

THE CHANGING VOGUE OF CALENDAR ART AMONG THE MIDDLE CLASS IN URBAN INDIA

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Abstract: This paper attempts to understand the perception of the new middle class urbanites towards printed calendars and their varied motifs in the current zeitgeist of smartphones and digital calendars. While the existing literature focus on contextual variance of calendar art motifs, they broadly overlook the 'volition' of consumers in the choice of calendars. This is so because the existing studies are mainly based on calendars received complementarily and not on calendars purchased out of one's choice. This research therefore explores calendar choice preference among the new middle class urbanites, who have a sufficient level of disposable income in their hands to buy calendars. The findings challenge the myth of calendar choice homogeneity among the middle class and the dominance of religious/traditional motifs in calendar markets reflect the choice of the consumers. The research observes the existence of differentiated calendar market catering to various segments of the middle class population. Calendar thus serves as utility items for the lower middle class and as beautification prop for the new middle and upper middle class. Additionally, while the lower middle class are found to be univore (use the traditional and religious calendars received complementarily) in their calendar use, the new and upper middle class are reported to be omnivore by virtue of heterogeneity of calendar choice varying in taste and style. Equipped with sufficient amount of disposable income in hands, the new middle class choose calendars that are maverick and their choice cannot be clubbed under a single genre. Stated differently, the calendar choice of the new middle class is abstract and unpredictable and is an amalgam of the classic and avant-garde art forms. The paper therefore adds to the homology thesis of Pierre Bourdieu by pointing out that there can be heteromorphic relation between people's class affiliation and aesthetic preference. This study was qualitative in nature; open ended interviews were conducted with the calendar designers, sellers, middle class urbanites in Lucknow City and content analysis of varied calendar motifs were undertaken.

Keywords: Calendar Art, New Middle Class, Cultural Capital

INTRODUCTION

Calendar is a ubiquitous household item. A calendar not only entails a series of pages displaying the days, weeks, months of a particular year, it also helps us to plan and schedule our activities. Calendar, in other words, is a 'standard temporal reference framework' that is shared and understood by all members of a society (Zerubavel, 1977). The calendar therefore informs us of institutionalized days for societal transactions such as economic/ceremonial exchange, reciprocity, and for practicing collective conscience. So, calendar is a basis for the formation of organic solidarity among people. The sociological understanding of time was posited by Durkheim (1965) in his discussion on, 'time common to a group' and Schutz and Luckmann (1973) in their deliberation on 'standard time' and these essays highlight the internalization of the concept of time through the process of socialization. In

fact, Daniel Dofoe's portrayal of Robinson Crusoe is an apt illustration of time existing as a social fact. For instance, the fact that Crusoe names the first person he meets on the island as Friday as an act of keeping track of the days of the week, implies the coercive influence of time on a person, even when he is far distanced from civilization (Zerubavel, 1977).

This research explores the perception of the middle-class urbanites about the utility of wall/desk calendar and examines their differential preference for varied calendar motifs and images in the age of digital calendars and smart phones. In short, the paper attempts to answer the questions: why and how print calendars survive in the present era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A calendar is typically accompanied by an image or motif, also referred to as calendar art. There is a varied body of literature on the trajectory of calendar art in India and how it varied into different epochs. For instance, Tapati Guha Thakurta (1991) in her work, "Women as Calendar Art Icons" highlights on how the parameters of defining 'high' and 'low' art are constantly changing and how the quality and type of feminine images portrayed in the calendars define those gradations. In tracing the history of calendar art, Guha Thakurta narrates the metamorphic evolution of calendar art from monolithic representation of Kalighat to Calcutta Art Studio's 'fleshing out' of Gods and Goddess, depiction of their animated gestures, and elaborate representation of mythological scenes at the backdrop of ornate palaces and green landscape. There was also the accompanying trend of domestication of divinity as depicted in various calendar prints such as Durga's wedding, home coming with children, and leaving for husband's abode. However, there was also sensual portrayal of women as calendar art motifs and Raja Ravi Varma's paintings of 'Hamsa-Damayanti' and 'Shakuntala' are illustrations of such a trend.

