

## **Early print advertisements in Kerala:Forms, mediation and perceptions.**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores how print advertisement can be seen as a medium which can talk on its own about various developments that happened during early twentieth-century Kerala. Beyond the usual method of taking advertisement as collaborative source in writing history, this article explores how print advertisement evolved as medium which can be used as potential source in writing history. In order to understand its potential as a cultural text, this article has taken various other sources like writings about advertisements and archival sources which talked about the medium of print advertisement. This article concludes that advertisement as medium has played an instrumental role in the mediation of notions about modernity and new selfhood.

**Keywords: Print advertisements, mediation, Kerala, History, modernity, politics.**

### **Introduction**

Emergent print culture in nineteenth-century Kerala paved the way for publication of various literary genres like textbooks, religious literature, novels, newspapers and magazines. These literary genres have had significant influences in various walks of the then Kerala society and thenceforth. Newspaper and magazines/journals had contributed to the development of print culture by inculcating a reading habit and scope for debate and discussion during late nineteenth century Kerala (Arunima: 2006, 70). To an extent, survival of these newspapers and magazines depended upon the revenues generated out of the advertisements published in it. Moreover, with the rising demand and fascination for more objects of everyday life and the proliferation of British imperialism advertisements became imperative for various manufacturers. In this context, this paper discusses how advertisement as a medium was received socially and politically during late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala. To a large extent, advertisements indicate how people lived or aspired to live (Padgaonkar, 1989). The huge volume of print advertisements in newspapers and magazines in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala help us to understand how the medium of advertisement had a profound impact on the life of people.

Hence, in the first part, the paper would give an account of how advertisement was received by the common mass during that period. The discussion is carried out by taking up various narratives/writings came in magazines about advertisements and people's initial responses\* and perceptions† about the medium of advertisement. Moving from the early perception at socio-cultural level advertisement had featured in the political discourses during this period. Various archival sources indicate that advertisements played an essential role in the political realm of colonial Kerala. Therefore, the second part of the paper discusses how advertisement was featured in the political discourses‡ in colonial Kerala. Using archival sources including the letters and confidential reports from various departments of Government of Travancore, this part brings forth a discussion on how various groups used this medium of advertisements within the domain of politics. Thus, overall the paper discusses how in the process of this mediation by advertisement how advertisement evolved as a medium, what were the forms of those advertisements and what were the signs and referents used in these advertisements as a part of the marketing strategy.

### **Advertisement: A Medium of Expression?**

Development in the fields printing culture and photographic technology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century India had brought enormous changes in the way people understood about their life, culture and the society so on and so forth. As a result of this development, mass-produced printed and visual materials that were imagined elsewhere came home in India as well. These materials, both visual and literary, helped the people to understand and articulate about themselves in various ways (Freitag: 2002, 371-372).

The advertisement had a ubiquitous presence in these printed materials as well, be it newspapers or magazines. For these publications local people were subjects, readers and advertisers (Jeffrey, 2000: 1). While manufacturers/business class used advertisement as a medium to reach out to its consumers, Newspapers and magazines found advertisement as a revenue-generating medium. A simplistic way of understanding advertisement is to see it as a medium which communicates a specific message for advertising purposes. However,

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\* Here, I don't use a reception theory analysis, rather, how the medium was seen by the people of Kerala.

† Perception is the act of understanding something from within the subjective experience of the Individual.

‡ This is not about advertisements with political ideology *per se*. Rather, how various issues related to the advertisements, like who should be given government advertisements to, question of favouritism in allotment of government advertisements, etc. resulted in serious political debates as to the advertisement practice in Travancore state during early twentieth century will be discussed in this section.

scholars like Robert Goldman have studied advertising as a social practice in which advertisement has materiality on its own (Goldman, 1992: 34). If advertising can be looked at as a medium which has its materiality, to probe its embedded social and cultural meaning will give us a better picture as to what was this medium meant to the people Kerala during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala. While advertisement on the one side showcases its materiality effect it plays as a dematerialising medium as well. The promises made in advertisements most often are only seen in advertisements, let alone in reality. Here, advertisements function as a medium which detaches the human body from reality by simply mediating certain emotions and experiences. References to the coming of advertising in Kerala can be seen in various literary forms. In such a writing, titled 'Art of Advertising' (*Parasya kala*) (Unnman: 1944, 553) came in *Mangalodayam* published from Trichur, Unnman critically writes about the art of advertising.

