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## Consuming Students: Advertisements and the Indian Youth Market, 1935–65

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### ABSTRACT

Advertisements for commodities offer a unique keyhole into the shifting consumption practices and media constructions of the youthful consumer. An analysis of five student and youth magazines foregrounds the gendered and materialistic idealisations of leisure invoked to promote branded goods in the Indian youth market. Analysing advertisements in these magazines allows us to trace the increasingly sophisticated way in which capitalist actors stratified the domain of advertising by life stages during the late colonial and early post-colonial periods in India. This finding runs contrary to the grain of historiography that contends that the Indian 'market' failed to respond to the interests of consumers prior to the media liberalisation of the 1980s and 1990s.

### KEYWORDS

Advertisements; branded goods; consumption practices; Indian youth; mid twentieth century; youth magazines

Some of the most common advertisements published in Indian youth and student magazines during the late colonial and early post-colonial period sought to entice aspiring middle-class Indians in their teens and twenties to drink tea, wash with soap, tour across their country, read books, improve their employment chances with study guides and to recognise the merits of government initiatives. This article will explore the ways in which capitalist actors, such as businessmen, magazine editors, advertising agencies and product merchants, used advertisements to target the heuristic category of the Indian youth. These materials provide a means to trace the contours of the youth cultural order of consumption in late colonial and post-colonial India from 1935 to 1965, a period normally associated with the rise of the nationalist movement, Independence and Partition, and nation-building. Scholars of South Asia have until recently tended to overlook the ways in which youths spent their leisure time at the everyday level in favour of historicising the post-childhood passage to adulthood in terms of narrowly defined political experiences.<sup>1</sup>

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1. For a political history of Indian youth, see Philip Altbach, *Turmoil and Transition: Higher Education and Student Politics in India* (New Delhi and New York: Basic Books, 1979); Dipesh Chakrabarty, "In the Name of Politics": Democracy and the Power of the Multitude in India', *Public Culture* 19, no. 1 (2007): 35–57; Subhash Chandra

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The study of advertisements has been a vital archive for historians of youth since ‘social history’ and ‘history from below’ caught the imagination of a generation of scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. Historian of youth Joseph Kett famously declared that the key to understanding the history of ‘adolescent society’ lay in researching ‘the compost heap of ... cultural life’. He argued that in the rich materials often disregarded or deemed superfluous by scholars—advertisements being a prime example—lay the answers to key research questions about the history of this social group.<sup>2</sup> These insights have more recently begun to be reflected in South Asian Studies.<sup>3</sup>

There have been important works exploring advertisement practices during the colonial period and following India’s liberalisation of the media and the onset of nationwide television broadcasting in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the few decades following Independence have been generally understood as somehow static and unchanging.<sup>4</sup> Arvind Rajagopal’s treatise on the genealogies of the consumer subject in India and its relation to capitalist modernity contends that the English-speaking enclave market that prevailed during the early post-colonial period was largely derivative of the colonial-era market. Rajagopal introduces a separation between the ‘enclave’, or ‘anglophone’, and ‘subaltern’, or ‘vernacular’, spheres of advertisement in pre-liberalisation India.<sup>5</sup> He claims the former was distinguished by English-language advertisements created by modern advertising agencies catering to the richer classes who were insulated from larger society. In contrast, the vernacular sphere served the Indian masses, with the result that smaller, more local capitalist firms were more likely to place ads in this commercial domain.<sup>6</sup>

There has been a broad consensus amongst scholars of Indian media that prior to its gradual liberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s, the ‘market’ generally failed to respond to the interests of consumers.<sup>7</sup> William Mazzarella has argued that it was only following India’s liberalisation in 1991 that ‘an entire industry sprang up around the proposition that Indian consumers were culturally unique and thus had to be targeted by corporations in ways that resonated with their native preference’.<sup>8</sup> This article contends that the stratification of the domain of advertising by life stages and the sophisticated advertisement techniques aimed at this social group suggest otherwise. These youth magazines mostly catered to well-to-do students who had more

Hazary, ‘Protest Politics of Student Youth in India: Change and Challenge’, *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (1988): 105–20; Chris Moffat, *India’s Revolutionary Inheritance Politics and the Promise of Bhagat Singh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Ali Raza and Franziska Roy, ‘Paramilitary Organisations in Interwar India’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 671–89; Benjamin Zachariah and Franziska Roy, ‘Meerut and a Hanging: Young India, Popular Socialism, and the Dynamics of Imperialism’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, no. 3 (2013): 360–77.

2. Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
3. Douglas Haynes et al., ed., *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 2010). For the early social histories of youth, see Kett, *Rites of Passage*; John Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770–present* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).
4. Arvind Rajagopal, ‘Advertising in India: Genealogies of the Consumer Subject’, in *Handbook of Modernity in South Asia*, ed. Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee-Dube (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 217–28.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. William Mazzarella, ‘“Very Bombay”: Contending with the Global in an Indian Advertising Agency’, *Cultural Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (2003): 33–71.

discretionary money, and I will argue that this ‘enclave market’ had the capacity to shape and cater to the demands of the youth public prior to India’s liberalisation. A sphere of advertisements that responded to the commercial interests of young consumers can be clearly traced to the late colonial period.

### The making of a modern youth in advertising

Earlier scholars have used advertisements to explore the cultural role of youth in Indian society. The pioneering Modern Girl Around the World Research Group contended that the heuristic category of the Modern Girl provides a means to identify commonalities of globalisation and gendered modernity during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup> They pointed out the Indian Modern Girl appeared in the consumerist domain during the late colonial period in her role as a ‘*sitara* (starlet), *swapno ki rani* (dream girl/queen), *romance ki rani* (romance queen), “sex symbol”, vamp and *kallege ladki* (college girl)’.<sup>10</sup>

Several important studies have begun charting the history of Indian youth by exploring media culture and practices, and these studies powerfully foreground the shifting subversions of sexual and cultural norms surrounding Indian youth. Kaushik Bhaumik argues that Bollywood films and the bohemian ‘cultures of the young’ in Bombay (now Mumbai) during the 1920s pushed the boundaries of the Indian public sphere. Douglas Haynes argues vernacular capitalist firms played on the sexual insecurities of young men to promote aphrodisiacs and, in doing so, historicises the articulation of sexual norms unimaginable to earlier generations.<sup>11</sup> Further, Douglas Haynes and Shrikant Botre examined an Indian sex advice column to reveal the sexual anxieties and the forms of sexual knowledge possessed by young Indian men.<sup>12</sup> These historical sources—such as film, print media columns and, indeed, advertisements—cross over, they are in a conversation, as what Christopher Pinney calls ‘interocular’ fields, in so far as there is a visual inter-referencing and citational authority that mirrors and reinforces the expectations of youthhood.<sup>13</sup>

I have examined advertisements from select magazines aimed at Indian youths to answer some of the basic questions about youth consumption and to reconsider some of the key insights into the history of advertisements in the Indian context. The selection of these magazines arose from my doctoral research into youth movements and mobilisations in post-colonial India, conducted in 2018 and 2019. Furnished with upper intermediate Hindi skills and a letter of introduction from my PhD supervisor, Dr. Taylor Sherman, I went in search of the headquarters of post-colonial era youth

9. Tani Barlow et al., ‘The Modern Girl around the World: A Research Agenda and Preliminary Findings’, *Gender and History* 17, no. 2 (2005): 245–94.

10. *Ibid.*; also see Priti Ramamurthy, ‘All-Consuming Nationalism: The Indian Modern Girl in the 1920s and 1930s’, in *Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, ed. Tani Barlow et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008): 147–74.

11. Douglas Haynes, ‘Selling Masculinity: Advertisements for Sex Tonics and the Making of Modern Conjugality in Western India, 1900–1945’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 35, no. 4 (2012): 787–831.

12. Shrikant Botre and Haynes Douglas, ‘Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Anxieties: Middle-Class Males in Western India and the Correspondence in Samaj Swasthya, 1927–53’, *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 4 (2017): 991–1034.

13. Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

organisations in New Delhi to find their surviving documentation, including magazines. It was in these magazines that I found a variety of adverts that I believe illuminate the voices, perspectives and understandings of the multiple pathways of Indian youth.

