

SELLING WOMEN A SELF-VIEW



Prostituting Women's Bodies

“STOP for Duco!” the ad proclaims but walking past the shop window, it is the woman’s big bursting bosom which compels you to stop and have a look at her. Only as the eye ‘fondly’ moves downwards from the bosom, does one notice the paint tin. But sure enough, the message is bound to stay in mind, considering the hard-hitting association of this buxom woman with Duco paints. This is perhaps one of the more blatant examples of how women’s bodies are being used as sex-objects to capture the eyes and mind of the buyer, and through him, capture the market.

Is this not a newer, sophisticated way of prostituting women’s bodies? The ordinary prostitute is made to sell her body to one man at a time. This model, in return for a couple of thousand rupees, displays her body and sells her ‘sex appeal’ to millions of ‘customers’, titillating them into buying this particular brand of paint. What is even more grotesque – the

ordinary prostitute is unjustly ostracized from the society which exploits her, and is condemned to live in the red-light area. But this kind of sophisticated prostitution has become a status symbol – the ambition of many a young woman!

Selling ‘Femininity’

This advertisement blatantly exploits the sexist distinctions between the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ qualities, which society attributes to men and women. The advocacy of hair removers for women implies that face and body hair is unwomanly. But why is body hair declared unfeminine? Body hair is a biological fact. Since women tend naturally to have less of it than men, the sexists have declared hairlessness to be a point of beauty among women. Hairlessness has also been approved of in men by some societies wherein men shave off beard and moustaches.

However, no great fuss seemed to have been made about body hair among women until someone invented hair removing lotion. One can hypothesize that when someone decided to market it, he was faced with the question of who would buy his product. The shaving razor had firmly entrenched itself. Men would not turn easily to another product. So, it appears, manufacturers turned to the women’s market. And advertising did the rest.

The feminine mystique created a ready market for such products. They sell a mysterious ‘femininity’ preserved in perfume jars and packaged in flimsy nightwear. Hair remover sells the same ‘femininity’, accentuating it by contrast with masculinity. A familiar Anne French advertisement says, “Not shaving – that’s for men! Gives you nicks and a thick stubbly

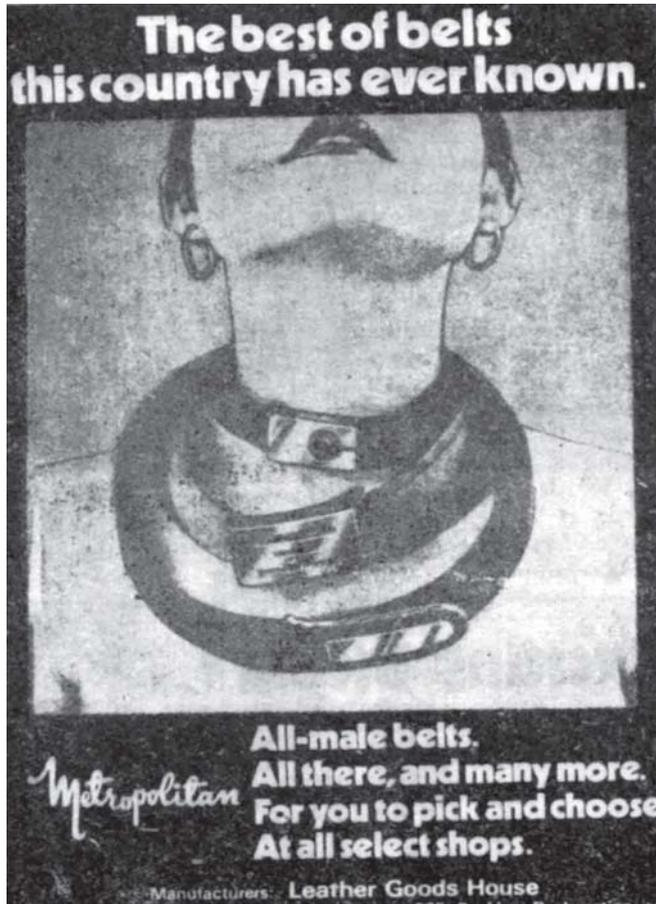


growth. Ghastly. Instead, just cream hair away the delicate feminine way.”

Worse still, this ad makes women guilty about using the rival product, the razor, when it refers to “the shame of razor cuts and stubble.” It is obvious from such ads that business firms make a fetish of “silky-smooth” femininity for it fetches them fancy profits.

Tied To Males

You first reaction to this ad may be one of revulsion. Are



those snakes coiled tight around the woman, ready to strangle her, crush her neck? Then you realize that they are just leather belts, and begin to relax, the shock is over. But wait a moment, what do those heavy belts signify? They are coiled close to the woman’s neck, like a noose. The broad, “all-male” (so the ad proclaims) belts have a stranglehold on the delicate, nude female body – isn’t there a certain symbolism here? The ad seems to say: This is how Indian women are and should be chained to their husbands – slaves of male violence, passion, lust.

