

Cultural Post #1- "Too funny to keep to myself"

Sometimes I find things in Pakistan that are too funny to keep to myself. Enjoy the first of what may become an occasional cross-cultural feature, as we find Jennifer Aniston's image on a product I'm pretty sure she doesn't know she is endorsing.

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I was walking along innocently enough, pushing my bike around the crowded streets of downtown Quetta looking for a shop that stocked a hard-to-find light bulb, when I spied a light of a different kind. There, from a tall box of some kind of beauty product set on the shelves of a rudimentary pharmacy, the face of Jennifer Aniston shone out upon me.

Her image was like a beacon of beauty in a public space dominated by craggy-cheeked men and by women who, if they're out on the streets at all, show barely any cheek. But here was Jennifer showing not only her face but her hair, her neck, her arms, and a nice little amount of cleavage, too.

Now, I've been in cover-up Pakistan long enough that any bit of cleavage stands out instantly from the crowd. Long enough, also, to know at first glance that this was not an officially endorsed product. No, I knew I had found an extension of that particular Pakistani penchant for copying copyrighted things.

I was familiar with the unauthorized duplication and selling of movies on DVD, even the pirating of books, but using an American movie star's portrait to sell a Pakistani beauty product was a new one. But it was unmistakable, her pendant dangling enticingly not only over the shadow between her boobs but also over some decidedly Urdu script.

I stopped and pulled the box from its case. I held it up in front of the boy, barely a teenager, who was in charge of the shop.

"Kitnee rupee?" I asked. "How many rupees?"

He dumped several smaller boxes out of the larger one that I held - the actual product packaged inside one large container. All these small boxes also had Aniston's image on them.

He held one up. "Fifty rupees," he said.

But I didn't want just one of the small boxes that the actual product came in, I wanted the big packaging box, too, that had her image printed much larger, slightly stretched to fit the tall and skinny space. I put one of the small boxes in the large box and held it up.

"Kitnee rupee now?" I said.

"Sixty rupees," he said.

More than happy to pay a dollar for this enticingly humorous East-uses-West confluence of star power and marketing license, I handed over the money. I couldn't really tell what exactly the product was, but I was sure it was something very feminine so I slipped it into my backpack to get it out of sight.

At home I examined the packaging more closely. Most of the writing was in Urdu, but there was a bit in English, too. The English, however, didn't make complete sense. This is quite typical of Pakistani products, and can make for some humorous reading. I'll type what's there out for you, and perhaps you'll get a chuckle out of it too.

On the large box:

"Smart Ladies

This Solution first dry the menses and make power full to ovary and it is also useful for lacoria.

Mix the Solution in the glycerin and paste on chest, after some time the"

And that's it. See, the English is almost non-sensical and simply stops mid-sentence. Definitely something feminine, though.

Then, inside the small box, some description and a little more direction (though of course not too much):

"ONLY FOR LADIES. FOR SPECULAR PARTS OF THE BODY. The Ladies can usually use for specular parts. They can use both upper side of the breast and specular parts their body as well. To keep the small size of this medicine the specular part of the bodies will more secerillinize with mixture glaserine the bodies can use on the upper side of their breast for looking more beautiful and Glamorous.

FOR SPECULAR PARTS OF THE BODY. To keet the high potential of the boys \ men. This cap can useful for their. All the above items / products is force from the ALKOHAL."

Seriously people, that's what it says; believe me, I couldn't make this up if I tried.

Any speculation on what the "specular parts" are? Definitely good to know it will get me high potential in the eyes of boys \ men, and that it is free from (I think that's what "force from" is supposed to be) alcohol, good Muslim that I am.

So, as you can see, I still don't know exactly what this product is, what it's supposed to do, or how you use it. But that doesn't really matter. I have a box with Jennifer Aniston's form floating above multi-colored Urdu script, and I've gotten a good laugh or two out of the content and form of the package and its writing, and that is definitely worth my money.

(Sorry, now you all know what your Christmas present is going to be...)