With the invention of lithography, there was a rapid proliferation of calendars and with them images of the deities and the divine. Thus, the credit of bringing the deities out of the temples to the drawing rooms of the households goes to calendar art. As Devdutt Pattanaik (2009), the mythology expert and the author of "7 Secrets from Hindu Calendar Art" elucidated, "*If you lived in a remote village you knew your local deity, and perhaps had access to folk art, but you wouldn't have seen the images in big temples.*" More importantly, calendar art provided the downtrodden castes the access to their revered deities, as prejudice debarred them from entering the temple premises. Stated differently, depiction of deities in the calendar art was a liberating experience for the subalterns and allowed for the percolation of great tradition among the masses.

Beyond the ritual and aesthetics, calendar art time and again has been used as a tool for gaining political ends and in propagandizing effect. Examples of such a

trend can be found in BG Sharma's portrayal of 'Milching a Cow' and Raja Ravi Varma's depiction of all the 84 Hindu Gods encompassed in the body of a cow. The depictions were in line with the cow protection movement and it entailed the subtle message that worshipping cow was equivalent of going to the temples and cow slaughter should be prohibited. The imagery of all the Hindu Gods in the body of cow also stood as a symbol of Hindu assimilation across caste, creed, and urban-rural divide.

The ethnographic study by Christopher Pinney (2004) of Bhatiusuda in Madhya Pradesh seems to lend credence to the argument. Thus, the popularity of Lakshmi and Shiva were cut across many jatis. Rajputs displayed more affinity towards Lakshmi, and Chamars (lower caste) towards Samvaliyaji. Therefore, depiction of cow's body entailing 84 Goddess is an attempt to assimilate the Hindus across caste and creed.

The depiction of Gods engraved on the body of a cow was later extended to promote brotherhood and harmony between the Sikhs and the Hindus and the figure of 10 Sikh gurus were illustrated on the body of the cow. This was complimented by the sketch of Khalsa symbol on the cow's forehead, the sign of Bhakti devotion outlined on her muzzle and the cow's horn bearing resemblance to the architecture of the Gurudwara. So, cow stood for a symbol of Mother India that required protection from the non-Hindus. Thus, calendar art thus became a vehicle of politics of representation and a means of spreading communal stench.

In a similar vein, analysis of the images of deities on calendars also reveals the circulation of the 'currency of colorism' where deities are almost always fair-skinned and stand as a symbol of high status and caste. The politics of colour associate light skin with divinity, compassion and virtue, and dark skin with deviance and bestial vices (Mandalaparthi, 2016).

In her work, "Unity in diversity? Dilemma of nationhood in Indian Calendar Art", Patricia Uberoi (2002a) discusses how calendar art contributed to the Nehruvian vision of nation building. She narrates the reorganization of various images and icons in calendar art so as to valorise the theme of secularism. Thus, calendar art in adherence to the Nehruvian vision of nation building tried to reconcile the dialectical forces of industry and agriculture, urban and rural, tradition and modernity.

Likewise, her another work, "Chicks, Kids, and Couples: The nation in Calendar Art", Patricia Uberoi (2002b) highlights how calendar art helps to form a nation of 'imagined community' of fellow Indians and how such creation is simultaneously inclusionary and exclusionary. Drawing on calendar archive of half a century, Uberoi explores how the Indian nation is represented through the prints of lady, kids, and couples.

In sum, we witness a change in the motif and theme of calendar art according

to the context and situation. For instance in the colonial era, the wealthy and aristocratic Indian families commissioned painters like Raja Ravi Varma to paint images of Gods and deities for them. Later with the invention of lithography and oleography, there were mass production of these pictures. Eventually during the era of independence struggle, the motifs of calendar art shifted to Mother India from the religious and mythological themes. Such depiction went hand in hand with the construction and veneration of cow as a mother. During the 1960s, calendars displayed motifs relating to the development of the country. Hence, they entailed slogans like 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' and pictures portrayed farmers working in the lush green fields and Army engaged in the protection of the nation. Calendars of this period entailed pictures of dams, industrial establishments and pictures of men and women wearing costumes of different states to mark the unity amongst the diversity in the country. Similarly, calendar of Air India in the late 1970s and 1980s, depicted ornaments from different states of India. Alongside the picture of the ornament, there was an accompanying write-up on the ornament, its significance and the occasion for wearing the ornament (Bande, 2004).

