

**Animal Imagery in Advertising: Issues of Conservation with Special Reference to the
State Animal of Assam**

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Abstract

The powerful presence of animals and their depiction in Indian culture, irrespective of religious belief, customs, region, mythology and more precisely the artistic representations of animals and birds in Indian art have culminated the idioms of the human perception of the animal world who shares the same earth. The diversity of the animals depicted on cave or rock paintings of Bhimbetka, on the seals of Harappan civilisation with frequent occurrence of bulls, anthropomorphic animals like multi hooded serpent, cosmic boar, suggests that they must be religious symbols. Other animals like tiger, lions, deer, elephant, monkeys, one horned rhinoceros were also depicted on seals, stone reliefs, rock cut halls etc. features to be hallmarks of Indian art.

Indian advertising scene also spearheaded a notable contribution in depicting animal imagery in various forms like fictitious characters, mascots, anthropomorphic forms, puppets, caricatures of the majestic animals of India that reflects the uniqueness of the animals and birds, representing the wisdom, power, beauty, opulence and grandeur that uphold and dignify the indigenous fauna and also restore the conservation issues through powerful visualisation and gratification.

The study explores the profile of depiction of animal imagery as visual elements in social campaigns, incorporating the essence of identity in terms of existence and distinctiveness of culture and biodiversity of, the state animal of Assam in particular where the infinite variety of its geographical settings, its varied flora and fauna, avian life, history of its people and the variety of its ethnic communities, rich heritage, lifestyles, festivals, art and crafts have commemorated the issues of conservation and preservation the state animal through graphical representation for social communication in the form of logo, symbol, signage, mascots, advertisements, social campaigns.

Keywords: Anthropomorphic, Mascots, Imagery, Identity, Signage.

Introduction

Every civilisation looks at animals, birds and other creatures in its special way. The Romans saw animals as fierce which has to be tamed and controlled for human survival. The Greek saw them

as symbol of power and affluent. Though the animal kingdom have not undergone major changes in terms of their shape or appearances, their presence and perception in human life have undergone changes from age to age. They have been presented in beautiful forms in paintings, sculptures, pottery, architectural designs and every other human activities that finds expression of human imagination are often use as symbols of power, identity, beauty, elegance, dignity and wisdom and affluence. The symbolic and dominant presence of animals in Indian culture, portrays animals to be inspiring growth, promoting unity and prosperity which gives us the glimpses of the incomparable diversity of Indian forest landscapes, animals and birds shown as exotic symbols of Indian religious culture especially. The most popular amongst them is the Lord *Ganesha*, with the head of an elephant and Lord *Hanuman* with the body of the monkey, symbolises auspiciousness, strength, devotion and power.

Manifestation of animals in Indian Art

The fascinated world of animals and birds were well depicted with their powerful presence in Indian art also where the creatures were depicted as companions of deities, mythical beasts, hybrid animals, anthropomorphic forms, religious symbols, presented in different poses, aspects and forms. The diversity of the animals depicted on cave or rock paintings of *Bhimbetka*, seals of *Harappan* civilisation, with frequent occurrence of bulls, hybrid animals, multi hooded cosmic serpent, cosmic boar, elephant represents the stature of being divine. Various other animals like tiger, lions, deer, elephant, monkeys, birds, one horned rhinoceros, crocodiles, antelopes, and squirrel were also depicted in their natural surroundings, hunting scenes, on seals, stone reliefs, rock cut halls, sculptures, and paintings features to be hallmarks of Indian Art. The finest amongst them is the lion capital at Sarnath erected by Asoka provide us with the best remaining example of Mauryan Art that projects the mood of grandeur is also adopted as the emblem for the modern republic of India. The fascinating world of animals were also depicted in the rock-cut monasteries with images of elephant, horse, monkey etc, participating in cosmic events. The association of animals in Indian art also features the anthropomorphic animal characters, where mythological stories such as incarnation of Vishnu as the cosmic boar, *Varaha* which is his third descent-*avatara* depicts the churning of the milk sea ocean, *Makara*-the mythical beast, that is a part of crocodile and part elephant, multi hooded serpent *Ananta*, slaying of buffalo demon –*Mahisasura* were remarkable in their depictions.

