

## The Advertising Side of 'Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam'- Introducing Spiritual Substantiation

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### Abstract

The present paper drawn on the advertising material of a famous Hindi motion picture – Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam, depicts the case of a deceptive advertisement for a product, Mohini Sindoor, through a sensitive example. A carefully written copy of the ad, augmented with a well-planned ad campaign completely fails to deliver the benefits it is supposed to accomplish, and thus leading to a mental agony to not only the consumer but also to an intermediary. The paper also presents a unique way to self-regulation by the advertiser of Mohini Sindoor, and further introduces a novel form of ad substantiation – Spiritual Substantiation, to the advertising literature.

**Keywords :** *Cinema; Epistemological radar; Deceptive advertising ; Spiritual substantiation; Self-regulation by advertisers; Publication advertising; Transit advertising.*

### Introduction

A 1962 Hindi movie – *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*, has already attained the status of Indian cinema's one of the most enduring classics. It is a critically acclaimed and commercially successful film, which basically happens to be (Late) Meena Kumari's vehicle to essay one of the most memorable characters, *Chhoti Bahu*, with an awe-inspiring performance. The other usual portfolios of the film in terms of having scored plural accolade, laurels and awards including, four Filmfare Awards, nomination for the Golden Berlin Bear at the 13<sup>th</sup> Berlin International Film Festival, President's silver medal, 'Film of the Year' from the Bengal Film Journalists Association, chosen as India's official entry for the Oscars, and many more ; a marvelous acting, brilliant cinematography, depicting a gradual decline of the zamindari system during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on the theme of an exceptional human story carrying a platonic relationship between a shy village-simpleton and a tormented & lovelorn but devoted wife of a

decadent husband, lilting music and touching lyrics, are also well-known and still remembered by the cross-section of generations of Hindi film lovers.

However, what goes beyond the repertoire, and remained so far buried and unnoticed by the epistemological radar is certainly some unbelievable academic contribution made by the film to the discipline of 'Advertising'. Apart from projecting the creative nuances required in 'copy approach', 'copy plan', and 'copywriting', the script of the film equally manifests some glaring cases of 'deceptive advertisement' coupled with highlighting a novel allotrope separately for 'advertising substantiation' as well as 'self-regulation by advertisers'.

### A look on Relevant Literature

#### *Cinema (Movie):*

In the mass media evolutionary trend, cinema

(movie), the pioneering audio- visual medium, arrived next to the print and has been much widely accepted and applauded both in urban and rural India ; its popularity, equally among literates and illiterates remained unimpaired at least till the piquant influx of T.V. clutter. According to Rao and Raghavan (1996), “The Lumiere Brothers of France held the first cinematograph show in India at Watson's Hotel in Bombay on 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1896. The first silent feature film was produced in 1912, in Bombay (now, Mumbai). Sound was added to image in 1931, when India's first talkie 'Alam Ara' was made.” As a mass medium, cinema, (and for the purpose Hindi cinema never remained an exception) has had been widely deployed by all the various classes of advertisers for projecting their advertising messages among the audience. Product placements within the script of the films or otherwise too are the most visible forms to create awareness among the target markets.

### ***Deceptive Advertising:***

Advertising carries a grave responsibility in our socio-economic system. Jha (2009) points out that in the 'Discovery of India', written in 1944, *Jawaharlal Nehru* said : 'The advertiser is one of the symbols of our age with his continuous and raucous attempts to delude us and dull our powers of perception and induce us to buy unnecessary and even harmful products'. It is one of the most highly visible institutions that affect many people. A more general question in regard to advertising regulation concerns *deceptive advertising*. If the information provided is misleading or deceptive, the responsibility of advertising in providing information for consumer decision making is treated as unfulfilled. Therefore, the need to avoid deception in advertising is well recognized by both industry and governments. Aaker (1975) feels, “Conceptually, deception exists when an advertisement is inputted (introduced) into the perceptual process of some audience and the output

of that perceptual process (1) differs from the reality of the situation, and (2) affects buying behavior to the detriment of the consumer”. Deceptive advertising refer to a kind of advertising that present or imply false / misleading information to the audience (Jha, 1995). Arens and Bovee (1994), quoting FTC Chairman James C. Miller III, indicate, “deceptive advertising is any ad in which there is a misrepresentation, omission, or other practice that is likely to mislead the consumer, acting reasonably in the circumstances to the consumer's detriment”. Wright et al. (1977) comments, “Deceptive advertising and other forms of unethical behavior do occur in the field of advertising. Protection is available in three forms: law, industry self-regulation, and enlightened self-interest on the part of advertisers”. Rathor (1984) writes, “One hundred consumers were interviewed to determine what constitutes unethical advertising. A majority of them stated that they considered an advertisement unethical when ..... it gave false or misguided information on the value of the product”.

