
Courting the Amateur Photographer : The Contested Worlds of Advertising in Mid-century India

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CHAPTER 5

COURTING THE AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHER

The Contested Worlds of Advertising
in Mid-century India

Sabeena Gadihoke

This chapter begins with a small detail from an interview recorded more than two decades ago. In the 1940s, a keen photographer was unexpectedly faced with a problem. After moving to the city of Calcutta, Debalina Mazumdar had always relied on the local branch of the German company Agfa to process her pictures.¹ When the Second World War broke out, it was rumoured that the owner of the branch had links with the Nazi state. He disappeared overnight or, as it was said, he might have been placed in an internment camp. The Agfa store became ‘enemy property’, and the materials of the branch were auctioned off. My primary focus was on a textual reading of Mazumdar’s photographs at the time. Today when I seek to explore the politics of advertising during the Cold War, the same story needs revisiting and magnification. Mazumdar’s memory about this relatively insignificant event in Calcutta should be seen against the backdrop of a less acknowledged history of intrigue, suspicion and a global struggle to control markets on

¹ Advertisements for Agfa India Limited mention a Calcutta branch as 31 Chittaranjan Avenue.



Figure 5.1 Negative Jacket from Liberty Photo Flash using Kodak Advertisement, Bhuj-Kutch, Early 1950s

Source: From the personal collection of the author. Courtesy Eastman Kodak Company.

the part of photographic companies such as the American giant Kodak Eastman, Fuji from Japan and those that originated in Germany and were affected during the war such as Agfa, Gevaert, Deko (advertised as deko), Zeiss and later ORWO. This cast a long shadow over operations all over the world and continued for decades after (Diecke 2019). Closer home, these transnational firms were locked in a keen contest to target non-professional photographers like Mazumdar. My chapter seeks to interrogate pragmatic imperatives to market cameras, film and paper during the 1950s and early 1960s. Exploring strategies and campaigns in print, I examine how compulsions of trade and infrastructure intersected with this publicity. In the absence of records and histories of technologies of

the time, the chapter speculates on how advertising as a form of cultural production may have been responding to the politics of the home and outside through the language of amateur photography. Seen against this backdrop, the presence of Mazumdar becomes a recurring trope to explore consumer choices, the transnational nature of the market and its diverse products and the female figure as both the object and subject of amateur photography at this moment.

GLOBAL AND LOCAL BATTLES

It is important to bear in mind that in an analogue moment, film and photographic paper were as integral to the practice of photography as the sales of cameras. The travel and flow of these material artefacts were always determined by economic and political compulsions. During the war, Josephine Diecke (2019) has described battles to control patents and secret formulas for film stock. As the 'original' colour stock emerging in Germany, Agfacolor was always seen to have softer and more 'natural' hues as compared to Kodak because of its sensitivity to pastel tints (Dudley 1979: 46; Narwekar 2017). But the Second World War and its ideological agendas gave this competition a different spin. Agfacolor was typed as a 'socialist' method since the Soviets and Czechs seemed to be the most likely to use it (Dudley 1979: 46). When the war ended, Agfacolor technology was treated as a kind of 'war loot' as the allies confiscated and handed over patents for the Agfacolor process to competitors such as Kodak and Ilford (Dudley 1979: 48; Narwekar 2017). They also divided the Agfa plant with its original headquarters in Wolfen into two branches in East Germany (the German Democratic Republic or GDR) and West Germany (the Federal Republic of Germany or FRG). In 1964, Agfa in East Germany evolved into a new company that manufactured colour film called ORWO (ORiginal WOlfen). There were unexpected collaborations that continued across the Iron Curtain. For instance, the origins of Deko film could be traced to Kodak despite being a 'socialist' concern. Deko film advertisements in India in the 1960s mention that it was a product of the VEB Photochemische Werk (Photo chemical works) Köpenick. The VEB photo chemical works in Berlin was sold to Kodak in 1927 and then seized by the Nazis as 'enemy property' in 1941. After the war,

the factory resumed operation under the name of Kodak because of Kodak's brand and commercial viability even though it was now located in the Soviet controlled quarter (2013).² The same was true for Agfa in India. A close look at certain advertisements for Agfacolor film reveals that both the branches, in Wolfen in the East and in Leverkusen in the West, continued to share the same space in print even two decades after the war.³

The advantages gained by the allies were reflected in India after the war. An editorial note for the photography journal *Camera in the Tropics* (1946) remarks on an anticipated boom in the industry and the advantages for those who did not have to make 'readjustments'.⁴

Many well-known manufacturers of photographic goods have begun supplying smaller retailers. Many of these manufacturers still have to fulfil government contracts and others are putting the finishing touches to the reconversion of their plants. The ending of the war caught many industries off their balance; but the British and American photographic industries are more fortunately placed because they have less of a reconversion problem.

Despite this disadvantage, Agfa was improved after the war. It was still one of the fastest colour films available even though it still needed to be consumed quickly in the hot and humid climate of the tropics where the hues faded away swiftly.⁵ In contrast to Kodak where film needed to be sent to Bombay for processing, Agfa branches were more easily accessible everywhere.⁶ Japanese-made roll films were also sold in India like the one produced by Fuji and Sakura film manufactured by Konika, besides others such as Deko, Geva and ORWO.⁷ In a detailed history of the 19th and early 20th

²Under soviet management, the name was changed to FEB or the Fotochemische Werke Köpenick in 1956. Available at <https://digitalcosmonaut.com/2013/veb-fotochemische-werke-berlin/> (accessed on 24 August 2020).

³In 1962, the same advertisement for Agfa colour film in India promoted both CT 18 film made by Agfa AG Leverkusen in the FRG as well as UT 16 film made by VEB Agfa Wolfen in the GDR. See *Illustrated Weekly*, 11 June, 28.

⁴I am grateful to Sukanya Baskar for sharing scans of the magazine with me.

