Printed Advertisement 1947-1970

Printed Advertisement 1947-1970: Bengali Middleclass; An Interaction

By

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For all anti-imperialist political activists.

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PREFACE

As a student of History, it was natural for me to flip through the pages of the old newspapers; it was then that the printed advertisements attracted my attention as a possible source of history. It seemed interesting to analyze the advertising texts to reconstruct the type of the society that responded, positively, to these texts. I must, to be fair, forewarn the readers that the viewers' response, to which the book often refers, is not based purely on any field work though I have spoken to people who were active consumers during the1950s, 1960s and the 1970s. While talking to them I felt that their present responses were not reflecting their past feelings properly; from the discussions, I certainly received some valuable inputs but I had to seek the help of the news dailies, popular films, popular magazines etc., of the period under consideration, to assess the mind-set of the people of those decades. I have assumed, perhaps rightly that since these advertisements appeared consistently over a period of time they could influence the consumers. How they could positively influence the consumers of Bengal, and how far these advertisements shaped their consumption patterns and lifestyle during the time, were the questions I sought to answer.

I sought answers to the questions because it is often believed that advertisements of those decades were less aggressive, they were austere, and valued the national tradition. I failed to appreciate this view because in whatever garb, the task of advertisements is to encourage not only the consumption of particular commodities but also to prescribe a consumption pattern that would encourage consumers to continuously buy ever new products that appeared in the market. Austerity and tradition would have only hindered the process. Yet, in the advertising texts of the period between 1947 and 1960, I found frequent references to nationalism, tradition and work ethics and more sobriety and control than in the language of advertisements of the current period. I tried to fathom the apparent contradiction. My contention is that though the advertising language of the pre-1980s was restrained, and though they spoke in terms of the nation, work/duty and family they contrived to reiterate the existing and emerging desires of the probable consumers. The idiom of those advertisements, prescribed a lifestyle and consumption pattern for the most volatile class, ready to satisfy their desires if only symbolically

through consumption, and prepared the ground for the present day advertisements. The language was restrained only because the market culture was still weak then and some of the traditional values had persisted, among the probable consumers, because of the objective conditions. But even without those advertisements, the traditional values would not have been perpetual but the present day advertisements would have to grope for a language required to encourage consumerism.

Many of the cited advertisements were meant for the entire country and yet I have dealt only with the probable response of the Bengali consumers not due to any parochial chauvinism but because India is a land of varied culture and uneven econo-social development. Therefore, the making of the middleclass in Bengal has a distinctive history and the advertisements particularly targeted this class. Since I am more acquainted with the situation of Bengal I have chosen to deal with the Bengali bhadralok/bhadramahila (to use Sumit Sarkar's notion) consumers.

The research was funded by the University Grants Commission of India. I am thankful to them. I am thankful to the librarians of The National Library and of the Center for Studies in Social Science, India for making the materials available to me. I am grateful to all the members of the Employees' Union of the now non-existent Yugantar and Amrita Bazar Patrika and especially to Debashis Chakraborty and Subodh Bose for making most of the old issues of the two newspapers accessible. I express my gratitude to Professor Goutam Bhadra for discussing each of the chapters patiently with me. I am indebted to my colleagues at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies at Shimla where I presented a part of the work; some of them helped me understand how these advertisements might have been read by the people of the other Indian states. I am grateful to Basanti Devi College where I have been working for the last nineteen years for providing me with enough opportunities to carry on my research work. I am especially thankful to my colleagues, Sudakshina Bhattacharya, Dr. Srabani Ghosh and Rusati Sen with whom I have often discussed my findings and arguments. My understanding about class formation and class consciousness has been enriched by my dear friend Goutam Ganguly, a political activist, to whom I happen to be related by marriage. For the same reason I am indebted to all my friends of BSPS (an organization for Literacy Movement) but especially to Partha Das. My daughter, Adhara Ganguly, a senior student of Psychology, helped me clarify some of my understandings about consumers' and viewers' response. However, I am alone responsible for the opinions expressed. I express very special affection

to Dr. Kaustav Chakraborty, who has encouraged me to write and publish the book and has gone through the manuscript. I am indebted to my young friend Basu Acharya for the same reason. I am also thankful to my friend Dr. Avijit Chakraborty for general help and encouragement. I am thankful to Moitryee Sen, my PhD scholar for helping me in collecting some of the research materials. I am indebted to my young friend and an able scholar of economics, Dr. Tanusree Chakraborty for helping me collect certain relevant data. Pinaki Chakraborty deserves gratitude for editing the pictures used in the work. I thank Cambridge Scholars Publishing for showing interest in publishing my book.

