



MARUL OF A MASCOT

MORE than anything else, the Maharajah has remained the prime symbol of Air-India. He has received his share of brickbats and bouquets; he has been reviled and lauded but through the rough and the smooth, the Maharajah has endured.

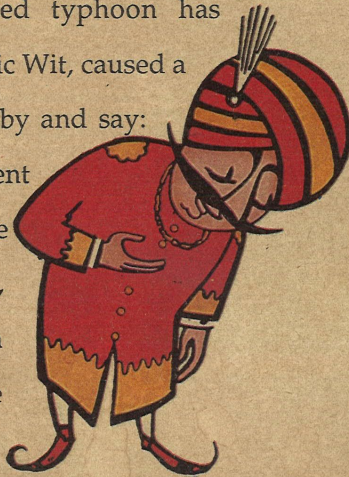
He has functioned as the airline's spokesman, exuding the warmth of traditional Indian hospitality and the graciousness of a royal lifestyle. The Maharajah has, for years, come alive on all of Air-India's advertising and consumer related items. On hoardings, the Maharajah has smiled and frowned, raised an eyebrow or closed an eyelid, romped and teased — all depending on his tongue-in-cheek comment.

Thanks to the Maharajah, no other airline has quite matched Air-India's panache and subtle humour in promoting its services.

Given below are extracts from Bobby Kooka's speech at the World Advertising Conference, London, June 1967.

To millions of travellers the world over — both male and female — whose lives he has

BOBBY KOOKA, the world's most envied midwife gave birth to the Maharaja in 1964. Ever since, the turbaned typhoon has through Kooka's Sardonic Wit, caused a ruffle. J.R.D. would opten buzz Bobby and say: "You've done it again, the government is on my back". In Turn, the unputdownable Bobby wrote, "Foolishly yours" — a little book with the roar of a thousand airplane engines.



Peter Fielden. 'Your billboard at Kemp's Corner. It's awfully bad taste you know'. 'And why do you say so', asked Fielden? 'Well, you know, who's expecting a child, don't you', commented the diplomat testily, now both impatient and annoyed. 'No, I don't', was the reply. 'Well then you damn well should — Her Majesty is — and I think your ad's in shocking taste'. Saying which, Her Majesty's representative in Bombay hung up.

A few years ago, the Speaker of our House of Commons announced the allocation of thirty minutes to discuss Air-India's publicity, in view of strong feelings in certain quarters.

The Minister for Aviation was asked if he had seen the Air-India hoarding in Delhi which showed a naked, Indian lady riding a horse bare-back. And if so, what the reaction of the Minister was.

There were sighs of relief when the Minister explained that she was not Indian but English, and muted approval, when the Minister added that she was a woman of good virtue — who had agreed to remove her Jodhpurs as a barter deal, to secure a reduction in taxation for her people. But nevertheless, we received orders to obliterate Godiva.

But our critic was not to be silenced. He asked the Minister whether it was correct that Air-India should portray Indians as thieves. The reference being to a page in *Foolishly Yours* which showed a rotund Indian passenger embracing an air hostess. The paragraph was titled, *Rendering Unto Caesar*, and the 'copy' ran 'True to the traditions of Eastern hospitality, thy Hostess

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Two men, legend has it, made Air India. J.R.D. being one, the other is the unmatched Bobby Kooka

touched in one way or another, Air-India's portly diminutive Maharajah is a real life character. To others, he is the Man Who Never Was.

The Maharajah made his debut in 1946. He was conceived by S.K. (Bobby) Kooka, Air-India's Commercial Director and designed by Umesh Rao, an artist with J. Walter Thompson Ltd., Bombay.

Says Bobby Kooka of him: "We call him a Maharajah for want of a better description. But his blood isn't blue. He may look like royalty, but he isn't royal. I suspect his turban inspired the Woolmark symbol.

"Our little fellow lends himself to situations. He's capable of entertaining the Queen of England and splitting a beer with her butler. He's a man of many parts — lover boy, Sumo wrestler, pavement artist, vendor of naughty post-cards, capucine monk, Red Indian, Arab, Chinese and even pregnant."

"We realised we had to be different. Like the kind friend who told Margaret Hockaday many years ago, 'My dear, since you'll

never be beautiful you'd better be creative'. Looking around us we saw airlines much bigger than we were, they were also longer in the tooth, they had many more planes than we had, more staff, more booking offices. Their planes were not better than ours, their captains no more experienced than ours, but their advertising budgets were fatter than ours, so their message was louder than ours.

We realised then, that we'd have to do something about it, if our name wasn't going to be Air Limbo.

OUR LITTLE FELLOW

We have an emblem, this is him — our symbol, our mascot. I'd prefer to avoid the term, corporate image, it's too pompous and I don't think he'd approve. We can call him our Maharajah, for want of a better description.

