

## RE-EMERGING TRENDS OF PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

MRINALINI B CHAVAN

**Abstract:** In this paper the presenter proposes to concentrate on increasing trends in Indian advertising industry to depict Indian women in the positive light and thereby, analyze their contribution in re-positioning them from margin to centre. The Indian T V industry, in the 1980s, was marred by representation of stereotypical image of Indian women in advertisement and in the serials as sex sirens, docile daughters - sisters, tolerant sister - in laws, a perfect mother and ever helping housewives. However, since last few years, the massive impact of globalization is visible on Indian socio-cultural ideas and norms. The old ideas and norms which directly used to recognize the traditional roles of women in our society, have been gone through a revolutionary changes, replacing them (slowly but surely) with modern values that offer a liberal socio-culture and economic environment to Indian women. In the recent times, the modern images of Indian women: confident, happy, educated, and emotionally as well as economically independent, are commonly portrayed in the advertisements. The presenter intends to analyze and decode few prominent advertisements that offer messages in the given socio-cultural and political context. The paper concludes that the media is very powerful medium that impacts the psychological set up of the masses. The advertising agencies should continued to take full accountability and responsibility for the women's depiction in their advertisement, thereby, fastening the process of recognizing the new roles and values modern Indian women cherish in our society.

**Keywords:** Advertisement Globalization, Stereotyped Images of Indian Women, Positive Images of Women.

**Introduction:** The Indian advertising industry has come of age since there has been conscious attempts to portray Indian women on TV as multifaceted personalities. However, this was not the case couple of decades ago.. 1990s was the decade of introduction of Liberal Economy which intended the long term economic revolution in Indian. Globalization had intense impact on the socio-cultural sphere of Indian society as well. The new economy offered employment opportunities to Indian women than to lead typical stereotypical lives. The new generation of educated, economically independent and politically conscious generation of Indian women started contributing to the Nation's economy. In real life the society was opening up to the idea of changing roles of Indian women. Unfortunately, these new roles of Indian women were completely ignored by glamour industry i.e Bollywood, T V serials (Ekapt Kappors 's serial promoted stereotyped roles of women) and even by advertisement industry (women's role limited to domestic lives), respectively. These three agencies continued to portrayed women superficially, reinforcing the stereotypical and biased images of women. However since last one decade, few socio-political incidences, forced these agencies to take serious note of women's contribution in nation building and they have seem to be taken initiative to do justice to their portrayal in Broadcasting/Electronic media. The presenter proposes to analyze the advertisements that have portrayed positive images of modern Indian women on T V. The re-emerging positive images of women

reflect the modern approaches, perspectives and sensibilities of modern Indian women in real sense. Though, the discussion treats the topic separately, they are integrated as a part of organic whole.

The process of women associating to T V in India has a long story. Indian television industry came into existence on an experiment basis in the form of UNESCO's pilot project on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1959 with an objective of using T V to conduct educational programmes for the masses, rural upliftment and community development. With positive feedback of survey done for two decade on T V, Doordarshan wanted to provide information, education and entertainment. On 15<sup>th</sup> April 1982 it decided to introduce the National programme on TV in order to create the awareness about the national educational programme, national integrity, communal harmony, family welfare, promoting varied culture in India, current affair, science programme etc. However in its silver jubilee year, The Indian Council for Communication Training and Research organized a two day National seminar on Sept 11- 12 1984, in collaboration with UNICEF, New Delhi on 'Media Utilization for the development of Women and children'. It emphasized to re-correct the distorted presentation of women and children in media who are the most neglected segment in the society. This was the first ever landmark decision to stop representing the distorted images of women in the Broadcasting Media. Jaya Chakroborthy(2009)in *Media and Women's Development(Vol 1)* mentions that shaping the strategy for the national Sixth Five Year Plan at a

time when women were emerging as another capable force in the society, the policy makers had noted:

“ Despite development measures and the constitutional legal guarantee women have lagged behind men in all sectors’ (as quoted in Media and women empowerment” (23)

#### ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertisements are messages paid for by those who send them and it intend to influence people ( those who receive it) in order to sell off the consumer products

