

Portrayals of Women in Indian Television Advertisement as an Agent of Patriarchy A study on Indian Context

Monika Mili

Department of Political Science

Abstract: Communication denotes a process that is both interactive and purposeful. It is obvious that the mass media plays an important part in every stage of the formation of public opinion. There is an image in the minds of most people that the mass media are very powerful, particularly, because they were successfully made use of during the two world wars and also by the great dictators- Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini. While, the old statement was that “The pen is mightier than sword”, the recent version is, ‘The mass media is more powerful than the Atom Bomb’ Television as one of the powerful communication medium plays a pivotal role in reaching large number of people in a very short time. It is an ideal medium to convey information to illiterate and literate in urban and rural areas on whom it would have profound impact.

Keywords: Women, Television, Patriarchy, India, Communication etc.

Introduction: The viewers of television increase day by day. According to the survey carried by BARC- Broad Cast India Survey, March 2017, the television viewers in India in 2017 was 64%, which is 10% more than compared to the 2013 that is 54%. Advertisements are the most powerful and universal means of communication among the media vehicles. It has the ability to control the market by creating diverse personal needs, changing attitude, self-image and preferences. It is not only limited to selling the products but also it reflects certain kind of societal norms and customs, which have been practices by a certain society. Simply, advertisement use as a tool which represent both as an economic organization and at the same time reflects ideas, values and attitudes of a culture.

Over the decade, women are exploited in every field of the society and advertising field is not an exception. Women are exploited in advertising to sell products to both male and female consumers through their two dimensional role: as caretakers of the household and the family and as a decorative sex object. The primary objective of the advertisers is to capture the audience to the advertisement by selling an image of perfection and that perfect image most of the time is a woman, who believes to have a good brand recall values and an easy way to grab the attention (schaffier,2016). For Matlin – she provide a ‘desirable’ image for the advertisements, irrespective of her relevance to the advertisement or product. In India, the trend of portrayal of women has been non-traditional and this can be attributed to the changes in the Indian society. Women are main targets of commercial related to them and household use like cosmetics, jewelry, food, cleansers that is detergents and soaps, utensils, kitchen gadgets etc. Women are depicted as sexual object in advertisement where they are made to look beautiful with the help various product or services and are made capable of demonstrating desire openly specially, to attract attention of men with the help of the acquire beauty and charm.

Advertisements take advantage of the Indian mentality craze for fair skin specially, for girls. Young girls are made the target of various fairness creams and encourage to become fair skinned and get good marriage proposal or the desired job. It seems that fair skin is the only ticket to success and all other qualification and qualities becoming irrelevant. Featuring, a

female model in advertisement becomes a compulsion for the advertisers, which sometimes seems unnecessary. Advertisers seem to sell anything from saving gel to cars. Women are being projected as nearly an object in such advertisement. The advertisements start with an attractive woman posing a seductive ways followed by the product or the service offered by the company. The beauty of the model already allures the customers, so advertisers do not have to put in more effort to motivate them. It has been discovered that the role of woman in television advertising has changed over the decades. Although, woman in India are portrayed as traditional and stereotypical over the decades, there is a difference in product categories advertised by them. Advertisers used women's emancipation to soft peddle consumerism advertisers in the decade 2000 are willing to portray woman in male dominated advertisements as compare to advertisers of 1990s.

Objective of the Study:

- 1.To know the Women exploiting and represent in the field of the society and Advertising.
- 2.To analys how Indian society is traditionally a patriarchal society, where women are often seen as subordinate or inferior to men.
- 3.To know how Women Portrayed as a Sex Object and Physical Decorative.

Television Advertisement as an Agent of Patriarchy:

Indian society is traditionally a patriarchal society, where women are often seen as subordinate or inferior to men. In every socio-religious believe and practices, political ideologies etc. has been followed from ancient time can found the sense of male dominance. Society and family play a key role in creating the division gender role and it is imbibe from one generation to another. In India, a women's image has been casted and shaped by years of male supremacy and female subservience. Though, over the years feminine and masculine roles are quite modified yet the stereotyping of women still exists somewhere in the minds of the people in the society. Bharat (1995) claims that Indian irrespective of their educational level and career status somewhere hold the traditional perception of women within their family.