#### I. Fascination for advertisement

The writing gives us an idea about how advertisements as a medium evolved historically and the impact it had on the lives of people and how it was received by the people. Throughout the writing, the author had analysed critically at the medium of advertisements and also the products advertised in these advertisements. While the medium of advertisement can be seen as the something which is very much related to the industrial capitalism that was taking ground across India with British imperialism, the author tries to unpack the capitalistic logic of these advertisements. The advertisement has been seen as an inevitable part of a capitalist economy. However, the urge to make money by advertising is nothing new that came with industrial capitalism. It has been there in human society since time immemorial. People used various forms of advertising forms from rock edicts to beating the drums to wall posts and print materials to visual media communications and even to performance of various types.

"Fascination for advertisements is in everything in this universe. Even before man-why to blame the man? Don't Devas have it? If not, why do they have annual fests and rituals? Why do they perform while moving around sitting on top of elephants? Why don't they sit at temples only and bless whoever comes there? So, they want to increase the revenue which that they get through offerings and rituals by showing the greatness of deities." (Unnman: 1944, 553)

Here, the author is also pointing into the performative aspect of advertisement by satirically citing the case of Devas (deities) at the occasion of annuals

festivals and rituals in temples during early twentieth century Kerala. A non-living entity like the idol of Deva is imagined to be publicising his/her worthiness to be worshipped and sacrifices offered to him/her by devotees. It is a common thing in any part of India to have processions as a part of annual festivals and celebrations in temples, shrines or as a part of any other religious or cultural festivals. Most often, one can see the deities or other historical figures<sup>§</sup> will be leading or being a significant part of those processions. Here, these forms of processions, especially the one mentioned above, are critiqued as another form of advertising to increase the popularity of Devas and generate more revenue to the temples or shrines. Although this analogy is purely an imagination of the author, with this he meant to highlight the tendency of advertising for making money during that time in Kerala. As a society closely knit in terms of religion and culture, the author found, an event or character related to religion as an easy way to communicate with people in Kerala during early twentieth century Kerala.

## II. Religion and Myth in advertisements

Religion and myth were used by advertisers in their advertisements as an easy communication tool. The author is critiquing such tendencies among advertisers in Kerala during the early twentieth century. To make the advertising more appealing and sell their products, it was prevalent among Indian entrepreneurs to resort to myth and local cultural codes in advertisements as a technique (Sharma: 2009, 217). In the case of Kerala, Unnaman writes;

“See another advertisement! ‘Panacea for all types of abscess from pimples to piles! Buy and use our *Kouravasamhari!* It will cure instantly’. How cunningly the word ‘Kouravasahmari’ is being used here to give a meaning to the medicine as it can eradicate the entire clan of Kuru? \*\*.” (Ibid.)

Here the author is critically looking at the use of local cultural code and referents in the advertisements by analysing the advertisement of *Kouravasamhari*, a medical product which claimed to have the effectiveness in curing all types of abscess from piles to pimples. Techniques and strategies are fundamental to make advertisements appealing and reaching into the public. Furthermore, this is the stage where maximum manipulation and distortion of facts happen. Here, the use of this term *Kouravasamhari* itself can be seen as a

<sup>§</sup>Procession led by *Maveli* (Mahabali), the benevolent king of erstwhile Kerala, is one of the main attractions of Onam celebration among Keralites across the globe. In a way, an image of a *Maveli* will be omnipresent in market places across the globe wherever Keralites are there. *Maveli* becomes a big marketing icon during Onam celebration.