On a different note, Kajri Jain (2007) in her book, "Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art" explored the question: how images depicted in calendars played a role in the development of Hindu nationalist politics from 1980s onwards. Drawing from interviews with artists, publishers, and consumers, the book beautifully illustrates the power that calendar art exerts over the Indian mass culture. In tracing the trajectory of India's calendar art, Jain observes how elements of patriarchy (the images of deities becoming more muscular), eroticism (sensual representation of women), and hybridity (coexistence of both sacred and secular) come to characterise India's postcolonial modernity.

This study attempts to gain an understanding of the changing perception of the new middle class urbanites towards calendars and their motifs in the era of smartphone apps and google calendars. The focus of the study was on the calendar designers and the new middle class urbanites of Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh.

KNOWLEDGE GAP

The above mentioned research papers and articles highlight on the changing motifs of calendar art according to era in question, the commodification of women in calendar art, propagandizing influence of calendar art, and the decline of calendar artistry in the era of modern technologies, etc. However, it may be argued that these papers focused on the supply side of the equation and largely overlooked the demand side of it. This is so because the existing literature is based on calendars received complementarily and overlooks the discretion element of the user in the choice of calendars. This paper specifically attempts to understand why and how print calendars exist in the modern day and the preference of the middle class with

regards to varied calendar art motifs. Since the study focuses on consumers who purchase printed calendars by exercising their agency, this research specifically focuses on new middle class urbanites who have sufficient disposable income in their hands to make choices. The paper also investigates whether the predominance of printed calendars with traditional/religious motifs in the market truly reflects the choice of middle-class urbanites. This research is therefore an attempt to understand the aesthetic orientation of the new middle class in urban India with special reference to calendar art.

The arguments made in this paper bear its roots in the theoretical conception of Pierre Bourdieu (1979) in his celebrated work 'Distinction'. Bourdieu's argument in the book rests on two concepts: structural homology and habitus. Habitus refers to the cultural structure existing in the minds and bodies of individuals that shape their thoughts and behavior. In extension to this argument, structural homology proposes an isomorphic relation between people's class affiliation and aesthetic preference (Coulangeon and Lemel, 2009). This means that the societal elites are likely to exhibit refined cultural taste and highbrow orientation, while the masses are likely to be lowbrow in their tastes and preference. Common examples of practicing highbrow culture could be the preference for gourmet dining, classical music and operas, classic literature and poetry, finer dressing habits, fine art, etc. On the contrary, being a lowbrow would mean affinity for punk music, graffiti, casual dressing habit, etc. Derivatively, the difference between highbrow and lowbrow art essentially boils down to the distinction between refined and coarse art forms. Since highbrow culture is practiced by the dominant class, it is typically assumed to be a source of power for the elites and a basis for exclusion of the masses. This paper therefore examines whether the Indian new middle class display/practice highbrow or refined taste in their use/consumption of a cultural artifact viz. calendar art, as they are expected to.

RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative research was conducted in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Open-ended interviews were conducted with the calendar makers and designers of Aminabad, the merchants who placed bulk order of calendars, the new middle class urbanites of Lucknow. The sample entailed new middle class urbanites who were frequent users of digital calendars on their phones and/or those who ordered printed calendars online.

The sample size was 60 and stratified random sampling was used to identify the participants. The term new middle class is ambiguous and refers to a class engaging in high level of consumption expenditure. However, for the present study, we have used the definition of Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo's (2008) yardstick of middle class to identify the participants. Banerjee and Duflo (2008) in their household surveys of 13 developing countries inclusive of India, identify new

middle class as those who spend between \$2 and \$10 per capita per day, measured at 1993 PPP. Similarly, lower middle class are identified as those who spend between \$2-\$4 per capita per day, upper middle class spends between \$6-\$10 per capita per day (Krishnan and Hatekar, 2017).