INTRODUCTION

My work results from an attempt to understand the politics of the patterns and the contents of the advertisements printed in the newspapers published from Bengal during the period between 1947 and 1970. This has been the most politically dynamic period of Bengal, a period of hopes and frustrations. Left movements and Left political debates of various strands have enriched the period and have contributed to its dynamism. From literature to cinema, from proscenium to street drama, from wall magazines to street side tea-shop adda[1]—almost all aspects of public intercourse were affected but positively by the political thoughts of different strands, and Left politics lent voice to the 'angry youth'. The period encountered on the one hand, state sponsored development projects, and on the other, violence and state repression. These, along with the colonial rule contributed to the formation of the Bengali middleclass. The Swadeshi Movement and the armed nationalist insurrections during the colonial period, also contributed to the process. I have tried to perceive how a market culture in general and advertisements in particular reacted to these developments and utilized the changing climate to induce consumption and prescribe to the middleclass Bengali a lifestyle to which consumption would be contingent; and also, from circumstantial evidences, how the Bengali middleclass, dubbed bhadralok, might have reacted to these advertisements.

Regional particularities were pronounced during the period, due to serious econo-political reasons, and the bhadralok consciously maintained a unique constructed identity that dates back to the colonial epoch.

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[1] A gathering for chatting where several issues and topics are raised for discussion spontaneously and people pass on from one class of topic to another and come back to the earlier one with equal ease. There are of course some specialized adda of which literature or art or cinema was the main topic of discussion but any other issue could also be raised because adda is never formal. This is a very typical Bengali affair and tea is an integral part of it. Usual participants are male but in college and university adda women also participated from the late 1960s especially.

Different parts of India came under the colonial rule at various points of time. Further, the modes of colonial control over the different parts were also not similar. Therefore, there was a remarkable heterogeneity in the patterns of the resultant economic and cultural changes, in India. During the post-colonial period, the government policies aggravated the differences. Remnants of a feudal culture in the name of tradition persisted, although certain parts witnessed social reforms without corresponding economic changes, thus making the issue of social outlook complex. The prime non-agricultural activities of the Indians during the colonial period involved trade, certain professions and salaried jobs. Familial and communal support were the powerful survival stratagems of the Indian trading communities during that period, though the mode of functioning continued in independent India as well, to only further strengthen the feudal cultural traits. Most of the social reforms centered on the educated professionals and the salaried job doers. But, even these reform activities were not free of references to tradition, for historic reasons. Tradition with a marked religious bias as a symbol of national identity was at the core of all non-Left nationalist movements, underplaying both regional and religious typicality and rational thinking. The tendency, instead of mellowing typicality, aggravated particularistic tendencies in due course. Often, as a result, the regional conflated with the national in popular imaginations. Due to all these reasons, the character of the Indian middleclass, as of the other classes, remained both heterogeneous and complex during and after the colonial period.

I am not directly concerned with the political implications of these developments but would like to bring these under discussion, for these influenced the cultural patterns and the lifestyles and hence, the consumption patterns and the patterns of desires of the Indians. Therefore, while analyzing the printed advertisements of the period I felt it best to regard the Bengali middleclass of various ranks. Since most of the advertisements appeared consistently in the news dailies published from Bengal, it may be assumed that they were able to arouse among the target consumers, some kind of positive feeling towards the advertisements. It is therefore necessary to understand the Bengali ‘bhadralok’, to realize why and how the advertisements influenced them.

The bhadralok, however, is not a monolithic entity, there being divisions within the category. Moreover, in whichever way the bhadralok may be characterized, there cannot be a specific model into which the entire category can fit in; though the broad categorization remained

constant for a considerable period of time, their character details did not remain so. Interestingly, as this category became more inclusive in due course, the theoretical characterization too changed.

In all the chapters I have tried to point out that there were certain typical ways in which the bhadralok defined themselves—education and intellectuality being the two important components of the definition. This was the collective self-perception and was independent of the individual bhadralok's level of education and his involvement with creative and intellectual activities. In most analysis of the mass media in general and advertisements in particular, the basic assumption is that people usually feel safe in the mainstream and fear to differ. However, it is difficult to regard this as the basic characteristic of the Bengali bhadralok. With all the timidity and opportunism, typical to the middleclass, the bhadralok is argumentative. From politics to social issues and sports, anything can be at the center of their debates. The venues of the debates could be either roadside tea-shops, or college and university canteens. At the same time, they live with a sense of the past and tradition. Interestingly, they consider their capacity to question tradition as a part of their tradition.

If there were a constructed Indianness, most Bengalis, during the said period, consciously tried to differ from the standard or were actually different from the Indian mainstream due to the material conditions. As the center of many literary and art movements and Left upheavals, Bengal, till date, is much discussed, highly revered or ridiculed in different parts of India. Participating in Left students' movements, being members of amateur theater groups, organizing film clubs or publishing literary magazines of the less popular type were common activities of the young bhadraloks of the period under discussion[2]. Without doubt, most of them settled down to quiet private lives in due course but the tendency often gave birth to some serious social and cultural movements like the Hungryalist Movement or the Third Form Drama, in the mid-1960s. The Bengali bhadralok youth gave expression to their apathy for the mainstream politics and culture by organizing street dramas, street exhibitions of paintings and through paintings and graffiti on walls. At the same time, some of them registered their protest against the hegemonic culture in less intellectual ways such as by listening to loud music,