Now a days, advertising is a part and parcel of life. It has really a strong influence in our decisions as consumers. The aim of advertisements is no longer restricted in to informing us about the product and its use. It is more about having a product. It can make us laugh and shock us as well. Advertising has a link with our custom and codes, which govern our society. This is why we believe that advertisements represents our lifestyle and our thinking. What we see we believe it. Advertisements portray women in different role such as mother, wife, girlfriend, friend, sister, daughter and many other roles. Among these different roles their main placement in advertisement is surrounded by either housewives or career women. Though, women have different roles to play but their representation in advertisements is limited. Here, emerge the need to know why representation in media is important. There is a great deal of attention paid to the very word representation in the media. However, literary representation refers to, "the act of representing or the state of being represented". It deals with the process of knowledge production. Many great people like Richard Rorty, Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger has worked on the philosophical aspects of representation. All of them agreed in the same point that representation and knowledge are two inseparable elements in modern philosophy. Representation is incomplete without knowledge. At beginning representation was a theory of knowledge and as time passed representation become a practical tool of knowledge in nineteenth century.

In advertisements representation refers to the presentation of the social aspects using the element of fantasy. Advertisements represent those ideologies, which are related to the social, cultural and religious fundamental objects. To portray the reality in front of the eyes of the people advertisements uses such things like people, places, objects, events, ideologies, cultural characteristics and other concepts.

Female representation in the advertisements are based on some criteria such as childlike/maternal, jobless, seductive or provocative, dependent upon a man, perfect, dizzy or unintelligent and manipulative. The advertisers focus on the body image inadequacy and subservience of female model. Ryan Saxby Hill in his writings “sex, lies and the media: Questioning representation” argued that the creation of the images that make women derisive in the society, “there are new markets for products to fix this shortcomings”. This is the reason for which the women are becoming more conscious about their weight and following weight loss regimes, anti ageing products. Images of women in advertisements are designed to sell products. Women are a common element in advertising for both the products of male and female. In the most advertisements, male characters are rewarded for self control and the control of other aggression and violence, financial independence and physical desirability. Advertisements represent dominant social norms for us. What we see in the ads can over time develop into what we view as normal or right.

The viewers think that the advertisements are always presenting the right images in front of them. So, ads play the powerful role in portraying the images of women in advertisements. In a seminar a well known producer of the Bangladesh world Mustafa Sarwar Foruqi said that they also think about the position of women in creating any commercial and they do not create any negative images of women consciously. They portray women more in ads because women take majority decisions in shopping. He took the example of detergent and said that as it is household products so using a female model in these ads would be a better choice for the manufacturer to sell the products. He also talked about the advertisements of fairness cream. He said that women are conscious about beauty from the ancient age so this ads will naturally have female models are there is nothing wrong about it. But he pointed out that the message they are giving to the society of getting a better husband by using the fairness cream is wrong. This is how ads hurting women’s self respect. Representing women in ads are not bad but representing them in negative way and sending the wrong messages in the society is bad. But what can be observed in Foruqi statement is that although he criticizes the message has been given by fairness cream but he supported that women should be in household activities. Advertisements are making in such a way that it serve the interest of patriarchy and reinforce the existing power structure. Most of the advertisements women are portrayed stereotypical role such as follows:

Women Portrayed as a Sex Object and Physical Decorative:

The depiction of women as sex objects refer to a woman in an advertisement that is portrayed a sexual manner, usually dressed in reveling clothing or in a provocative poses. The sex object is purely ornamental and her presence and appearance are not related to the product, for example, in all the Axe deodorant advertisements the male model is shown always to be surrounded by the beautiful and glamorous female model. In the ads the female models become fascinated by the fragrant of the Axe deodorant and want to have the user of the deodorant desperately. Here, the advertisers do not give preference to the other benefits of the product. Their main concentration remains on portraying beautiful glamour female models. Due to more concentration on the models, the attention deserve by the product is not sufficient. The main focus of the advertisement is lost. Also such unnecessary projection of women is derogatory to them. Many tobacco companies also use women in their advertisements to sell the products. Women featured as sex objects have specifically been

identified in commercials in the United States of America. Garau found that suggestive and partially nude attire was found in 81% of advertisements featuring female athletes, placing the focus on the sexuality of the female athlete rather than on her athlete skills. Products category advertisements that featured sex objects most often included clothes, food and personal care items. Advertisements for fashion items or apparel used sexualized females in China, UK and South

Africa. In a study on sexualized images in advertising personal care or body enhancing products predominantly featured sex objects. Thai advertising images contained sex objects most frequently in advertisements for food and beverages and second most frequently for promoting personal care products.