Since this paper mainly focuses on calendar choices of the new middle class, it is important to underline some of the defining characteristics of the new middle class. The new middle class is a class with sufficient level of discretionary income and are well above the poverty line (Krishnan and Hatekar, 2017). The new middle and upper middle class are mostly service sector professionals engaged in Information Technology (IT) industries, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries, and professionals engaged in health, education, finance, insurance, administrative services and the like. In other words, the new middle class are mainly the service sector professionals, whose size surged from 304 million in 2004-05 to 604 million in 2011-12 (ibid). In terms of asset ownership, the upper middle and new middle-class individuals typically owned a car (Krishna and Bajpai, 2015). In contrast, the lower middle-class individuals were engaged in manufacturing, trading and construction activities and were characterized by ownership of a motorcycle or a motor scooter (ibid). As the new middle class is taken to be the younger members of higher status groups (Wynne and O’Conor, 1998), the study sample comprised of respondents (residents of Lucknow city) aged below 40 years.

Aminabad area of Lucknow had many calendar shops namely the Rajdhani Card and Calendar Centre, Naaz Paper and Calendar Products, King Cards and Calendars, Shaan Calendars, Paradise Diaries and Calendars, Saraswati Calendars, Gold Calendars, etc. The study attempted to include some of the most prominent (in terms of sales) shops and the criterion of saturation was used to determine the point when no further shops were visited.

In addition to interviewing, content analysis of sample calendars were done in order to better grasp the changing trends in calendar designing. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the research subjects, alphanumeric characters were used in place of actual names of the respondents.

FINDINGS

The study revealed that demand for calendars with motifs of Gods and deities were in highest demand in calendar stores of Lucknow. In line with the present-day concern, there has been upsurge in the demand of calendars depicting environmental wisdom/awareness yet the traditional religious motifs dominate the market.

As Respondent R, the owner of a calendar shop shared:

“Going by the sale statistics over the years, I would say that the religious calendars are in highest demand and it is being followed by calendars portraying scenery and imaginary cityscape.”

Another respondent P, the designer in a calendar shop, posited an interesting view:

“The religious calendars are mostly ordered by the business houses, the calendars of nature and buildings are ordered by offices and schools.”

It was found that the calendar designers shared with their buyers certain prototypes available in their shops in the form of catalogue and buyers select from those designs. Most of these calendars were single paged calendars with an image/motif above the months of the year. The motifs in the catalogue were mostly religious and customers do not opt for much alteration and modification. Interestingly, it was found that the client base in the shops were mostly stable and their clients more often than not went for change of the motif of previous year’s calendar. As Respondent D, the owner of a shop narrated:

“The clients in my shop are mostly business owners. They mostly choose images of Lord Ganesh or Laxmi or the image of Kaba of Medina as their calendar motif...They do not alter the motifs of calendar if their business has done well in the previous year. They consider it to be the good omen. Keeping the same motif with minor alteration in color, shade, and background is the trend.”

Moreover, the artists opined that they were skeptical about displaying their creativity in their portrayal of mythological figures lest they offend the customer’s sentiments. They do only minor modifications in the form of altering the gaze, dress, and adornment of the deities. As Respondent S, a calendar designer expressed:

“India is a land of religions. We are skeptical about experimenting with the acceptable images of revered Gods and deities. We can experiment about designing landscapes but not with religious motifs....We don’t want to be in trouble and ruin our established business.”

Some of the designers felt that computer softwares like Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom adversely affect creativity in their business. As designer H explained:

“The scope of displaying artistic novelty in calendar art has also been adversely affected by computer softwares like Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom. The mechanization of art has thus robbed us of the scope of experimenting with our skills. What goes on the calendar art industry today is a permutation and combination of different acceptable images by means of photoshopping.”

Most of the business owners believe that distribution of calendars is a good way of renewing ties with their clients/customers. It serves a means to advertise their business. In the words of Q, a business owner who ordered calendar in bulk:

“Calendar is a means of renewing our ties and goodwill with our old customers. As the New Year approaches, we give calendars to the customers who do business with us.....In the process, it also helps to advertise our business.”

Another business owner T echoed in a similar vein:

“The average cost of printing a single page calendar comes to Rs. 15-20. So, I believe that in today’s date, it is one of the cheapest means of publicity.”

With regard to the question of not choosing to alter calendar motifs, Respondent I explained:

“Business is subject to a lot of fluctuations. We, the business owners, that’s why value stability a lot. Using the same calendar motif (with minor alteration) is a reflection of such a mindset.”