The woman is here not just to attract the male buyer’s attention – she awakens a sadistic tendency too. Wife-beating with belts is all too common. “The best of belts” – “his country” would be more appropriate.

The Hunter or the Hunted?

This woman dresses daringly. She carries a dangerous looking rifle. She is vampish, powerful. She expresses the secret desire of women (who are all too powerless) to have power over their men. But the only power this advertiser can promise women lies in a bottle of nailpolish, a case of lipstick. In the battle of the sexes these are poor weapons indeed!

The notion that a woman can catch a man and hold him captive with the sole aid of her glossy lips and painted



fingerails is ridiculous. Such power is only skin deep. Yet women snatch at it because they have long been denied even the veneer of the powerful vamp.

In this sense the advertisement reflects the ‘modern’ attitude to women. Women are no longer looked upon as just demure dolls, they are now femme fatales. But even vampish women are not allowed to be too dangerous, to challenge male domination. The ammunition they are encouraged to use is just a harmless compound of cosmetics.

And far from being the huntress, the woman who responds to this ad only becomes a victim. Note the words in which she is described. “You’re sure to *surrender* to the tempting range of Step Nail enamel and Lipstick. In a range of *alluring* shades.”

The role has been reversed: the woman is not the huntress,

Are your professional ambitions at war with your homemaking instincts?



Take some tips from **Femina**

At Femina we have experts with concrete suggestions on how to make the best of your home and your job. We give you articles and features on how to make the most efficient use of your time, in the office and at home. We show you how to best organize yourself on the job at the office, so you don't carry home your office tensions... or how to cook up a simple, delicious and nutritious meal on a slender budget. We present you with details on career openings, promotion prospects, salary structures, vocational training schemes, wise financial investments, creches for children and other items of interest to the working woman. The modern Indian woman always tries to strike a happy balance between her career and her home because both areas are vital to her. So, what we try and work out for you is how to build a rewarding life for yourself and your family.

femina
means different things to different women.

she is the dupe of an unscrupulous advertising agency.

Promoting a Split Self

And here is a leading women's magazine, supposed to be providing reading material for the "modern Indian woman." The advertisement shows the same woman in two poses – first, in a sympathetic sari and sleeveless blouse which exposes her bare waist, hair attractively open, watch on her wrist, a string of pearls round her neck, obediently waiting to take down her boss's dictation (she can't possibly be a 'boss' herself!) On the other side, she's busy cutting vegetables – the image of a 'good wife', wrapped in a cotton sari and sleeved blouse, bangles on her arms, mangal sutra round her neck, hair soberly tied back.

The ad asks :- "Are your professional ambitions at war with your homemaking instincts?" Notice the words used – to peel potatoes as the picture shows her doing, is a woman's "instinct", her "natural desire", while to be successful in her professional is a selfish ambition which obstructs this "instinct."

The ad then goes on to claim that the magazine is every woman's guidebook to efficient double slavery : "We show you how to best organize yourself on the job at office so you don't carry home your office tensions (or ambitions?) or how to cook up a simple, delicious, nutritional meals on a slender budget."

The ad first tries to make the working woman feel guilty about wanting to work outside the home at all, the then goes

on to assure her that she can learn to be doubly "efficient" so as to cope with two jobs – the paid and the unpaid. *She* must make all the adjustments if she wants to satisfy her 'unwomanly non-instinctual ambitions'!

Why do ads for men's journals never suggest that men too needs to "strike a happy balance between (his) career and (his) home"? What role are popular women's magazines playing? Are they helping women raise questions about the social injustice and inequality they face in employment and at home? Or do they train women to satisfy better the expectations of men – to be 'better dressed', 'better cooks', more obedient secretaries and wives?

For Male Consumption

"Exciting Biting" claims the slogan. Just what is exciting biting – the biscuit or the 'beauty'? the slogan is double – edged – it seems innocent, but has definite sexual connotations. It could be dismissed as just naughty, if it were not for the fact that the woman is equated to a biscuit, a crisp, savoury snack which 'gives more taste, more satisfaction' than any other brand (or woman ?)

Another advertisement in the series shows a woman covered with Britannia's orange Delite biscuits, as orange is with peel. "Unpeel a Delite!" goes the slogan. The delight is obviously is woman. No wonder then that men often describe the sex act as 'having' a woman and 'hunger', 'appetite', 'eating' are words associated with sex. Punning on such words

Exciting Biting !



Crisp, savoury
BRITANNIA SNAX
— the best salted biscuit
... gives more taste, more satisfaction.

BRITANNIA
Britannia biscuits are the best

**From our men
in the field...
to the men
in the fields...**

**...Happy
harvesting**

While the grain piles up high
Solekhi fills the air, our men in
field are on the move
They are celebrating this harvest
the farmer. And preparing for
next sowing agriculture. Disburse
sowing schemes. Bringing bank
close to the poor
It's their way of saying 'Yes
Harvest

PSB—The name of total banking service
THE PUNJAB & SIND BANK LTD.
(Head. Office : Main Tower, Anandpur) Control & Admin. Office : 8/25/47 Connaught Place New Delhi.
Chairman : Inderjit Singh

is an alarming trend in advertising today. Women become the items of consumption and men the consumers.