⁵Conversation with veteran press photographer N. K. Sareen.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Founded in 1873, Konika was older than Kodak by a decade.

centuries ‘techno-bazaar’, Sudhir Mahadevan suggests that the ‘Kodak moment’ that popularized photography in the West did not have the same resonance in India. This was because photography as a hobby was an upper class pursuit. A patronage-based studio practice prevailed.⁸ Mahadevan (2015: 112) does imply though that the market for amateur photography—at least among those who could afford it—was dominated by Kodak. This is no doubt because the company was perhaps the major player at this moment. Half a century later, print advertisements, especially for film, point to a different scenario with several other contenders targeting the non-professional photographer. By the late 1940s, there were advertisements for Russian, Czech, Italian and German-made cameras such as the Ferania, the Praktina, the Lubitel 2, the Ensign and the popular Rolleiflex and Rolleicord. I will suggest that while Kodak may have ruled markets for still photography in North America and Europe, the situation could have been different in India with major competition from companies in East and West Germany for film at least, in particular Agfa, its affiliate later, Gevaert headquartered in Belgium, Deko and, eventually, ORWO. A comparison of advertisements reveals that the prices of basic competing camera models for Kodak and Agfa at this time were almost the same.⁹ As we will see later, well-known camera dealer in Bombay, Ambalal Patel, was determined to challenge the dominance of Kodak by exploring other options during his travels abroad. He is reported to have said, ‘In this country when you say “film”, people immediately think Kodak. I am going to break that monopoly’ (Narwekar, 2017). In the 1950s and 1960s, Agfa may even have had an edge over Kodak because the company had domestic production units in Baroda and Bombay (Bhalerao 2011). In Baroda, the New India Industries Ltd manufactured photographic papers and popular box cameras such as the Synchron Box and Gevabox. The company had another unit in Bombay where photo paper was cut from ready-made rolls imported from Agfa, Germany. In the mid-1960s, Agfa India Private Limited that manufactured films, paper, cameras and movie stock merged with Allied Photographics India Limited (APL) that had marketed Gevaert products (Gevaert was originally a Belgian company) from

⁸ Also see Pinney (2008).

⁹ The Kodak Brownie Model D and the Agfa Synchron Box cameras were both just under ₹30 in the early 1960s. The Gevabox camera was priced at ₹38 in 1965.

the 1940s to form Agfa-Gevaert India Limited. In contrast to Kodak that focused on domestic photography during this moment, these companies targeted both the home and the world outside occupied by amateur photographers. As we will see, their advertisements seem to address national and international events too.

THE CONSTRAINTS OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE IN PRINT

Ironically, it was still rare to have photographic advertisements in print till the 1960s, even for companies advertising photographic products, because of the difficulties of reproduction (Chaudhuri 2014: 82). Instead, a ‘photographic imagination’ was created through a drawing or very finely etched sketches that resembled photographs. An artist used a mould on a photograph to create hybrid images that were in fact photographs as well as sketches (Pereira 1999: 90). This was called a scraperboard or quarter tone technique. We will return to the effect of this on photographic advertising later but one such example is a campaign for the multi-national oil company Burmah Shell with the tag line ‘In India’s Life and Part of It’. The advertisements used sketches of women from different parts of the country with homogenizing typologies about their defining ‘features’. For instance, the ‘Prabhu woman’ was described as ‘handsome of feature, neat in appearance and polished in manner’.¹⁰ The copy noted that Burmah Shell was in constant touch with these communities. ‘They have come to rely upon us, and we in turn are proud to serve them.’ The sketches drew upon the idea of photograph even if they were not lens-based images. Classifying others such as the Thakur girl, the Lambada woman, the Oriya woman or the Andhra peasant, this series seemed uncannily similar to an earlier colonial photographic survey called the ‘The People of India (1868–1875)’.¹¹ This was not surprising given the origins of Shell as a British-owned company that needed to adjust to a changed political scenario. Ravi Vasudevan (2012: 119)

¹⁰ *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 13 December 1953.

¹¹ The infamous eight volume *People of India* was commissioned by the first Viceroy Lord Canning to photographically document the ethnic tribes and castes in the colony. The unspoken agenda of this project was to place unfamiliar subjects under scrutiny and surveillance.



You might forget ... but 'Kodak' snapshots won't!

Baby's first unsteady steps, that chubby smile... how live and real they seem today! How sad that in years to come they will be so hard to remember... Will you have a picture to remind you? Or will you only wish you had! Capture their magic now, with an inexpensive 'Kodak' camera... and make these happy times live for ever!

A new 'Kodak' camera costs only Rs. 17/6
 Ready to use - you just aim and press the button! Eight beautiful pictures on every roll of film.
 Strong carrying case. Rs. 1/4

'Brownie' 127 camera
 Perfect for use - you just aim and press the button! Eight beautiful pictures on every roll of film.
 Strong carrying case. Rs. 1/4

'Brownie' 127 camera
 Simply reliable, good-looking - no wonder these are the most popular cameras in the world. In a roll of film. Model C. Rs. 24/-

Model D and **E** give even greater scope for making good pictures, including 'close-ups' of very little extra cost. Model E also makes very beautiful 'wide' shots.
 Model D - Rs. 25/-
 Model E - Rs. 26/-
 Carrying cases (Models C, D & E) extra - Rs. 2/-

Many others, too! There's a 'Kodak' camera to suit every pocket, every taste - the matter's up to the market. Ask your nearest Kodak dealer to help you choose yours!

'Kodak' film brings out the details

Whatever the light, whatever your subject, you can get an 'Kodak' film for the best possible rendering of every detail - from deep shadows to bright highlights. And when you buy a roll of 'Kodak' film, remember to buy an extra roll as a spare. You can't afford to miss the chance of a precious picture!



KODAK LTD
(Incorporated in England)
Bombay - Calcutta - Delhi - Madras

ORIIYA WOMAN

Hers is a land with a memorable past and a unique architectural heritage. Temples carved from sheer rock have earned Orissa's fame all over the world, and every community in the State still has its own ancient shrine. Of these, the most venerated is undoubtedly the temple of Jagannatha—Lord of the Universe—at Puri. Twenty miles to the north stands the Black Pagoda of Konark, with its huge carvings of lions, elephants, figures and thrones, scenes of battle and the chase.