The Gupta period provides us with some of the earliest surviving examples of Indian painting in continuous visual narration along the wall and the best preserved are located in the twenty nine caves at Ajanta, one such example depicts image of an elephant in lotus pond, one of many small panels decorating the ceiling, representing the huge mammal scattering lotus. The image was later incorporated in the logo of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. The elephant is but one of the hundreds of animals-horses, bulls, birds, monkeys and others which were brightly woven through the pictorial fabric at Ajanta.

Moghul school of painting also depicts the subtle native Indian elements with images of animals, birds, flowers, vegetation and landscapes. Also to mention *Pahari, Jain* and *Rajasthani* paintings depicts animals in various occasions. After the demise of the Rajput art centres and a complete domination of India by the British, descendants of artists from Moghul court found employment to produce paintings of flowers, animals and exotic scenes for the British marked as company painting. One such intriguing influence on Indian folk art of the European presence appears in the paintings created at the kali temple in Calcutta in the second quarter of nineteenth century, occasionally depicts European events and subjects.

Objectives of the study

The study focuses on depiction of animal imagery as elements of visual identity in advertising designs, incorporating the essence of identity in terms of existence, distinctiveness of culture and biodiversity of the North Eastern region of India, in particular the state animal of Assam, where the infinite variety of its geographical settings, flora and fauna, avian life, people, lifestyles, festivals and art and crafts have commemorated and preserves the state animals traditionally in various art forms. The study tries to explore the possibilities of social campaigns, in specific the visual depiction of the state animals in various promotional formats in order to gratify, conserve and preserve these animals. The study also intend to provide an indication of such representations in national dimension of advertising.

Depiction of animals in Indian advertising

Indian advertising scene also spearheaded a notable contribution in depicting animal imagery in various forms like fictitious characters, mascots, anthropomorphic forms of the diverse sets of the animal resources of India that reflects the uniqueness of the animals apart from birds and vegetation, representing the wisdom, power, beauty, opulence and grandeur that uphold and dignify the indigenous fauna and also restore the conservation issues through powerful visualisation and gratification

Animals were used as visual metaphors, symbolic of the role played in a society in advertisements to draw the attention of the potential consumers to deliver a specific message without to many words.

This response toward portrayal of such anthropomorphic animals along with human characteristics also plays an important role in advertising, because people tend to draw toward things and objects that are similar to themselves. The physical similarities of the animals with that of humans associate the product, service or idea to create and enhance positive image about the product. Animal mascots as trade symbol have been an important element used in Indian advertising along with other pictorial representations such as logo, symbols, and trademark etc. It is apparent that a mascot plays an important role in advertising that had created some of the popular mascots in the history of Indian advertising which is more human in their approaches and formation.

The association of animal imagery in Indian advertising represents an integral aspect of consumer behaviour with various images taken from Indian mythology, legends, and epics, which also directly associate them with religious embodiment and national symbols. For example the caricature of *Shera*, the mascot of the XIX Commonwealth Games 2010, is taken from the *Hindi* word ‘*Sher*’ (means ‘Tiger’ in English), embody the power and courage associated with Goddess *Durga*. The image of the tiger which is also the national animal of India depicted in anthropomorphic form, reflects the power, charisma, intelligence and graceful attitude of the majestic Royal Bengal tiger. His athletic proficiency, courage and speed is well evident with the human like portrayal with jersey, boot and most interestingly the folded hand, commemorating Indian hospitality.

Another majestic animal, elephant is also associated with Indian mythology that had accredited the anthropomorphic representation of animals in Indian advertising. The mascot of Indian Railways -*Bholu the Guard Elephant*, represents the embodiment of the caricature of an elephant in the attire of a railway guard holding a signal lamp with green light in one hand symbolising safety of a running train and the well-being of the passengers. Such physical similarity to humans is indeed an important determinant of how people react to such visual representation appeared in the various print advertisements, logos and symbols, posters packaging design etc.

The non-anthropomorphic approach is also been initiated in restoring and preserving the animals of the nation which were not only used for selling products, but also to make social impact and mass awareness about the animal. As we have observed the legacy of the animals in Indian art, a notable contribution have been attributes to preserve and conserve the same through posters, films, social campaigns, awareness programmes by various brands, NGOs, institutes in India. For example, the social campaigns initiated by Aircel ‘**SAVE OUR TIGERS**’ campaign is one of the successful campaign of the many initiatives that uphold the dignity of the national animal of India. Various other animals from different parts of India were also depicted and incorporated in various visual identity designs. For example, tiger, lion, camel were used as visual elements in designing the corporate identity to promote the place and culture.