Calendar and Social Class

The researcher made it a point to interview few people among whom the calendars were distributed. The research found differential use of complimentary calendars among the respondents. The preference and use of complimentary calendars and the calendar motifs (in general) varied according to the class of the consumer.

It was found that most of the lower middle class respondents used the complimentary calendars that they received at the beginning of the year and were reluctant to spend money in buying calendars. Respondent X, a client, revealed:

“I have never purchased calendars...I receive calendars as gifts from my office and one from shop from where we get our garmentsAnd this serves our purpose.”

Similarly, Respondent M narrated:

“We the middle class people do not have the luxury of spending on unnecessary items. When we receive calendars as freebies, there is no point in buying them.”

Thus, for the lower middle class respondents calendars served as utility items and the observation was further bolstered by the fact that the respondents use calendars to note down information regarding expenses incurred on particular days of the month or days when a particular utility service was availed vis-à-vis missed. K, a homemaker, illustrated:

“I write down important titbit information on my calendar.....For instance, I note down the date(s) when the milkman did not deliver milk or when milk in excess was purchased. This makes calculation a lot easier at the end of the month.”

Thus, for the lower middle class there is ideally “no choice” of calendars and they use what they receive. In other words, their choices of calendar motifs were dictated by the organizations that printed and distributed the calendars. Accordingly, the choice of religious motif on calendars, which dominated the calendar market, was mainly the choice of business houses that ordered them in bulk.

Few lower middle class respondents displayed preference for Saka calendars (calendars based on solar and lunar years) as they can be a useful replacement for almanac. As the Saka calendars are mostly printed in vernacular, some of the respondents felt comfortable using them. As Respondent C narrated:

“I generally prefer to have Saka calendars over the Gregorian calendars as

they provide information regarding Indian customs, festivals, and 'tithi'....I thus save money by not having to buy almanac."

Similarly respondent F, a homemaker in a lower class household, echoed:

"We prefer to receive such calendars at the beginning of the year...Calendars in vernacular language are always preferable."

Such concern was not replicated by the new middle-class urbanites. They typically used Gregorian calendars and for them calendar represented more than a utility item. They choose their calendars based on their tastes and preferences and 'individuality of choice' guides them to buy calendar from online sites. Online platforms offered the advantage of variety and customers could choose calendars from varied mundane themes like motivational wisdom, tourist destinations, cartoons characters, paintings of famous American calendar artist, Thomas Kinkade, etc. Furthermore, this also illustrates the availability of disposable income in the hands of the new middle class to spend on an item that is not a necessity. As A, an upper middle class respondent shared:

"To me calendar is more than a utility item. Now-a-days people have calendars on their mobile phones. Still I prefer to have calendars that are innovative and uncommon. I get access to those on online sites like Amazon and Flipkart."

Another respondent G explained:

"Calendars that you get for free from shops and other organizations do not fit my taste. You find little diversity in them. It does not gel in with the décor of my home. I therefore prefer to order them online."

Interestingly, some of the upper middle and new middle class respondents believe that calendars they use have entered into the habits of their life and hence they are not easily discarded even in the age of mobile calendars. Respondent C2, an IT professional, opined:

"I feel that because calendars have entered the habits of our life, they cannot be easily discarded. One cannot also deny that they are convenient to use for people like us having sedentary or desk jobs. My point of using innovative calendar is this: when I am using calendar why use a calendar that is bland or cliché."

In line with their omnivorous taste, new middle class respondents revealed that they don't outrightly reject calendars on traditional motifs (religious themes) and they usually place complimentary calendars on religious themes in the prayer room of their house. Some of the respondents also had no inhibition about using religious calendars in the drawing rooms of their house, provided that they had an element on novelty.

Respondent B1, an IT professional, reflected:

"Whenever I receive complimentary calendars on religious theme, I usually place them in my prayer room as the motifs match. However, for my drawing

room, I buy calendar that is compatible to both my taste and the environment of the drawing room."

Another respondent J1, a homemaker, highlighted:

"I have no issue in putting calendars on traditional motifs in the drawing room of my home. However, they should be unique in their style.....An example could be the image of designer Ganeshha."