The people of Orissa have known administrative upheaval and have faced famine and drought. Yet they remain a quiet, modest race that clings tenaciously to its religious traditions and simple way of life.

We are in constant touch with the many communities in every corner of India. They have come to rely on us, and we in turn are proud to serve them.



**BURMAH-SHELL...
IN INDIA'S LIFE AND PART OF IT**

Figure 5.2 Digital Grab of a Print Advertisement from the Burmah Shell Campaign featuring the 'Oriya Woman' from the *Illustrated Weekly of India*

Source: *Illustrated Weekly of India* (20 November 1953, 18). Burmah Shell and the Eastman Kodak Company.

Note: See the difference between the sketched advertisement from Burmah Shell and the photographic advertisement from Kodak above.

points out how the post-Independence publicity of Burmah Shell was predicated on a complex identification with nation building. This was true not just for Shell but many other firms like Kodak that were now faced with the prospect of acquiring 'an Indian soul' (Vasudevan 2012).

KODAK, DOMESTIC PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE EMERGENCE OF 'INDIAN' BODIES

Tracing a rich cultural history of Kodak Eastman from the late 19th century, Nancy Martha West (2000: xv) notes the possibility that a corporation may have 'taught modern American culture how to see,

to remember, and even to love'. Kodak's marketing of nostalgia for the past, particularly of pleasant domestic memories through the seemingly spontaneous snapshot, was standardized the world over. How was it deviating if at all from this template in India where it entered through a British subsidiary?¹² In her insightful analysis of different phases of Kodak advertisements in the English language newspaper the *Times of India* (TOI), Jennifer Orpana (2018) points out that early publicity of the company did not refer to the family. Instead, illustrated advertisements of the 1920s featured Kodak's mascot—the sketched figure of the modern white Kodak girl—in a striped dress. Orpana describes a series of adverts where the Kodak girl travelled unencumbered in the colony taking picturesque images of exotic terrain and people who were passive subjects for her gaze. There was a change in strategy during the war when the advertisements started to make reference to shortages of material. By the 1950s, Kodak aggressively targeted the affluent middle-class family that could afford a camera. It also presented a vision of the modern nuclear family with the father as the primary recorder of everyday events and occasions (Orpana 2018).

While Orpana has largely focused on illustrated advertisements that appeared in the newspaper, it is interesting to look at those that appeared in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (hereafter referred to as *the Illustrated Weekly* or *the Weekly*) and *Filmfare* which were also visual magazines published by the TOI group.¹³ With good paper and superior photogravure printing, one of the key attractions of the *Weekly* was its high-quality reproduction of photographs. This also made it one of the most preferred publications for advertising. Significantly, some of the sketched Kodak advertisements in the TOI described by Orpana had *identical photographic versions* in these magazines. For instance, during 1955–1956, the *Weekly* and *Filmfare* carried a series of staged vignettes using models. All the advertisements offered not one but two idealized moments of modern domestic life, performing a tableau of the nuclear family as well as the imagined snapshot that

¹² Kodak India had branches in Lahore, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

¹³ Published as a weekly edition by the TOI group of newspapers from 1880, the *Weekly* came into its own from 1923. Till the mid-1950s, it was distributed in India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon. *Filmfare* also published by the TOI carried photographs and articles about the Bombay film industry.

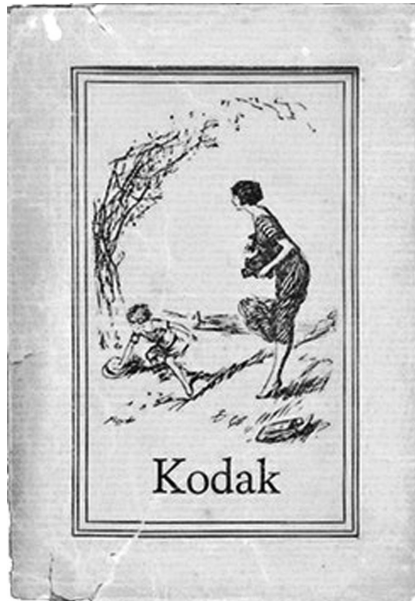


Figure 5.3 Negative Jacket of a Photo Studio Using a Sketch of the Kodak Girl, the 1950s

Source: Personal collection of the author. Courtesy Eastman Kodak Company.

would be clicked. The advertisements capitalized on the camera as a mnemonic aid and recording children as the most ‘natural’ of subjects was primary to many of them. In one, the father who wore Western attire photographed a little baby in his chair with his proud mother watching him: ‘Laugh over this years later—baby is unpredictable—True you cannot anticipate his next move but you can keep a Kodak camera handy, ready to capture such heart-warming moments forever.’¹⁴ While imagining the picture of the baby that would be captured forever, the advertisement drew attention to the gender dynamics within the family—the mother’s open hair but also how she stood slightly behind her husband, wearing a *bindi* and a carefully draped sari with *pallu* drawn around her waist. Another advertisement in the same series depicted a father

¹⁴ See the sketched version in the *TOI*, 27 May 1956, 7 and the photographic version in the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 29 April 1956, 14.

shooting his son leaving for his first day at school.¹⁵ The man with the camera was positioned between the mother and child so that readers could see both images—that of the possible frame taken by camera as well as the larger *mise-en-scene* as the father, distanced from the emotional drama of the moment, took pictures. The advertisement promised to capture the scared look on the child's face, his oversized clothes and shiny satchel as well as 'the air of confusion of the home' and the 'enchantment' of the moment. The third vignette did not have a child, but it featured a couple where conjugality was implied, with a reference to a home where a woman played a sitar.¹⁶ The woman's hair was tied back; she wore a sari, a *bindi* and what appears to be a *mangalsutra*—the sign of a married woman. The crouching man holding a Brownie camera in the background seemed captivated by her voice. The caption stated, 'The Melody lingers on in a "Kodak" snapshot' suggesting that photographs were not just visual substitutes for actual moments but could be triggers for more sensory experiences. With the same copy and positioning of characters as their sketched counterparts in the TOI, these vignettes draw our attention to an emerging material world of photographic advertising that would have involved not just art directors but actors and locations too. In all probability, the sketch may have been the template for actors (at times, the same ones) to perform their roles for these advertisements. In this case, all the details were almost the same including the positioning of the bodies except that the photographic advertisements had to address the question of race—the characters needed to look 'Indian' rather than being White as was true of most illustrated advertising of the time. This was partly true because most agencies at the time were British-owned concerns that made gradual shifts towards using 'local' models like with Brylcreem and Burmah Shell (Pereira 1999: 91–115).¹⁷

¹⁵ See the sketched version in the TOI, 27 November 1955, 13 and the photographic version in *Filmfare*, 25 May 1955. This must have appeared as part of the campaign in the *Weekly* too.