Notable contribution is also spearheaded by **PETA India** in conserving this majestic animal from the verge of extinction. Apart from tiger animals like Asian elephant, One Horned Rhino, Ganges River Dolphin, Red Panda, Gharial were the priority species to be initiated by **WWF India**. The advertisement campaign designed for Sanctuary Asia projects the horrifying consequences of deforestation and promotes the need of conservation through shocking visuals and graphics. The Incredible India campaign initiated by the Ministry Tourism, launched in 2002 also made a greater contribution in conservation the animals with powerful advertisements and poster campaigns. Many other social campaigns were also launched and initiated by different brands, institutional bodies to uphold the heritage of the rich treasure of wildlife of India

India's North East: an overview

The present study focuses on the North eastern state, Assam, which houses some of the majestic animals like Greater one horned Rhino, Asian Elephant, Bengal Tiger, Gangetic Dolphin, clouded leopard, Golden Langur, Pigmy hog and many more, the Greater One Horned Rhino has been placed at apex of its existence in the cultural milieu of Assam regardless of its appearance in traditional crafts, handlooms, festival and events, textile, art, cinema and advertising too. Animal images has been considered as predominant element of the culture of Assam where typical designs motifs used in the textile, pottery, handicrafts, wood works, witnesses the presence of variety of animals, like deer, butterfly, rhino, elephant, lion with refinement and stylization which invigorate the preservation of the natural resources of Assam.

The symbols and motifs which were woven on the silk garments traditionally have undergone a massive change. The earlier motifs basically had an angular geometrical shape with references to the traditional culture and symbols. The motifs are mostly imitation the shape of flowers, ferns, trees, butterflies, animals, and birds. For example, one of the most commonly used motifs is the Kaziranga style which, according to the local craftsmen and experts derives its inspiration from the wildlife of Kaziranga. As a part of the motif a rhino and a deer are woven onto the silk garment.

A unique token of love and hospitality, the *Gamocha*, a white rectangular piece of hand-woven cotton cloth usually with a red border on three sides and red woven motifs on the fourth, is seen all over Assam and is one of the most easily recognisable cultural symbols of the Assamese people. Although cotton yarn is most commonly used for weaving *gamochas*, sometimes *pat* silk is used for special occasions. The motifs used in the design were geometrical shapes, animal and bird motifs, musical instruments etc.

The *namghar* or *kirtanghar*, which contains a throne-like seat, is a rather unusual shape for a throne. Flowers and deities elaborately carved in wood can be seen on doors, walls, beams, ceilings and on *simhasanas* used in prayer houses, throne-type structures. The sacred scripture is placed on the Guru Asana. The Guru Āsana, literally the seat of the Guru is a seven-tiered, triangular, wooden throne adorned by the tortoise-elephant-lion motif and other decorative wood.

The depiction of animal images has a notable presence in the ancient tradition of painting in Assam. Many of the manuscripts available from the Middle Ages bear excellent examples of traditional paintings. The most famous of such medieval works are available in the *Hastividya* (A Treatise on Elephants) where a comprehensive study of elephant makes a deliberate attempt to project animal kingdom, but rarely any trace of representation of rhino can be seen in any of the paintings though occasionally birds, monkey, horse, bull, and hybrid animals can be seen.

The archaeological sites such as the *Madan Kamdev* (c. 9th–10th centuries AD) exhibits mass-scale use of lions, dragon-lions and many other figures of demons, serpents, hybrid forms to

show case power and prosperity. The Vaishnava monasteries and many other architectural sites of late medieval period display the use of lions and dragons for symbolic effects.

The issues of patronisation, conservation and protection of the state animal thus discussed is not only confined to the traditional aspects of its existence and identity where this animal is been identified as an important medium of expression and marked as token of pride and power of Assamese culture. Modern day craftsman have taken to producing articles of commercial value, including figures of the famous one-horned rhino of Assam as a token and souvenir of statehood and pride.