A closer analysis of the responses of the lower-middle and new middle class homemakers reveal an interesting trend. While the lower-middle class homemakers mostly concerned about the utilitarian aspect of calendars, the new middle class homemakers appeared to be more involved in the aesthetic dimensions of calendars. Such behavior could be explained from the fact that new middle class homemakers had sufficient amount of disposable income and leisure time at spare to involve themselves in cultural consumption and 'status work' in the family (Collins, 1988). Managing leisure to engage in cultural consumption is easier for the new middle class homemakers as they have the disposable income to hire domestic assistance. Thus, apart from calendar choices made jointly (by both husband and wife), there were few households in which calendar choices were made by the homemaker. In the words of M2:

"At my place, calendar choice is made by my wife. In fact, my wife plans the décor of our house....Her choice of calendar is innovative and perfectly suits the ambience of the concerned room."

Another peculiarity of calendar preference among the new middle and upper middle class was their specific preference for desk calendars. The specific preference for desk calendars among this class could be explained from the nature of job that they have. Most of the respondents in the sample were engaged in service sector jobs and they were high end IT professionals, BPO professionals, professionals engaged in health and education industries, finance and insurance companies, etc.

Another respondent K1, a professional engaged in health services explained:

"I feel desk calendar is always a must for professionals like us. It helps me, for example, check my schedule and inform my patients of my availability, give them checkup dates, and appointments....Still the theme of the calendar is important and should be in concordance with the profession you are engaged in. In my chamber, I have a desk calendar on the theme of 'positive thinking' and at my study I have a desk calendar on 'satirical cartoons from The New Yorker'.... In sum, the calendar theme should gel in well with the surrounding ambience."

The above responses imply that the new middle and the upper middle-class respondents were concerned about calendars matching the décor of their homes/offices. Thus, complimentary calendars on religious motifs found place in the private sphere of the prayer room and thus not displayed in the public sphere of the home i.e. the drawing room. We therefore witness a clear demarcation between the private and

public sphere of home and what is open for public gaze is defined according to the cultural capital of the class in question. The upper middle and the new middle class therefore strive to portray themselves as urban mavericks by purchasing calendars with print replicas of art work of Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dali, Gustav Klimt, Vincent Van Gogh, paintings of Indian masters, National Geographic calendars, calendars on Buddha Wisdom, calendar on Poetry of Rumi, calendars on Japanese Paintings or calendars on posters of some of the most prominent Hollywood movies, Calendar on Shakespearean insults, calendars with other surrealist motifs, etc.

Calendar in a new middle class home is an exhibitionist item and this explains the reluctance of the new middle class to display old-fashioned calendars in the public domains of their homes. We thus encounter a Dionysian form of art preference among the new middle class urbanites, which is resonated from their appreciation of calendar forms that are abstract, unpredictable, and different. Stated differently, the preference of various calendar prints among the new middle class cannot be classified into a single genre. Additionally, their acceptance of replica art forms reveals the absence of 'snobbishness' among the class in question. The findings inform that the taste of upper and new middle class, with regard to calendar choice, cannot be described as 'highbrow' (preference and affinity for classical art forms) but rather as 'omnivore' (preference for art form that are distinctive but cannot be categorized as classical) (Peterson and Kern, 1996). The taste of the new middle class is referred to as 'omnivore' in lieu of the fact that there is no well-defined genre of art that their preference can be classified into and they opt for any form that is unique and peculiar. Stand out calendars are bought but not engaged with. Thus, the affinity of the new middle class towards distinction and uniqueness, makes the new middle class akin to new petite bourgeoisie (Van Eijck, 2000).

Since the new middle class traces its origin in the middle and lower class, and subsequently achieved higher mobility, their taste do not have the refinement or sophistication of that of the highbrows (Van Eijck, 2000). Thus, the new middle class entailing young, educated, upwardly mobile individuals, exhibit preference for 'maverick' art forms. Their art preference can be best described as a hybrid of the classic and avant-garde art forms. The omnivorous tendency of the new middle class is reflected from their affinity for both the highbrow/classic art forms and hybrid/meme arts. Likewise, in deviation from the highbrows/elitists who are looking for classical and intellectually enriching art forms, the new middle class are driven by the need for distinction and narcissism in their consumption.