¹⁶ *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 5 February 1956, 14.

¹⁷ It is another matter that for long, the chemicals used to process colour film for many companies, including Kodak, was known to be adjusted according to Caucasian skin tones that did not adequately represent other kinds of faces (Winston 1995). Also see Roth (2009).



Figure 5.4 Printed Advertisement in the Times of India
 Source: Times of India (27 May 1956, 7) and Orpana (2018). Courtesy Eastman Kodak Company.



Figure 5.5 Digital Grab of a Printed Kodak Advertisement
 Source: Illustrated Weekly (29 April 1956, 14). Courtesy the Eastman Kodak Company.

There is little information accessible so far on Kodak in India except for the fact that the account was handled by the Indian subsidiary of J. W Thompson-Hindustan Thompson. In the absence of accessible records, one has to look obliquely for other kinds of clues. We know that Kodak campaigns in the USA were specially

commissioned to photographers like Edward Steichen and that he worked with non-professional actors asking them to emulate actual snapshots (Johnston 1997: 101). In India, we get hints from annuals of a professional body, the Commercial Advertising Guild from the 1950s that increasingly list the names of photographers and photo studios along with visualizers and art directors, who were clearly integral to the world of advertising. Brendon Pereira, an advertising professional, notes how the arrival of photography in the industry from the 1960s was seen as a threat to well-established artists (1999: 90). But photography did not make a smooth entry into the industry either because the camera demanded a different kind of regime of objects and bodies, clothes of the right colours depending upon whether the shoot was in monochrome or colour, as well as, props and actors who could emote (Pereira 1990). The sketch may have allowed agencies to circumvent not just the compulsions of printing but also travel and the need for models, locations, art direction or choreography. This might also explain the compulsion to recycle photographs. Kodak's use of a photograph of two sombre little Indian children huddled together used to advertise shortages during the Second World War ('Now That Film Is Scarce, Make the Most of It') was strangely incongruous when repeated a decade later with a different copy ('Happy Things You Want to Remember').¹⁸

While there was little knowledge about his association with Kodak, Edward Steichen, who was also the Director of Museum of Modern Art's (MOMA) Department of Photography in New York, was a recognized name among photographers in India because of his celebrated exhibition 'The Family of Man'.¹⁹ Advocating global solidarity after the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the show travelled all over the world during the Cold War and was displayed in six Indian cities under the cultural aegis of the United States Information Services.²⁰ The 'Family of Man' was widely criticized for its universal approach to poverty, race, gender and class, and for ignoring the specificities of the South. In India, however, it inspired local photographers and even an exhibition in Bombay called 'Images of India' organized by the magazine *Marg* in 1960 for

¹⁸ *Times of India*, 21 December 1942, 10; *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 13 December 1953.

¹⁹ *The Family of Man* was exhibited at the MOMA, New York, from 24 January–8 May 1955.

²⁰ The show travelled to Bombay, Calcutta, Trivandrum, Agra, New Delhi and Madras.

which there was an enthusiastic response of over 135,000 entries from across the country (Chinwala 1960). Photo competitions for amateurs and professionals had always been part of the culture of photography through magazines, salons, clubs and photographic societies, but the *Marg* show was unprecedented. While continuing to emphasize domestic photography, Kodak tried to capitalize on this new interest with a set of advertisements targeting amateur photographers from the 1960s (Orpana 2018). But this market was already being tapped by others.

COURTING THE AMATEUR

A year after the 'Family of Man' had completed touring Indian cities, APL carried a campaign using photographs taken by amateurs to promote the German-made Zeiss Ikon range of cameras.²¹ Like the Burmah Shell pictures, these romanticized vignettes depicted toiling but happy young women 'of the land'. Telling the story of 'India and its people', the photographs were a euphoric post-Independence version of the 'People of India'. They were also in conversation with both the pictorial aesthetics popular with intrepid amateurs at the time and the documentary images showcased by the 'Family of Man'.²² Unlike Kodak, they did not focus on the family or the sketched image and instead reproduced realist photographic images. One advertisement that used a photograph of a hard-working but happy peasant woman threshing wheat by J. V. Shivarama Sastry was titled 'A Picture of Happiness', while another by P. C. Patel depicted a sun-rimmed woman playing with a little child against a thatch hut expressing 'the depth and beauty of a mother's love'.²³ The campaign added value by using images of well-known practitioners like A. L. Syed.²⁴ Syed's low-angle photograph of a tribal woman with a gleaming body in one advertisement was similar to other images taken by Sunil Janah who photographed for publications of the Communist Party of India

²¹ The Zeiss factory at Dresden was damaged during the war and like Agfa the company was divided into competing operations in both zones.

²² A brief perusal of the pages devoted to amateurs in the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and the contents pages of *Camera in the Tropics* throws light on these aesthetics.

²³ *Filmfare*, 25 April 1958, 52; *Filmfare*, 24 July 1958, 26.