There have been times when his pulse beat has caused us concern. Ministers and dignitaries of lesser import have denounced him as a relic of the feudal system, an

insignia not in keeping with a Corporation, the owners of which are our Government.

We are reminded that when the country had put "paid" to our Maharajahs, Rajahs, Nawabs, Princes and Zamindars, why should this undemocratic symbol portray a false image of India. But things are different, now that the Maharajah of Kashmir is our Minister. And bless his heart, he rushes sword in hand, to defend our little man in parliament, from the onslaughts of gentlemen who see red even when they're happy.

In the olden days of Seat Occupied Cards, ours showed a lovely creature sitting happily on our hero's lap, with another lovely, looking on irate. The caption was *A thousand Pardons — this seat is occupied*.

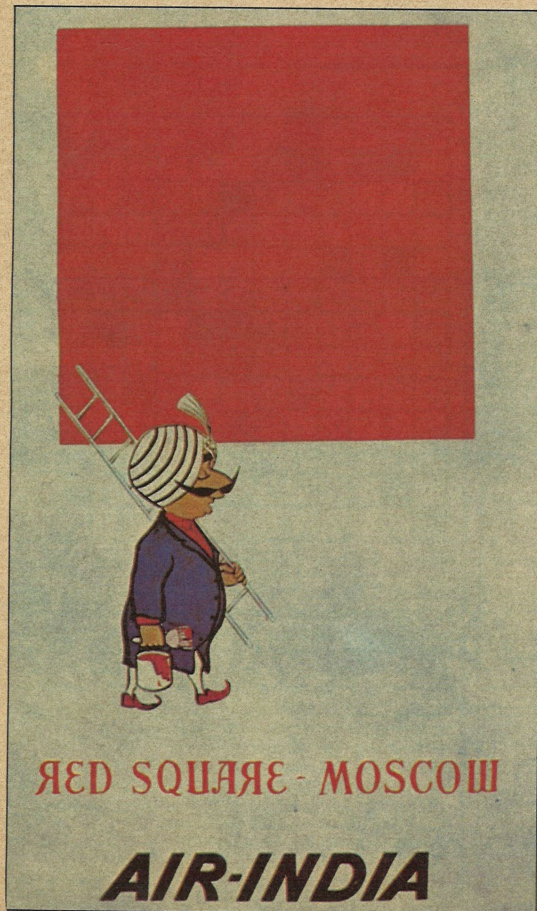
The Minister for Communications saw the card and complained to our Chairman, that the drawing was against the traditions of Indian womanhood, and we were asked to withdraw the card. No one bothered to ask dear Indian womanhood how she felt about it!

In February of 1960, on the eve of our first Boeing's arrival, we displayed a billboard at Kemp's Corner, Bombay, where we have a permanent and unique position.

It's like the Piccadilly Circus of Bombay. You'll observe that our Maharajah portrays the serenity of a woman about to have her new born and the caption was *Can you keep a Secret?*

The British Deputy High Commissioner in Bombay telephoned the British No. 1 of our advertising agency, and the conversation went like this, 'I say, Fielden your company handles the Air-India account', 'yes' was the answer. 'Then I think it's pretty poor show'. 'What is?' asked





country. Furthermore, this poster is presented in a very American style, which is far from the truth, as if the erotic sculptures of Khajuraho were to represent Indian art. Awaiting your reply."

How comforting was it then to realise, that there was one country with a sense of humour that never died — England. A poster we had on London depicted row upon row, of black-suited, bowler-hatted, heavily overcoated, grim, elderly men, reading *The Times*. They might have been waiting for their bus or underground, or waiting for the weather to clear. It wasn't long before Mr. Lickorish, the General Manager of the British Travel and Holidays Association, wrote to our London Office.

'Our Manager in Australia has drawn my attention to a poster published by Air-India headed *London* and depicting a group of

distributing this poster outside Britain.'

We were silly not to realise that Mr. Lickorish was on a ticklish wicket, selling England... with emigration to Australia hitting a new high! I'd like to tell Mr.

Lickorish the story of a young woman who wrote to us from the Negev desert, where her husband was posted. She asked us to send her that very same poster. 'I'm parched, she said, for the fog and the rain of dear, old London.'

But all these were pleasantries compared to what happened to us in the German part of Switzerland-Zurich.

Our copy talked learnedly of elevation to thirty thousand feet, into inner equilibrium and disassociation from distributing exterior influences. The illustration showed a bearded, turbaned Sikh with piercing eyes, and the caption *I can teach you the*

'Regarding your ad in today's issue of *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, your disgusting advertisement on yoga could not be worse. Vivekananda would most probably have given the correct reply to this. I can only say be ashamed you...'