\*\* Kuru in Malayalam means abscess.

use of a myth to make an easy entry into the consumers' minds without being much questioned and critically looked at. This uncritical reception is what advertisers are looking for. This is made possible when a myth is seen as like Barthes had said, 'an unexamined assumption rooted in prevailing political (or social) order' which will be consumed uncritically (Barthes, 1957, 108). There is certain element of force of tradition in such instances. Habermas, in the context of enlightenment tradition of thinking, explained the functioning of myth as "an authoritative normative tradition as opposed to the way historians use where an 'unforced force of better argument' is used to establish the actual elements and convince the people. (Habermas, 1987:107)

In the case mentioned above, the author's scathing critique is on the same issue. He is referring to the usage of the term *Kourava* and *Kuru* which was used in the advertisements to denote that the medicine is capable of eradicating the entire clan of Kuru or abscess. Clan of Kuru and Kourava belong to the Hindu epic Mahabharata in which the Kurukshetra war between Pandavas and Kauravas was narrated over a dispute on the throne of Hastinapura. While both Pandavas and Kauravas hailed from the Kuru clan, the Pandavas had come victorious at the end. Here, Kauravas from the Kuru clan stays defeated and the advertisement, it is asking the consumers to take the role of Pandavas and defeat and eradicate the Kauravas of Kuru clan. In the course of making advertisements, the advertisers have used the religion and local culture into the domain of advertisements.

A similar pattern is continued in the same advertisements by invoking a feeling of religiosity among its consumers. As the author puts it in his own words;

"This advertisement also has a blatant lie written in it. It is a note about the one who prepared this medicine. 'Swami Deshanandan', that is what he was known, was a devotee who was in charge of Thruppuka<sup>††</sup>. Aswani Devas who were regular for Thruppuka was impressed by his devotion and called him inside the temple after all other devotees had left the premise to advise him with this medicine as a livelihood for him" (Ibid.)

Here the author is criticising how religious sentiments are targeted in the advertisements to influence the potential consumers by bringing the elements of religion in it. While calling it this advertisement strategy as a blatant lie, the author once again exposed the hollowness in the promises of advertisements.

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<sup>††</sup>Thruppuka is the last one among the daily rituals practiced in Kerala temples, especially in Vadakkunatha temple, Trichur. . It is believed that all Devas from the nearby temples do come together, sometime in disguise as common man, for this ritual.

### III. Art and Modernity in Advertisement

While this writing gives an idea about how the art of advertising had evolved like any other art forms over the period, it also brings the very notion of seeing an advertisement as art under severe criticism. Having evolved from the initial form of drums to seek the attention of people in advertising a particular commodity or an event, to neat and clean wall posters using nice colours and brushes, the medium of advertisements became an art form for making money in the capitalist economy newly emerged in colonial Kerala (ibid, 553). Newspapers and magazines provided the ground for this transformation of advertisements from being an art to the medium that emerged out of greed for money. Newspapers and magazines were filled with advertisements like the two-third of earth are full of water, newspapers were filled with advertising having only quarter of its total space left for news reporting.

“If art is for making money, it can be used in business also. In such a case, the intention of art is not the representation of the truth, like all other art forms; rather, it is the representation of falsehood in the form of truth. It is not the beautiful manifestation of ideas; it is filling pockets with money.” (Unnaman: 1944, 554)

During the late nineteenth century, with whole lot changes in the sphere of literature and art in Kerala, there was a new desire for the representation of truth or real-world in writings and art manifestations. Influenced by the European style of painting people had begun to opt for oil paintings, watercolours of men, animals and objects. (Udayan: 2016, 129, Menon: 1997, 294). Puranic tales that were told by older generations were begun to be seen as boring and repetitive. True representation of things brought respect for the artists as well. It was in this very context, novel like *Indulekha*, first proper Malayalam novel, by O. Chandumenon was written which was characterised by element of realism in it. Chandumenon had made it a point that the novel should not be a mere translation of some other work with which Malayalam reader cannot relate in any way. (Menon: 1997, 294). Efforts like that of Chandumenon stand as vivid testimony to the insistence of representation of the true world in writings as well as in any art forms.