This article will analyse adverts from magazines published by Indian youth movements that reflect a range of political orientations.<sup>14</sup> These include the pro-Communist Party of India (CPI) All-India Student Federation (AISF)'s *The Student*, the pro-CPI All-India Youth Federation (AIYF)'s *The New Generation*, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)'s *The Young Men of India, Burma and Ceylon*, the Scouting movement's *The Bharat Scouts and Guides Magazine*, and the Hindi literary journal *Sarasvati*. These movements, either as a whole or elements within them, both moved towards and away from the patronage networks of the varied apparatus of the Government of India during the colonial and post-colonial period. For example, Harald Fischer-Tiné found that from the early 1920s, some of the Indian and American representatives within the YMCA openly showed their sympathies for the M.K. Gandhi-led Indian National Congress and consequently attracted the colonial consternation of British officials.<sup>15</sup> I have demonstrated elsewhere that after 30 years of a broad division between pro- and anti-British Raj Scouting movements, in 1951, Education Minister Maulana Abul Kalam Azad facilitated their unification into the Bharat Scouts and Guides. Thereafter, planning officials facilitated its expansion through the organisation's incorporation into the Government of India's Five-Year Plans.<sup>16</sup>

The AISF and the AIYF represented a dramatic indication of student power and symbolised a youthful counterculture for the period at hand, although, in line with the Communist movement in India, both supported the British war effort between 1942 and 1945.<sup>17</sup> The capital that funded the publication of their magazines came from the CPI, and both used the CPI's printing press, and the ideological orientation of its youthful readership was Left leaning. These magazines were the obvious space for adverts relating to the movement's uniforms, training courses, relevant books and merchandise. *Sarasvati* was not exclusively a youth magazine, although it is clear from its content that it had a large readership amongst the youth and a great many of its adverts are aimed at this social group. The magazine is one of the most

- 
14. The full names and locations of the magazines explored in the article are as follows: *The Student: The All-Indian Student Federation Newspaper* (Ajoy Bhavan, the Communist Party of India Archives, New Delhi); *The New Generation, A Youth and Students Monthly Journal* (Ajoy Bhavan, the Communist Party of India Archives, New Delhi); *The Bharat Scout and Guide Magazine* Scouts and Guides National HQ, Lakshmi Mazumdar Bhavan, New Delhi (This official monthly organ of the organisation started its publication in January 1955. For historians of Scouting, it conveniently picks up where the NAI records largely cease). Finally, *The Young Men of India, Burma and Ceylon* (YMCA Archives, New Delhi)—this was the official organ of the council of the YMCA in South Asia. It became known as the Association Men in the late 1950s. It later became *Yuvak: National YMCA Youth Journal* in the 1970s.
  15. Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Fitness for Modernity: The YMCA and Physical Education Schemes in Late Colonial South Asia (c. 1900–1940)', *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2018): 512–59.
  16. Tom Wilkinson, 'Youth Movements and Mobilisations in Post-Colonial India, circa 1930–1970' (unpublished PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 2022): 91–115.
  17. Tom Wilkinson, 'Student Politics in British India and Beyond: The Rise and Fragmentation of the All-India Student Federation (AISF), 1936–1950', *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* 22 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.6488>.

celebrated and earliest examples of a Hindi literary journal, and it had a distinctly pro-Hindi language editorial agenda.<sup>18</sup>

Even though the range of strategies and approaches to placing the adverts is difficult to retrieve, it is clear that the Christian, Communist or pro-Hindi ideologies of these magazines did not put a stop to the placing of corporate adverts in the youth marketplace, nor did their editorial boards ever put in print their opposition to such adverts. Mazzarella notes that even today the advertising business holds an ambiguous place within the processes of mass consumerism.<sup>19</sup> However, the placement of advertisements is far from arbitrary, and this article reveals that capitalist actors placed advertisements that targeted the social body of youths and depicted figures designed to resonate with their attitudes. These adverts, as I will show, demarcated a separate categorisation of the youth consumer, constructed gendered and materialistic idealisations of this life stage, and sought to shape a distinct set of consumerist needs, desires and choices.

This paper will argue that the growth of magazines published by youth movements, though never as large a market as those aimed at children and women, points to a highly identifiable social body of consumers during the late colonial and early post-colonial period.<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding that collective consumerist change must not be overstated in addition to acknowledging that this group was made up of a varied set of actors, and that counter-norms or economic constraints are rarely revealed by this source, advertisements aimed at this social group provide a vital lens to trace the general consumption patterns of the young.

The first section will reveal the ways in which tea and soap adverts incorporated sporting personalities and actresses to publicise fast-moving consumer goods; I argue that these figures became the '*Gods of the Youth Bazaar*'.<sup>21</sup> Further, I will explore the gendered social discourses and media representations of young women and men depicted in adverts, and the materialistic conceptions of youthhood, fashion, romance, tourism and leisure of this period, to show that advertisements placed in the youth market tapped into the political discourses about the freedom struggle and the developmentalist agenda of independent India.

The second section will give historical insights into the decline of sea travel and the rise of an air travel culture in the youth market. These adverts coached youthful consumers in notions of comfort and sought to link this life stage with the cultural phenomenon of travel. Reasoning with the economic limitations of this consumer group, though, these ads emphasised the luxurious travel experience they could provide on the one hand, and their low fares and value for money on the other.

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18. Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002): 5.

19. Mazzarella, "Very Bombay".

20. As Robb states, 'literary journals and newspapers aiming to reform the religious beliefs and domestic habits of women were common in early twentieth-century North India': see Megan Robb, 'Women's Voices, Men's Lives: Masculinity in a North Indian Urdu Newspaper', *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 5 (2012): 1441–73. A genre of children's magazines emerged in late colonial India and expanded dramatically during the 1950s: see Sudipa Topdar, 'The Corporeal Empire: Physical Education and Politicising Children's Bodies in Late Colonial Bengal', *Gender & History* 29, no. 1 (2017): 176–97; Nandini Chandra, 'The Pedagogic Imperative of Travel Writing in the Hindi World: Children's Periodicals (1920–1950)', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (2007): 293–325.

21. An adaptation of a concept borrowed from Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Moreover, adverts relating to education, skills and employment reveal media depictions of an aspiring and enterprising, but generally inadequate, Indian student. They reveal the way capitalist actors sought to exploit his (and the figure was far more frequently male than female) employment insecurities. The third section will explore Hindi advertisements that promoted books and government development schemes to bring to light media representations of subject formations of the literary-youth and the citizen-youth in the Indian context.

### **Advertisements, branded goods and youth consumption: Tyres, tea and soap**

Advertisements for electric radios, torches, tennis rackets, transistorised megaphones, luxury inks for pens, electric fans, motorcycles, *beedis* and cigarettes represent a regular smattering of the branded goods promoted in the Indian youth market, but this article will begin by focusing on the branded goods publicised most in the magazines I explored: tyres, tea and soap. Specifically, this section will take advertising campaigns run by Dunlop, Tata Soap and Tea for Stamina to bring to light the way large companies sought to foster consumption practices and the growth of brand visibility amongst this social group. These adverts collectively reveal the carving out of a separate category of young consumers and demonstrate an understanding of their distinct desires and consumer choices, and communicate a particular set of youthful forms. Arvind Rajagopal offers a helpful definition of ‘the brand’, which he argues ‘represents the identity of the consumer product, or the business, that a given publicity event advertises’.<sup>22</sup>

These tyre, tea and soap ads did appear in other magazines and targeted adult consumers as well, but there is a high recurrence and regularity in these magazines because they sought to specifically target and engage the youth market, which included teenagers and soon-to-be married and newly wedded couples. Indeed, these ads for specific commodities interacted with the youth market through their media representations and social constructions of this life stage, thus allowing us to trace what Timothy Burke argues are the ‘prior meanings’ of capitalist actors.<sup>23</sup> He argues that consumption must be understood within the context of the ‘detailed map of “prior meanings”’ and this alludes to the social, material and cultural significance that becomes attached to commodities that capitalist actors are able to generate over time in the colonial context. Burke claims that this accumulative ‘historical weight’ gives commodities ‘their rich individuality within a specific place and time’. Endorsing this viewpoint, Douglas Haynes notes that ‘modern consumer-oriented capitalism involves efforts to shape new needs and shape old ones ... advertisers draw in some part upon existing understandings and values to be successful’.<sup>24</sup> It is the understandings and

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22. Arvind Rajagopal, ‘Early Publicity in India: Trademark, Branding and Advertisement’, in *The Story of Early Indian Advertising*, ed. Jyotindra Jain (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2017): 90.

23. Douglas Haynes, ‘Creating the Consumer: Advertising, Capitalism and the Middle Classes in Urban Western India, 1914–1940’, in *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, ed. Douglas Haynes et al. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 2010): 186.

24. *Ibid.*

*The Student*

Janki Dass,  
the All-India  
Cycling Cham-  
pion, says:  
"Cycling for  
championship is a strenuous sport. I have  
discovered however, that tea is an excellent  
beverage for maintaining energy and stamina  
and have always made it a point to take  
plenty of tea when training or competing.  
I consider this delicious beverage to be  
invaluable for every sportsman."

**TEA** for Stamina

Read our new Sports Brochure entitled, "Tea for Stamina" and see why the leading sportsmen of India recommend tea for endurance and stamina during and after games. Please cut out this coupon and send it, together with your name, address and occupation to the Commissioner for India, Indian Tea Market Extension Board, P. O. Box No. 2172, Calcutta who will send you free of charge a copy of the Brochure.

INSERTED BY THE INDIAN TEA MARKET EXTENSION BOARD. L.R. 172

Figure 1. Tea for Stamina, *The Student*, May–June 1942.

values relating to the life stage of Indian youth, as produced in the commercial sphere of branded advertisements, that this section will explore.