The women, as physical decorative creatures refer to a portrayal that focuses on physical beauty. The “flower vase” is a role that carries an image of glamour, charm and beauty and was the second most-used role portrayal in advertisements in China. The women beauty in a physical decorative role was frequently identified in mobile communications and advertisements. The woman as a physically attractive decoration was the most popular portrayal for advertising medicine and personal care products in Thai.

The women, as decorative figures, in television commercials are mainly used to promote personal care products. The decorative role as stated previously, is an image that signifies beauty and symbolizes the physical ideal. Its relation to personal care items lies in the fact that the application of the advertised products will enhance the physical attractiveness of women. Though media proves out to be a boon to bring social change in Indian society but its policy in terms of depicting women image has somehow distorted. More often, the media depicts women not only as a sexual object with little value, but also it sends negative messages about the ways in which women should be treated. They constantly degrade status of women in the society.

Women as Housewife or Mother: The women as housewives or homemakers are typified by a degree of dependence and are generally, depicted in a household setting. Women are shown as dependent in 72.5% of role portrayals in a study of Zimbabwean television commercials. Similarly, Bulgarian television commercial depictions feature women advertising domestic products more often than other product categories. A study of Saudi television commercials indicated that females are portrayed in household settings in a large majority of advertising depictions, indicating a market preference for the home maker role portrayal. An international study found that women are consistently shown in a home setting and are far less likely than males to be shown outdoors or in business settings. In Spanish commercial television setting women are frequently shown in a home. Similarly, women are shown at home far more frequently than men are in Zimbabwean commercials. Women are portrayal as happy and loving housewife, mother with doing multiple task and caring her family etc. all these ads shows draws a picture of ideal woman. At the same time they teach their daughter also.

Although women are the main consumers of products, advertising companies do not portray women in a powerful way but more as the dependent on the male in their lives or showing low cost items to buy such as laundry, detergent and cosmetics while men are portrayed as a powerful in advertisements and selling non-domestic items like, cars and cameras along with domestic products. They portray as the businessman or expertise. For an example in the ads of Tresemme shampoo, shows a men expertise gives advice to the women to use it. In an ads of Gillette Razor shows woman, played the role as wife, ask permission to buy a saree from her husband. Women are specifically noted as product users in television commercials advertisements rather than as experts. The research findings of an international comparative

study indicated that women are often portrayed as product users but not as product authorities. For an example, in the advertisement of Harpic the sales boy play the role as the expertise of harpic and gives advice to the woman to use it.

In a study “women’s role portrayal in advertisements: An Empirical Study” conducted by Lawrence H., Wortsel and John M. Fisbie showed that women do not want to see themselves as a redundant object in advertisements. On the other hand the study also pointed out that men think differently from women. In this article according to male consumer, “women are perfectly satisfied when portrayed in their traditional homemaker, fashion or sex object roles.” Sometimes the advertisers also support the thoughts of the male consumers regarding women consumers. Erving Goffmans research on gender advertisement aids educating about the different ways that the media reinforces the common stereotype of women. Goffmans outlined six visual cues for power that tend to be in favor of male dominance. The first of these cues is relative size, which suggest that the larger person in the photo is more important or influential.

Similar to this cues is the ritualization of subordination, in which women are prostrated in such a way that they are physically lower than men are. Feminine touch shows the passiveness of women, because they do not forcefully grasp an object, but caress it. In advertising, men are typically depicted as in a supervisory rule over women in the workplace, having a higher function ranking. Women are also portrayed as more involve in the family, where as men seen more withdrawal and stand at a distance from the rest of the family. Whereas, men are depicted as withdrawn from the family, women are depicted as withdrawn from social situation. They are often looking around at the scenery and not engage in the happening around them. These six power cues, along with many others provide audiences with a quick common understanding of how gender is viewed in society. They create stereotypes for both women and men, as well as indicate what types of statuses they should have. Advertisements put women in her place, put her down and they represent as affectionate, gentle, sympathetic, emotional, submissive etc.

