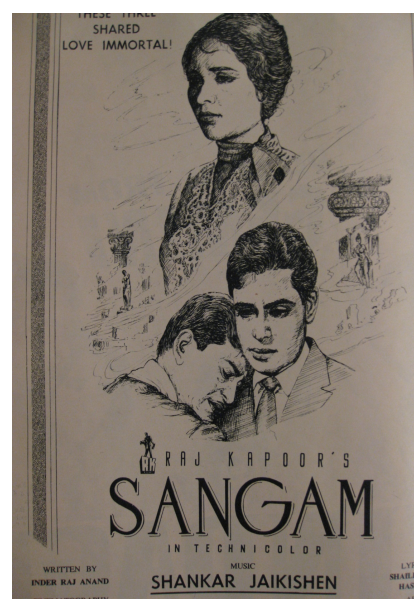
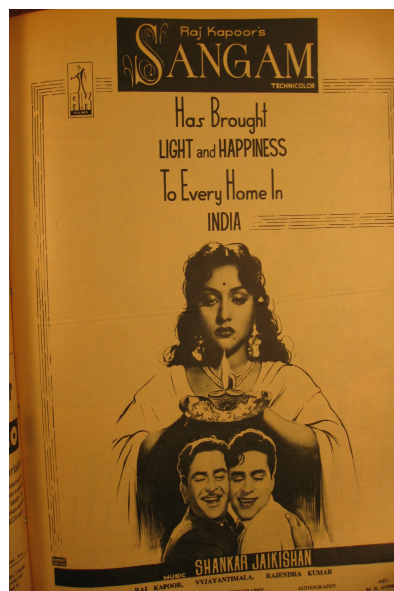


Figure 20

Now let us look at these other advertisements – all of which highlight the bond between Rajendra Kumar and Raj Kapoor. In Figure 19 we see three stars featured in the top box while the bottom shows us literally two couples – one couple is smiling, the other is not. Our two male stars appear cheerful in their loving display of affection for each other; Vyjantimala however looks troubled on the right. In Figure 20, the two men look like a married couple but now not smiling



so much as expressing a sense of longing, much like the way heterosexual couples are depicted in posters. Look at Vyjantimala's expression – she appears troubled again. This advertisement (Fig. 21) was published after the release and the success of the film is evident from the caption – “*Sangam* has brought light and happiness to every home in India”. Now Vyjantimala holds a lamp with her eyes shut to show her praying. The two men are shown embracing each other with great joy and happiness. The same image that we just saw (Fig. 19) is now here just below the lamp (Fig.21). In these three advertisements, the homoeroticism so marked in the film is

highlighted both evocatively and explicitly. In this cover page (Fig. 22) of the magazine *Mother India*⁷, Kapoor is shown in air-force uniform while Vyjantimala and Rajendra Kumar are on the right placed as a couple. But there is turbulence in this image highlighted in the angular crossing of the Big Ben and the Eiffel Tower. Clearly the heterosexual married couple is not the focus of the advertisements at all.

Let us now go back to the posters of the film. They appear quite simple and tame, revealing none of the turbulence, complications and provocative headlines we see in the advertisements. Was homoeroticism then just an interpretation framed by academics or was it central to the way Raj Kapoor had imagined the narrative thread of the film? What do these advertisements reveal for us today? We may never fully know, but they certainly operate like a powerful trace of the possible themes imagined by the film's director. In the techniques of historical detection mastered by Carlo



Figure 22

Ginzburg, these advertisements fulfill the performative role of circulating as clues that provide fleeting access to underlying narrative threads. These clues provide us with the resources to conjecture and speculate about a central mythology associated with the film, which in itself endows the advertisements with tremendous power. Was travel just a camouflage for an underlying homoerotic force?