Youth magazines featured a great many adverts for branded teas and soaps during the late colonial period and they appropriated sporting personalities to promote these goods to the Indian youth market.<sup>25</sup> The Tea for Stamina advert series used images of Indian hockey coach Sardar Harbail Singh, gold medallist cyclist Janki Das and wicket-keeper D. Hinklekar (Figures 1–3). The ads attribute comments from these icons about the benefits of incorporating tea drinking into their training regimen, and they make the claim that black tea increases athletic traits such as stamina, endurance and performance.

The adverts for Jai soap, a Tata product, similarly incorporated sporting icons to promote branded goods to the youth market and made regular use of the image of track and field gold medallist Jesse Owens throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. Jesse

25. Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*, 44.



D. D. Hindlekar, the famous wicket-keeper in All-India cricket today, says: "I have found from experience, that a cup of hot tea has always served me well as a stimulant after a day's strenuous wicket-keeping. It is a fine refresher."

**TEA for Stamina**

Read our new Sports Brochure entitled "Tea for Stamina" and see why the leading sportsmen of India recommend tea for endurance and stamina during and after games. Please cut out this coupon and send it, together with your name, address and occupation to the Commissioner for India, Indian Tea Market Expansion Board, P. O. Box No. 2172, Calcutta who will send you free of charge a copy of the Brochure.

ORIENTED BY THE INDIAN TEA MARKET EXPANSION BOARD

1K 177

Figure 2. Tea for Stamina, *The Student*, August 1942.

Owens comments, 'for strenuous athletic work, Jai falls in with my requirements of a good toilet soap' (Figure 4). It is difficult to excavate the extent to which this ad might seek to interact with contemporary debates about minority rights that arose following the Berlin Olympics in 1936, but Tata's regular placing of an image of a renowned black athlete on their soap gives an insight into the existence of a non-white transnational sport celebrity youth culture in India. Satadru Sen found that one generation earlier, the victory of black US heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson over his white opponent Jim Jeffries in July 1910 meant he soared to popularity in India. Sen argues there was much political significance attached to Johnson's victory against a white athlete, a man who had promised to defend the 'athletic superiority of the white race' and, despite attempts by the colonial government to censor the news, this was reported widely by the Indian press.<sup>26</sup>

Ads placed in youth magazines harnessed the celebrity culture of the Bombay cinema industry to promote branded soap to the youth market. Hindustan Lever's publicity for Lux soap, as in the example in Figure 5, centred around the Indian film actress Nanda Karnataki. She informed the middle-class readers of *Sarasvati*, who would have been more likely to afford such branded goods, 'please listen to the secret from Nanda.... For [a] beautiful look, Lux is necessary'. This ad not only brings to light the striking

26. Satadru Sen, 'Schools, Athletes and Confrontation: The Student Body in Colonial India', in *Confronting the Body: The Politics of Physicality in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*, ed. James H. Mills and Satadru Sen (London: Anthem Press, 2004): 72–5.

*The Student*



**Sardar Harbail Singh,**  
Physical Director, Khalsa College,  
Amritsar, who played for the All-  
India Hockey Team which toured  
New Zealand, writes:

"A cup of tea before and after a  
hard game is most beneficial to the  
system. As a member of the Indian  
hockey team in New Zealand I always  
had a cup of tea. As the Physical  
Director and Coach of the  
College hockey team, I have  
always been advising  
my students to take a  
cup of tea after a  
strenuous game."

**TEA for Stamina** 

Read our new Sports Brochure entitled "Tea for Stamina"  
and see why the leading sportsmen of India recommend tea for  
endurance and stamina during and after games. Please cut  
out this coupon and send it, together with your name, address  
and occupation to the Commissioner for India, Indian  
Tea Market Expansion Board, P. O. Box No. 2072, Calcutta  
who will send you free of charge a copy of the Brochure.

INSERTED BY THE INDIAN TEA MARKET EXPANSION BOARD 16 173

Figure 3. Tea for Stamina, *The Student*, May–June 1942.

similarity of the cultural meanings and icons attached to soap in the Hindi and English-speaking domains, it also offers a prime example of the way ads invoke secular-modernist images of sporting and movie personalities to address the middle-class youth audience in India.<sup>27</sup>

There is a notable absence of Hindu deities and Indian nationalist leaders, who were the popular and mass cultural icons of Indian calendar art during this period, in these youth and student magazines.<sup>28</sup> Instead, a discernible investment of cultural values, embodied by sporting and Bombay celebrity aesthetics, in branded fast-moving consumer goods such as tea and soap can be found. Athletes and actors became, to borrow Kajri Jain's concept, the Gods of the Youth's Bazaar.

With the emergence and expansion of their domestic tyre production from 1936, the Dunlop Rubber Company ran a far-reaching advertisement campaign for their

27. Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*.

28. *Ibid.*



Figure 4. Jai soap advert (a Tata product), *The Bharat Scouts and Guides Magazine*, May 1959.

rubber tyres that targeted young Indians throughout the 1950s.<sup>29</sup> The campaign for Dunlop tyres was designed for well-to-do youths and students who might need to replace their bike or motor-car tyres and the discretionary money to consume such branded tyres. Furthermore, as these adverts repeatedly depicted images of young adoring couples, it is likely they were targeted at newly-weds or soon-to-weds.

Moreover, the Dunlop ad series centred on promoting motor tourism in India. N. Jayapalan claims increased ownership of motor cars amongst the middle classes 'revolutionised holiday habits' in India.<sup>30</sup> He claims the number of holiday-makers travelling by road 'increased tremendously' during the early post-colonial period.<sup>31</sup> Dunlop created these adverts in an attempt to shape this emergent market, its consumer culture and to strengthen the firm's local identity amongst the next generation of citizen-consumers.

These Dunlop adverts reveal much about the gendered social discourses and media representations of young women in post-colonial India. Figure 6 depicts 'Garba dancers of Gujarat' singing, dancing and clapping, or performing what the ad calls

29. See Geoffrey Jones, 'The Growth and Performance of British Multinational Firms before 1939: The Case of Dunlop', *The Economic History Review* 37, no. 1 (1984): 35–53.

30. N. Jayapalan, *Introduction to Tourism* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2001): 15.

31. *Ibid.*



Figure 5. Lux soap, *Sarasvati*, August 1962.

'beautifully formed gestures', during Navaratri. On the one hand, the garba dancers are in possession of agency in so far as they can define themselves through dance and provocatively avoid direct eye contact with the reader. On the other hand, they appear in their assigned roles as objects of erotic traditionalism and the ad, which encourages motor tourists to travel across Gujarat to find such sights, invokes these women as potential objects of the tourist gaze.

These ads projected the 'traditional' difference of the young Indian village woman to the generally well-to-do, urban and youthful reader. This conjuring of the 'other' Indian youth resonates with what the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group calls the 'Asianisation' of the modern girl.<sup>32</sup> They describe this as 'the ambition to transform oneself into the Other, if only temporarily, and if only from the position of relative privilege'.<sup>33</sup>

32. Barlow et al., 'The Modern Girl', 259.

33. *Ibid.*

Registered No. M. 6290



MAN-ABOUT-TOWN

*Loves his car. Loves to drive people around in it. Burns up miles when he's got the blues. Highly appreciative of Dunlop Gold Seal tyres because they are completely dependable: smooth-running, hard-wearing and the last word in road safety.*

**DUNLOP**   
**'Gold Seal'**

CAR TYRES  
 FOR  
 HAPPY  
 MOTORING 

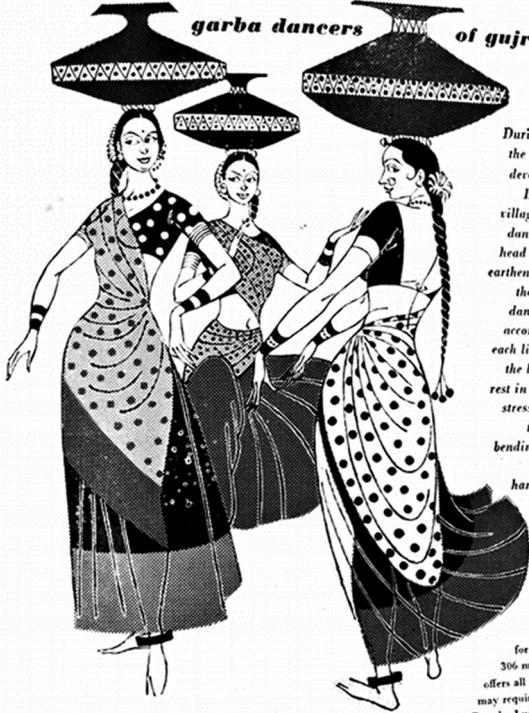
W411

**Figure 6.** Dunlop advertisement, *Association Men*: Official Organ of the Council of YMCA India and Ceylon, November 1959.