Laterally with the traditional counterparts, the distinction of the animal is well defined with appropriate adoption of the image of rhino in various brand identity used in various advertising and promotional activities, awareness campaigns in the form of print advertisements, logos, symbols, and mascots. The awareness campaign by WWF on the preservation of Indian Rhino, the corporate logo of CEAT Tyres, Assam Oil representing the vigor and energy of the animal in action, the Great Indian Rhinoceros runs on all Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) bus, logo of Assam Tourism, Assam tea board, Assam State zoo cum botanical garden also features the presence of the animal in different attire and gesture expresses the dynamism of the animal.

The representations of the state animal as game mascot of 33th National Games 2007 and South Asian Games 2016 held in Assam added a new dimension to the existing set of the image of the animal as visual identify for communication purpose, made the animal visible beyond regional arena. The mascot '*Rongmon*' of the 33rd National Games 2007, wearing a dhoti and a *Muga* shirt with a traditional *Gamocha* tied around his neck and a buffalo-horn pipe tucked to his waist, holding the Olympic torch in one hand, symbolizes the spirit and joy of the Olympic movement and the essence of Assamese culture and its rich natural heritage.

Another mascot named *Tikhor*, the baby rhino, who is the Brand Ambassador of the 12th South Asian Games, 2016 also earmarked the presence of the animal international arena. *Tikhor*, is someone who is sharp, naughty, sporty and modern. He is all-rounder, active, energetic. With traditional and sporty costumes, he is playing all games and welcoming every new idea in sports. Here the playful rhino is represented with new perspective, carrying the message, aspiration of peace, stability, amity and progress in the South Asian region. Mention may also be made with the wildlife of the other part of North Eastern Region where the endangered species were restored and preserved in various visual formats, with minimal space for mass awareness.

Concern for reinstating identity and conservation of the state animal of Assam also found expression with the noble gesture of the contemporary visual artists of Assam. For instance Rajkumar Mazinder's artistic narration of mix media work "Assam Boil & Toil" is a take on the logo of 'Assam Oil', the premier oil refining and marketing company of the state which is a marker for economic growth, prosperity, modernisation of the state, apart from being the signifier of Assam's identity in the global map and world economy.

For the global world, Assam's identity is often equated with resources like oil or tea and hence this appropriation of the logo becomes the metaphorical representation of the land, people, and their holistic politico-cultural identity. The logo of the company represents the one horned rhinoceros, the state animal of Assam epitomizes power energy and solidity of existential being in the symbolic representation is shown as wounded and collapsing in the visual narration of the artist. The artist also re-investigated the issues of saving the critically endangered species with some of the other artworks namely –the series called Red Rhino, Endangering trust, where the state emblem is shown in catastrophic condition.

Social campaigns viz *Save Assam's Rhino* by Sanctuary Asia Magazine makes a commendable job in making mass awareness. Activities like *Dancing Rain*, a creative festival celebrating environment and protection also feature the beautiful rhino "green" sculptured with *Sal* (teak) tree leaves. A fantastic initiative taken up by *Yantr* the Street Artist from India on account of 22nd September being "World Rhino Day", creating awareness regarding the diminishing One Horned Rhino in Assam. NGOs and environmental activists groups and bodies like Assam Science Society, Kaziranga Wildlife Society, Environ, Aaranyak, Nature's Beacon, Nature's Foster, Early birds need special mention, striving to protecting the environment and wildlife of Assam.

Conclusion

Being the pride of not only the state of Assam, but of the whole nation, the Greater One-Horned Rhino is in the verge of extinction and poaching is an unwrapped secret that is known to every common man. Besides poaching, this animal species is also lessening owing to loss of habitat as it is being destructed by the illegal immigrants. Moreover, the floodplains which are the natural habitat of the rhinos are repeatedly used for cultivation of crops. It is now time to create awareness among the masses through various promotional aids and scholastic approach to save the pride of the state of Assam from being extinct. It is the obligation on the part of the Government to prevent illegal immigration and preserve the natural habitat for the rhinoceros that is a treasure of the state. It is the responsibility of every one of us to help and save the Great one-horned rhino, which postures as symbol of the state, seems to be on the brink of losing its identity and existence. The adoption of the images of this majestic animal though found few credits in various communication purposes, a national wide campaign can also be initiated to uphold the identity and existence of the rhino which on the other hand is well acknowledged in the case of animals like tiger, lion, elephant, leopard etc. where a nationwide response is well evident in various advertising and social awareness campaigns to conserve and protect the animal from extinction.

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