Figure 24

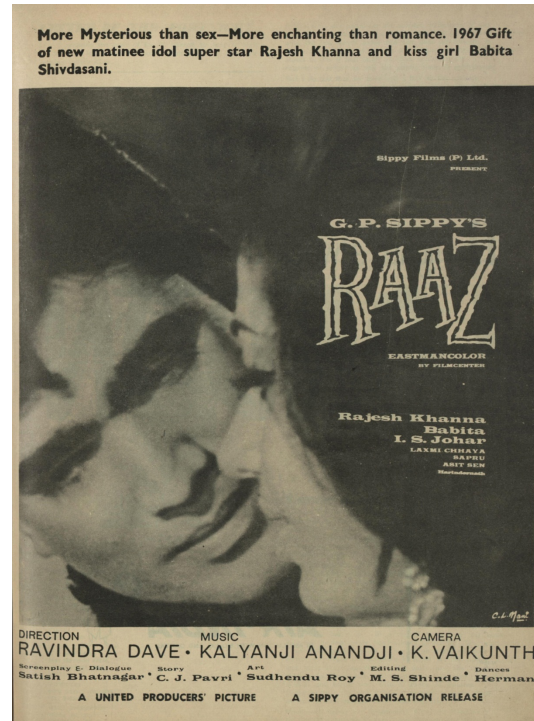
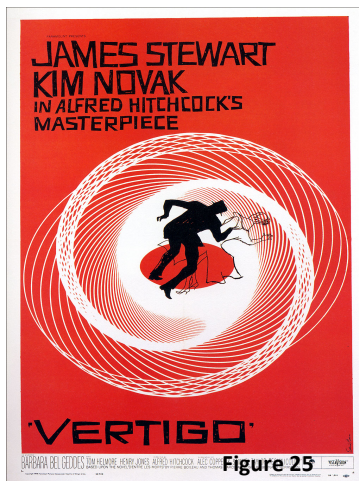


Figure 23

Bill Bernbach, the architect of the sixties revolution in creative advertising claimed that playing it safe was the worst thing possible in creative advertising.⁸ Psychological motivation along with sex and the subliminal became important elements in the sixties and the subject of some research in the organization of advertising campaigns. As we will see, several magazine advertisements were drawing on this despite major moral panic and debates on obscenity and vulgarity in the media.⁹ In an advertisement for *An Evening in Paris* (1967) in *Filmfare*, Sharmila Tagore can be seen in a nightclub dancer's attire both in the foreground and the right-hand corner of the image, while Shami Kapoor's smiling face dominates the rest of the frame. Right on top we have the caption "A film full of sex, songs and sensation" (Fig.23). This advertisement encapsulates what

the producers had hoped to achieve with the film. It was as if foreign lands had enabled an expressive charge to the body, circumscribed by national sovereignty. G.P Sippy's 1967 film *Raaz* (Fig.24) carried a similar headline that said "More mysterious than sex, more enchanting than romance. 1967, gift of new matinee idol Rajesh Khanna and kiss girl Babita Shivdasani". This kind of sexualized advertising entered the world of English language magazines to target middle class readers with more explicit forms of publicity. The crowd in the street was clearly viewed as unruly, habitually conditioned to see films in a particular way and therefore not to be provoked, tempted or confused by the use of sexualized language, complicated plots and global references. The middle and upper class audiences reading English language magazines were viewed as a public with liberal taste, capable of dealing with and processing sexualized language, complex narrative details and emotional upheavals. We see two kinds of imagined publics being framed by this split discourse – the mass audience and the niche audience – a discourse produced by film industry professionals themselves.