The Dunlop ad series brings to light the way this consumerist space reproduced gendered idealisations and imaginings of masculinity. The young man in [Figure 7](#) '[l]oves his car. Loves to drive people around in it. Burns up miles when he's got the blues'. This 'man about town', who wears a *sherwani* and Indian-style shoes, perches in a relaxed posture on a Greco-Roman decorative support wall below a tall woman wearing a sari whose attention he has not quite fully captured. Beside him is his stylish car, behind him is the seascape. The depiction of him invokes various notions of leisure—his car, a woman, fine architecture, nice dress, and the limitless horizon—to indicate his desirability and attractiveness.

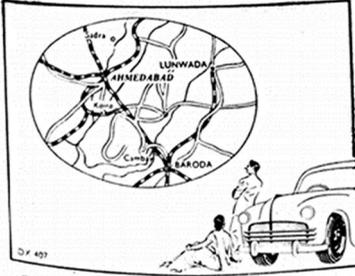
These ads represent the way companies sought to address the preoccupations of middle-class youths by linking notions of youthhood, fashion, sexuality, romance, tourism and leisure with their branded consumer goods—in this case, the Dunlop tyre. The company (re)established imagined cultural roles for youths to respond to and portrayed this life stage in terms of aspirationalism. These adverts forged an association

**garba dancers of gujrat**



During the nine nights of the Navaratri, a festival devoted to the worship of Durga, girls in Gujrat villages perform the Garba dance. Each bears on her head the 'garbi'—a lighted earthenware pot, which gives the dance its name. The dance is performed to the accompaniment of a song, each line being sung first by the leader and then by the rest in chorus. The beats are stressed by the clapping of the hands, the dancers bending gracefully sideways at every clap and the hands sweeping upwards or downwards in beautifully formed gestures.

Ahmedabad, a city worth a visit in its own right, is an excellent starting-place for a tour of Gujrat. The city, 306 miles by road from Bombay, offers all facilities a visiting motorist may require. Roads radiate from here to Baroda, Lunwada and other important towns of the region. Ready access to the numerous places of interest in Gujrat is assured by the safety and comfort of road travel made possible by J. B. Dunlop's invention of the pneumatic tyre.



**DUNLOP**

★ ELEVENTH OF A SERIES ON  
THE PLEASURES OF MOTORING

don't just ask for a tyre—ask for **DUNLOP**

Figure 7. Dunlop advertisement, *Association Men*: Official Organ of the Council of YMCA India and Ceylon, February 1961.

between prestigious branded goods and culturally gendered symbols of status that could shape the formation of youth identities. Its invocation of notions of travel, leisure, fashion and romance at once represents this.

The two depictions of the Indian youth in Figures 6 and 7 serve to illuminate the paradoxical meanings simultaneously invested in the social body of youth. The young village women in Figure 6 are objectified as the embodiment of cultural authenticity, whereas the young lovers in Figure 7, by contrast, are promoted as the idealisation of a modern couple. The figure of the Indian youth could be local and national, rural and urban, traditional and modern, the object of romantic desire and the pursuer of romance.

Registered No. M. 6250

1 "At first the infant  
Mewling ... in the nurse's arms ..."

2 "Then the whining school-boy, with his satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school ..."

3 "And then the lover,  
Sighing like a furnace ..."

4 "Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths and bearded  
like the pard ..."

5 "And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon  
lin'd ..."

6 "The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon  
With spectacles on nose and pouch  
on side ..."

all 'ages' love to relax on **Dunlopillo** ... a gift for all occasions

DEC-120

ASSOCIATION MEN is published monthly by V. M. Philip for the Literature Dept., Council of YMCAs of India and Ceylon, 53/1, Peters Road, Cathedral, Madras-6. When articles are an expression of the policy or view of the Council, this fact will be made clear. In all other instances the writer of the paper is responsible for the opinions expressed. The Editorial Notes, if any, represent opinion of the Editor alone.

Printed and published by V. M. Philip at the Diocesan Press, 10 Church Road, Vepery, Madras-7, for the Literature Dept., Council of YMCAs of India & Ceylon. Editor: N. G. Josters.

Figure 8. Dunlop advertisement, *Association Men*: Official Organ of the Council of YMCA India and Ceylon, August 1961.

These ads give insights into how capitalist actors conjured up subject formations of the Indian youth and, in turn, manifest a gendered modernity. This is represented in the image in Figure 8, which depicts the youth in his idealised form as the unhappy schoolboy, the dejected lover and the fearless *jawan* (youth or young soldier). He is depicted as 'the whining schoolboy, with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like [a] snail Unwillingly to school ... and then the lover, sighing like a furnace ... then the soldier, full of strange oaths and bearded like the *pard*'. Borrowing from Shakespeare's 'The Seven Ages of Man', the advert holds that all these 'ages' love to relax on a Dunlop pillow, called Dunlopillo. Besides revealing the way Western literature was refashioned by advertisers to resonate with the educated

Indian market, it reveals the way in which adverts (re)produced caricatural understandings about the life stages of the Indian man.

Nationalist rhetoric remained an identifiable feature used to promote branded goods in the youth market. It was used to invoke and signal the pre-Independence movement(s) that worked against mindless consumption and against the purchase of foreign goods.<sup>34</sup> The adverts for Jai soap (a Tata product) in Figure 4 states it was 'truly a swadeshi product'. Another soap ad series by Tata ran the publicity headline, 'For Personal hygiene, For Freedom from Infection'.<sup>35</sup> The discourses of the Independence movement was one technique used by corporate soap firms to promote brand-name awareness.

Besides illuminating the modernist-secularist celebrity culture of the youth market and the gendered and materialistic idealisations conjured up to appeal to this social group, these adverts for branded goods bring to light the increasingly sophisticated advertising techniques employed by capitalist actors during the mid twentieth century. It is unlikely, for instance, to be purely a coincidence that magazine editors and advertising agencies placed a great many adverts for soaps in the *Bharat Scouts and Guides Magazine* when soap usage, cleanliness and hygiene had been key cornerstones of the Scouting movement since its arrival in India and its inception in the UK (see Figure 4, for example). The founder of the movement, Lord Baden-Powell, had indeed made practical tips on health, hygiene and soap use some of the core instructions of the Scouting movement's foundational text, *Scouting for Boys*.<sup>36</sup> To offer a different example of the way that companies weighed up the youth market, Hindustan Lever's Lux ads requested readers to mention where they found the advert whenever ordering the soap and this was so that the company could measure the impact of their publicity in the youth and adult market.

### Advertisements and the youth market: Travel, leisure and work

Advertisements for ship travel, hotels and airlines offer a unique entry point into the leisure activities and shifting youth travel cultures of early post-colonial India, but it is a source that scholars studying the history of travel in South Asia have largely neglected. Further, historians of travel have hitherto failed to differentiate the tourist market.<sup>37</sup> Carol Henderson and Maxine Weisgrau claim, 'the academic literature has rarely documented how Indian groups conceive of tourism, exploit it, or make it their own', and travel adverts in youth magazines offer one way to do this.<sup>38</sup> The way these ads targeted young consumers suggests that sightseeing and travel became a more

34. Ananta Kumar Giri, 'Rethinking the Politics and Ethics of Consumption: Dialogues with the Swadeshi Movements and Gandhi', *Journal of Human Values* 10, no. 1 (2004): 41–51 <https://doi.org/10.1177/097168580401000105>.

35. *The Bharat Scouts and Guides Magazine*, Golden Jubilee 1961 souvenir edition. For literature on the soap, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Philip Lutgendorf, 'Chai Why? The Triumph of Tea in India as Documented in the Priya Paul Collection', *Tasveer Ghar India*, December 30, 2009, accessed August 29, 2022, <http://www.tasveergharindia.net/essay/chai-why-advertisements-consumption.html>.

36. Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship* (London: Horace Cox, 1908).

37. Haynes et al., ed., *Towards a History*, 20.

38. Carol E. Henderson and Maxine Weisgrau, *Raj Rhapsodies: Tourism, Heritage and the Seduction of History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007): xxvii.

widespread youth leisure activity during the first few decades following Independence, and this runs contrary to the accepted assumption about the 'austerity' of the Nehruvian era.<sup>39</sup>

Magazine editors and advertising agents targeted the travel ads at well-to-do Indian youths, and those who could afford to travel would very likely have been *ipso facto* middle class. While more aspirational rather than attainable for most students and youths, the calculation of these capitalist actors was that at least a section of the subscribers would have had the capacity to aspire to, if not the discretionary money to consume, travel as a leisure experience. Arvind Rajagopal draws a binary between the so-called 'vernacular' and 'enclave' spheres of advertising, and this appears to hold true for the leisure adverts I have explored.<sup>40</sup> The advertisements for branded travel experiences further demonstrate that a sophisticated stratification of the youth market existed during this period.