Advertising is a means of communication with the users of a product or service. Advertisements are messages paid for by those who send them and are intended to inform or influence people who receive them, as defined by the Advertising Association of the UK. In today's world, advertising uses every possible media to get its message through. It does this via television, print (newspapers, magazines, journals etc), radio, press, internet, direct selling, hoardings, mailers, contests, sponsorships, posters, clothes, events, colors, sounds, visuals and even people (endorsements). [4]

Portrayal of women in the advertisement create an impression of women being a mere sex objects. The main intention is to provide titillation to male dominated world in order to sell off the consumer products. Women's entire being is reduced to her physical appearance only. For instance the half naked female models are usually shown selling off cigarettes, automobiles, men's undergarments etc. Chakroborthy(2009)in *Media and Women's Development(Vol 2)*

“ Media images of women are by and large confined to the traditional archetypes - treating women in their domestic roles and sexual appeal ignoring their significant contribution to society ...

... the portrayal of women in media reinforces prejudice and stereotype. This distortion tends to justify and perpetuate existing inequalities” (19)

#### STEREOTYPED IMAGES OF INDIAN WOMEN ON TV

Chakroborthy(2009)in *Media and Women's Development(Vol 3)* mentions that according to Feroz Rangoonwalla, there was little efforts on the part of popular cinema to show women in a little more liberated, assertive, independent and progressive form. Dance, bathing scenes and rapes were essential ingredients of cinema.

Economically independent ambitious career-minded women who assert their individuality and attempt to act rationally are termed as self-centered, ruthless, domineering and the ones who are not bothered about their husbands and family ... (in serials) Economically independent woman is portrayed as a smoking, booze neurotic who pursues men with single mindedness, unbecoming of

a women. At the end she realizes her folly in being independent of man and is published with either death or in losing her man to a slavish, husband / lower worshipping woman who finds satisfaction (and approval of male audience) in serving him by fulfilling every demand of his spoken and unspoken”(27-34)

Broadcasting media reinforced the stereotyped and distorted image of women. Women are rarely shown as capable professionals. Roles of women as mothers, sisters and wives are regarded as secondary as they are meant only to serve men and fulfill their material needs. Women appear in television drama, comedy as self depreciating, dependant, irrational, over emotional figures. The Joshi Committee Report (Report of the working group on software for Doordarshan) commented:

Middle class ideologies of women's role as wives and mother's provide the underlying basis for most of the programme. In a country where 36% percent of the agricultural workforce in female, women continue to the projected as predominantly non-producers and as playing a limited role outside home(20)

Ekata Kapoor's *Sass - bahu* serials, re-enforced the stereotypical images of Indian women, contrasting the re-merging images of real life modern Indian women. *Kaunki Sass Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* serial immortalized the character of Tulsi, as the helpless, ever suffering crying housewife, always clad in heavy saris and ornaments. Independent and smart women were presented as vamps and husband stealers. Unfortunately, same stereotyped images were copied by the advertisement industry as well.

Following are the common observation of distorted representation of women in the Electronic media.

- Housewives are shown more concerned about their husband's clean shirts. They are made to feel guilty if they fail to clean it properly.
- Children are shown giving more credit to their father for being their mentor and mothers are shown taking back seat
- Few energy drinks advertisements mostly, show mothers justifying the need of the energy / health drinks for their sons and daughters are never in the picture as if a girl's health is not an issue to be taken seriously.
- Family members are shown ordering housewives/mother / sisters to cook different breakfast dishes and these women, too, shown obeying their orders like slaves.
- Girls are never shown doing outdoor sport activities as if they are assumed to be, too, comfortable in domestic environment alone.
- Cold war is commonly portrayed between *Sass and Bahu* (mother-in-law and daughter-in-law) over the use of appropriate brands of washing

powders .Women are portrayed as each other's eternal enemies with lot of exaggeration .

