Chapter Three. The Origins of Advertising
So what makes Ads possible? Or what are the conditions under which advertising can exist? Advertising needs certain conditions to flourish. Indeed modern advertising that we know of took a long time to evolve through the ages. It's not just the 'shortage of things' that creates the human condition. Plenty creates its own logic. Mankind down through the ages has not just grappled with acute shortage of things, a large part of a modern society's time and effort is spent in deciding how to take care of plenty. Instances of storing, hiding, hoarding, stashing and salting are as aplenty throughout human history as famine, drought, and dearth.

Human progress has been marked by how much each of the preceding age could create. This journey has been fashioned invariably by the means through which sustenance could be eked out. Evolution could proceed only when the means of production could produce enough surpluses to finance the next stage of human evolution. Men didn't stop using stone tools one fine day. Rather stretched over a period of thousands of years, human learned the art of smelting tin and copper to produce bronze that could produce more than needed. Evolution therefore could
pass on from one stage to another when newer material means of creating surplus could be invented. Bronze tools rendered stone tools redundant. Iron tools made bronze tools inadequate.

The surplus of one age ushered in another. Iron tools transformed nomadic and hunting tribes into passive farming communities. The surplus of farming communities brought urbanism into existence. The surplus hoarded in the medieval age financed the factory system of the 19th century. The surplus of the 21st century is financing the consumerism of the present century. Advertising essentially deals with the question of consumption of this surplus. What to do with the factory system keep on producing.

Advertising is essentially a modern phenomenon. It took a long time for advertising to emerge. To exist it required the coming together of society’s surplus, beyond the immediate need of the producers’ class, and a monetized economy. In a monetized economy the surplus of a community can be converted into capital. Without this conversion, the surplus remains in its original form and its exchange become restricted to barter. Advertising needs a target audience or to put it simply
a consumer class to whom the advertising messages are directed. And finally the corresponding purchasing power at the disposal of the consuming class. And tied to this is the concept of branding. In many ways an understanding of brands underpins much of what we attempt to achieve within the field of advertising.
Modern needs of Advertising

The modern consumer society is marked by an overflow of items. Just as industrial concentration results in an ever increased production of goods, so urban concentration results in a limitless promotion of needs. We produce more than we can ever consume. Democracy has reached not just people and places in the nooks and corners of the globe but has also extended itself to the material objects, and consumer choices. Buying a shampoo is not an easy task any more as it entails making ‘informed decisions’ based on individual preferences. The quality of one’s own hair matters as much as the quality of the shampoo itself. Agonizing time is spent before the purchase of a car or a shampoo is affected. Making a choice means rejecting other varieties of the same product.

The most apparent feature of an advanced consumption society is the existence of a large variety of good of each ‘type’. Markets present a profusion of varieties of the same good or commodity, yet all of them possess qualities that differentiate them from the other. Varieties of the same though not identical products are known as ‘differentiated products’. Coca Cola, Pepsi, Maaza, 7Up, Sprite, Limca, Thums...
Up, Mountain Dew, etc are all differentiated products because they are soft drinks. While the individual varieties within the same product group are known as 'product differentiates'. Yet in spite of being soft drinks all the same, they offer different taste to the consumer, come in different packages and are therefore 'product differentiates'. The more advanced an economy the greater the differences between products of the same variety. Shampoos will no longer be just shampoos to wash hairs. They can be herbal based, conditioner based, moisturizer based, ZPTO based, or oil based shampoo. They may or may not contain extracts of _shikakai, reetha, egg, amla, coconut oil, neem, aloe vera, Pro vitamin B5, fruits, ceramides, henna, bhringraj_ etc. Shampoos will also depend on the type of the hair one possesses: dry, oily, tangled, knotted, or with split ends. They may depend on scalp condition: itchy, flaky, dandruff ridden. Some may make hairs shiny; others may make hairs healthy. While another variety may claim to offer to make hairs, strong healthy and shiny.

Individual choices will therefore be based on, and made in terms of availability of certain characteristic of the product differentiates. They may also come in the required quantity. In sachets for the small buyers; in medium sized bottles for
frequent users; in litre bottles for those who don't prefer changing their product
once they have tried it out. What is ignored in this melee is the fact that when
shampoo must have been introduced to the consumer world it was required to
perform the basic function of just cleaning hairs. And this is just about shampoos.
When it comes to varieties in detergents, toothpastes, creams, food products,
confectionaries, beverages, cigarettes, toilet soaps the choices being offered is
mind boggling.