Advertising agencies and travel businesses placed publicity relating to sea travel in student and youth magazines, but the prevalence of these decreased throughout the transition from the late colonial to the early post-colonial period. Anchor Line Cruise Ship's long-running commercial series in the YMCA's magazine, *The Young Men of India, Burma and Ceylon*, provides a useful example that brings to light youth sea travel culture in late colonial India. It offered transport from Bombay to Liverpool, calling at Suez, Port Said, Marseille and Gibraltar (Figure 9). These ads requested students to answer the ad by mentioning the YMCA, and this gives some insight into the way they measured take-up, even though the specificities of the decision-making processes behind the placing of these adverts is sadly lost to the historian. The Anchor Line ad proudly declares that its steam-powered liners have playgrounds and dayrooms for children. This indicates that they were speaking to an audience of soon-to-be married and young married couples in addition to students who had the discretionary money to pursue employment or educational opportunities abroad.

Travel advertisements sought to associate this type of sea travel as a leisure activity and with comfort, luxury and pleasure. Anchor Line declared their steam ships provided 'a very high standard of comfort, service and efficiency' (Figure 9). They advertised their steam vessels' amenities as being cutting edge and drew attention to their tiled swimming pool with underwater illuminations to corroborate this. The Anchor Line was also 'the Comfort Line' because 'the service is excellent—the food unequalled and the fares are moderate'. Figure 10 is an advertisement for the Aurangabad Hotel, which holds that 'situated amidst old-world charm, this gracious and luxurious hotel is a fascinating retreat for tourists'. By appealing to the 'old-world charm', this ad explicitly links together an elite lifestyle and the luxurious consumption of the Mughal world. Arvind Rajagopal maintains that the advertising world in India sought to 'coach consumers in the appropriate styles of expenditure, and to render ubiquitous the signposts that equate consumption with the good life'.<sup>41</sup> A pedagogical strategy aimed at the social body of Indian youth that sought to

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39. Benjamin Siegal, "'Self-Help Which Ennobles a Nation": Development, Citizenship, and the Obligations of Eating in India's Austerity Years', *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 3 (2006): 975–1018.

40. Rajagopal, 'Advertising in India'.

41. *Ibid.*, 224.



**THOUGH** passage rates are extremely moderate, the ANCHOR LINE ships maintain a very high standard of comfort, service and efficiency. The cuisine is unequalled and the reputation of the line increases year by year.

In the new twin screw motor vessels, "CIRCASSIA" and "CILICIA", soon to be in service on the Indian run, the acme of modern ship construction is achieved. Luxurious single and two-berthers, fitted with private toilet and shower—Tiled swimming pool with under-water illumination and a generous sized beach—Large playground and day room for children—these are some of the amenities which every ANCHOR LINE traveller will enjoy on these new motor vessels.

*Full particulars from Passenger Agents or:—*

**ANCHOR LINE**  
BOMBAY to LIVERPOOL

*Calling at*  
Suez, Port Said, Marseilles  
and Gibraltar.

**SAILING DATES FROM  
BOMBAY.**

**1937**

Elysia	July 14th
Britannia	July 31st
Castalia	Sept. 24th
Elysia	Oct. 16th
Britannia	Oct. 21st
California	Oct. 28th
Tuscania	Nov. 11th

•••

CALIFORNIA & TUSCANIA  
First Class and Tourist.

•••

CIRCASSIA & CILICIA  
(Building) One Class.

•••

BRITANNIA  
Cabin and Tourist.

•••

CASTALIA & ELYSIA  
Cabin Only.

# ANCHOR LINE

LIMITED.

Post Box No. 383,  
**BOMBAY.**

Post Box No. 548,  
**KARACHI.**

*Agents:*  
**CLEGG, CRUICKSHANK & CO., LTD.**  
9, CLIVE STREET, CALCUTTA.

When answering advertisements please mention "Young Men of India, Burma & Ceylon."

Figure 9. Anchor Line Cruise Ship, *The Young Men of India, Burma and Ceylon*, July 1937.

promote a middle-class idealisation of comfortable travel is evident in this youth cultural order of consumption.

The good life, however, did not always equate with a high price. Thrift, or value for money, is a key theme in the adverts that targeted the youth market. These adverts sought to speak to the consumerist considerations of a large section of the anglophone enclave market that, despite their relative affluence, nevertheless faced cultural and economic constraints that affected their ability and willingness to purchase travel. The publicity for luxury steam ship travel, for example, claimed the prices were 'extremely moderate' (Figure 9). Prashant Kidambi shows how economic insecurity led to a pre-occupation with the avoidance of luxury in late colonial Bombay.<sup>42</sup> Douglas Haynes argues that during the inter-War years, economic limitations coupled with prevalent

42. Prashant Kidambi, 'Consumption, Domestic Economy, and the Idea of the "Middle Class" in Late Colonial Bombay', in *Towards a History of Consumption in South Asia*, ed. Douglas Haynes et al. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 2010): 108–36.

*Delightfully Different!*

Situated amidst old-world charm, this gracious and luxurious hotel is a fascinating retreat for the tourists—internal or foreign. Renowned for its exquisite rooms and superb cuisine. Rates from Rs. 25 single, Rs. 48 double. Rail-head for the world-famous caves at Ajanta and Ellora.

# Aurangabad Hotel

For reservations and information write to—

The Superior, Aurangabad Hotel,  
Aurangabad.  
(Telegram: "Rail Hotel", Aurangabad)  
(Telephone: No. 25, Aurangabad)

or

Divisional Superintendent,  
Central Railway, Secunderabad (Dist.)  
or  
Chief Commercial Superintendent,  
Central Railway, Bombay V. T.

Figure 10. Aurangabad Hotel, *The Bharat Scouts and Guides Magazine*, February 1961.

Gandhian critiques about the expenditure of high-end goods worked against the flaunting of 'conspicuous consumption'.<sup>43</sup>

Ads relating to air travel were increasingly targeted at youths through the first few decades following Independence. Regrettably, there has been little written on the history of commercial air travel in post-colonial India, especially on the rise of Air India International.<sup>44</sup> The growth of commercial airlines, coupled with the subsequent reduction in fares for European travel, opened the way for youths to use air travel for holidays. As with hotel and steam ship adverts, airlines stressed the comfortable and luxurious in-flight experience and their low fares. The image in Figure 11, for instance, depicts a tall, glamorous, younger woman being chaperoned by a tiny man wearing a turban and pointy shoes: 'she looks like a million but pays the same'. The mascot demonstrates the way this Air India ad seeks to interact with the nationalist and orientalist consciousness of the consumer. Travel companies often associated their brands with the Indian tricolour and Indian nationalism, and the ads by Jai

43. Haynes, 'Creating the Consumer'.

44. Shankar Prasad, 'Indian Airlines Corporation', *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 2, no. 1 (1956): 34–49.

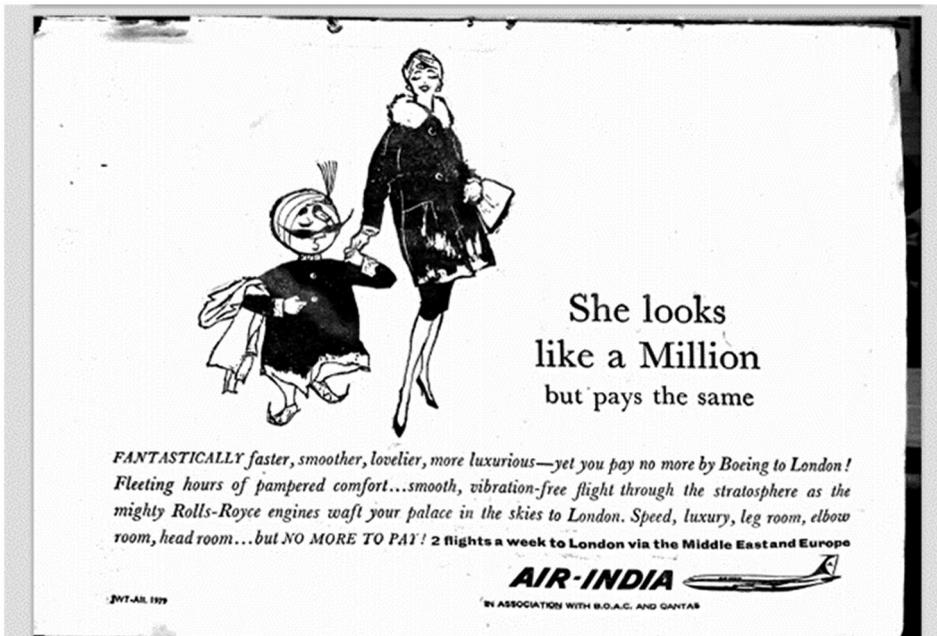


Figure 11. *Association Men*, December 1961.