Let me now move to my last example. 1958 saw the release of *Vertigo* starring James Stewart and Kim Novak. With its mysterious ambience, mesmerizing music, deep psychological reflection and back and forth detective form, *Vertigo* established Hitchcock as a master storyteller with a powerful ability to handle suspense even more than before. A complicated plot about love, memory loss, deception and murder, *Vertigo* became an instant success and continued to retain a special place amongst Hitchcock's repertoire of films. In the film, James Stewart suffers

from a fear of height, a problem that becomes the driving force of a complicated narrative web. It is this dizzy experience of falling through a spinning void that became the striking opening sequence of the film. Saul Bass, one of the leading poster designers of the 20th century, directed the opening sequence and also designed the poster for the film's publicity. This poster that you see here freezes the spinning effect to evoke a sensation (Fig.25). There are no star faces, only their names and the central effect of vertigo. As we will see, this effect became identified with Hitchcockian mystery and started travelling independently across the world. *Raaz* (Ravindra Dave, 1967) and *Teesri Manzil* (Nazir Hussain, 1966), were both released as mystery films. This

poster of *Raaz* (Fig. 26) shows Babita and Rajesh Khanna, new stars at the time, with the title of the film. This is a rather dull image with the sea as the background and nothing else to convey any thematic element of the film.



Figure 26

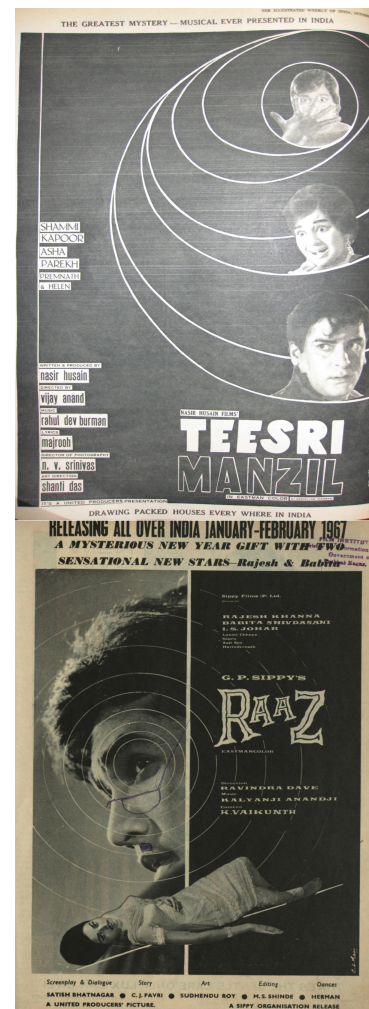


Figure 27



Figure 28

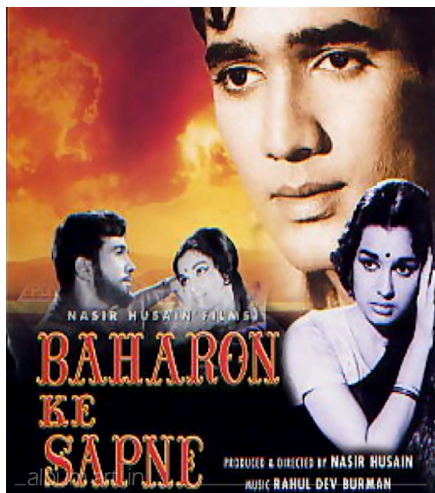
The *Teesri Manzil* posters on the other hand used a typical 60s look for the film's publicity (Fig. 27) – colourful polka dots in the background, Shammi Kapoor with the guitar, Asha Parekh's close-up and Helen in a dancing pose in the foreground. We recognize from this that the film has modern music. This was R.D Burman's first film as a composer and the music got identified with the beats, instruments and spirit of the 1960s. This second poster of *Teesri Manzil* (Fig.28) expands a little more on the previous one but retains the centrality of music associated with the guitar and the musical blast etched in yellow just above Shammi Kapoor's Elvis pose. While the two posters are lively, they still do not provide us with any sense of the suspense and mystery central to the films. Obviously the posters were attempting to draw in a wide mass audience for whom the combination of music, Shammi Kapoor and Helen would have



Figs. 29. 30

been enough to make them wait expectantly for the film. Yet for the magazine advertisements, both films used the design effect of *Vertigo* (Fig. 29, 30). The *Raaz* advertisement is from *Star and Style* and *Teesri Manzil* from the *Illustrated Weekly*. Although *Star and Style* was a typical film magazine, it was obviously read by an English speaking public.