Bride and Bike – A Package deal

This bicycle ad plainly advocates the evil social custom of dowry. “Marriages are made in Heaven, blessed on earth”, it says, implying that material wealth ensures a couple’s, and particularly a bride’s happiness. “Give the bride a gift her husband will value for ever.” Surely there is something wrong here – it is the bride who should be valued for ever, not the gift. Or is the implication that the bride is valued only for the expensive gifts that are given with her? If not, why should a bride be given a gift for her husband? Why not for herself? Can a woman not ride a bicycle?

But bicycles, we must remember, are an essential part of the dowry in many lower middle class families! This kind of advertising seems to be becoming more popular, for example, “the wedding gift that shows Daddy cares – Chandan wardrobe. It’s as big as Daddy’s heart.” ‘Daddy’s pocket’ would have been more appropriate! And even Government ads are actively supporting the dowry system. Here is an example: “There is a minor controversy: Will HMT Avinash make a good wedding gift or an HMT Vijay?” Below is a picture of a bride holding two watches, and next to her mouth the sentence: “Our lips are sealed.” Silence is all that is expected of the woman! The ad

goes on: What could a loving, father-in-law do? Buy both! And none would appreciate it better than the daughter. Avinash and Vijay. For the man in her life.” Dowry giving and taking are supposed to be illegal. Where are the laws to prevent this kind of anti-social advertising?

The Invisible Women

This ad is supposed to carry a message of goodwill from bank workers to peasants. Though the picture shows a rural scene with both men and women cultivators, the wording of the ad totally excludes women from any participation in productive works. This kind of advertising is fairly common. While ads often show men in decision-making positions – as business executives, engineers, technicians, doctors, women are projected as housewives or at best; ‘attractive’ secretaries and typists.

Women have always toiled with men outside the house too in the production process. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women, 1975, said: “Agriculture remains the major economic activity for women. According to the Census of 1971, 80 per cent of women workers are found in agriculture.” The banking industry too employs thousands of women. Yet this blatant arrogation of work to ‘men’ in the field! It may be said that ‘men’ includes ‘women’. If the picture showed five women and one man in say, the handloom industry, would the ad have said ‘the women in the field’ or ‘the workers in the field’? Such devaluation of women’s work is not just verbal – it is also economic. From 1951 to 1971, there has been a 50 per cent decline in the number of women cultivators and a

Marriages are made in Heaven. Blessed on Earth...

**Give the bride a Gift
her husband will value forever**

**BLESS HER WITH
HERO**
a thoughtful present

On her wedding, make a precious gift, which will last and last. For the man in her life, for a whole lifetime. A great gift idea is a Hero bicycle, desired and admired for the appreciation of the one who gave it.

**EVERY FOURTH BICYCLE
PRODUCED IN INDIA TODAY IS A HERO**

corresponding increase in the number of women landless labourers. Even more startling: “The proportion of *female unpaid family workers* is much higher than that of males, and they form an important segment of the labour force.” Women work as part of the family and the family income is controlled

by men – the men in the fields !

Trained to be Unequal

Children come in two varieties – the superior grade, known as boys, and the inferior grade, girls. However, skilled biscuit makers have successfully fabricated a fuel on which both can be run. These two Parle Gluco ads show how differently society treats boys and girls. Little girls are made of “tears and dolls, frills and falls” while little boys are made of “fights and games, toys and trains”. Tears and falls are negative concepts because they make a girl seem a sissy afraid of rough games and adventures. But a boy is apparently meant for fights and games, in which he can act the explorer or aggressor. Further, this ad associates girls with frills which are signs of a pretty, protected “femininity” and with dolls whom she cuddles – after all, what else can she grow up to be except a mother ? In complete contrast, boys are associated with toys, especially trains which are symbols of technology, movement and the whole outside world.

What are little girls made of?

Tears and dolls, frills and falls.



and bubbling energy with
**Parle Gluco—
the tastier
energy food.**

And here's what Parle Gluco is made of—
the goodness of milk, wheat, sugar, glucose.

**PARLE
Gluco—India's largest-selling biscuit**  World Selection Award Winner

What are little boys made of?

Fights and games, toys and trains.



and bubbling energy with
**Parle Gluco—
the tastier
energy food.**

And here's what Parle Gluco is made of—
the goodness of milk, wheat, sugar, glucose.

**PARLE
Gluco—India's largest-selling biscuit**  World Selection Award Winner

Shakuntala Devi, the mathematical genius who has pitted her brains against the world's most sophisticated computers and come out tops,... is an ardent feminist and is also the first woman in India to get a ration card in her own name. "I refused to identify myself as anybody's wife or daughter", says she, "my contention was, quite clearly, that one can never be sure of one's paternity."

- *Femina*, May 23