Hind Travel (lit. Salute the Nation Travel) in the YMCA magazine are a prime example of this.<sup>45</sup>

Adverts promoted the flow of youthful tourists to special places of natural scenic beauty and historical and cultural importance during the early post-colonial period. Private travel companies and the Department of Tourism became the principal actors that set out to publicise domestic travel amongst the youth market. The Government of India ad in Figure 12 publicises ‘Towers of Renown, Monuments of Glory’, and it poetically expresses the country’s wide range of attractions, ‘Wherever you turn, wonders to see. From Kashmir to Kanya Kumari, from sea to sea’. Travel companies publicised, for instance, ‘seats in car’ for tours of historical interest and the ad in Figure 13 represents publicity for such excursions to New Delhi and Agra for Rs15 per head. The ‘Aurangabad Hotel’ ad in Figure 10 coaxed its would-be consumers with the chance to see ‘the world-famous caves at Ajanta and Ellora’.

Ads attempted to associate the life stage of youth with travelling. The Sita World Travels ad in Figure 14 notes, ‘Youth is a time of promise, A time for looking forward, a time for forging ahead to new horizons’. Travel was construed as a way for these almost-but-not-quite adults to prepare themselves for the next stage of life. Even adverts publicising alternative branded goods, rather than travel experiences, sought to link their products with the cultural phenomenon of travel. Dunlop, for example, linked its rubber tyres with the idea of youths travelling via cars to places of historical interest. In addition to Figures 6 and 7 already explored, they placed commercials relating to the Gol Gumbaz mausoleum at Bijapur and the Marwar princes

45. *Association Men* (Journal of the YMCA in India), December 1961.



Figure 12. Department of Tourism ad, *Association Men*, December 1961.

of Rajasthan.<sup>46</sup> These ads encouraged expressions of Indianness based on motoring across the country and sought to orientate this social group of well-to-do consumers towards a love of travel. As a pedagogical project, the ads served the purpose of attempting to mobilise youths to become more broadly acquainted with their country by visiting heritage sites and through sightseeing. They informed this group that their post-childhood passage to adulthood could be best utilised by them undertaking travel for the sake of travel. They encouraged this social body to use travel networks to begin to move back and forth across the country to expand their cultural horizons and for the purposes of leisure.

Adverts relating to education, employment opportunities and the acquisition of skills were targeted at the Indian youth market. A handful of prominent studies from

46. See Dunlop Advertisement, *Association Men* throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s. For these specific ads, see Official Organ of the Council of YMCA India and Ceylon, August 1961.

**MERCURY TRAVELS (INDIA) Pvt. LTD.**

*All Travel Arrangements*

**ROAD-RAIL-SEA & AIR**

Agents in all parts of the world

Providing a comprehensive and personalized service,  
Leave all irksome details to us  
—At no cost to you

Daily sightseeing tours of DELHI and AGRA on a "Seat in Car" basis

Tour of Delhi—Rs. 15 per head	}
" " Agra—Rs. 90 " "	

Mercury Offices in :

**HOTEL IMPERIAL, NEW DELHI**

Phone : 4 5 8 3 6 (5 Lines)

GRAND HOTEL CALCUTTA	79 FORBES STREET FORT, BOMBAY-1	CONNEMARA HOTEL MADRAS	OBEROI PALACE SRINAGAR
-------------------------	------------------------------------	---------------------------	---------------------------

and Bhalai House DRUG (M.P.)

Figure 13. Mercury Travels advert, *The New Generation*, May 1965.

***Youth is a time of promise .....***  
***A time for looking forward .....***  
***A time for forging ahead***  
***to new horizons .....***

Strives to carry you to those horizons &  
to make your journey there a pleasure

Figure 14. Sita Travels, *The New Generation*, May 1965.

the social sciences have taken the liberalisation of the 1990s as the singular critical juncture in India's enterprise culture and foreground the role of the young in this

**PARDON ME**

**IT SLIPPED MY MIND**

Slips may be small but they are dangerous. They may cost you anything from your job to your happiness. No business will ever tolerate slips. To keep your job you have to remember and remember at right times too. An efficient memory is an integral part of success. Do not take chances with your memory; improve it by taking **Dr. Robert's Memoree Pearls.** They are a combination of Brain-Vitamin and active principle of Pistachew Nuts. They are the brain food which help to improve your memory by strengthening the brain tissues and ensuring an abundant supply of blood.

**PSYCHOLOGY OF MEMORY**  
 Good Memory depends on the intensity of interest and attention. But it has now been accepted that both interest and attention depend entirely on the brain tissues. Memoree Pearls which are a synthesis of Cerebral Extracts and brain food essences, activate the brain cells by stimulating them to healthy action bringing about the juvenescence of the cerebrum.

Original Size Rs. 7/8/- Trial Size Rs. 4/-/-  
 Packing and Postage As. 10 Extra.

**SEND TODAY FOR A FREE COPY OF  
 "MEMORY—THE MOTIVE POWER"**

Sole Agents in India:  
**MEMOREE (INDIA) AGENCY**  
 Post Box No. 907 (S) BOMBAY

Distributors:  
**KANCHANLAL VADILAL & CO.**  
 BOMBAY.

Figure 15. Dr Robert's Memoree Pearls advert, *The Student*, May–June 1942.

political and economic shift. However, the adverts under study here reveal that there is nothing particularly 'new' about India's youthful enterprise culture.<sup>47</sup>

The commercials I explore here give historical insights into the enterprise culture of youths during the mid twentieth century in addition to the figure of the aspiring, striving and enterprising Indian youth. He (and, again, the depiction was far more frequently that of a male) was keen to gain employment and enhance his skills but is

47. Craig Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Class and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Nandini Gooptu, *Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India: Studies in Youth, Class, Work and Media* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017); Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery, *Degrees without Freedom? Education, Masculinities, and Unemployment in North India* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Ritty Lukose, *Liberalization's Children: Gender, Youth and Consuming Citizenship in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

**ARE YOU A DEFAULTING** Secretary, Principal, Parent?  
Here's a Bright Idea in Any Case!

Use **SUNSHINE'S** Ready-Made Services for developing

- \* Leadership \* International Friendship
- \* Efficiency \* Service-mindedness \* Character

**CONTAINS**

- \* Puzzles \* Quizzes \* Hobbies \* Crafts \* Games \* Contests
- \* English Lessons \* Stories \* Personalities \* World News
- \* Popularity Tips \* Career Advice \* Study Hints, etc.

**No Better X'MAS or NEW YEAR GIFT for teen-agers!**  
An attractive card will mention your unforgettable present  
*A Gift that Repeats itself Every Month!*  
*A Short-Cut That Lasts Longer!*

**SUNSHINE** (A non-profit 7-year old publication), Poona-1.

**Editor: G. STEPHEN KRISHNAYYA,**  
M.A. (Madras), Ph.D. (Columbia)  
Formerly Inspector of European Schools; Principal,  
Gov. Teachers' College, Belgam; Educational Attache,  
Indian Embassy, U.S.A.

**for teenagers**  
**sunshine**

Give them **SUNSHINE**, widely appreciated by parents and teachers as the ideal teen magazine for promoting general knowledge, citizenship training, world outlook and providing language practice the pleasant way.

Act now. Send off that M.O. Today.  
**"TODAY YOU BUILD TOMORROW"**

Figure 16. Advert for *Sunshine* magazine, *Association Men*, Convention Number, December 1961.

generally represented as inadequate and falling short of what the job market expects of him.

Adverts directly exploited the politics of unemployment and youth insecurities in youth magazines. They reveal a consumerist discourse that constructed Indian youth as lacking in the necessary skills for the workplace and stoked anxieties about their potential failure there.

Many ads sought to popularise products that claimed to be able to enhance workplace performance. Figure 15 represents a panicked young man scratching his head whilst telling his stern employer, 'Pardon me. It slipped my mind'. The ad warns, 'No company will ever tolerate slips... To keep your job you have to remember and remember at right times too'. It then communicates how *Dr Robert's Memoree Pearls* will strengthen the brain tissues to ensure the 'juvenescence of the cerebrum'. Maintaining a youthful memory and brain was deemed necessary for navigating through the job market in post-colonial India. Douglas Haynes similarly found ads that reproduced a discourse about the inadequacies of Indian youth and claims vernacular capitalist firms used sex-related advertisements to instil in young Indian men the idea that 'bad habits' in one's youth involving seminal loss would produce physical weakness and sexual inadequacy in marriage.<sup>48</sup>

Adverts publicising employment opportunities promised dubiously lucrative earnings for young Indians and quick routes to success. The ad for a magazine claiming to coach teenagers in soft skills in Figure 16, for example, claims to provide 'a short-cut that lasts longer'. The Indian Life Assurance Company ad in Figure 17 said, 'A Stable Income in Such Uncertain Times! That is the ambition of all Educated Young men....