- Products like condoms, sexual power enhancing pills etc. are promoted with men as their main target group as if the issue of women's sexual pleasure is not to be given a thought at all.
- Women oriented products: sanitary napkins, undergarment , birth control pills are hardly directed/ presented aesthetically in the advertisements .
- Mothers cooks for the family and family members ,in return never appreciate their hard work
- Advertisement on Pain killers, pain -bam etc target housewives, since they are expected to be physically fit 24x7 to perform household activities. Men in the family are never in the picture in such advertisement .
- Working women are shown as dissatisfied figure, assuming that in general they fail to pay equal attention to family
- Kitchen appliances, food products etc are strictly shown to be promoted by housewives as if there's no another domain available to them where they could be better at .
- Housewives / mothers / sisters are shown caring more about their family member's health ( husbands and children prominently ) than their own .
- Housewives are made to feel guilty if they demand to be indulge into pleasure outside domestic domain.
- Jewellery products mostly show a man ( mostly husband) as the bread earner o f the family , gifts Jewellery to his wives( mostly housewives) as a token of love for being low profile family entity .
- Fat women / housewives are shown to be feeling insecure and guilty for gaining weight .They loose weight not for the sake of their own health but to please their husbands/ boyfriends etc.
- Mostly financial decisions ( different policies, life saving schemes, children's education plans health etc ) are shown to be taken by family man and women are presented as dumb and ignorant family members .
- Women are presented as gossip mongers who prefer to indulge into kitty parties to kill time . It shows as if they are incapable of any intellectual activities. .
- Women as single parents ,widows, spinsters etc. are portrayed as unfortunate and pathetic people . Such women are shown, unwillingly , stepping out of home to earn bread and butter for the family .
- Women are depicted as figures who are completely ignorant about matters related to financial planning and financial mess occurs only

when male family members( father , brother husband etc. ) fail to opt for appropriate financial decisions/ choices .

#### **NATIONAL MEDIA POLICY**

Citizens and women activist have been demanding an appropriate National Media Policy to curb the negative portrayal of women and to recognise their real contribution in the society . It also intended to help to change the existing archetypes in portraying women .

**Indecent Representation of Women ( Prohibition ) Act ( 1986 ) :** The IRWA, 1986 was enacted with the specific objective of prohibiting the indecent representation of women through advertisement, publication, writing, and painting or in any other manner. The existing Act, in its present form, covers the print media. However, over the years, technological revolution has resulted in the development of newer forms of communication such as internet and satellite based communication, multi-media messaging, cable television etc. The act enacted by Parliament in the Thirty-seven Year of the Republic of India The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 (IRWA) focuses on indecent representation of women and brings under its ambit references that are derogatory to the dignity of women. This law defines indecency as below : "indecent representation of women" means the depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman; her form or body or any part thereof in such way as to have the effect of being indecent, or derogatory to, or denigrating women, or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure the public morality or morals .[5]

Late 1980s is considered as an experimental era in the Indian advertising industry . This is the era when the advertisement guru Alaque Padmasee, created history by creating two important advertisements: Surf washing detergent powder and bathing soap Liril , respectively !!! Till then an Indian housewife was considered just a dumb decorative piece. However, this image changed when in the Surf commercial *Lalitaji* , a housewife had been shown ,claming to be making an intellectual choice by buying Surf detergent powder . This is the earlier example in Indian advertising industry where it is shown in the electronic media, that even a housewife is capable of making an intellectual choices to run daily chores. When Indian housewives, connected themselves with the image of *Lalitaji*, it was bikini clad young model in Liril advertisement that took the young Indian masses by storm. .At the same the popularity of Poja Beddi's sexy image in *Kamsutra* advertisement, symbolized the growing processes of Indian women's attempt to re- assert their sexuality ..

#### **GLOBALIZATION**

Globalization has far more impact on Indian 's socio-cultural and economic domain .

Sociologically ,The term globalization means International Integration. It is a process through which the diverse world is unified into a single society. Opening up of world trade, development of advanced means of communication, internationalization of financial markets, growing importance of MNC's, population migrations and more generally increased mobility of persons, goods, capital, data and ideas[6]

Globalization , though initially considered as an economic phenomenon , has a large impact o f the socio-cultural sphere in Indian society . It offered a better opportunities to Indian women to step out of stereotypical roles and contribute to the economy and nation building by offering professional services in all important sectors. Today women are working in all important sectors .They have challenged male domination in all respects. Women are tend to lead career oriented independent lives. Even parents/ husbands/ boyfriends are seen to be supporting their women to follow their dreams .