While the representation of the truth was the prerequisite for any art during that time, the author in this article critically looks at advertisement as art used to propagate falsehood in making money by exploiting the desire of people for the true representation of the world. Although he criticises the advertisements for showing falsehood in the form of truth and reality, it discloses that there was a demand within the field of advertising that

advertising should be seen as a representation of the real world. Moreover, it was this very notion that made the medium of advertising a saleable commodity.

Claims of being an artist and the representation of truth all can be seen a strategy by the advertising agents and newspapers or magazines to find a space in the newly emerged modern sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala. These representations are made possible by advertising certain products with the promises of modernity and change. Art element of advertisements comes into play here while showing the change and offering a reality that people do not possess at the time of consumption. Here advertisements play a dual role, unlike any other art forms, by showing the reality which is not so modern and offering another one, which is, of course, modern, with the consumption of the advertised product. This is what is making the art of advertisement different from other forms of representations like that of the novel mentioned above which represented the real world. John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* had made this distinction clear that how artworks are different from advertising. While art of work like oil painting represented the happy present which is real, the advertisement offered a bright future by consuming the commodity advertised (Berger: 1972, 142). It is in way making the viewer unhappy and dissatisfied with the present life and making them dream about bright future.

“What will you feel seeing an advertisement in which a village man with wooden paduka<sup>††</sup> and a tuft is transforming into a modernman (pachaprashkari) with shoes and cropped hair after consuming bhavabedhini basman?” (Unnaman: 1944,554)

These words are referring to many changes that were happening during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Kerala. Encounter with colonial modernity introduced so many new things into the life of people in Kerala. In the first instance, the author and the medium of advertisements itself are conversing with the ones who see and makes sense advertisements during days. The term *pachaprishkari* denotes someone who has undergone drastic changes and transformed into a well-fashioned modern man. Wearing shoes and suit makes one modern according to the perception of this advertisement. This can be read in the context of colonial modernity in the late nineteenth and early twenty century Kerala where a variety of objects were newly introduced to impart a new modern sensibility.

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<sup>††</sup>Paduka is ancient Indian footwear which had references even Hindu Mythology like Ramayana. Later period, this was used by saints and priestly classes. In Kerala, this was a part of the attire of upper caste Nambodiri Brahmins.

Moreover, this also represents the change that had happened with the introduction of modern medicine in colonial Kerala. The transformative ability of medicine is the central component in this narrative. Here the advertisement projects a newly emergent modern visuality against the indigenous way of representation. While it shows the representation of modern visuality, it is done by contrasting with the old indigenous way of representation.

To prove his point, he brought two advertisements as examples. The first one is *Bhavabhedini basmam*, a medicinal powder which claimed to have the power to change one's total appearance. The term Bhavabhedini means something which can change your appearance. The advertisement pictured a man having a potbelly and very traditional look, which is generally seen as very archaic and this man turning to be a modern gentleman soon after consuming the powder. Citing this advertisement, Unnaman asked sarcastically which of the two, the advertisement or the product, is more effective in showing a change (Unnaman: 1944,554).

He further exposed the twisted logic of advertisers by explaining what if a consumer goes to court against the product for not getting the effect from the use of a product as it was offered in the advertisement. In such cases the advertisers would resort to the lame arguments like the product could change the spot of an abscess from one place to another or one type of abscess to another. Here the reference of court is interesting as it opens up further possible questions on how advertisement was a subject for legal discourses at that point of time (Ibid: 555).