*The Illustrated Weekly*¹⁰ was a news and current affairs magazine that catered to a reading public interested in national and international news, current events, feature articles and discussions. The publicists of *Raaz* and *Teesri Manzil* were banking on the visual memory of Hitchcock, trying to draw in a cosmopolitan urban middle class audience. Both advertisements establish the circular spinning web as the sign associated with mystery and detection which an educated reading public would recognize as Hitchcockian. These advertisements also tell us about the presence of Hollywood in India in the 1950s and 60s when these films were not dubbed into Indian languages but watched primarily by an English-speaking, reading public. The use of a design almost ten years later also tells us something about Hitchcock's global circulation in the 1960s.



Nazir Hussain's *Baharon Ke Sapne* (1967) a black and white film dealing with the theme of unemployment and inequality and starring Rajesh Khanna and Asha Parekh had posters that did not look any different from the usual posters of films on the sixties (Fig.31). The two protagonists are presented as a romantic pair. Yet the advertisement published in *The Illustrative Weekly* had an unusual look about it (Fig.32). The caption right on top says "Cry India Cry! Today the flower of Youth Lies in the Dust. Today millions groan under the

Figure 31 crushing weight of injustice. But through these tears and this blood, a new India is to be born, the India of Gandhi's vision, the India of Nehru's dreams." Below this caption we see two elderly people and below that Rajesh Khanna and Asha Parekh. But the stripes across the image evoking the country's multitude are unusual. Clearly here the advertisement is geared to invoke a 'realism' associated with an earlier black and white period. The overall iconography of the advertisement runs counter to the demands on the film poster to cater to a wide public. The

‘social’ imagination of the advertisement is addressing an educated public while the film poster imagines its audience as a mass public.

Conclusion

In a world of constant degeneration and disappearance associated with film-related material, the advertisement is one of the few documents to survive in the pages of several magazines. In the spectrum of artifacts and objects that make up the material culture associated with cinema, the magazine advertisement is a rare document that once moved through the pages of weekly magazines to stoke the imagination with its subterranean interplay with audience composition, notions of class, education, aesthetic preferences and cinema. Right from its inception, filmmakers needed to persuade audiences to come to the movies, since the entire existence of the industry depended on

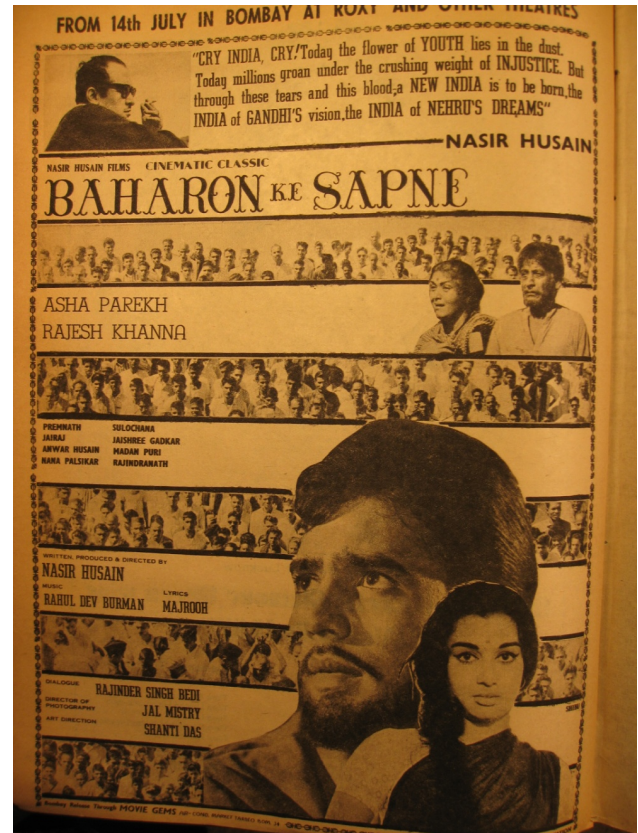


Figure 32

this economic transaction. Publicity and promotion have therefore co-existed alongside the history of cinema, creatively working to sell movies. In 1960s India, the film poster and the magazine advertisement played the most important role in publicizing films along with theatrical trailers and limited radio advertising. Television made its entry as a domestic item only in the 1970s. In this scenario, the advertisement as a repository of clues and traces enables us to speculate and conjecture, in the process complicating assumptions about the mass public of cinema. As a form of creative expression, a communication medium, and a business transaction, these advertisements have with time acquired significant value as a rare archival source.