²⁴ *Filmfare*, 28 February 1958, 27.

and the *Illustrated Weekly of India*. Both photographers had access to second-hand copies of *Life*, but their primary references came from illustrated propaganda magazines such as *Span*, *Soviet Land* and *Soviet Life* that circulated widely promoting their own forms of ‘cultural conversions’ during the Cold War (Zecchini 2019). *Soviet Land* was translated into 13 Indian languages in India and some of the photographs in this campaign echoed its sunny images of the rural countryside and happy working-class families.²⁵ In an interesting ‘double promotion’, all these advertisements for the Zeiss camera asked consumers to use Gevapan and Gevacolor roll film. Since both companies were German (Gevaert by virtue of being an Agfa affiliate), there is a possibility of a collaboration between them. This campaign also draws attention to the fact that photographic film was being marketed as forcefully as cameras. Many Kodak advertisements for cameras described earlier had urged the consumer to use only their own film. These persistent reminders, such as ‘For Best Results Use “Kodak Film”’; ‘Kodak Film Brings Out the Details’; ‘Don’t Risk Running Out of Film—Ask Your Kodak Dealer for Two Rolls, One for Use and One for a Spare’, suggest that consumers like Debalina Mazumdar may have been using Kodak cameras with film from other companies too.²⁶ Aggressive advertising for Geva and Agfa film seems to confirm this.

So far, I have described a textual terrain of advertising. It was equally important for sales to promote the material culture and infrastructural terrain for popular photography. Companies could take advantage of the fact that there was almost no training for photography. An entire campaign for Agfa cameras used photographs taken by amateurs and credited them by name with the technical details of their camera settings, much like a tutorial.

Kodak, Geva and Agfa offered prizes to photographs made from their own film and paper, and made announcements regarding forthcoming photo shows and competitions. Some advertisements for Gevapan film in the mid-1950s even announced a radio

²⁵ *Span* started publication in the early 1960s and was printed by the US Embassy in India while *Soviet Land* was one of the many propaganda magazines distributed in India from the Soviet Union. Available at <https://www.thecitizen.in/index.php/en/NewsDetail/index/9/9945/A-Generation-Fed-On-Misha-Sovietland> (accessed on 24 August 2020).

²⁶ Her sister Manobina Roy, also a photographer, was using Agfa too. This is indicated on the reverse of many of her prints.

PHOTOGRAPH BY A. L. SYED ON GEVAPAN 33

Young woman of the land

This is a picture that tells its own story of India and its people. And just imagine how you would enjoy taking pictures like this with your own Zeiss Ikon camera loaded with Gevaert film.

What a pity that the present rigid import restrictions have made cameras and photographic films so scarce—in fact, now they will become rarities! Let us at least hope that these restrictions on India's most popular hobby will come to an end in the not too distant future and that you will then become the proud owner of a Zeiss Ikon camera with all the Gevaert film you require!

ZEISS IKON SUPER IKONTA IV

You simply cannot go wrong with this 2 1/4" x 3 1/2" and 1/2" camera in form and styling. It's light, compact and built to last with the finest German craftsmanship. The camera is loaded with the best of its kind—Gevaert film. It's a Zeiss Ikon camera with all the Gevaert film you require!

GEVAERT

ALLIED PHOTOGRAPHS PRIVATE LIMITED
22, Park Road, Bangalore 1.

PHOTOGRAPH BY A. L. SYED ON GEVAPAN 33

Young woman of the land

Here is a picture that tells its own story of India and its people. And just imagine how you would enjoy taking pictures like this with your own Zeiss Ikon camera loaded with Gevaert film.

What a pity that the present rigid import restrictions have made cameras and photographic films so scarce—in fact, now they will become rarities! Let us at least hope that these restrictions on India's most popular hobby will come to an end in the not too distant future and that you will then become the proud owner of a Zeiss Ikon camera with all the Gevaert film you require!

GEVAERT

Figure 5.6 Digital Grab of a Printed Advertisement for Zeiss Super Ikonta IV Camera Using a Photograph Taken by A. L. Syed Shot on Gevapan 33 manufactured by Gevaert

Source: *Filmfare* (28 February 1958, 47). Courtesy Gevaert.

FOR SUCH TOP-QUALITY PICTURES!

GREAT CAMERAS AT MODEST PRICES!

The world's most popular pocket size in 3 1/2" x 4 1/2"—and the world's most popular camera in this size having to the Isolette name!

Isolette camera combine the most desired features: German precision craftsmanship, highest quality color—correct, light lens, elegant shape, sturdy 50-year construction at the most desirable prices.

ISOLETTE CAMERAS

THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR FOLDING CAMERAS—WITH THE FAMOUS ISOLETTE

Agfa Distributors in India: **AGFA INDIA** Pvt. Ltd.
1957, Indian Capital Hill (N.W.), New Delhi, India.

“My Pet”
by Dr. M. Kanikar, amateur.
1/100 sec. at f-16 on Agfa Isoapan
ISS film with yellow filter.
Agfa Portriga Rapid paper.

Figure 5.7 Digital Grab of a Printed Advertisement

Source: *Filmfare* (28 February 1958, 20). Courtesy Agfa India Pvt Ltd.

show—APLs ‘Photo Fantasy’ competition on Radio Ceylon every Friday on 31–49 metre bands. They distributed free booklets on how to take better pictures and published advertisements and photographs sent by amateurs in these glossy publications. An enthusiast notes:

The (Agfa Photo Gallery) magazine, though free, was so much in demand that amateurs often were disappointed to find copies sold out at photo dealers. To keep up with the tremendous demand, Agfa India Ltd announced that readers could have all 12 issues every year by sending the publisher an amount of Rs 1 to cover postage charges. (Bhalerao 2011)

Kodak also produced its own illustrated booklet titled ‘Making Pictures with Light’ priced at ₹1. In 1964, the *Illustrated Weekly* carried a photo spread on a photo competition titled ‘Life in India’.²⁷ This competition was held at Kodak Hall in Bombay which presumably hosted many such shows.²⁸ All these companies sought to elevate themselves from being perceived as just commercial interests with claims to promote ‘good photography’ and shape ‘pleasant memories’.