While coming of western medicine and science was seen as a part of social engineering by the colonial state to cure and govern the colonised in colonial Kerala (Burtein, 2007:12), the advertisement that was to sell western medical products were very much part of it by inculcating certain notions about sciences, health and hygiene. The author here tried to critique such knowledge about science and modernity that were imparted through these advertisements. His critic of medical advertisements in this article exposes the hollowness of the promises that advertisements offered to the readers/consumers.

In newspapers, most clever advertisers put their advertisements close to important news so that the attention of readers would fall upon it. He is citing an another advertising in this fashion to prove his point, as there was a news that Gandhi sitting on hunger strike for continues 21 days, just below there is an advertisement of a medical product *Makkunarasayanam* which actually tried to reach out to people saying that you starve (read

hunger strike) because that you don't find food so tasty. This is happening because your taste buds are facing severe problems, which can be cured by taking this particular medicine. So here while on one side Gandhi's hunger strike news is given and whoever reads this news would be thinking of how it is difficult to sit on hunger strike, and the advertiser tried to exploit this very feeling to sell their product. This is very important as to how the advertisement tried to negotiate with the real. He went on explaining how poems, short stories and Kathakali, traditional performance art in Kerala, were used for the purpose of advertisements (Unnaman: 1944, 555).

An array of issues like tendency to advertise, advertisement and representation of the truth, advertisement and being modern, and how advertisement evolved over a period of time were discussed in this writing. While discussing these aspects of the art of advertising in early twentieth-century Kerala, this writing brings forth a fascinating account on how advertising as a new medium was received among people of Kerala. As we go by this narrative it can be argued that people in Kerala during late nineteenth and early twentieth century was fascinated about the medium of advertisement so much so that there was as an insistence that advertising, like other art forms, be more realistic. However, what is evident throughout this narrative is how advertising industry uses this fascination, religious symbols and also the desires of being modern in advertisements so as to create consumers in the newly emergent market economy of that time.

### **Advertisement and Political Discourses in Colonial Kerala.**

Although the advertisement is studied as a powerful medium in the cultural and social realm which can mediate people in many ways, however, it is right to state that when it is in the hands of state authority, it becomes a much powerful medium to interpellate the masses. Today we see how advertisements, especially state advertisements, become yet another tool for government in manipulating the contents of media house in favour of the government policies<sup>§§</sup>. Apart from Government agencies, there are business groups<sup>\*\*\*</sup> who

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<sup>§§</sup>State is also known for using their power to muzzle their political opponents by denying government advertisements in Kerala. Recently, Kerala government stopped giving government advertisement to Tejas, one of the Malayalam dailies published from Kerala on the pretext of alleged communally divisive contents of the newspaper<sup>§§</sup>. P. Chekkutty, editor of Thejas daily refuted all the allegations and said if the newspaper is found spreading communal venom and antinational messages, the editor should be imprisoned and newspaper should be closed down, let alone denying government advertisement. While any such allegation is a serious matter of concern as to the peaceful environment of the state is concerned, Government should be investigating it further and take necessary steps to stop its publication. Since that is not the case till now, Government's move to deny advertisements to Tejas daily looks to be vindictive and partiality on political line. Indian Express, "Constitute a Committee to Asses Thejas daily content: Kerala HC tells State Government", 10<sup>th</sup> July 2015. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/constitute-a-committee-to-asses-thejas-daily-content-kerala-hc-tells-state-govt/>.

resort to this move of denying advertisements to certain media groups citing reasons like to safeguard public interests. Here, the following section is probing how advertisement as a media form was used by princely state of Travancore for their own political interests.

### **Travancore State and Print Advertisement.**

By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were significant numbers of Malayalam periodicals in Travancore with a ratio of four newspapers for every thousand people in the state. These newspapers and periodicals were at times were very critical about state policies and hence had invited the wrath of the ruling dispensation of Travancore at that time. (Jeffrey: 2009, 474). Legislations were made to control and regulate the contents of newspapers as and when Travancore state government found it distasteful for them. A newspaper like *Sawadeshabimani* edited by K. Ramakrishna Pillai<sup>†††</sup> was closed by Travancore state in September 1910 for its scathing critique of corrupt state officers. Ramakrishna Pillai was accused of taking money from wealthy adversaries of Travancore *dewan* to write against the state and its officers (Ibid, 477).