[2] The passion for these activities remains among the bhadralok youth even now though the number of young people involved in these activities has decreased. The young women are a new inclusion to the group, interested in these cultural activities.

wearing queer dress and/or adopting odd hairstyles. This attitude could remind one of Richard Hoggart's remarks:

> "This becomes very soon the idea of freedom as justification. It is always freedom from; freedom as a good in itself, not merely as the ground for the effort to live by other standards. One may easily see how this may spread in a class which has never before felt so free; one can understand the force of resistance which is encountered the moment it is suggested that freedom is not an absolute, not 'being', but only the 'ground of being'. It is in the interest of the organs of mass entertainment that this attitude should be maintained."

However, the middle and lower echelons of the bhadralok, during the late '60s and the early '70s did not "feel so free". Queer dresses, long hair etc. were rather the marks of protest against the much revered tradition and restrictions that benefited them very little. In fact, the lack of the much expected freedom prompted them to fight for "freedom from". During the period, the dream to "live by other standards" was among the youth, organized politically or organized for cultural activities with a political purpose. In other words, among the bhadralok youth both tendencies—to strive for "freedom from" and "freedom for"—were present. Obviously, the organs of mass entertainment and the advertisements here, as elsewhere, promoted the former tendency.

Nevertheless, the tendency to differ is not emblematic of the bhadralok youth alone though vibrant activity, even if for a short while, might have been common among them. Since the course of development of the Bengali middleclass, from the colonial period up until now, is sharply different from its Indian counterparts, it has some peculiar characteristics. In independent India they suffered from a sense of injustice for due reasons which they at times exaggerated, so much so that even the matured elderly bhadralok, after settling down to a quiet private life, chose often to express differences with the Indian mainstream. Further, even those who settled down to simple lives later would proudly cherish their past throughout their lives and would proclaim that they broke off from the movement to express individual freedom. On the other hand, as the early recipients of the formal western mode of education and due to the social reform movements of the Nineteenth Century, the members of the bhadralok community consider themselves progressive, modern and intellectual.

The Bengali bhadralok is characterized as a category, with greater academic prowess by the rest of the Indians as well. This has become a myth because the political and economic factors leading to the bhadralok's determined adherence to formal education is taken into consideration neither by it nor by the others. However, the devotion has bestowed a typical character and capability on the bhadralok. The myth of intellectualism and progressiveness was exaggerated by the bhadraloks to compensate their sense of discrimination. It is once more remarkable that even the most socially conservative bhadralok would never express caste and/or communal bias overtly—the prelude to a most biased statement would be, "I am neither communal nor do I believe in any type of discrimination; however…" They know it is politically correct to be progressive though there is no dearth of conservatism among some of them. Therefore, I consider it important to read the advertisements as the Bengali bhadralok/bhadramahila might have done during the period.

The advertisements of the national and multinational products were read by the bhadralok in ways different from the other Indians. Concepts like tradition, nationalism, science, progress, childhood and womanhood are not things out there. Just as the present practice goes, meanings were put into them and decoded in various ways. Hence, the advertisements that comprised these concepts were read by the consumers, according to their regional traditions and respective historical backgrounds. At the same time, because of this, the desires and passions, which the advertisements could sell to the consumers of the different regions of India, were different.

This means, although the pleasures offered by the advertisements to the middleclass did not always correspond to the aspirations of the bhadraloks, the latter could extract or even construct their own pleasure quotient from them. Moreover, even after the "meanings were taken", what was consumed remains a question, for, I feel, there are at least three types of consumption involved here. Further, how the meaning was "articulated in practice", too, remains a question. By three types of consumption I mean (1) visually consuming the advertised lifestyle (however decoded) for simple pleasure (this would have long-run effect); (2) accepting the life style ("articulating in practice") and finally (3) consuming the product or class of products advertised (also "articulation in practice" in a rather crude form and perhaps, a result of the second type of consumption) as an expression of the accepted lifestyle. The final consumption depends not only on desire but also on demand, in the sense

used in economics and therefore cannot be guaranteed by the first two types of consumptions. This "articulation in practice" may be for several reasons. (All quoted phrases are from Stuart Hall, Encoding/Decoding)

Advertisements can neither totally ignore nor can they completely contradict popular mood; they can re-present these in a mode conducive to the market. On the other hand, partly by talking to some people who were active consumers then and by taking into consideration news, articles published in popular magazines, films and popular songs of the period, I have tried to gauge how the bhadralok/mahila, who witnessed the social and political turmoil and were at the same time steeped in adda, the political and cultural movements and the debates, received the advertisements and the advertised lifestyle.

