

“Bika hua saman...” here and there

by Suchita Malik

INDIAN economy is indeed opening up. It is opening up to bring in a competitive market much to the relief of the hassled consumer and to the chagrin of the producers and the traders. The seller's market has slowly started giving way to the buyer's market be it the cars, the televisions, the refrigerators and what not. Consumer's supremacy is coming around and gaining ground.

The phenomenon of “sale” is again one of the international imports. Before this concept came in here, it was the regime of haggling and negotiating between the shopkeepers and the customers, which though still continuing, is on its way out. But this animal called “sale” is really mind-boggling. Eye-catching banners declaring massive sales of 50% with a minuscule and deftly hidden “upto” are the order of the day.

And then, you have these sales around the year under different banners: summer-sale, winter-sale, autumn-sale, grand clearance sale, “sabse bari sale”, pre-renovation sale and what not. The concept of chain-stores announcing their “sale” plans at all the locations has also set in. No doubt, the sale strategy has worked well and it is continuing to work well.

One point of the real “dadagiri” of our trading stores has been their meticulously followed principle of “Bika hua saman vapis nahin hoga” or “Things once sold will not be taken back.” The coming up of big stores of the likes of Ebony and Big Jo's in the market has introduced some dent in this. But if the stuff is sold during the “sale”, this condition is strictly enforced by all without any exception. The concept, thus, was

imported after deleting the difficult parts.

Anybody having shopped here (in India) and there (in Western world) would have perceived the stark difference. In UK, for example, you could return the garment any time stating that you did not want to retain it only if you had not used it. You could return it without any hassles if it turned out to be a defective piece and get your money and apologies in return. This is borne out of personal experience. It was a unique experience in the USA where my sister-in-law claimed the difference between her purchase price and the reduced “sale” price only because she had bought it only a week before the same line of garment was put on sale or else she would return the garment.

We were in Glasgow for a year. It was

January. My husband and I were on our weekend round of the nearby Marks & Spencer. He got fancy for a newly introduced line of woollen trousers. It was priced at £ 37 and was very expensive going by our means. He was so keen on it but the price was a major deterrent. Seeing his keenness, I also supported and made him buy it out for himself. He bought it but never wore it. The stickers remained intact. Came February, and another of our rounds and he noticed that the same trouser had come on the reduced price list, £ 30 this time. He rushed back home, brought the old one, returned it for £ 37, turned around and bought another piece for £ 30. The glow on his face was like that of a child having found a treasure. This exercise continued with every reduction in price at levels of £ 24, £ 20 and £ 16. He was

lucky to get his size every time. By now, it was June and he seemed contented with the last catch.

It was the end of September and we were packing up. One of those last few rounds of the stores and suddenly, I saw him almost yelling. He had found one piece of the same trouser, and his size, marked at £ 8. He did not think once before changing again. For me, it was an experience, I was wonder-struck at such reductions and perhaps even the margins. But then, my husband also explained the sound economics and commerce behind this.

I was baffled. I am still not able to reconcile with the warning: “Bika hua saman vapis nahi hoga”. I am looking for the day when we also will have genuine sales here and this warning will be ticked off.