Similarly, Malayala Manorama was closed down by Travancore state for allegedly inciting people for disobedience of law (Koshy: 1976, 632). These incidents point into the murky side of the relationship between Travancore state and print newspapers in early twentieth-century colonial Kerala. Contents of the newspapers were strictly monitored, and anything critical of the state was not tolerated in any way. Confronting phases between newspapers and state also brings out the censorship rules that Travancore had adopted during their regime to suppress the dissenting voices.

While most of the studies talked about the critical contents as reasons for the strict regulations and various actions by the state on many newspapers, advertisements that came in these newspapers and periodicals also were scrutinised and regulated during the reign of princely state of Travancore in Colonial Kerala. Advertisements were subjected to various political discourses during this period. The medium of advertisement was used by the state to suppress political dissent and to muzzle views that were critical to government policies and to do favouritism on several occasions.

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\*\*\* Of late, Bheema, a known jewellery group from Kerala stopped giving advertisements to Mathrubhumi, one of the oldest media institutes in Kerala, for publishing a controversial novel, *Meesha* by S. Hareesh. This novel irked many on the right wing side for apparent reference to its characters' sexuality. Scroll.in , "Kerala: Jewellery company withdraws advertisements from Malayalam media group after row over novel" 5<sup>th</sup> August 2018. <https://scroll.in/latest/889317/meesha-row-jewellery-company-in-kerala-withdraws-advertisements-from-mathrubhumi>

††† Ramakrishna Pillai is known to be one of the pioneering journalists, political and social activist who worked tirelessly for free press in Kerala since early twentieth century.

*Government Advertisements and Question of Favouritism*

It was quite common for Travancore State Government to give government advertisements to various newspapers and it was also one of the important sources of revenue for these newspapers and publications. This did open up a space for the Government to manipulate the contents of newspapers in their favour. This section would be discussing this very issue as to how the Travancore State used its discretionary power in allotting print advertisements to various newspapers who would write in favour or against the government policies.

A confidential letter issued from the office of the department of Information, Travancore state on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1946<sup>+++</sup>, addressing the registrar, Huzur Secretariat ordered that no Government advertisements should be given to the Deepika Newspaper from any Department of the state. The reason here is being mentioned as the Newspaper reportedly had written in their recent issues against the educational policies of Travancore Government and the arrest of some catholic leaders by the government. This clearly indicates that the Travancore government had used advertisement as a medium to bargain and manipulate the content of newspapers.

In another confidential letter<sup>§§§</sup> from Division Peishakar, Quilon, addressing the Chief Secretary, Travancore State on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1945 raised the issue of an advertisement (Figure-1) of Swarajyam press published in a journal called Malayalam. The press which was owned by V.R. Nanoo of Poovasseril, Puthupallyy, Kayancolam was a staunch supporter of the state congress<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>, and he was convicted for political offences. State congress was formed as a party with the support of Indian National Congress in the year 1938 in Travancore with an aim to protest various Travancore state policies which excluded people of Travancore. State congress was seen as political opponents by Travancore government and hence, any activities of them were keenly observed with suspicion and doubts.

<sup>+++</sup>Department of Communication, Government of Travancore, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1946, D. Dis. 158/46/C-50. Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram..

<sup>§§§</sup>Confidential Letter, Government of Travancore, D.Dis. 1102/45. (e.803/45/es) Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> (Travancore) State Congress was established on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1938 against the anti-people measures by Travancore Dewan Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy. This was formed after dismantling Joint Political Congress, a political platform associated with Indian National Congress. Political leaders from Travancore felt that the Joint Political Congress was largely unsuccessful in addressing the problems of people of Travancore and formed Travancore state congress with a primary objective of a *Responsible Government* based on adult franchise. Sumathy, M (2004) *From Petitions to Protest- a Study of the Political Movements in Travancore, 1938-1947*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Calicut University, 65-95.