Taken separately, the concern of each advertisement was different but the bulk together did not only advertise the products concerned but also a consumption pattern, and prescribed a lifestyle for the people 'with distinction'; distinct because of their desire to build the nation, utilize time 'properly' for the purpose and enjoy life in a particular way; distinct because they were rational and had faith in 'Science'. It would be superfluous to ask whether such a monolithic group ever existed in India/Bengal because the 'ideal' never exists, and therefore, is perpetually desired. The relevant questions would rather be 'who desired?', 'what was desired?' and 'why they desired?'

The desire 'to become' is an essential character of a transient class; the upper class has already 'become' with real opportunities to 'become further' and the poor cannot hope to become. But the middleclass can hope but actually never 'become' what it wants to become; hence, it desires the marks of distinction as a compensation for the real distinction—marks that will show. Being educated, articulated, and being white collar employees, often though not always earning substantial salaries, the middleclass is most unsure of its class position with a queer feeling of precariousness. Living perpetually with a fear of sliding down and ever-increasing desire to climb up, the middleclass searches for signs that would keep them apart from what they fear and compensate for what they want but cannot become. From films and plays, theater halls and newspapers, dress and food to furniture and home décor—anything can serve the purpose of sign and it is here that advertisements have a major role to play. In fact, if the ground for the middleclass had not been slippery, commodities and advertisements would have precious little to do with the formation of the

class. They would be most prepared to subject themselves to a double exploitation—to not only alienate their labor but to alienate their desires and emotions as well, to crystallize them on commodities. For them, a commodity would not only have an exchange value, but also a symbolic value that might surpass the use value. This is the class that can be induced to value tradition (whatever that might mean) because it can signify social rank under a feudal cultural condition; with equal ease it can be induced to forgo tradition for that may signify modernity, further signifying an ability to move forward, education or the ability to value rationality instead of a hollow tradition, as, after all, experience teaches them that they actually have little to gain from the existing hegemonic tradition. In other words, the middleclass is most malleable and vulnerable to advertising gimmicks. Moreover, the middleclass sans class consciousness is also individualistic; therefore, from tradition, nationalism etc. to rationality, whatever is presented to it, ought to indicate personal gain instead of a collective action, and this is what the market would be ever prepared to do, for it wants innumerable consumers, estranged from each other as far as possible. In other words, the market wants people to take uniform decisions but individually.

However, during the entire period, of a little over twenty years (1947—1970), the objective conditions, the media and the other discourses metamorphosed the middleclass in Bengal as much as elsewhere. While the aspirations of the class changed, the media offered ever new and often conflicting meanings of the changing objective conditions—rejected, accepted, and often resisted by the middleclass to form some other meaning of their choice. Through constantly decoding the encoded messages offered by the media and moving through several discourses, the middleclass, ridden with some spillover of the past, expectations and frustrations of the present, groped to define itself as a prestigious class apart.

Class formation and class-consciousness are debated issues—not only in the academia, but also in the world of political activism. The middleclass, in a way, further problematises these issues. Following Antonio Gramsci, it would be proper to consider the middleclass as a part of the proletariat, for class is determined by the ownership of the means of production. Following E P Thompson's statement,

> "And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited and shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as

> between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs (.)"[3]

In my opinion, class exists even without 'happening'. The feeling about which Thompson writes is the primary basis of class consciousness without which class can still be real. But I still agree that subjectivity formed through several discourses is an important component of class formation that owes to the economic position and add that the subjectivity may not always correspond to the economic realities of the class. Since the desired correspondence would require both foresight and courage, in contradiction to Gramsci's very correct consideration, the middleclass does not consider itself as a part of the proletariat, because only ownership of the means of production cannot make a class 'happen'. In fact, while explaining the cause of the rise of fascism in Italy and the role of the middleclass in the phenomenon Gramsci mentioned, the typical hatred of the middleclass, for the proletariat in the absence of the proper objective and subjective conditions required for class-consciousness. There is some element of truth in what Erik Wright says,

> "…Among wage-earners, the growth of professional and technical occupations and expansion of managerial hierarchies in large corporations and the state have at least created the appearance of a considerable erosion of a simple polarized structure"[4](,)

though the word 'appearance' is very important here. Going back to Thompson one might say that the middleclass 'happens' by feeling and articulating the shared interests both against the owners of the means of production and the poorer proletariat; for the former it has deference and tries to simulate (and gets angry when it fails) while straining to distance itself from the latter. The impossibility of the project leads them to seek a distinct identity—often through a consumption pattern and lifestyle.

The formation of this class in Bengal, during the colonial period in a location that was the headquarters of the colonial financial activities and its capital for a considerable length of time, has a distinct history. Later, the Swadeshi Movement, the partition of India and the Government policies in independent India conferred a unique character on this class in Bengal.