48. Botre and Haynes, 'Sexual Knowledge'.

*'A Stable Income  
in Such Uncertain Times!  
That is the Ambition  
of all  
Educated Youngmen.*

**THE  
'INDIAN LIFE'**

*gives you opportunities to create  
for yourself a stable and  
permanent income*

**WITHOUT ANY INVESTMENT !**

*'INDIAN LIFE' is the Co., which  
enjoys a reputation for being  
Financially THE Strongest  
Life Office in India,  
with unrivalled facilities to its  
Constituents.*

- *Applications are invited from  
well-connected and educated  
youngmen to represent us :*

**The  
Indian Life Assurance Co., Ltd.,**

- *Head Office : KARACHI.*
- *Branch Secretary  
(C. P. & Beer)*
- **PREM DUTTA, ESQ. B.A.**

Figure 17. The Life Insurance Company, *The Student*, May-June 1942.

*Let "MOTOR UNION" OPEN A CAREER FOR YOU.*

**FIRE, MOTOR, ACCIDENT INSURANCES EFFECTED.**

**CAPABLE YOUNG MEN OF INFLUENCE & CONNECTIONS  
WANTED AS REPRESENTATIVES**

*For particulars apply to:-*

**MOTOR UNION INSURANCE Coy., Ltd.**

*Branch Office*

**THE MALL, LUCKNOW**

CALCUTTA OFFICE  
1 & 2, OLD COURT HOUSE CORNER

BAL BHU SAHANEY  
LOCAL SECRETARY

Figure 18. Advert for the Motor Union Insurance Company, *The Student*, July 1942.

The Indian Life gives you the opportunities to create for yourself a stable and permanent income'. These commercials reproduced the social hierarchies of youth by inviting applications only from 'well-connected and educated young men', such is the text in the ad in Figure 17. The ad in Figure 18 for the Motor Union Insurance Company provides another instance in so far as it solely seeks to recruit 'Capable Young Men of Influence and Connections'. In sum, these adverts sought to coach youthful consumers in the skills and education allegedly required to be the model enterprising youth in possession of the requisite cultural and social capital to steer the Indian job market.

### The literary-youth, the citizen-youth and the Hindi sphere

This final section will explore advertisements for books and for government schemes from the Hindi magazine *Sarasvati* to bring to light media representations of subject formations of the literary-youth and the citizen-youth in the Indian context. *Sarasvati* is one of the most celebrated and earliest examples of a Hindi literary journal, and Francesca Orsini claims it fostered 'vigorous and wide-ranging debates' amongst its 'eager readership'.<sup>49</sup> This magazine was not exclusively a youth magazine, like the other magazines examined thus far, although it had a large readership amongst the youth and a great many of its adverts were aimed at this social group.

*Sarasvati* represented an important literary space for the youth and its adverts for books give insights into the varied cultural mobilisations and preferences of India's educated young citizenry. My exploration of issues of this magazine from the late 1950s and early 1960s revealed that a great many adverts for Hindu texts came to be printed in close proximity to those for books about secularism and science, many from the Western world yet translated into Hindi, in this wide-ranging literary magazine.

Advertisements for 'the best religious books' would be located nearby advertisements for 'the best scientific monthly magazine with pictures for the common person and student'.<sup>50</sup> The closeness, for example, of advertisements for Sri Raghunath Singh's *The Secular State* with a foreword by Jawaharlal Nehru to those placed by Ramakrishna Ashram books on Hindu mystics suggests adverts on the topic of religion and science were entirely compatible in this literary space of the youth. The latter offered no great challenge to the former in a magazine that fostered a tolerant and progressive coexistence of science and Hinduism amongst India's future intelligentsia.

*Sarasvati* published a diverse range of ads for acclaimed classical European and Indian literature and philosophical works in Hindi, ranging from *The Democracy of Plato* to *The Works of Rabindranath Tagore*. The adverts reveal a flourishing market for teenage adventure fiction during the early post-colonial period.<sup>51</sup> Much of it was translated from English or French into Hindi and this genre also borrowed Western literary figures. *The Strange Campaigns of Daku Mohan* is one such example. He was 'the friend of [the] poor, the killer of devils and the robin hood of India'.<sup>52</sup>

49. Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*; Shobna Nijhawan, 'Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere: Periodical Literature in Colonial North India (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

50. See *Sarasvati*, August 1962.

51. Raminder Kaur and Saif Eqbal, *Adventure, Comics and Youth Cultures in India* (London: Routledge, 2018).

52. *Sarasvati*, August 1962.

The adverts in *Sarasvati* give insights into the ways in which the varied set of actors that made up the Government of India sought to promote books that would mould the political and cultural preferences of the future intelligentsia of India. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry placed commercials for the *Bharat Mein Angrezi Raj* (English Rule in India) by Pandit Sundarlal.<sup>53</sup> This book had been banned by the British because of its criticism of colonial rule. The Publishers Department of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry promoted the writings of leading freedom fighters and politicians, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad, Vallabhbhai Patel, Chittaranjan Das and Dadabhai Naoroji. To indicate their importance to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, the title of the range was 'Precious Publications'.

The varied apparatus of the Government of India targeted adverts at India's young citizenry in *Sarasvati*. Public awareness adverts, ranging from the introduction of the metric system to the essentiality of writing an address properly on telegrams, would have been glanced over by the youthful readership of *Sarasvati* during the late 1950s and early 1960s. These adverts encouraged a patriotic sense of post-colonial civic engagement amongst young men and women and sought to inform this social group of the duties associated with being a good citizen and the planned development of post-colonial India. The two examples that shall be discussed below, which are recurrently placed adverts relating to family planning and the National Saving Scheme from the early 1960s, reveal the ways in which the Indian nation-state sought to mobilise young people and, indeed, how this nation-state itself came of age following Independence.

Adverts on child and family planning uncover the Government of India's efforts to reduce the stigma around this social issue amongst the next generation and their attempts to negotiate the demographic future of the nation-state. The Department of Family Planning advert in [Figure 19](#) celebrates the decrease in societal opposition to birth control through the life of the Maharashtrian social reformer Raghunath Dhondo Karve. The ad highlights the years 1925, 1950 and 1962 in his personal career as turning points in the national history of family planning. In 1925, the authorities forced Karve to resign as a professor of mathematics at Wilson College in Mumbai because of his vocal support for birth control. In 1950, the advert claims 27 different surveys revealed that no organised religious or social movement opposed family planning. The inference is that Indian youths should not be concerned about religious groups forbidding birth control practices. In 1962, the year of that issue of *Sarasvati*, the advert highlights that the Government of India's establishment of a Department of Family Planning demonstrated that 'the time has been changed [*sic*]' and family planning is a 'source of contentment and health'. This advert represents an attempt to depoliticise and reduce social stigma around contraceptive practices by making the case that during this period, societal attitudes had changed progressively.

The Hindi advert foregrounds the results of a recent survey that shows that 70 percent of women in the age group of 35 and above agreed with family planning. The implication here is that older women who have had children understood the importance of being able to determine freely the number and spacing of their children.

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53. *Sarasvati*, October 1962.

१९२५  
१९५०  
१९६२

**समय बदल गया है**

१९२५ में जब प्रोफेसर रघुनाथ धोंडो कर्वे ने परिवार नियोजन के पक्ष में प्रचार किया तो उन्हें बहुत विरोध का सामना करना पड़ा। वे उन दिनों किसन कालेज में गणित के प्रोफेसर थे और कालेज के प्रभिकारियों को यह पसन्द नहीं था कि वे संतति-नियंत्रण के बारे में प्रचार करें। धन उन्हें अपने पद से हल्लाका देना पड़ा।

१९५०-१९६२ के दौरान परिवार-नियोजन के बारे में लोगों का रुख आने के लिए अब तक भारत में २७ वर्षों तक पूरे हो चुके हैं। इनसे पता चलता है कि परिवार-नियोजन का कोई धार्मिक या सामाजिक संगठन विरोध नहीं है और ३५ वर्ष से ऊपर के धायु-वर्ग की ७० प्रतिशत महिलाएँ परिवार-नियोजन के लिए सहमत हैं।

**सुख-स्वास्थ्य का साधन**

**परिवार नियोजन**

सरकार द्वारा मान्य पास के परिवार नियोजन केन्द्र से सलाह लीजिए।

१९६२/२५२

Figure 19. *Sarasvati*, August 1962.

Framing this as an intergenerational issue, as the advert does, the clear preferences of older women are emphasised to persuade the younger generation to accept birth control. Historians have begun to explore the history of birth control in colonial and post-colonial India, and a larger study of the way government agencies used advertisements to influence societal attitudes on contraception would be an exciting avenue for scholarly exploration.<sup>54</sup>

Adverts for the National Saving Scheme (NSS) reveal how the Government of India engaged young citizens in development planning and took the youth as the target-object of information campaigns. The advert placed by the Information Department of Uttar Pradesh in Figure 20 claims investments in NSS bonds would

54. Historians have begun to explore the history of birth control in colonial and post-colonial India: see Sarah Hodges, *Contraception, Colonialism and Commerce: Birth Control in South India, 1920–1940* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Sanjam Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints: Birth Control in India, 1877–1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Mohan Rao and Vina Mazumdar, *The Lineaments of Population Policy in India: Women and Family Planning* (London: Routledge, 2017); Mytheli Sreenivas, *Reproductive Politics and the Making of Modern India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, open-access edition, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.6069/9780295748856>.