About the author: Ranjani Mazumdar teaches Cinema Studies at the School of Arts & Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is currently Marie Curie Fellow in Indian Film at the University of Westminster, London (2013-2014). Her publications focus on urban cultures, popular cinema, gender and the cinematic city. She is the author of *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* (2007) and co-author with Nitin Govil of the forthcoming *The Indian Film Industry* (2014). She has also worked as a documentary filmmaker and her productions include *Delhi Diary 2001* and *The Power of the Image* (Co-Directed). Her current research focuses on globalization and film culture, the visual culture of film posters and the intersection of technology, travel and design in 1960s Bombay Cinema.

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Notes

¹ Carlo Ginzburg *Clues Myths and the Historical Method* Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990

² See Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin ed. *Looking Past the Screen: Case Studies in American Film History* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007; Also see Debashree Mukherjee's "Notes on a Scandal: Writing Women's Film History Against an Absent Archive" in *Bioscope: South Asian Screen Studies* 4 (1) 2013, 9-30

³ For overviews on poster culture see Rachel Dwyer and Divya Patel *The Visual Culture of Hindi Film* Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, New Jersey: 2002; Preminda Jacob *Celluloid Deities: The Visual Culture of Cinema and Politics in South India* Lexington Books 2009; Ranjani Mazumdar "The Bombay Film Poster: A Cultural Biography" in Jyotindra Jain ed. *Iconic Spaces: Image Mobility in India's Popular Culture* Marg Publications, India, 2008, "The Man Who Was Seen Too Much: Amitabh Bachchan on Film Posters" in *Tasveer Ghar: A Digital Network of South Asian Popular Visual Culture*, Coordinated by Sumathy Ramaswamy, Christiane Brossius, Manishita Das and Yuosuf Sayeed, 2010, <http://tasveergharindia.net/cmsdesk/essay/106/index.html>, "From the Street to the Gallery" in *Art India*, Special Issue on Heritage, Bombay, India, May 2005, "The Bombay Film Poster" *Seminar*, Special Issue on Film Culture, New Delhi, India, May 2003, "The Bombay Film Poster: The Journey from the Street to the Museum", *Film International*, Special Issue on Film & Finance, edited by Toby Miller, No.4, Sweden, July 2003

⁴ While in Hollywood the transition to colour was a gradual process, in India despite a few experiments, the transition is compressed within the decade of the sixties.

⁵ The first James Bond film *Dr.No* (1962) had a successful run in India introducing the spy theme on screen to an English speaking audience that was watching Hollywood films.

⁶ *Dus Lakh* had one of the most memorable songs of the Sixties – 'Gareebon ki suno, who tumhari sunega, tum ek paisa doge vo dus lakh dega...'

⁷ Baburao Patel established *Film India* in 1935 as a film magazine. In 1960s he started another magazine called *Mother India* and *Film India* slowly went out of circulation.

⁸ *The Madison Avenue Journal*, April 13, 2010. Also see Hazel G. Warlaumont *Advertising in the Sixties* Praeger Frederick A, 2001

⁹ See *Report of the Enquiry Committee on Film Censorship* (Khosla Committee) Publication of the Government of India Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi 1969

¹⁰ *The Illustrated Weekly of India* was a weekly news, culture and arts magazine of the *Times of India*. It was founded in 1880 and was initially published as the *Times of India Weekly Edition*. In 1924 it was renamed *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. The magazine ceased publication in 1993