In an insightful essay, Kamal A. Munir and Nelson Philips (2005) draw attention to the discursive strategies used by Kodak in North America and Europe. Kodak encouraged people to put pictures in albums and separated the process of taking pictures from processing so that the company could promote both cameras and film. They also created the charismatic figure of the Kodak Girl. Despite emphasizing the modern ‘father photographer’ in India, the margins of most advertisements always carried a sketch of a woman with a camera. Dressed in a striped sari with a bindi, this ‘local’ Kodak woman had a more mature appearance. Mindful of cultural sensitivity, she even covered her head that may have enabled a stronger local sales presence. The Kodak woman was to be found outside photo studios as a life-sized cardboard cut-out or on the jacket covers of local studios including in small towns.

²⁷ *Illustrated Weekly*, 19 April 1964, 36–37.

²⁸ In all eventuality, this was located on Hornby Road (now called D. N. Road).



Figure 5.8 Digital Grab of a Printed Advertisement Announcing a Competition by Gevaert in the *Illustrated Weekly*

Source: *Illustrated Weekly* (15 January 1956, 50). Courtesy Gevaert.

The existence of skilled amateurs like Debalina Mazumdar and her twin sister Manobina Roy suggests that the Kodak woman resonated with a hidden constituency of women. Kodak may have divided roles—pitching the taking of photographs as a male activity and archiving family memories as a feminized activity but by the 1960s the figure of the woman photographer was difficult to contain within the family as she started to emerge in sketched and photographic advertisements for all kinds of cameras and in outdoor spaces. Agfa capitalized on the appeal to women with its Rangefinder and the popular Click III camera while other locally made cameras like the Genette or the Bunny camera also depicted young women as users.²⁹

²⁹ The Genette was manufactured by the Central Camera Company Private Limited in Bombay, while the Bunny was manufactured by Camera Works Private Limited.

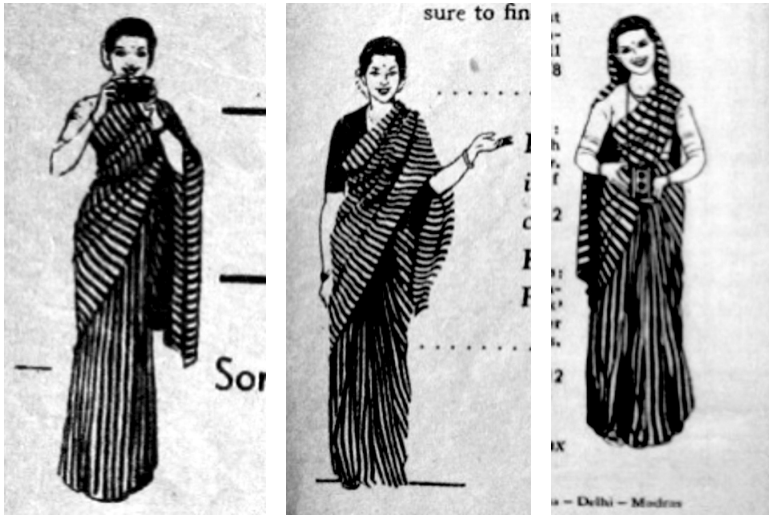


Figure 5.9 Digital Grabs of the 'Indian' Kodak Woman Who Appeared on the Margins of Printed Kodak Advertisements for Cameras, Accessories and Film

Source: Eastman Kodak Company.



Figure 5.10 Digital Grab of a Print Advertisement for the Bunny Camera from the Illustrated Weekly

Source: Illustrated Weekly (1 January 1967, 4).

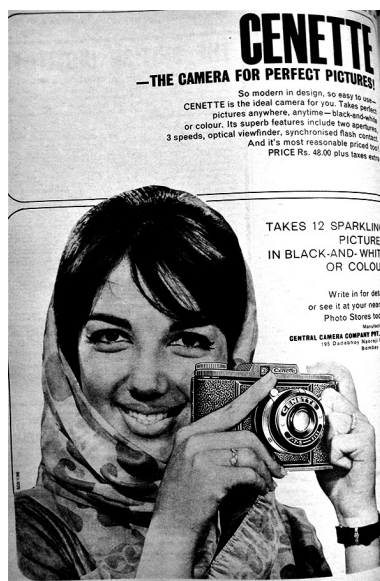


Figure 5.11 Digital Grab from a Print Advertisement for the Genette Camera in the Mid-1960s

Source: *Filmfare*.

Munir and Phillips (2005) point out how Kodak conceived other innovative ways to promote photography in the West, for instance, they printed approaching scenic vistas on billboards so that users on long drives would take more pictures on vacation. In India, Kodak advertisements with travelling families were rare but by the mid-1950s, a full-fledged imagination of national and global travel was emerging in print. There were advertisements for travel by air to global destinations, the railways, hill stations, national parks, guesthouses, resorts and travel agencies.³⁰ Products such as Gold Flake cigarettes and the Ambassador car also depicted the use of the camera during travel. From the mid-1950s, advertisements for Gevabox and Agfa Synchro Box cameras appealed to affective experiences outside of domesticity such as romance, travel and vacations. ‘Girlfriends Galore’ was the title of one Agfa advertisement for the Isolette I folding camera with a sketch of a

³⁰ Ranjani Mazumdar (2011) has described an explosion of national and global travel in Bombay cinema of the 1960s. An imagination of travel in print preceded this by the mid-1950s.



Figure 5.12 Digital Grab of a Printed Advertisement for the Isola Camera in *Blitz*

Source: *Blitz* (20 July 1957, 3). Courtesy Agfa India Pvt Ltd.

Caucasian man at the beach surrounded by women in bathing suits while another for the Isola depicted a woman in a sari and camera shooting a portrait of a man (presumably 'Indian') declaring 'I Shot him because I loved him'.³¹

This interest in the outdoors was reflected in the works of Mazumdar and Roy. While both sisters primarily photographed their own families, they also took many pictures outside the home especially during festivals or holidays. This wider ambit of options for the amateur was reflected in an advertisement for photographic paper to be manufactured at the new Agfa factory at Mulund in Greater Bombay that promised the possibility of taking photographs of 'dances, festivals, customs, sports, monuments, great men, scenery and of course your own family'.³² The 'great man'

³¹ *Blitz*, 20 July 1957, 3; 10 August 1957, 8.