One brand will offer something that the other brand doesn't. But they won't be too
different from the others. Since so much is on offer, it will be impossible to make a
choice without knowing in advance what each one has to offer. Consumers would
need information about where to fit the product into their system of things.
Consumer will therefore need prior information about the products on offer. This is
how advertising *justifies* its existence in a modern society. It also allows the
consumer to be an efficient consumer. The best way to look at a choice among
product differentiates would be in terms of the characteristics a product possesses.
‘A consumer may not be aware that he can obtain the same collection of
characteristics from a different collection of goods, which costs less, thus in this
case he is consuming inefficiently' 4. It is through this way that a consumer information service helps people make efficient choices.

As an industry, advertising mediates between commodity production and cultural production; as a message form, it adopts, revises, and shapes other cultural message systems; most importantly through research it appropriates the social structure and cultural dynamic of market society and recycles them as strategies towards segments of the population5. This research intends to find out the way advertising portrays the different social groups such as men, women, elderly, and the children. There are obvious reasons for doing so. Advertising permeates and abounds everywhere. It is the lifeblood of the TV channels we all watch religiously every day; advertising finances our cultural programmes and our soirees; our cricket matches and award functions. Without advertising there would be no brands, consumer choice or media. Without advertising there is a fair chance that the entire mass media system in operation the world over will collapse leading to the complete breakdown of the system so assiduously built up in the last two hundred years.
Advertising in an Indian context

It will be quite easy to claim that Advertising emerged in ancient India; that ancient seals discovered in the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa were in fact the earliest form of billboards. It can also be claimed that the various *prasasthis* discovered in India were in fact advertisements of some government service. But Advertising as we know it is a phenomenon of recent origin, growing out of the wombs of the laissez faire or the mercantilist economy that was introduced by the English colonists in India in the Mid-seventeenth century. Advertising is a paid for, non-personal communication from an identified organization, body, or individual designed to communicate information and to influence *consumer* behaviour.\(^6\)

Since Advertising is intimately linked with the idea of surplus (that which can be sold in the market) in any society the most important question is the amount and the method of surplus collection and the mode of its distribution. Vince Norris in his article ‘Advertising History According to the Textbooks’ infers as much when he writes ‘every society, even a group of castaways, must cope with two basic economic problems: how to allocate scarce resources and how to distribute output
He then mentions that ancient societies sought to distribute wealth through the means of reciprocity, redistribution, and house holding.

If the only means through which goods exchange hands is through gift giving, *dana, dakshina, zakaat*, or as war booty, advertising will have a very negligible role to play if none at all. Reciprocity or gift giving is a practice well documented in ancient Indian literature. We find the mention of gifts being given as dowry and being part of marital rituals. Harshavardhana is mentioned giving gifts to Buddhist monks. Earliest literary sources refer to the giving of *dana, dakshina*, etc., to priests and brahmanas.

Gift giving was a system through which surplus was appropriated while the context of such an exchange was religious and largely symbolic. Gift giving was tied down to the way ancient India’s social system was organized: hierarchically. Gifts were given to the daughters as dowry; to the priest as the cost of performing elaborate and time consuming rituals. Failure to do so could invite social censure or active social boycott. Gift giving therefore had social sanction to it. Material gifts brought social acceptance and physical protection. Gifts weren’t just about utilities. They
were the means through which status was made public. It was the means through which others could be controlled and won over; it also placed the receiver of the gifts under certain obligations. Therefore gifts became the means of measuring power-relationships. The weak offered gifts to the powerful. Kings made offering to propitiate Gods and their intermediaries the brahmanas. Romila Thapar talks about the earliest references to gift (dana) as a distinct function in society coming from the dana-stuti hymns of the Rig-Veda. They were hymns in [the Rig-Veda in] praise of those who make generous and handsome gifts. 

In the absence of well-developed markets, gifts giving kept goods and commodities in regular circulation in Ancient India. Raiding other settlements was also one of the means through which this circulation could be effected. Again the Dana Stuti hymns of the Rig-Veda are eulogies to the successful raider who brings back wealth and wealth is frequently computed in head of cattle. 

Redistribution was other method through wealth could be transferred to others. In tribal pre-state societies whatever was gathered or hunted was collected and then re-distributed through the tribal chief. This system accorded stability to the system
and prevented its members from engaging in futile and sterile competition with each other. Throughout all societies and social systems, men have devised ways and means to control, appropriate and then distribute surplus. Islam conceptualized zakaat; Hinduism elaborated upon dana and dakshina; the Church imposed the tithes and the modern state system regulates itself through an elaborate and well-structured tax system.
References:

4. Ibid. Pg. 128
9. Ibid. Pg 523
10. Ibid. Pg 698