Women are not only portraits stereotypical in Indian television, but also across the culture women portrait in a same way. The study of Siu and Au is a cross culture between China and Singapore. There study found that both in China and Singapore male central characteristics appeared in products used by either sex, whereas more female central characters appeared in products used by females only. They also observed that male voices were used in voice-overs as compared to female voices. Women were portrayed more often to be younger than men and men were more likely to be seen in independent roles, whereas women were portrayed in roles relative to others.

Portrayals of Women in Indian Television Advertisement:

Advertising is not a new phenomenon. The oldest known written advertisement is a 3000 year old that is ‘Babylonian Tablet’. Although, it is started earlier but, in 1926 when Jon L. Bayard in England invented television, it created a new outlook of advertising on electronic media. The first commercial advertisement was seen in Indian television in 1978 on ‘Vivid Bharti’. In this advertisement Bengali actress Konkana Sen Sharma appeared in first commercial advertisement of ‘Horlicks’. After this, in Indian television world various new companies and advertisement agencies also used to broadcasting advertisement by casting female model in the television. Over the course of history of television advertising, women have defined in very narrow roles. They are mostly place in domestic sphere like cleaning and housework, caretaker, often shows as a sex object Advertisement at present not only make women as product but as men also and neglected their intelligent. Advertisements fix the idea of beauty for men and women. For an example, the fair and lovely advertisement

not only gave importance to establish external beauty of women but also at the same time represents patriarchy. One of this advertisement shows that a fat boy looking for his bride. He likes a girl because of her external beauty, as she uses fair and lovely cream. But the boy thought that the girl might not like him due to his fat body. Therefore he started to go to gym. They perpetuated physical strength of male. Women portrayed as product users and they uses product for getting a good male in their life. Therefore, one cannot say that as a fourth pillar of democracy advertisements are gender neutral; it is gender biased.

India has a rich culture, where women were worshiped as incarnation of goddess. But, status of women in India has been changed from different time. The status of women in India in pre medieval period was good, but in the medieval period it was worse. Although, it was believed that after the 19th century women condition was improved but actually it was not rather it become domination of traditional patriarchal society. In the traditional patriarchal society, like India women were treated as a sub-ordinate group. She identified as a daughter, wife and mother in a family. Different religious communities practices certain custom and tradition which exploited women rights like- in Hindu community believed in child marriage, sati prartha, ownership of properties of men, widow harassments and so on and in Muslim community practiced parda system, the role of ideal women etc. in the Vedic period and medieval period women condition are bad in day by day. But during the British period, the different social- religious movements and various social reforms try to against social evils which exploited of women. After the independence, of India to provides constitutional provisions, which give the equal status both men and women. Although these provisions ensures to fulfill certain rights for women but on that time also apply to certain patriarchal societal tradition beliefs, customs which create a sub- ordinate space of women. Still dowry, female infanticide practicing and these are increasing day by day. Still the value of a woman is judges by her outer beauty not by her intellectuality. The media (most of them) represent women as a commodity, which is good for men. So, in a patriarchal society women condition will be good when the psychological mindset of a society would be change.

Conclusion: Based on the paper one can come to a conclusion that although there emerge some changes in portrayals of women in television advertisement, but there have many other advertisements where women have relatively remain the same over the years. Using camera angles to look down upon a model, positioning of the body in order to appear small and weak and overall standard of beauty that constantly remains female that we must look sexuality pleasing to the others, all play into the idea that women are objects. Objects, of course cannot hold any form of power and there must be subordinate. Second the depiction of men in advertising has become more sexualized yet the underlining message is still the same. Advertisement at present not only make women as product but as men also and neglected their intelligent. Advertisements fix the idea of beauty for men and women. For an example, the fair and lovely advertisement not only gave importance to establish external beauty of women but also at the same time represents patriarchy. One of this advertisement shows that a fat boy looking for his bride. He likes a girl because of her external beauty, as she uses fair and lovely cream. But the boy thought that the girl might not like him due to his fat body. Therefore he started to go to gym. They perpetuated physical strength of male. Women portrayed as product users and they uses product for getting a good male in their life. Therefore, one cannot say that as a fourth pillar of democracy advertisements are gender neutral; it is gender biased. Whatsoever, India is a democratic country its provide equality and the emergence of awareness among the society also success to change to some extent and we hope for the better in future.

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