³² *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 4 February 1962, 34.

in this advertisement was Prime Minister Nehru. This was not a coincidence because it was important to respond to domestic as well as international circumstances that could have a bearing on markets. My next example refers to one such crisis that posed the first major challenge to Nehru.

CRISIS WITHIN AND CRISIS WITHOUT

Crisis and the shortages that affected the supplies of photographic materials were not new. The copy of advertisements constantly made reference to the uncertain conditions that made the supply chain in their markets vulnerable. If Kodak repeatedly told photographers to conserve film during the Second World War because of diversions, in the early 1950s Agfa advised photographers about shortages created because of the currency crisis and the lack of foreign exchange in the country: 'Let us at least hope that restrictions on India's most popular hobby will come to an end in the not too distant future and you will then become the proud owner of a Zeiss Icon camera with all the film you need'.³³

Let us see how Agfa responded to the first major crisis to affect the newly independent nation state. India's war with China in 1962 was short but decisive in terms of its devastating effect on the morale of the army and its foot soldiers at the front. It had been a colossal defeat. The war lasted only one month and one day from 20 October to 21 November 1962 and this was followed by all kinds of advertisements directed towards 'the service of the nation' through 1963. These ranged from announcements for donating bangles to purchasing gold bonds and other austerity measures. Cashing in on the patriotic sentiments for the Indian jawans (soldiers) who had been ill prepared for the extreme conditions in which the battle was fought, Agfa carried a set of photographic advertisements during the month of July 1963. The series promoted the Synchro Box, a cheap and easy-to-use low-end domestic use camera. Shot like spontaneous snapshots the adverts documented civilian efforts for the soldier in which Agfa cameras would play a significant role. One of them featured a soldier (If Your Neighbour Is Away at the Front) sitting in his uniform with gun holding a photograph of a

³³ *Filmfare*, 28 February 1958, 27.

woman, perhaps his wife.³⁴ ‘What’s His Family Doing?’ asked the copy. Another showed two women knitting for the soldiers and in a third a smiling woman donated blood (by implication for the soldier).³⁵ These ‘home front activities’ were to be circulated to not just the soldier at the border but in newspapers, college magazines and to friends. By now, reports had come in of casualties from the border and press photographs of the bodies of several soldiers found frozen had appeared in the newspapers of the time. These more acceptable and reassuring images about the efforts of civil society could be circulated publicly in print. Drawing from the heightened feelings for the soldier, they seemed to give hope to the middle-class citizen with a continued fantasy of helping win wars in the future. This campaign domesticated the war using the language of amateur photography.

While photographs used in this series no doubt made the experience of the war effort seem more ‘real’ and immediate, the mise en scene of these tableaux was flat and uninspiring. Moreover, they were still directed at the domestic user. My last example returns to a more imaginative campaign of sketched images published a few years earlier that appeared to address larger anxieties regarding the networks and infrastructure critical to the presence of photographic companies in India. In work on colonial Nigeria, Brian Larkin (2008) points out how media technologies represent modes of leisure and cultural ambitions. While they could be seen as infrastructures, in that they facilitate and direct a transnational flow of ideas, the existence and place of media technologies is determined by infrastructure that is both concrete and intangible (2008: 2). This could include transportation, roads, telecommunication, fibre optics and electricity but also state policy, urban planning or other forms of cultural expression such as the knowledge of a local language. While the campaigns I have described so far incorporated the textual language of amateur photography, the imports of cameras and accessories to India were highly dependent on networks and government policies that affected trade. A series of three sketched advertisements from Agfa India Private Limited that were printed between September and December 1959 seem to

³⁴ *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 14 July 1963, 68.

³⁵ *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 21 July 1963, 20.

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© 1963

WHAT'S HIS FAMILY DOING?

If your neighbour is away at the front, why not take lively, informal snaps of members of his family, for them to send on to him? He will be happy to have the latest news-in-pictures of his family and know that they are doing well.

All you need is an inexpensive Agfa Synchro Box Camera (Rs. 36 plus local taxes). So dependable, so easy to use. Sold everywhere.

Agfa

AGFA INDIA LIMITED
BOMBAY • NEW DELHI • CALCUTTA • MADRAS

KNITTING FOR THE JAWANS?

Spread the message with Agfa photograph

- ◆ take snaps of such activities on the home front
- ◆ send snaps to your friends
- ◆ publish snaps in your local newspaper or college magazine
- ◆ enclose snaps when writing to jawans

All you need is an inexpensive Agfa Synchro Box Camera (Rs. 36 plus local taxes). So dependable, so easy to use. Sold everywhere.

AGFA INDIA LIMITED BOMBAY • NEW DELHI • CALCUTTA • MADRAS

Figure 5.13 Digital Grabs of Printed Agfa Advertisements from the *Illustrated Weekly*

Source: *Illustrated Weekly* (14 July 1963, 68; 21 July 1963, 20). Courtesy Agfa India Pvt Ltd.

refer to these conditions which were critical for commerce. In the first advertisement, three smart young women scout Indian bazaars to study oriental fashion and handlooms.³⁶ A closer look reveals a background of cargo being unloaded from a ship. Clearly, transport was critical to not just the export of cloth but to the imports of film stock to India as well. In the next sketch, Franz Shortz from the University of Hamburg visits India after doing his honours in Indology.³⁷ Again, we see a line drawing of a ship and plane above him that would presumably be used to carry tourists like him to India who would in turn take photographs.³⁸ We are told that Franz would encourage other tourists from Germany to visit India after seeing his snapshots while the young women would promote the exports of Indian textiles. In contrast to these two advertisements that depicted the global travel of White people, the third sketch in this series featured an Indian couple, the Swaminadhans who were visiting Egypt to explore markets in the Middle East for exports.³⁹ This advertisement did not refer to transport. Instead, it highlighted world friendship with the icon of a globe and it depicted Mrs Swaminadhan photographing the Sphinx. The three advertisements made a mandatory mention about the range of Agfa products but the copy in all three advertisements seemed to emphasize the ‘soft’ investment in global ties and friendship that had an impact on trade.