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[3] The Making of the English Working Class-Preface, Pelican, 1963.
[4] As quoted by Tom Mayer in Chapter 5 Page 131 (Class) of Analytical Marxism-Sage Publications, 1994

Formed during the Nineteenth Century under colonial tutelage, it was fragmented and rather unsure of its self-image. The first batch of the bhadralok emerged from among the landed class whom the Permanent Settlement had benefitted.[5] It did not only benefit the large landowners, but also the affluent landed intermediaries. Pronounced availability of cash was a novel factor in the rural economy of Bengal then and with the cash in hand the large land owners acted as junior partners of the East India Company, came to live in the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata) and came into close contact with the colonial masters depending on the size of their share in the Company's trade. This had multifarious effects, both economic and social. On the one hand, they were exposed to the criticisms of the Christian Missionaries of the traditional Hindu society and on the other, to Western liberal ideas. While this encouraged some of them to adopt a more conservative stance, others among them desired Western education and social reform. The latter resulted in what is popularly but debatably termed as the Bengal Renaissance, in the first half of the Nineteenth Century. Most of the reforms were religion and women-centric. They perceived the colonial rule as a boon and not curse and hoped that their society would benefit from it if it strived sincerely. However, since all of them had strong rural ties, the successful social reformers were, to use Professor Amales Tripathy's terminology, "traditional modernizers".[6] Those who were more daring had to face the brunt of social rejection that ultimately marred their projects.[7] This should aptly portray the mood of the Hindu Bengali society.

In spite of the success of the moderate social reformers in introducing women's education, in banning the Sati and in legalizing widow remarriage, they were often criticized for disturbing the social fabric, by 'liberating' especially the women. They were also suspected of breaking religious and caste norms and taboos and hence, had to take too much care to show that

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[5] A land settlement introduced by Cornwallis in Bengal in 1793 by which the large land owners (zamindars) promised to pay a fixed amount in cash to the colonial Government by a stipulated date and retain anything extra they might have collected from the tillers of the soil. If the land owners failed to pay within the time, their zamindaris were auctioned to whoever promised to pay the highest amount in time.

[6] Raja Ram Mohun Ray and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar are examples. Professor Tripathy used the term to designate Vidyasagar. Vidyasagar: The Traditional Moderniser, Amales Tripathi. Bombay: Orient Longman, 1974.

[7] The Young Bengal Movement under the leadership of Henry Vivian Derozio, a young Professor of the Hindu College is an example.

they did not. Moreover, since the male members of the developing social group had to forego some of the social norms to be able to work with or to please the colonial masters, the burden of protecting whatever was perceived as tradition, fell on the women. So, their desire to read or avail the opportunities that the urban life offered were severely criticized as norm breaking attitudes.

The poorer bhadralok, also a creation of the colonial rule, included mainly schoolteachers and clerks of the Government offices or of the other commercial firms. They were the worst victims of the social changes and belonged to the middle rung of the landed families. While the former received Western education, entered into business relationships with the East India Company, made its foray into the Government services and usually adopted the legal profession and sometimes medical jobs, as means of self-improvement, for the latter, salaried jobs were the only means to supplement their inadequate earnings from land. Moreover, except the teachers the members of the group were usually meagerly educated and hence, had very little scope of self-development. Often ignorant about the norms of the city life and the Western ethos, everything including certain commodities related to urbanity was perceived by them as the worst type of anguish. Neither could they afford to live in the city with their womenfolk nor did they dare to do so for the fear of 'losing' their caste and religion. Living in dingy boarding houses they longed to get back to their respective homes whenever possible—though never permanently. Sumit Sarkar has pointed out, that they lovingly called their village home 'bari', meaning home, and their city dwelling 'basa', meaning a temporary abode;[8] further, the city was to them always alien and therefore, they called their village 'desh', i.e., native land though their relatives at home envied their city lives and they too at times, kept up the show.

Whatever caste/religious norms the higher echelons of the bhadralok had to forgo was compensated by the opportunities of self-development; but for their poorer counterparts, caste status was their last refuge and the only mark of social position. Moreover, the more affluent bhadraloks were also keen on breaking many of the barriers that tradition placed on their womenfolk, for they understood the logic of the social reforms, and were more exposed to the Western criticisms of the traditional Indian society.

[8] The City Imagined: Calcutta of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century in Writing Social History -Delhi Oxford University Press, 1998.

The burden of protecting the tradition mentioned above was at times taken up by the women against the wishes of their husbands to offset the 'sins' the men were committing by breaking the religious norms. However, this was not uniformly true, as in certain families the load was placed on them by the men who feared the Nineteenth Century social reforms. Some of them, however, had to leave their ancestral religion to enter the Bramho religious order[9] to break the traditional social norms. Nevertheless, for both groups of the bhadralok the rural economic base and the feudal social customs were important and even normal; they caused most of the changes in their lives within the broad socio-economic feudal structure. However much affluent the high-ranking bhadraloks might be, they had little opportunity to invest their incomes, chiefly from land, in business independently, for at the most they were compradors. Hence, the money either was spent on land or was spent on needless luxury, gold and festivity, in a feudal fashion.