### ***Advertising Substantiation:***

The author feels that ad substantiation basically indicates a programme wherein the advertisers within an industry are required to submit proof that their advertising claims are truthful. Aaker (1975) on the issue writes, “In mid-1971, the FTC adopted a documentation program that, in essence, shifted the burden of proof in deceptive advertising cases by requiring an advertiser to submit proof that advertising claims are truthful – in other words, to substantiate their advertising claims”. Wright et al. (1977) add, “If the FTC requests it, an advertiser must supply the commission with documentation in support of claims made in its advertising, such as claims of product safety, performance, efficacy, quality, or comparative price. In addition to submitting documentation advertisers must also show that they relied on the documentation when

preparing the advertising in question”. Kleppner (1973) also holds a similar view when he says, “Substantiation of claims: The FTC has increased its demands that advertisers make available documentation of claims relating to the safety, performance, and efficacy of their products”.

Mentioning significant cases of ad substantiation, Jha (2001) adds, “The decade of nineties witnessed much encounters of advertising with the regulatory bodies like, Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC), Municipal Corporations, bodies for consumer & environmental protection, and etc. Particularly, 1997 remained a year of ad wars with 150 complaints in the calendar year. Some worth mentioning cases of substantiation were Hindustan Lever vs. Colgate (Dental cream imbroglio), Wheel vs. Fena, Godrej – GE vs. Whirlpool, HCL vs. Compaq, Reckitt and Coleman vs. Jyothi Laboratories, Castrol vs. Sunstar Lubricants, Vim vs. Fena, and etc.”

### ***Self-Regulation in Advertising:***

It implies the necessity for the advertisers to regulate themselves even more stringently than do the government-agencies, in order to ensure the realization of a true societal marketing. Each firm must ensure that its advertising decisions equally satisfy the society's unwritten values and norms, apart from complying with the laws and regulations. This calls for the establishment of a self-regulatory mechanism that would respond constructively to public complaints about the national advertising and would significantly improve advertising performance and credibility. Such mechanism should, however, be flexible, efficient, respected, reliable, and should focus on truth, accuracy, taste, and social responsibility. In this context, Dirksen et al. (1978) opine, “Self-regulation by advertisers, advertising agencies,

and mass media begins at the level of each individual firm. Each advertising decision directly or indirectly relates to a society's unwritten values and norms and its regulations and laws. Thus, each firm must insure that its advertising decisions satisfy those rules of behavior”. Aaker (1975) mentions, that, in 1971 an ambitious program of self-regulation was established by the advertising industry. The objective of the program was to establish a “self-regulatory mechanism that would respond constructively to public complaints about national advertising and would significantly improve advertising performance and credibility. It was further intended that this mechanism be flexible, efficient, respected and reliable”. Kleppner (1973) writes, “Self-regulation by individual advertisers: The most meaningful of all forms of advertising self-regulation is that of the individual advertiser. It is wholly voluntary and not the result of group pressure; it reflects the policy of top management, its sense of public responsibility, and its enthusiasm to survive and grow in a competitive arena where consumer confidence is vital”. In terms of the steps towards self-regulation in advertising in India, Mohan (1983) writes, “The Advertising Club, Bombay, in collaboration with the International Advertising Association, organized a workshop on Code for Self-Regulation in Indian Advertising in April 1982 in which Indian advertisers and advertising agencies, World President Emeritus of the International Advertising Association and the Director General of the Advertising Standards Authority participated.”. He further mentions, “The deliberation of the workshop led to the setting up of a committee on Self-Regulation Code in India and modalities of its implementation. Subsequently, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI), a non-profit organization, set up by 43 founder members, adopted the ASCI Code under Article 2(ii)f of its Articles of Association at the first meeting of the Board of Governors held on November 20, 1985”.

In order to regulate the unethical practices, Jha (2001) indicates that the early years of post-independence in India witnessed three significant Acts namely, Bihar Drug Advertisements Control Act, 1946, West Bengal Undesirable Advertisement Control Act, 1948, and Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954.