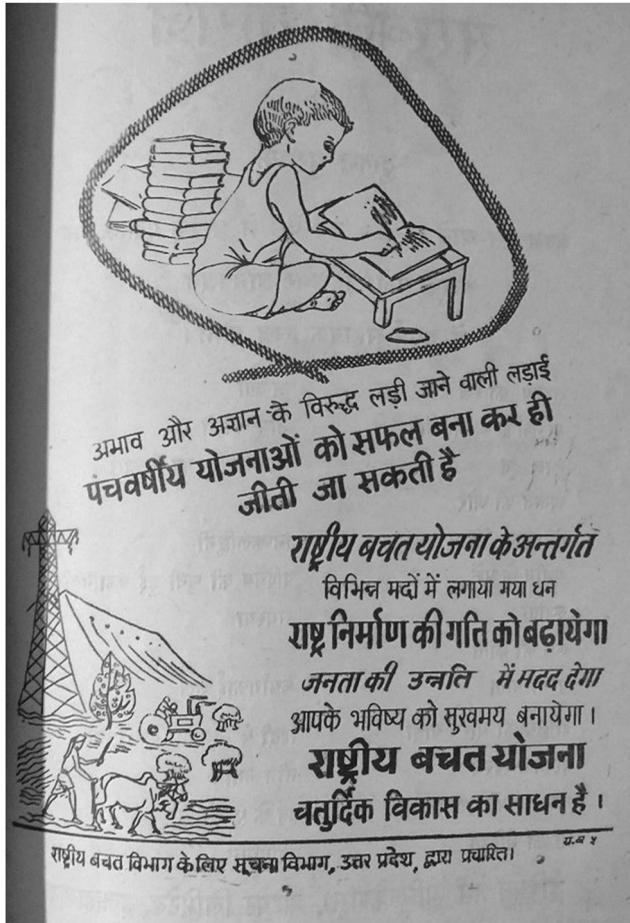


Figure 20. *Sarvasvati*, August 1962.

hasten ‘the building [of] the nation’ and ‘increase your future happiness’. Framed in utilitarian terms, the ad seeks to tie sentiments of futurity with this social group to mobilise the citizens-to-be for the purposes of national development. The advert says that ‘the fight against shortage and lack of knowledge can only be won through making successfully the five-year plans [*sic*]’. These adverts are an example of what Nikhil Menon describes as a ‘pedagogical state tutoring its inhabitants on plan-consciousness, plan-participation, and productivity as self-help and national duty’.<sup>55</sup> The educated Indian youth, like those who read *Sarvasvati*, as the future intelligentsia of the nation-state, had a unique role to play in the project of national development because state planners deemed this group malleable and most receptive to state-sponsored information.

55. Nikhil Menon, “Help the Plan—Help Yourself”: Making India Plan-Conscious’, in *The Postcolonial Moment in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Gyan Prakash, Michael Francis Laffan and Nikhil Menon (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018): 221–42.

This section has explored how government-sponsored Hindi adverts targeted Indian youths and it will conclude by considering how language mediated the Indian youth's consumption of information, goods and advertisements.<sup>56</sup> Differences of language and an understanding of English undoubtedly curtailed the movement of youths between the various linguistic realms of advertisements. But it is also clear that a great majority of Indian youths in northern India switched and moved between what Arvind Rajagopal calls the 'vernacular' and 'anglophone' spheres of advertisement. For instance, an Air India Radio Survey in 1969 analysed magazine reading habits amongst Indian youth, and its results revealed that a great many more educated youths were likely to consume information in the English-speaking domain.<sup>57</sup> Around 87 percent of those who were graduates or more read magazines in English but, crucially, 57 percent of this group of educated youths also read magazines in Hindi. Amongst those respondents educated to the level of higher secondary and below, this percentage is almost reversed: 85 percent of this category read magazines in Hindi, yet 42 percent also read magazines in English. This suggests the more porous and venn-diagrammatic nature of these linguistic realms of advertisements than allowed for hitherto. Historians have rightly excavated a double tier system of subjecthood and citizenship, one distinguished by unequal access to two different spheres of advertisement that was determined by language, but they have overlooked the fluidity and crossover between their sizeable margins.

## Conclusion

This article has provided an opening into the history of Indian youth, everyday life, consumption and advertisements during the late colonial and early post-colonial period. Kaushik Bhaumik's far-reaching essay on Bombay cinema in the 1920s uses the phrase the 'cultures of the young' to denote the leisure habits of this social group in the Indian public sphere.<sup>58</sup> In a similar vein, this article has sought to trace the types of quotidian public and private activities in which the social body of Indian youth engaged. This article does not seek to negate the epistemological reality that it is difficult to retrieve the way complex and diverse subsections of Indian society responded in multiple and conflicting ways to commercialist forces. It nevertheless maintains that advertisements are an archival material that can be read against the grain to enable historians to 'emphatically infer', as Mona Gleason calls it, the viewpoints, habits, inclinations and commercial agency of the young.<sup>59</sup>

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56. Rajagopal, 'Advertising in India'.

57. Extension of Youth Service Programme, 1969, 1/72/69/-B 9 (D)53, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, National Archives of India, New Delhi. The survey sought to ascertain the listening habits of youths. In each household, one person between the ages of 16 and 30 years was contacted, and the male-female ratio in the total sample remained 50:50.

58. Kaushik Bhaumik, 'The Colonial State and Early Indian Cinema: A Significant Absence', in *Empire and Globalisation: Transnational Networks and the Making of a Global World, 1850-1925*, ed. Gary B. Magee (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

59. Mona Gleason, 'Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education', *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 446-59; also see Kristine Alexander, 'Can the Girl Guide Speak? The Perils and Pleasures of Looking for Children's Voices in Archival Research', *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 4, no. 1 (2012): 132-45.

Scholars of India have tended to overlook the way this social group spent their time at the everyday level in favour of historicising the passage to adulthood in terms of a narrowly defined political struggle.<sup>60</sup> Historians have largely focussed on the political activities of youths and their volunteer movements during the period under study, but everyday consumption habits and leisure activities are similarly insightful for understanding modern society and state formation in India. Aparna Vaidik has begun to turn the tide on this trend with her examination of the everyday essence of the lives of Indian revolutionaries and what these youths did as they ‘waited’ for political action to occur.<sup>61</sup>

This article has illuminated the everyday ‘cultures of the young’ by exploring the way those in their teens and twenties drank tea, used soap, toured the country, sought employment, purchased books and learnt about their novel responsibilities as citizens. Besides that, it offers insights into the changing strategies, practices and formations of corporate capitalism, and these ads illuminate the ways in which Indian capitalist actors stratified the domain of advertising by life stages. This article has brought to life the everyday pathways of the youth, many of which were not tumultuous, rebellious, bohemian or highly sexualised.<sup>62</sup> As the field of childhood and youth studies has revealed, the scholarly focus on subversions of the norm can lead to the very norms of childhood and youth that we set out to locate being overlooked.<sup>63</sup>

Advertisements aimed at Indian youths pertaining to tea, tyres, soap, ship travel, airlines, hotels, employment, books and public information bring to light the youth cultural order of consumption during the period, 1935–65. This article has revealed how adverts incorporated sporting personalities and actresses to publicise fast-moving consumer goods and how these figures became the Gods of the Youth Bazaar.<sup>64</sup> I have argued that the adverts coached youthful consumers in notions of luxury and sought to link this life stage with the cultural phenomenon of travel. The adverts give insights into media depictions of an aspiring and enterprising, but generally inadequate, Indian student and the way capitalist actors sought to exploit their employment insecurities. Furthermore, an example of what Nikhil Menon describes as the ‘pedagogical state’, the varied apparatus of the Government of India placed public awareness adverts aimed at India’s young citizenry, its future intelligentsia, and these offer a compelling way to decentre stories of the nation-state and youth political movements.<sup>65</sup>

This article has added a layer of historical understanding to the specific commodities explored in addition to revealing the media representations and social constructions of this life stage. The main argument has been that large companies sought to foster consumption practices and the growth of brand visibility in the youth market, and this is evidence that the Indian ‘market’ was far more responsive to the interests

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60. See footnote 1.

61. Aparna Vaidik, *Waiting for Swaraj: Inner Lives of Indian Revolutionaries* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

62. Willem Koops and Michael Zuckerman, ‘A Historical Developmental Approach to Adolescence’, *The History of the Family* 8, no. 3 (2003): 345–54.

63. Sarah Maza, ‘The Kids Aren’t All Right: Historians and the Problem of Childhood’, *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 1261–85; Mary Jo Maynes, ‘Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood’, *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (2008): 114–24.

64. Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*.

65. Menon, “Help the Plan”.

of young consumers prior to the liberalisation of the 1980s and 1990s than scholars have allowed for hitherto.<sup>66</sup>

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66. *Ibid.*