En masse, the bhadralok belonged to the three higher castes (Brahman, Kayastha and Vaidya) of Bengal and that was the only bond that the lower and higher echelons of bhadralok shared; in fact, both owed their bhadralok status to their caste positions. Otherwise, in terms of income, education and social outlook they were far apart. The fact that neither of them were the owners of the means of production and even the most affluent among them could neither hope to own the means of production nor even to reach the highest professional ranks under the colonial rule did not bridge the gap between them. Thus, while the higher echelons continued to define themselves with education, proximity with the colonialists and a certain lifestyle emerging out of their attempts to imitate the Europeans often as far as caste norms would allow, the lower echelons defined themselves with the caste status and a more traditional lifestyle. In other words, a class with precariousness and limited scope of development existed without 'happening' in Thompson's sense. Their respective self-perceptions matched with their financial conditions, but did not correspond with their economic position.

From the end of the Nineteenth Century and definitely from the first half of the next, hopes of the affluent bhadralok began to crash. The Western form of formal education became the norm for most of the higher caste urban Bengalis, the number of job seekers expanded thus, though the job market did not and therefore, a large number of people failed to

[9] A mono-theist Upanishad based religion founded by Ram Mohun Ray.

perceive the colonial rule as beneficial as they had done earlier. Many educated youth could identify the economic interests of the colonialists that were bound to thwart the development of India and the Indians. The Swadeshi Movement that entailed boycotts not only of foreign goods but also of foreign ideology, even if progressive, began in Bengal from 1905. Strict adherence to traditional ways of life, wearing traditional costumes, valuing traditional High Art[10] and buying indigenous products, defined the educated Bengali patriot. This is not the place to discuss the viability of the project. Suffice to say, economic boycott of foreign goods was never complete because indigenous production was negligible thanks to the colonial rule and because machine made cheap yet attractive foreign commodities of daily consumption flooded the Indian market.[11] Yet, it is necessary to mention the efforts of many indigenous entrepreneurs—most of whom failed but some survived. The successful production enterprises included Bengal Chemical (founded by the Scientist Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy), Bangalakshmi Cotton Mill and Supra Ink, to name just a few. The point however is that, for the first time a consumption pattern popularly defined a group. The earlier lifestyle and consumption pattern of the high-ranking bhadralok was not popular. The Swadeshi lifestyle on the other hand, though often backed by the landowners and the landed intermediaries became popular even among the less affluent bhadralok. Nevertheless, instead of business logic, the consumption pattern was backed by patriotism and created an unparalleled consumer producer partnership. For a while, apparently, the fragmented middleclass was united by ‘otherizing’ the foreigner; but only apparently, because the social gap between the two sections of the bhadralok persisted. And yet, the leadership of the Movement especially at the local levels was in the hands of the young and less affluent bhadralok who found a new mark of distinction besides education; a mark of distinction that afforded them to otherize along with the foreigners those high-ranking bhadraloks who still aped the Western lifestyle and consumed foreign goods. However, it was a mark of distinction that entailed sacrifices and pain. The question of ownership of the means of production once more seemed superfluous,

[10] The Bengal School of painting under the aegis of Abanindranath Tagore stemmed from here. A detail discussion of this is available in the writings of Tapati Guhathakurta and Prtha Mitra. For example, The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920 Cambridge South Asian Studies 2007 Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850 1922 Cambridge University Press 1995.

[11] For details see The Extremist Challenge by Amales Tripathy-Orient Longman 1967.

patriotism apparently became the line that divided the middleclass of Bengal, where honoring traditional religious values was no more a mark of backwardness.

However much a consumption pattern might define a class in the most encouraging way, a group can hardly become a consuming class by following a politically correct line of consumption; they would rather remain taut throughout. After independence, the logic of sacrifice suddenly evaporated, but the burden of tradition remained. It was necessary for the entrepreneurs, after the independence, to adroitly lift the burden of tradition so that the bulk of the middleclass could consume without any feeling of guilt; most of the affluent bhadraloks, though not all, were free enough of tradition to consume much of what was in the market and the poor could not buy. On the other hand, the lesser bhadralok often desired to emulate a higher-class lifestyle, but either traditional values or patriotism, or both, hindered them.

The First Chapter, In the Name of the Nation, would show how allusion to nationalism and tradition (as defined by the advertisements) could draw the viewers away from both. Since advertisements are by nature conservative, in the sense that they apparently honor popular beliefs, the advertisements of the period between 1947 and the mid-1950s linked each advertised product with tradition and the consumer-producer duo of the past, to create its own distinct group of consumers, for nationalism still made sense to the public. The advertisements cashed a sentiment to make commodities signifiers of tradition and nationalism and signs of a proud, community. Torn away from history, the signified served as an empty signifier— material fit for creating Myth.

In other parts of India, the association between the products and tradition and/or nationalism would simply make the products notionally parts of or as old as the Indian tradition, and hence authentic. In Bengal, it would additionally remove the apprehensions about the commodities, which the bhadralok associated with ‘undesirable’ urban modernity.