### ***Publication Advertising:***

Wright et al. (1977) write, “Publication advertising is basically a subset of the large family of print advertising, which encompasses in its fold also the elements of Direct advertising like, direct mail (leaflet, post card, letters, folders, broadsides, brochures, house organs, etc.) ; Specialties including, calendars, novelties (pen, pencils, ash trays, key rings, bottle openers, balloons, memo pads, thermometers, rulers, etc.), matchbooks, executive gifts ; Point-of purchase ad materials, such as signs, window displays, wall displays, display cards, merchandise racks and cases, etc. ; materials for Directory ad – the yellow pages, travel directories, telephone directories, etc. ; posters, menu cards, time tables, registers, etc. apart from the prominent group of publication ads. The publication ads, which are exclusively the focus in the present study, use the newspapers and magazines of different types to deliver the ad message. These are actually periodicals – with an element of periodicity, and so published at regular intervals”. Jha (2009) opines that publication advertising is one of the most fundamental types of mass communication force, where newspapers and /or magazines are used as vehicles to convey the ad messages to measurable groups of readers in combination with news, entertainment issues, or other contents of the editorial environment. Wells et al. (1998) suggest, “Newspaper advertisements don't have to compete as entertainment, as television ads do.” They further add, “most newspaper advertising is straightforward and

newslike. Local retail advertising announces what merchandise is available, what is on sale, how much it costs, and where you can get it”.

### ***Transit advertising:***

Wright et al. (1977) comments, “(Transit advertising) is similar in function and method of operation to standardized outdoor advertising. Instead of relying on passing traffic for its principal circulation, however, transit advertising depends upon consumer usage of commercial transportation facilities - buses, airlines, trolleys, subway and commuter trains - and upon pedestrians viewing the advertising from the street. This dual role that transit advertising boasts is explained by the fact that it is really two media in one”. Jha (1995) adds, “Transit advertising refers to a form of out-of-home media that basically employ three separate forms – inside cards, outside posters, and terminal posters. It depends upon consumer usage of commercial transportation services, such as buses, taxis, airlines, and subway plus commuter trains, and also upon pedestrians watching the advertising from the streets ; also known as transportation advertising.”

### ***Problem-avoidance message format:***

Jha (1995) indicates that it is a variation of Problem-solution format / Product-as-hero message format for writing the ad messages, where the problem is avoided because of the use of the advertised product. It is thus a form of threat appeal and is commonly used to advertise insurance and personal care products.

### ***Pertinent Characters in the Movie-plot***

#### ***Bhootnath (Guru Dutt):***

An educated but naïve looking and simpleton guy from a lower stratum who has just arrived in



colonial Calcutta (now, Kolkata) from his native village searching his brother-in-law, a former tutor - the 'Masterji' - at the *haveli*, and residing on the periphery of the grand ancestral mansion of the zamindars. Bhootnath stays with his brother-in-law who further manages to procure a clerical job for Bhootnath at a salary of Rs. 7 a month plus day-time-meal at Mohini Sindoor Factory (See Plate 1). Bhootnath, however, unintentionally gets drawn into the life of *haveli*'s Chhoti Bahu. As word spreads about the magic of Mohini Sindoor to salvage failed relationships, Bhootnath, one night, is summoned by Chhoti Bahu for bringing her secretly a small box of Mohini Sindoor, when he is dumbstruck by her irresistible beauty and sadness as well. Thus begins the relationship between the two with Bhootnath inadvertently becoming Chhoti Bahu's secret confidant. Eventually, a platonic relationship develops between the two.

Plate 1: Front view of Mohini Sindoor Factory



(Courtesy : Hindi movie – *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*, 1962)

### ***Chhoti Bahu (Meena Kumari):***

Notwithstanding her feudal status, a literate and ravishingly beautiful Chhoti Bahu is a typical example of a fully devoted, yet neglected wife whose life is revolving around her husband, Chhote Babu. She presents an instance of the helplessness of an upper class Indian woman of zamindari era who despite being trapped in a gilded

cage is expected to uphold the honour of the family. She has been receiving a continuous sense of humiliation as well as a persistent pain by the hedonistic habits of her errant husband who regularly goes to courtesans at night instead of spending it with her. Chhoti bahu refuses to reconcile herself with the decadence and debauchery of her morally corrupt spouse, and become committed to gain her husband's attention by hook or by crook. She, however, becomes a winner at last and sets an example of self-sacrifice.

### ***Suvinay Babu (Nazir Hussain):***

An old aged dedicated member of Brahmo Samaj, Suvinay Babu is a kind hearted, frank, and noble person who owns Mohini Sindoor Factory, a business that he has inherited from his father, an orthodox Hindu. Despite practicing Brahmo Samaj, Suvinay Babu still seems to carry significant hues of Hindu religion & deities.