MANNIKEN PIS

We opened Brussels online a few months ago. For our Brussels poster, we could have had bunches of gladioli and begonias, snails, mussels and bouillabaise. We chose the Manniken Pis. It wasn't long before the Belgian Ambassador to New Delhi wrote to our Chairman, more in sorrow than anger, and ended by saying that his Cultural Attache was in a position to supply us with other landmarks of his capital.

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Other enlightened members of our public wrote to the leading newspapers asking whether Air-India's poster on Brussels was desirable, in view of all the student unrest in the country! And questions were raised in our Parliament. A Communist M.P., who loves me dearly, asked the Speaker the following: 'May I know whether it is not a fact that this gentleman, Kooka, who is responsible for this advertisement, is a much too Western-oriented person with decadent and bourgeoisie culture? May I know why this man is not being changed? May I know why this man being kept and why a person having proper cultural background in the Indian set-up and conditions is not being put there?'

For succour we ran to the Director General of Tourism for Belgium, and dear Monsieur Haulot, may his tribe increase, wrote us a letter which read:

'I appreciate very much this kind humour and am always pleased to see our "little man", so symbolic of the Belgian refusal to conformity, being integrated to a publicity campaign in favour of Belgium. In this too serious world where we live, some humour does a lot of good, personally, it does not displease me at all that a bit of frank impertinence is added to the picture that one can have of our country.'

His reference to "impertinence" foxed me. I realise now that what we should have done was to make the Mannikenstand below our Maharajah and have the little fellow hoisted with his own petard.

YOUR BREAD & BUTTER

This being the International year for Tourism, we prepared a poster with the caption, *Honour the tourist, he's your bread and butter*. Realising what England, France, Italy and Japan earned out of tourism, we thought we should bring home to our Government and public, the financial benefits from the rubber-neck... Appreciative messages poured in, telling us that, whilst the tourist might be our bread and butter he was certainly not India's. We were also notified that our Prime Minister took a poor view of this poster...

Herein lies the basic appeal of the Maharajah. Truly, if there is an International Citizen, it is him.

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will embrace thee at destination. It helps your ego, and us, to cut our losses. Whilst you're thanking providence for the heaven in your arms... she's recovering our cutlery from your pockets."

We duly received orders to make the Indian passenger un-Indian. We changed his cap and gave him a bowler, removed his dhoti and put him in trousers. And there was peace, and for us a reduced quantity of honour.

INVOLUNTARY LIBEL

Trouble can come from unexpected quarters. We ran a series of ads depicting a bowler-hatted, cavalry-moustached Englishman, carrying gloves, tightly wrapped umbrella, a waisted coat and drain pipe trousers. The copy talked clipped nonsense about the Cholmondeley family's ties with India — Henry John Cholmondeley, reprimanded for riding Skinner's horse. Augustus

Fortescue Cholmondeley, acting fancy in Jhansi, etc.

Everything was fine until we received a letter from our Manager at Singapore, telling us that an Englishman walked into his office, announced himself as Cholmondeley and threatened to sue us forthwith, unless we stopped the series. He stated that there were only four Cholmondeley's in the world, and wanted to know how we had

They called us name we'd never heard of. They swore never to fly Air India. We were accused of having disgraced our country.

managed to secure his photograph, since the drawing in our ads resembled him more than superficially. To make matters worse, our Manager admitted he looked the spitting image of our Cholmondeley.

Our solicitors quoted chapter and verse from a case in the House of Lords and warned us of the hazards of involuntary libel.

We gave Cholmondeley a reluctant burial.

Our troubles have not all been indigenous. We recently won a world competition for airline posters. It featured our Maharajah dressed as a suspicious looking Frenchman-cum-beret, his jacket slyly open, revealing post-cards of our Maharajah as himself. The caption was, *Psst-Naughty pictures!*

It wasn't long before we heard from the Minister of Cultural Affairs, the Louvre, Paris. And this is what he said. "I was very badly surprised as a French citizen to see an Air-India poster inviting Indians to visit Paris, advertises for "nasty pictures", which is not a sympathetic way to represent a

bowler-hatted Englishmen standing behind a symbolical figure reading *The Times*, which paper has a headline *London Smogbound*. Apparently this poster has been distributed in Australia, where it is our interest to attract visitors to Britain at all times of the year.

We do have an agreement with all the other National Tourist Boards, that international travel promotion should be positive, and should not include unfavourable references to any particular country. I would be grateful if you would consider this matter and particularly the suitability of

secret of Levitation.

Our offices were besieged with telephone calls and callers, and a stream of vitriolic letters from the German speaking canton. They called us names we'd never heard of. They swore never to fly Air-India. We were accused of having disgraced our country. We were told that true yoga was for the West a message of high, holy feelings, from the ancient land of India, a message which went back thousands of years into history.

I can sum up the emotions aroused by reproducing the four lines received from Herr Hermann Joder to our Zurich Manager.