Here in this case, what was the matter of concern for the State government was the way V.R Nanoo gave the advertisement of his press in Malayalam journal? Usually, no printing was done in any of the presses at Kayancolam with political character in it. However, V.R. advertised about his press, Swarajyam, by saying that content of any nature will get printed in Swarajya Press. This was a matter of concern for Travancore state, given his state congress background and political activities.

However, it was found out after the due enquiry by Inspector General of Police, Trivandrum, that the owner of the ‘Malayalam’ journal in which the advertisement was printed had no political motive as the owner himself possessed pro-government views. The letter sent by Inspector general of Police Trivandrum addressed the Chief secretary of Travancore Government, noted that the advertisement was just another strategy to attract more customers, let alone any political motive behind<sup>†††</sup>.

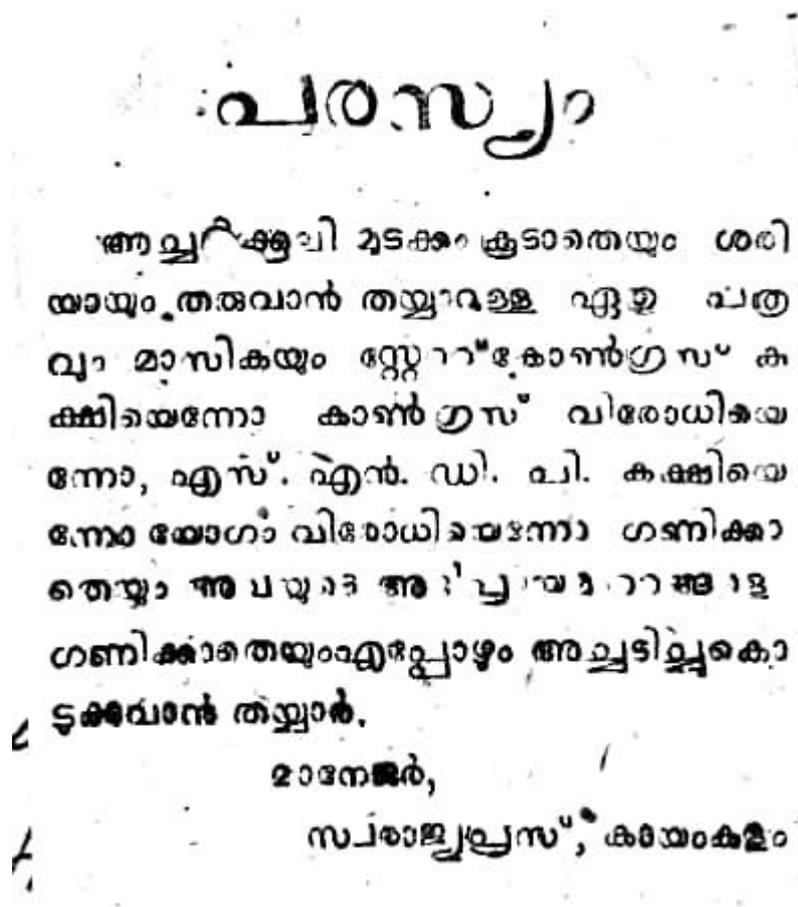


Figure- 1 Advertisement of ‘Swarajyam Press’ Published in ‘Malayalam’ Journal

<sup>†††</sup> Police Department 30<sup>th</sup> April 1945, D.Dis. 1102/45. (e.876/45/es), Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

Another Confidential report from Government of Travancore dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1945 sheds light upon the controversy erupted on the issue of Government advertisement being given to certain newspapers on unfair means. This was an allegation from Mr A.N. Satyanesan, the editor of newspaper 'Bharathi' that advertisements are distributed to newspapers supporting State propaganda citing the case of a tender published by District Magistrate on special duty in 'Powradhwani'<sup>+++</sup>. He demanded a fair and equal allocation of government advertisements through the department of Information, Travancore Government and he asked further why the government cannot distribute government advertisements through the Department of Information for those newspapers which have no connection with subversive political parties.