In fact, some respondents were found to customise their calendars. For instance, they got their calendars printed using personal photographs that helped them to preserve and relish the cherished moments of life. Respondent D1 observed:

"What is the point of getting calendars that are largely monotonous and usual? ...This year, I got a personalized calendar printed. It entailed photographs of our anniversary celebration, our visit to Goa, our son's birthday celebration, and the

occasion of the purchase of our car.”

This reflected the typical tendency of people to freeze life in a set of captured photographs.

Another engaging finding in this regard was that few of the new middle class were found to use organisational calendars. These calendars are given by the organisation as freebies but are of premier quality (in terms of paper and print quality) and differed greatly from single paged calendars with traditional motifs.

As respondent V elucidated:

“Some calendars may be given as freebies but you tend to use them. This is because they are a marker of social status and membership to an exclusionary club. Calendars of big corporate houses like Maruti, Apollo Tyres, Kingfisher fall in this category. They are given as freebies but still depict your association to an elite club. This apart, Kingfisher Calendars, for example, entail a compilation of photographs taken by eminent photographer, Atul Kasbekar. I will certainly use those kinds of calendars (if I get one) even if they are free.”

Few new middle class respondents were found to purchase 2020 Naam calendars. Naam Calendars is a project of south-India based Naam Charitable Trust and the turnover of calendar sales is used to support and empower single women from underprivileged sections of society. In the 2020 edition of Naam calendar, Chennai based photographer G Venket Ram paid tribute to Raja Ravi Varma by recreating some his paintings through his photography. He has roped in famous celebrities from the southern film and dance industry, namely Ramya Krishnan, Samantha Akkineni, Khushbu Sundar, Lissy Lakshmi, Lakshmi Manchu, Shruti Haasan, Aishwarya Rajesh, Nadiya Moidu and dancers Priyadarshini Govind and Shobana, for this endeavor. The actresses have reenacted the poses that Ravi Varma used to paint his muses. In the attempt to recreate the original feel, accessories, furniture, props, jewelry, saris, etc. similar to that of the paintings were used. The styling and costume detailing ensured that the imitation is near perfect (Paitandy, 2020). The Naam calendars are priced Rs. 1700 a piece and the new middle class respondents were found to buy such calendars. The irony however was the buyers were however unaware of the original names of the photographs or hardly ever engaged themselves to understand the meaning of the photographs. Respondent II reflected:

“When I first saw this calendar online, I instantly wanted to own it. They recreate the art of Raja Ravi Verma...Though I do not know much about the paintings, it looks fabulous on my drawing room.”

Another respondent L observed:

“I brought this calendar because it is cocktail of tradition and modernity. It captures some of most gorgeous faces of the film industry in traditional attire and setting....I am a proud owner of the calendar.”

Art form represented in Naam calendars is an instance of what Gianni Vattimo (1988) calls an 'explosion of aesthetics', whereby hybrid art forms have replaced the predecessors of pure genre. With the proliferation of such 'simulacra' or replica art, the original art seems to have lost its meaning and aura. The buyers do not buy such products because they had a passion for art but because they want to be different. They do not feel the aura of the object and never felt the urge to dig deep into the latent meaning or the context of the art. For them, possession of the 'simulacra' was more important than understanding the meaning of the original art. Following possession of the item, admiration was meted through occasional cursory glance.

Such peculiarity of home décor among the new-middle class could be explained from the arguments made by Norbert Elias (1994) in his work, "The Civilizing Process". Elias argues that because in modern society power is defined in terms of social standing and not in terms of physical strength, people are encouraged to display 'civilized behavior' to be identified as societal elites. So, the new-middle class individuals chose to be different by displaying the possession of unique cultural capital. Thus, consumption of goods not available to others become a means of enhancing social status and repute. This closely goes with the idea of 'noticing', people want guests to notice their possession in order to hold them in high esteem (Van Wessel, 2004). So, in the modern society, consumption forms the basis of community and engagement in conspicuous consumption becomes imperative for establishing one's worth to fellow members of the class.

DISCUSSION

This paper attempted to understand the perception of new middle class urbanites about the importance of wall/desk calendar and their perception regarding various calendar motifs in the current zeitgeist of technological revolution. Adding to existing wisdom, this research reports an increasing proclivity among the new and upper middle class to spend money to buy calendars. Thus, the new middle class of the 21st century India has sufficient disposable income in hand to spend on calendars and hence have the power to exercise their volition in the choice of calendars.