### ***Jaba (Waheeda Rehman):***

An educated young girl with modern outlook, Jaba is the only daughter of Suvinay Babu. Carrying a poetic acumen, she seems to be adept in the managerial activities including advertising copy writing also, and spares time to take care of the administrative needs of Mohini Sindoor Factory as well in the absence of his father. Not initially, but eventually she seems to enter into love with Bhootnath whom he equally reciprocates. As a matter of fact, both were made to enter into engagement during their very childhood, which becomes evident at a much later part of the movie.

### ***Bansi (Dhumal):***

Valet of Chhote Babu, Bansi is a witty staff-member at *haveli*. He is as such obliged to act as a legitimate messenger to carry the summons from Chhoti Bahu to Bhootnath or somebody else as and

when required. He not only holds a high esteem for Chhoti Bahu, but is piously dutiful to both Chhote Babu and Chhoti Bahu, apart from being very affectionate to Bhootnath as well. Following the ruin of *haveli* during the fag end of the movie, Bansi takes on the job of a coolie (porter) at the local railway station. He is however still eager to enquire about his old affectionate and confidant – Bhootnath, and eventually manages to meet him in a bedridden state at a hospital to share some secret episodes including aftermath of Mohini Sindoor-fiasco.

### 'Mohini Sindoor' – the Product for Advertising in the Movie:

Among the cosmetic products, used also in Indian culture, 'Sindoor' is a vermilion red or orange-red coloured powder. As a bridal mark, it is generally worn by married women along the parting-line of their hair, and/or anointed by them as a 'dot' of various sizes on their foreheads. 'Mohini' implies nothing but a 'Brand name' for the generic product, Sindoor.

### Advertising Side of 'Mohini Sindoor' - An Analysis :

The final text of the advertising copy of Mohini Sindoor for print media (newspapers) in Hindi (vernacular) reads:

*“Mohini Sindoor ke adbhut chamatkaar”. “Jo premee ya premikayen virah ki aag mein bhasma ho rahe hon, ya jinke milan mein archanen ya badhaayen hon, ya jin premiyon ki premikayen unke paas to hain par parwah nahin kartin, ya jinke premee ya premikayen inse rooth chuke hon, door-door rahte hon, inhen chahiye ki hamare vishwavikhyaat Mohini Sindoor ka sewan karen, asar na hone par daam waapas, keemat eak rupya paanch aane”.*

The transliterated version of this advertising copy in English should look like:

*“The wonderful miracles of Mohini Sindoor”. “The lover and the loved ones troubled by separation or whose union is hindered or the beloved who is near but does not care or lovers who have quarreled... All may use Mohini Sindoor. Money back if not satisfied. Price one rupee five aane”.*

Analysis of the ad message text makes it very clear that this is a *product reputation advertising*, carrying a *Problem Avoidance Message Format*, a variation of the popular *Problem Solution Message Format / Product-as-hero Message Format*, and is equally endowed with both factual and emotional copy approaches. In other words, both *hard-sell* & *soft-sell* approaches seem to be guiding the design of copywriting. Further, the movie makes it evident as to how much particular the copywriters are in doing away with the possibility of any mistake remaining in the final text of the ad copy, and getting the same corrected then and there. During an effort to make the final copy proof, Bhootnath, while reading the text in presence of Jaba, gets confused over the etymology of a word – '*parwah*' in the piece – '*parwah nahin kartin*' of the ad copy and instead pronounces '*par hawa nahin kartin*', which only after a small pause is corrected by Jaba as '*parwah*' in place of '*par hawa*' and Bhootnath corrects the text immediately and gets relaxed (Plate-3). Their discussion also discloses that actually Suvinay Babu had given dictation to Bhootnath for the ad copy to be sent to the press without any delay for complying with the deadline. However, with a view to doing away with the above confusion, Bhootnath, in absence of Suvinay Babu, approaches Jaba for the said job asking her the proof of advertisement must be corrected at once. It thus shows the degree of sincerity and attentiveness of the creative team of Mohini Sindoor in as much as correctness of ad copy as well as honouring the press deadline are

concerned.

The *media strategy* employed for the purpose is equally admiring. Under the *media-mix* both *Publication and Transit / Transportation advertising* have been used (Plate-2). *Newspaper(s)* as vehicle for Publication media and *Trams* (drawn on rails laid in a public road by horses during the said period) as vehicle for Transportation media have been roped-in for ensuring an optimal ad reach among the target audience.