However, in a letter<sup>§§§§</sup> addressed to the Chief Secretary, Mr Ramakrishna Pillai, the District Magistrate on special duty clarified his part on the issue raised by the Bharathi newspaper and denied all allegations put forth against him. Advertisement which the newspaper was referring to, came on his name was actually done by the depot officer without his consent and knowledge. He accused the newspaper of levelling baseless allegations against him without checking the real facts and requested the government to take adequate action against the newspaper for this gimmick to get government advertisements. He also observed, government should not encourage those newspapers with subversive political inclinations by giving government advertisements to publish in their newspapers. However, he further continued, it is not to be understood that no newspapers should be given any type of preference in terms of giving government advertisements to, simply because they don't support state congress propaganda. He further added that advertisement should be distributed by looking into the ability of newspaper into the intended larger audience which can get through only those newspapers which possessed much bigger circulation.

#### *Advertising on Electric Posts*

Moving on from print advertisement, the paper would like to take the discussion to another genre of advertising, advertising on the electric post, during the rule of Princely State Travancore. Electric posts were given to interested parties on lease. A series of letters<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>

<sup>+++</sup>Confidential Report, Government of Travancore February 1<sup>st</sup> 1945, D.Dis. 1448/45. Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

<sup>§§§§</sup>Urgent and Confidential letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 1945, From the District Magistrate on Special Duty to the Chief Secretary, Government of Travancore, D.Dis. 1448/45 (e.266/45/es). Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> Letter from Electical Engineer to the Chief Secretary, Travancore Government, S.Dis. 29/40 .PWD. )05/01/1945, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

between electrical engineer, Chief Secretary, Travancore Government and a private contractor, P. Fernandez, gives a fascinating account on how leasing out of electric post for advertising purpose was carried out during that period.

In the course of the conversation, much detailing was evident as to the advertising practices in the then Travancore is concerned. Advertisements were entrusted by the interested traders to a contractor who had taken a right to advertise on the electric post from the Government on a stipulated amount as lease amount. These advertisers did not have a direct connection with the Government. Instead, the contractor used to be the one with whom government had any deal in this matter. So, many rules were applied to these practices as per the government order, primarily as to the content of the advertisements were concerned. Advertisements were to be gone through thorough scrutiny by the government and advertisements, in any case, should not feature any publication that would go against the law or anything that government would find objectionable. In such case government had the full right to disapprove or withdraw any advertisements. Moreover, any failure in the payment of lease amount would lead to the cancellation of the lease and withdrawing and confiscation of the advertisement boards by the government<sup>††††</sup>. From the entire discussion one thing is understood that advertisements were subjected to heated debates and discussion in the political realm and it was seen as an essential factor in the political discourses during the reign of princely state of Travancore.

### **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, this paper discussed different ways that advertisements as a medium was received and used in two different spectrums of the early twentieth century Kerala. In the first section, this paper discussed how the advertisement was perceived by common mass from a different point of view. While the author of the article discussed how advertisement reflects the desire for a self-fashioning among the English educated elites in Kerala during this period by consuming certain products like health and cosmetic items and saree and suit for women and men respectively, so as to look modern (*pachaparishkari*). Moreover, the article discussed above itself was a testimony to the new subjectivity, who was critical and rational, which could be seen as a distinct feature of colonial modernity. The second section discussed how this medium stirred controversy in the political realm of the then Kerala society by especially looking into the political discourse that triggered by the

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<sup>††††</sup>Electrical department, Government of Travancore, 228/37, P.W, dated 21-01-1937, Kerala State Archives, Thiruvananthapuram.

advertisements. Advertisements were seen as powerful tool among the ruling so as to control the dissent and critique of the state and also to favouritism for state.

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