Moreover, the present trend reveals that print calendars have not become irrelevant in the age of mobile phones and calendars with religious and other traditional motifs dominate the market. The question however remains whether the dominance of religious motifs and/or other traditional motifs of calendars truly reflect the choice of the new middle class consumers. The fact is that a large portion of such calendars are distributed complimentarily by various organizations at the beginning of the year or at auspicious occasions and they do not reflect the choice of middle class individuals in society. The calendars serve as cheap tools of publicity for these organisations. Also, business houses do not radically alter their calendar motifs annually owing their preference for stability over change. Their superstition inhibits them from experimenting with new styles and motifs

of calendar. So, traditional calendar motifs survive in the market because of the preference for status-quo among the business houses. This in fact leaves little scope for the artist to experiment with his oeuvre and to create a novelty.

Additionally, this paper challenges the myth of calendar choice homogeneity among the middle class Indian urbanites. The study finds that complimentary calendars are mainly used by lower middle class, they use them as utility items and therefore such calendars do not reflect their taste or preference. They simply use complimentary calendars because they do not have sufficient disposable incomes. Neither do the use of religious calendars portray a probable indication of greater fatalism and religious affinity among the middle and lower middle classes. The paper therefore contends that the lower and the middle classes are not 'univores' (of traditional and religious calendar motifs) by choice but because they do not have enough disposable incomes in their hands.

On the other hand, the upper middle and new middle class respondents, equipped with substantial disposable incomes, spend money on calendars that suit the decors of their homes. Calendar for them is a cultural artifact and caters to the beautification of their homes. For them, calendar is less of a utility item and more of a beautification prop. In fact, calendar survives in the era of smartphones because they are more than utility items to many. In short, the paper contends that ornamental importance of calendar art overrides utilitarian significance of it among the new and upper middle class urbanites. The paper contends that possession of unique calendars instills a sense of empowerment among consumers and gives them the boost of additional confidence to go about their daily lives. Possession of unique cultural goods becomes the demarcator: for enhancing one's status in society and for gauging the status of others.

The new middle class urbanites tend to buy calendars on varied themes ranging from art of Claude Monet, personalized calendars, and meme calendars representing Tollywood actress reenacting the poses that Ravi Varma used to paint his muses. The race is to be different and to bring home an avant-garde calendar and gain recognition for their taste and cultural capital. Echoing Longhurst and Savage (1996), the paper argues that the new middle class are engaging in the act of impressing others through such consumption. Such proclivity, nonetheless, could only label the new middle class as 'consumers' and not as 'connoisseurs' of art because they do not engage with the art in question. The act of buying decorative calendars is therefore not a reflective endeavor of the new middle class but an act of hedonism. Such tendencies makes perfect sense in a globalized world, where enhanced fluidity makes consumption easier and consumption decides the status of the people.

The paper therefore adds to Bourdieu's (1979) concept of homology in highlighting that cultural lifestyles of the new middle class is an amalgamation of the cultured and philistine habits. So, deviating from the Bourdieusian argument, the paper finds that the new middle class are moving beyond the singular, isomorphic

correspondence between class and aesthetic preference. The omnivorous tendency of new middle class men and women is reflected from the heterology of calendar choices made by them. The paper contends that multicultural capital of the new middle class and their higher mobility makes them omnivores in their cultural orientation.

We therefore observe the induction of new middle class in the cycle of consumption. They crave for new calendar art forms, enjoy a fleeting fixation with them, and then encounter gradual disillusionment and succession by other novelties (Campbell, 1987). The craze is therefore to buy “new commodity” before it becomes popular/common among the masses. The symbolic value of a commodity is contingent upon restricted popularity among the elites and non-dissipation among the masses (Mathur, 2010). Undoubtedly, this impulse for the ‘new’ is triggered by the access to internet, which has created avenues for ‘frictionless capitalism’. There is no doubt about the fact that the proliferation of e-commerce sites have enhanced the possibility of impulsive buying and allowed the consumers to experiment with new styles and trends. New middle class urbanites thus enter the consumption race and continually chase the latest fad. The irony however is conspicuous consumption remains an essential part of self-realization in modern society.

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