The period of Post Economic Liberalization led to the introduction of satellite television to Indian masses . The influences of foreign brands and channels revolutionized the advertisement domain and as a result , smart , intelligent and independent Indian models were overnight in demand to sell off foreign products to masses .The landmark events in the world of glamorous industry , accelerated the process of remerging of the independent modern women in India : First Madhu Sapre the pretty Maharshtrian model turned out to be the first ever second Indian runner up in the Miss Universe pageant (1992).Secondly Aishwarya Rai , became the Miss World ( 1994)and Sushmita Sen , became the first Indian Miss Universe( 1994) respectively , during the post liberalization era in India.

Such successful achievements of Indian girls/models on the international platform gave them golden opportunities and exposure to represent the foreign products( beauty, cold drink and electronic goods etc ) with lot of confidence and courage . This newly found identity gave a new high to the young generation of Indian women . For instance , Aishwarya Rai who was the highest paid model in 1992 -1993 and later on went on to become Miss World. She not only advertised for commercial products but also appeared in organ donation advertisement as a socially conscious citizen of the country . Indian women in new liberal social environment sensed the need to step out of the box to reassert newly found identity and economic and emotional independence. However theses realistic trends in the society were never depicted on

television since producers and the advertisement department , both were still busy portraying women stereotypically.

With a history of portraying the distorted images of Indian women for almost two decades on TV ;the advertisement industry is going back to one thing : Reality check !!! Advertisement industry could no more afford to portray women superficially because in real life women had already entered a man's domain .Since last one decade increasing crime against women , have already alerted socio-political and legal agencies to introduce or re-enforce the major legal protections for modern working women . The heinous crimes against women in the country : Jessica Lal murder case in Delhi , Arushi Talwar murder case, the case of Lakshmi , the acid attack victim in Delhi , increasing cases of honor killing in the society and not but the least Delhi Nirbhaya rape incidence , made the collective consciousness of Indian women to stand for their rights and demanded right to /work with dignity and security in their professional as well as domestic sphere .Other agencies in their immediate environment , too, were forced to observe these changing perception of and about Indian women .Advertising Industry had to take notice of these changing roles of women in our society and needed to portray them realistically .

#### **POSITIVE IMAGES OF INDIAN WOMEN IN THE ADVERTISEMENT**

The emerging new liberal value systems definitely benefiting to some section of women in our society .For instance, parents are wholeheartedly welcoming birth of a girl child .Girls are encouraged to continue and complete their education for the sake of employment and self-sustenance . Government agencies too, have come up with pro-girl child education and health policies. Ambitious women demanding space for career advancements. Over and above , women are blissfully taking sweet time to settle down in their lives since marriage is no more considered by them as their priority. Women are demanding liberty in choosing their life partners .Compatible life partners are preferred to non-understanding life partners and as a result increasing divorces among couples, remarriages ,widow remarriages ,single hood etc are no more considered as taboos . .Women are travelling alone exploring life experiences. Educated , talented and intelligent women earning fat salaries. Sexually conscious women are comfortably expressing their sexuality .Married women demanding freedom to have a say on family planning , own career , financial decisions for family members etc. Even young generation of men / friends/ husbands /boyfriends are willingly offering a support system to ambitious smart female partners .Theses obvious changes have

been thankfully ,captured by the advertising agencies and suddenly there is popular trend of portraying Indian women in the positive light in the electronic media to sell off the consumer products .

**Following are the advertisements with specific themes and need special mention:**

**1)Re-marriages in the society :**The increasing trend of re -marriages in the society is captured by *Tanishq* jewelers. In this advertisement a woman with a girl child is shown to be remarrying . On this happy occasion ,she is shown to be beautifying herself by beautifying herself in *Tanishq* Jewellery

Hansa Research's executive director, Srinivasan Rama claims that post survey they found that this advertisement topped the popularity chart because of its sensitive portrayal of women. "It shows a woman living on her own terms, who also brings people together, her to-be spouse, her child... that is why it clicked," [7]

**2) Emotional independence/ Liberty to express oneself :***Hero Honda's Pleasure* with a tag line "Why should Boys have all fun" , presents Alai Bhatt , the young throb of the nation, appealing girls to have fun in their lives as enthusiastically as like any given group of boys, rather than restricting themselves

**3)Career space :** In *Fair and Lovely* advertisement , a young girl is persuaded by her father to marry a perfect groom who could offer her financial security . However , the girl demands space in her life and asks father to give her few more years to carve her identity in the professional field , so that she would be equally capable of offering the same financial security and home to her family .