**Plate 2: Transit Advertising of Mohini Sindoor**



(Courtesy : Hindi movie – *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*, 1962)

**Plate 3: Attentive designing of Ad Copy for Mohini Sindoor**



(Courtesy : Hindi movie – *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*, 1962)

### Relevant Movie-plots on the Mohini Sindoor advertising fiasco – A Discussion

Chhoti Bahu naturally carries the normal expectations of a house-wife too. She has long been facing negligence, avoidance and humiliation from her debauched husband, Chhote Babu who is habituated of visiting a *tawaif* and prefers the tinkling anklets of courtesans to the affectionate smiles of his arrogantly beautiful wife. Standing lonely in the corridor at nights, Chhoti Bahu continues to be on the lookout for her husband through the rhyme & rhetoric of her songs to come back to her, but in vain. She as such decides not to reconcile herself anymore to the hedonistic habits of her husband and rises in revolt by turning to other means in a fit of desperation. In the meantime, she comes across an advertisement of Mohini Sindoor and starts believing that the exaggerated claims made by the advertisement in as much as bringing together estranged partners is all true. She equally comes to know that the newly arrived brother-in-law of *haveli's* Masterji – Bhootnath, is an employee at the Mohini Sindoor Factory. Therefore, one evening she asks Bansi to bring Bhootnath to her. After a brief introduction, Chhoti Bahu puts a few coins (money) on the hand of Bhootnath and asks him to secretly bring her a small box of Mohini Sindoor. She further enquires of the effectiveness of *sindoor* with Bhootnath, which he hesitantly assures her that it will work. Bhootnath again visits Chhoti Bahu the following evening to hand over the small box of Mohini Sindoor which she receives with a sense of gratitude.

The next day, Chhoti Bahu urges Bansi to bring anyhow Chhote Babu to her even for a while, and then spends a long time getting ready, wore *sindoor* to let it work its magic on Chhote Babu. He of course comes to Chhoti Bahu, but her ravishing beauty, her pleas and even her Mohini Sindoor leave Chhote Babu cold. Despite several attempts

of wearing Mohini Sindoor along the parting-line of her hair as well as anointing her forehead with gradual enlargement in size of dot by the sindoor, Chhoti Bahu is repeatedly rejected with contempt by her husband. Her long cherished hope centered on Mohini Sindoor thus seems to have completely shattered, and leaving her dejected once again.

### Advertising Substantiation - A Spiritual Tag

Repeated wearing and anointing of Mohini Sindoor brought a zero outcome to Chhoti Bahu. It utterly failed to deliver what it was supposed to accomplish. All the long haul of claims made by the advertisement of Mohini Sindoor proved to be completely false and barely misleading. It could not bring Chhoti Bahu back her husband's faded love.

Bansi narrates the whole story of *sindoor* fiasco to Bhootnath, who becomes extremely sad. Lying on a hospital bed, he starts feeling a deep sense of guilt. Later on he tells Suvinay Babu that he has done great injustice in giving Mohini Sindoor to someone. He equally expressed his annoyance with Suvinay Babu as to why didn't he tell him the reality about Mohini Sindoor, and that he cannot stay anymore in the job.

Suvinay Babu, on the issue of advertising substantiation, informs Bhootnath that his late father, a traditional Hindu and not a *Brahmo Samaji*, had started the business of Mohini Sindoor following a dream when Goddess *Bhawani* had revealed Mohini Sindoor to his father. He believed in this boon and that Suvinay Babu only continued the business which his father began. This is the only base and proof on which the entire faith about the miracle of Mohini Sindoor used to stand so far. As an expression of an extreme sense of repentance following the *sindoor* fiasco, Suvinay Babu also gave up the *sindoor* business, closed the Mohini Sindoor Factory and equally presented five

hundred rupees to Bhootnath as a compensatory gesture coupled with a strong recommendation letter for an another job for him. Excepting this evidence for proving the truth which certainly deserves a nomenclature of *spiritual substantiation*, nothing more could be advanced by the noble Suvinay Babu, the advertiser of Mohini Sindoor, whose advertisement had attracted a glaring dent of deception. What else can be a better example for '*self-regulation by an advertiser*'.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell it can be said that the Hindi movie – *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam*, already enjoying a heritage status, is equally endowed with a significant lesson for the cross section of advertisers, advertising agencies and society at large. In the present world with a materialistic approach where examples of deceptive advertisements abound, the advertisers need to practice the spiritual substantiation in a true spirit. Semantic and syntactic correctness of the ad copywriting should be a point of priority before the advertising agencies. The way Suvinay Babu closed down Mohini Sindoor Factory immediately following the complain of the advertised product having failed to deliver the promises made in its advertisement certainly sets an eye-opening example. His compensatory attitude exhibited by presenting a lump sum to Bhootnath coupled with giving a letter of recommendation to get him another job certainly qualifies to be a perspicacious spiritual gesture and deserves to be appreciated by the society at large. Let this Paper be the author's tribute to Meena Kumari !

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