It might be useful here to examine India’s diplomatic relations at this moment, particularly with Germany. During the Cold War, India had defence agreements with the FRG that supplied second-hand aircraft to the country. Although ties with the GDR took longer to establish, a trade mission was established in India in 1954.⁴⁰ This may have aided East German companies that had been adversely affected during the war. For instance, Josephine Diecke points out how a bilateral trade agreement between India and the GDR benefitted ORWO film in the late 1960s. India did

³⁶ *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 6 September 1959, 14.

³⁷ *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 4 October 1959, 22.

³⁸ According to N. K Sareen, Agfa was preferred by tourists as it needed to be consumed within six months.

³⁹ *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 6 December 1959, 26.

⁴⁰ Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/india-and-germany-essay1.pdf> (accessed on 24 August 2020).



Figure 5.14 Digital Grab of a Printed Agfa India Advertisement
Source: *Illustrated Weekly* (6 September 1959, 14). Courtesy Agfa India Pvt Ltd.



Figure 5.15 Digital Grab of a Printed Agfa India Advertisement
Source: *Illustrated Weekly* (6 December 1959, 26). Courtesy Agfa India Pvt Ltd.

not have foreign exchange, but there was an agreement between the two countries based on barter. India sold coffee, tea and other natural products to East Germany in exchange for cheaper raw stock from ORWO that was used by the film industry (Diecke 2019). There were other local players involved in these flows of goods. A close look at the fine print of advertisements reveals how concerns like the Central Camera Company Private Limited and Patel India Private Limited based in Bombay were the sole distributors of certain imported and locally produced cameras and film.⁴¹ Photographer and entrepreneur Ambalal Patel also known as A. J. Patel probably had links with both these establishments.⁴² Besides owning the Central Camera Company Private Limited, the enterprising Patel also ran a studio called Photo Central as well as the popular journal for professional and amateur photographers and filmmakers that had been founded by him in 1940 called *Camera in the Tropics*.⁴³ Looking through print advertisements, it is evident that Patel was marketing everything from cameras and accessories, roll films, chemicals and even enlargers. The firm also seems to have had a monopoly over selling the popular Stereoscope (Viewfinder) as well as photographic products from the GDR such as Agfa, Deko, ORWO and Zeiss. As mentioned earlier, the cosmopolitan Ambalal Patel is known to have travelled abroad to explore alternatives to Kodak. The terms of engagement of these firms and others like them as well as histories of trade and the political climate that impacted upon the imports of camera equipment needs far greater exploration in subsequent research.

⁴¹ Central Camera Company advertised a range of cameras and also announced sales at discounted prices, while Patel India Private Limited distributed locally produced cameras such as the Argus, Ajoy, the Sure Shot and the Snapix. There were other establishments like the Cine Foto Laboratories India in Matunga with a branch in North Vincent Road that offered a range of photographic services from repairs to sales, processing, printing and enlarging. Cine Foto sold Kodak, Agfa, Ilford Selo, Gevaert, Ansco, as well as Zeiss Ikon and Voigtlander cameras (*Camera in the Tropics* 1950). AMA Limited were the sole distributors of the Ferrania Elioflex 2.

⁴² The address of Patel India was listed as 190 Hornby Road and that of the Central Camera Company was listed as 195 Hornby Road. In one advertisement, there is a reference to Central Camera Company being the Bombay dealer of Patel India (*Illustrated Weekly of India*, 20 March 1955, 5).

⁴³ Ambalal Patel had close links with the film industry. The advertisements for Photo Central often featured glamorous models and film stars like Begum Para (*Camera in the Tropics* 1951).

I would like to conclude with a discussion of the curious appearance of Egypt in the third advertisement. This campaign appeared four years after the Bandung conference in Indonesia. Held in April 1955, the meeting was attended by 29 newly independent states from the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Prime Minister Nehru and President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt were major figures at Bandung where, as the 'Third World', they collectively condemned the cultural imperialism and racism of the West and expressed concern about the deepening fissures created by the Cold War. Atreyee Gupta (2015) notes how the Non-Aligned Movement in the way it is known now would only culminate by 1961, but the intervening years were decisive for the relationship between India and Egypt (2015: 35). This was also a moment when Nehru's prominent role at Bandung was looked upon with great suspicion by the USA. The arrival of the 'Family of Man' in India a year later may have been no accident and an effort to court India through US cultural propaganda (Gupta 2015). Could this campaign for 'world friendship' and the presence of the Swaminathan's in Egypt be obliquely referring to some of these developments?

In this speculative chapter, I have tried to interrogate the mid-century marketing strategies of transnational camera and film companies by looking for clues through photographic and sketched advertisements. In the absence of histories of trade, I suggest that print advertising might reveal ways in which firms such as Agfa, Kodak and Gevaert competed for the attention of the non-professional photographer. The chapter began with an anecdote about a skilled amateur photographer. Debalina Mazumdar may have used Agfa film, but she remained loyal to Kodak too suggesting that the discerning consumer may have made more informed and autonomous choices impervious to the heightened pitch of advertising during the Cold War. I have also tried to suggest that German companies divided by the War may have continued to provide substantial competition to Kodak in India. There is a strong possibility that companies such as Agfa, Deko and ORWO were the commercial beneficiaries of India's distrust of the USA during the Cold War. Significant overlaps notwithstanding, each company targeted the amateur practitioner, and their advertising strategies offer insights into a still elusive textual and material

world of popular photography. If Kodak sought to re-imagine the family space through staged vignettes of domesticity, Agfa and Gevaert used the language of realist documentary and pictorialism favoured among amateurs to highlight the land and people. They also responded in their campaigns to national and economic crisis as well as international events that may have impacted upon their presence in India. Some of these advertisements indicate other emerging narratives—of travel, trade and tourism; and the presence of the woman photographer—an invisible history that has still to be uncovered. Given the practical compulsions for printing, the sketch, I suggest, may have offered greater possibilities for these articulations. In the absence of available sources, tracking advertisements through this grainy archive from the past could allow us an entry into not just representation but the politics, history and material practice of media technologies of the time.

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