From the middle of the 1950s, i.e., during the halcyon days of the state sponsored development of the Nehruvian era, the picture of the nation in advertisements changed from a shared community to a geographic space that was developing and providing scope to everybody to develop. Instead of tradition, rationality and willingness to work for the developing nation were the new marks of distinction. But while the bourgeoisie, the upper-

middleclass and the landed rich actually reaped the fruits of the development, the condition of the lesser bhadralok changed very little. They were now victims of class instead of racial discrimination. The upper echelons of the bhadralok were distinct but they still wanted ever new marks of distinction to make a show of their importance; and the lower echelon oscillated between hope and fear of the reality—a reality that drew them closer to the poorer classes who were by no means bhadralok[12]. They very definitely needed external marks of distinction to declare their bhadralok status.

Advertisers during the second half of the 1950s defined the middleclass *man* as one who worked hard for national development and benefitted from it; and prescribed for the class, a lifestyle comprising a consumption pattern (including obviously the advertised commodity) and a dressing pattern and fashion. Via the products, the members of the successful middleclass could proclaim their success on the one hand; and on the other, the lower middleclass could try to buy distinction and the advertised image of the meaningful life. Not that they could always afford the commodities, but if these were accepted as signs of middleclass life and if the logic of the consumption pattern were accepted, buying could become a compulsion. In fact, just as today, failure to buy increased the desire for the commodities, as desire breeds in the space between the wish and the capacity to achieve. In such cases, the desire would primarily be for the importance and the lifestyle and next for the commodity as a sign for the former two. The bhadralok, agonized by the urbanity during the colonial epoch, would see in the advertisements a brighter aspect of the same—an image that could make them happy enough to consume.

By the 1960s, most of the expectations of those of the lesser middleclass had fallen flat to the extent that they could not even pretend to hope for anything better; the earlier definitions of bhadralok would no more work. In fact, no meaning of nationalism and nation could cast a spell on them. Newspapers were full of reports of parochial/micro-nationalist movements in the North-East and in the South against declaring Hindi as the national language. Some of these turned violent and the state

[12] High caste status, certain amount of education and white-collar job were qualifications of bhadralok. The father of a refugee (due to partition of India in 1947) bhadralok family in 'Meghe Dhaka Tara, a film by Rwittik Ghatak, lamented when his son joined a factory as a mill-hand due to dire need in these words, '(he) has become a labor at last'! His rather prolonged sigh expressed the rest of his feelings.

that sponsored development also sponsored repression in the North-East but compromised with the anti-Hindi movements in the South. The Bengali newspapers complained against what was popularly known as the 'Bengali frustration'. Unemployment became a chronic problem in a state that saw very little industrialization even during the days of the state backed development and became a hot bed of Left Movements of various strands during the 1960s. Central allocation for the development of the city of Calcutta, where refugees from the then East-Pakistan had poured in, was negligible, and as a result a shabby and murky image of the city circulated all over India and shamed the dwellers of the city.

The advertisements still created a desire for distinction to be crystallized on commodities, but without any reference to tradition and/or the nation. During the period that followed, the advertisements defined the members of the middleclass neither as parts of a shared community nor as citizens of the nation-state, but only as a group—capable of consuming for personal satisfaction or of buying social position and prominence via commodities. New modes of recreations were offered, and in the mirror of the advertisements, the middleclass might have perceived itself as a group, capable of foregoing all traditional values for the sake of modernity that signified progress and vivacity.

This could influence the bhadraloks because though their lives had stagnated by the 1960s, they still perceived themselves as progressive, rebellious and romantic, as spillover effects of the Bengal Renaissance, the armed nationalist movements and many the cultural movements. Any advertisement that circulated consistently in Bengal must have been able to harp on this Bengali sentiment, even if unwittingly.

The Second Chapter, 'Keeping with Time' explicates how the advertisements made a range of commodities from the pressure cookers and kerosene stoves to hair oil and branded clothes desirable, by associating these with measurable time, speed and fleeting time. The advertisers related the concept of time with the lifestyle of the salaried class in ways that could enhance their sense of importance and with modes of enjoyment that could be marks of taste, modernity and economic capability. Measurable time had been a source of tension for the Bengali clerks during their formative period under the colonial rule. In the advertisements, they found a new meaning of time to signify the importance of one who could move along with it, and a mark of distinction

for a class desiring importance that constantly slipped away from it even in the post-colonial Bengal. The symbol now would substitute the real.

However, the sale figures of some of these commodities from Bengal, during the period, were not impressive and increased only gradually; more, what the advertisements projected as modernity were sources of tension in many Bengali middleclass families. Yet, once these were established as marks of distinction and modernity, the younger members of the aspiring middleclass could be encouraged to buy distinction, even if unsteadily, via the advertised products, at a time when many of their hopes had actually crashed, as the newspaper reports would attest. The tensions mentioned above, would underscore modernity and steer consumers a step further away from the traditional ethos—a stumbling-block for the unfolding market. Moreover, the young and often the unemployed bhadralok were thus encouraged to crystallize their anger and protest, on the commodities that the previous generation detested. Nevertheless, total success of the media in this direction would have thwarted the Left Movement in Bengal. Since that did not happen one may agree with Stuart Hall and say that the encoded messages were not always decoded in the way desired by the media[13]; they might have been decoded in some other way or even might have been resisted by some of the members of the target class.