**4) Mother as a doctor who is making intelligent choices:** In the advertisement of *Lizol* liquid , a mother who is a doctor by profession , is shown to be opting for said liquid to keep her house gem - free for the sake of her little baby girl .

**5) Women as financial advisor in the family :** In the *ICICI Prudential Life Insurance* advertisement , it is the wife who insists her husband on signing the insurance papers for future security . This advertisement reveals the reality that women too are playing major roles in financial decisions at home

**6) Understanding and caring life ( male ) partners :** In *Domino pizza* advertisement , a typical cosmopolitan couple is shown, where a husband intend to enjoy *Dominoz* pizza for dinner with his beloved wife than fussing over the burnt vegetable she attempts to cook .

**6)Men offering helping hand in the kitchen:** In the *Philips Air* machine advertisement , a wife is shown doing her office work on the laptop , whereas her caring husband willingly, offer to cook evening snakes for both o f them on the said machine

**7)Girl child with disability considered as no more burden :***Bharti Health Insurance* advertisement , shows a father investing in a long term health policy to arrange funds for the artificial leg for his differently able daughter who later shown to be performing *kattak* on the stage with great courage and confidence .Father is shown watching proudly the brave performance of his daughter among other little girls.

**8)Finding compatible life partner** In the advertisement of *Bharatmatriomomny .com* a woman is proud to be married to a man who she finds on the said website He is her dream life partner who before marriage promises her to give all the liberty and space to maintain her identity( she is allowed to work ) in the society than just to be a housewife. Though the family is not in any sort of financial crises, the husband is shown defending his wife's decision to work for the sake of her happiness ( she wants to maintain her identity ) and emotional satisfaction .

**9) Menaces is no more taboo:** *Whisper* sanitary napkins, shows a confident young girl performing her professional assignment successfully, without getting conscious of menaces.

**CONCLUSION:**

Globalization has offered a golden opportunity to India women to step out of their cocoon and contribute in nation building . This is the best socio-cultural and economic phase in which Indian society has already started offering liberal environment to women where they are progressing as an individual entities with no burden of restrictive cultural baggage This process can be fastened by media since it is the most influential and fastest medium to reach the Indian masses . If they continue to portray women in the positive light ,with lot of accountability ;our society at its sub -conscious as well as conscious level would encouragingly , accept the new values that Indian women cherish since they(women) have already embarked upon to play challenging roles in their lives

**References**

1. Dr. Devakumar Jacob, Access to Rural Women in Higher Education; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 2 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 266-274
2. Chakroborthy , Jaya . Women and Media. *Women in Journalism ( Vol 1 ) : Media and Women's Development .* Sarup and Sons: Delhi, 2007. Print .

- 
3. [2] Role of Electronic Media in Women's Development  
 4. *Women in Journalism ( Vol 2) : Media and Women's Development* Sarup and Sons: Delhi, 2007. Pp .28-34  
 5. Waheed Shafiah, Impact of Globalization on Indian Women in Anita Desai's Fasting & Feasting; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 1 Issue 1 (2013), Pg 149-152  
 6. [3]- Utilization of communication Media for Women's Development *Women in Journalism ( Vol 3) : Media and Women's Development(35-39)* Sarup and Sons: Delhi, 2007. Pp .35-39  
 7. [4] see:<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/advertising>  
 8. Waheed Shafiah, Women's Plight - Global Issues Either in Past or in Present; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 1 Issue 1 (2013), Pg 144-148  
 9. [5] See:<http://pib.nic.in>  
 10. [6] See:<http://www>.  
 11. [7] See:<http://www.business-standard.com>

\* \* \*

Mrinalni B Chavan , Assistant Professor Kirti M Doongurse College,  
 University Of Mumbai .MS , India      [mru\\_hc@rediffmail.com](mailto:mru_hc@rediffmail.com)