The Third Chapter, 'All for Love and Family', would expound the process by which the advertisements made certain commodities alluring by linking them with a particular pattern of conjugality, love and small family, which were still non-existent among the bhadralok, in reality, or were centers of tensions among and hence desirable to them. The image of the bhadramahila that emerged in the advertising texts of the 1960s and the '70s was especially novel and incorporated many of the desires that their previous generations too had but could never dare to express. In fact, the created tension produced a sense of modernity, defined a lifestyle and made the products even more alluring. The advertised family pattern also included new methods and agencies of childcare that were supposedly 'Scientific' and replaced the traditional methods. Older forms of family, the last bastion of the traditional values of the bhadralok were thus negated and a new definition of the same was put forward very alluringly by the

[13] Stuart Hall Encoding/Decoding in Media And Cultural Studies: Keyworks Page 171 Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, Eds. (2001).

advertisements to introduce new products that the older generation could have resisted.

This brought modernity within the bounds of the private sphere and attuned the bhadralok to a consumption pattern that would shock their predecessors of the 1940s and even of the 1950s. 'Science' in this case was the justification of consumption. It would be interesting to note how the pretext of consumption changed from tradition to modernity/Science via a particular concept of nation-state during a period of about twenty years.

When I say consumption, I do not always mean buying because financial incapability and archaic beliefs and habits often hindered purchase of commodities. The traditional practices, despite everything had not vanished to the extent that the advertisements pretended. My argument is that the viewers consumed even if falteringly the advertised consumption patterns and tended to perceive themselves as consumers of the advertised lifestyles. This could encourage them to give up all the inherited and fixed identities to acquire any new tantalizing identity, to try out new marks of distinction and honor because the older ones had failed. Identities would henceforth be most unstable, neither to be inherited nor to be achieved but to be purchased via commodities because the middleclass unwilling to recognize its real economic position and standing on a slippery ground is actually left with very little opportunity to achieve and far less to inherit. Once the practice of buying identity is accepted, once commodity fetishism develops, buying becomes a compulsion; financial incapability only increases desire. I would argue that the advertisements of the decades under consideration did not create compulsive buyers but created a mindset that could be turned to obsessive buying during the later period of a stronger market culture.

Many of the advertisements analyzed in the following chapters were meant for an all India circulation; though a few of the advertisers prepared separate texts for the Bengali newspapers. However, since India is a land of varied culture and uneven development, the texts could be interpreted differently in different parts of India during a period when regional traits were strong. I have interpreted the texts in a way the bhadralok/ bhadramahila, given their historical background, might have done. I am aware of some of the ways in which the people from the other parts of India might have read them and have cited a few examples in the Concluding Chapter.

I have followed Roland Barthes while analyzing the advertising texts—but I have been cautious. First, because Barthes' method emerged out of a more developed capitalist system; as a method however it has general validity but the condition of India was peculiar during the period under discussion. My focus is on Bengal, whose condition was further complex. Barthes usually analyzed the pictorial advertising texts to show how viewers would gather meaning from the pictures/component parts of the pictures (when arranged in a particular manner), where these would be signifiers of 'Italianness' or 'Frenchness', for example. Prior knowledge about the signified, in these cases, is a necessary factor to enable viewers to decode the signifiers. Moreover, they should have some primary knowledge and willingness to accept the type of the products advertised—Frenchness or Italianness was meant only to raise the prestige of a brand. The texts analyzed by him either had very little literary texts or he paid less attention to them, for the relation between the two types of texts were obvious to any reader/viewer.

Bengali viewers on the other hand, during the period were introduced to many new types of products; or the already existing products had to be imbued with new meanings to make them acceptable to the bhadralok. The advertisements printed in newspapers published from Bengal had signifiers signifying Indianness but the signifier and thus the type of Indianness signified had often very remote connection with the advertised products. Further, allusions to Indianness in these advertisements were sometimes used to remove apprehension about a class of products or to reserve a section of consumers for the local products but not to raise the prestige of a brand. In fact, since throughout the colonial period Indians and especially the Bengalis hardly had any scope to participate in manufacturing industries and since all of the traditional industries had been destroyed, it was difficult to associate any industrially manufactured product with Indianness unless the origin of the product was notionally located in ancient India.

The advertising media in India during the period under discussion was still weak and had to struggle to influence the middleclass. From the 1930s to 1945, the Bengali newspapers especially carried very few advertisements and some of them were mere declarations and short insertions stating the presence of a product in the market. Most of the advertisements in the English newspapers like The Statesman or Times of India addressed the Europeans in India with words like, 'the cream will save your delicate skin from the scorching tropical sun'. Alternatively, the upper class Indians