

SHATTERING MEDIA TROPES: REVISITING GENDER ROLES IN THE BHIMA'S ADVERTISEMENT "PURE AS LOVE"

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Abstract:

Media plays an important role in codifying and disseminating the ideas about gender and sexuality. Media largely uses words and images to convey ideas that inspire action, and shape what we think and feel; they influence us to see things in certain ways such that it mould our behaviour. India has approximately two million transgender people and in 2014 the Supreme Court of India proclaimed that transgenders too have equal rights under the law as people of other genders have. But still in our society, abuse and stigma exists. This paper examines how advertisement media can be a transforming tool in changing the social mindset towards transgenders by drawing the journey of a transwoman with empathy and authenticity.

Keywords: Media, advertisement, gender identity, transphobia

Media emblemize the particular picture of reality we hold in our minds and that plays a dominant role in determining the choices we make as we live each day, the beliefs and values we hold, and the things we hold in the real world. It also helps in fostering that particular picture of reality in people's mind. Media holds a mirror to contemporary life because it both represents elements of a pre-existing reality, and constitutes reality-in-the-making by encouraging people to organise their own experience through imitation of what they see on the screen. Media plays a prominent role



in the transmission and establishment of dominant cultural values. As a popular source of providing information, media projects the collective consciousness of the society. It acts as a medium through which the societal changes can be represented on the screen.

Culture can be said to be the soul of every society. There is a strong inclination in any culture to think of everyday reality as normal and it is quite hard for us to accept something beyond this 'normal'. This kind of normalisation also happens in the context of gender and sexuality. The concept of sexuality or the practice of gender is clearly characterised by a male - female binary opposition in the minds of people. And the society in which we are living is only concerned with the notion of heterosexuality. Other than heterosexuality is considered as a taboo, that even people might fear to speak up. Majority of the transgenders are thrown out of their homes by their families, and most of them make a living by singing and dancing at weddings or child births, or through begging and prostitution.

Media plays a key role in how people form their identities, social norms and values in relation to gender. It is very much to see how important is mass media in shaping common man's idea because most of the people are exposed to mass media in their daily lives. Truly speaking, mass media are chiefly involved in the production of modern culture. Gender representations are clearly evident in media as well. Television is the most ubiquitous form of media. Depiction of transgender people in media can be considered as a true representation about transgender identity. Portrayal of transgender community in media is vital in order to give voice and visibility to these marginalized sections.

In the present-day context, homosexualities and queer identities may be admissible to more Indian youths than ever before, but within the boundaries of family and other social institutions, acceptance of their sexual identity and freedom to openly express their gender choices still remain a constant struggle for this marginalized community. Discrimination is currently alive in several parts of the country, where LGBTQ people often face rejection from their families and forced to participate in opposite sex marriages.

Kerala became India's most trans-friendly state in 2015. Kerala is the first state to unveil a Transgender policy to end stigma and discrimination towards the sexual minorities. But transphobia still exists as a day light reality in Kerala as well. Famous American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler in her seminal work “Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity and Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex”, presents the concept of Performativity Theory. According to Butler, gender is something that is socially and culturally constructed and something that is also performed. In it she argued that "gender is not an innate or essential identity but a contingent and variable construct that mandated a 'performance'- that is, a particular set of practices which an individual acquires from the discourse of his or her social era and strives to enact" (Abrahams 148). Gender is something performed, a performance that is composed of stylised acts also known as the Performativity Theory. Gender is discursively constructed within a cultural discourse.

An innovatory endeavour that happened recently in the field of advertisement is evident through the latest advertisement of Bhima Jewellery, titled 'Pure as Love' traces the journey of a transgender woman - with jewellery playing an integral role in taking the chronicle forward. Apart from marketing their products and capturing the attention of the public, the Bhima Jewellers' ad becomes successful in making the first move, a positive depiction of transgender identity. This can be seen as a path-breaking effort by deviating from the usual portrayal of binary gender opposition- male and female.

Bhima's advertisement titled 'Pure as Love', created by Delhi - based agency 'Animal' is an exquisitely short journey of a young boy transforming into a confident young woman with the support and acceptance from the family. It begins with an unsure, unshaven young man being gifted a pair of gold anklet, by his parents and gradually shows his transformation into a beautiful and confident young woman. The ad which features transperson and activist Meera Singhaniya traces the journey of a transwoman from childhood to marriage.

Meera Singhania Rehani, the leading character of the advertisement, is a 22 year old student from Ambedkar University, Delhi. The credit goes to the makers of the advertisement for not choosing a cis woman- and for once it is not a person “dressed up” as transwoman, but really a transwoman,

cast in the role. This ad dismantled the cliché concepts put forward by the jewelry ads, that entirely focuses on pretty and good-looking women models for advertising their brand. On the contrary to this, here the protagonist is a transwoman.

The enthralling one-minute-forty-second video known by its title, 'Pure as Love' by Bhima Jewellery is a path-breaking attempt in the history of advertisement media. Contrary to the usual family negligence and social exclusion, here the ad makes a transition from the traditionally followed parameters of treating transgenders. One of the noteworthy aspects in this ad is the family's support and acceptance gained by the transwoman. Unlike the traditional notion of victimising the LGBTQ community, it is important to admit the fact that this ad becomes an eye opener for the entire society, about the need and relevance of accepting a person's true gender identity. This ad can be seen as a milestone in the history because of its unique theme that is never ever discussed in advertisement media. The advertisement successfully portrayed that all they need is support and acceptance, not mere sympathy.

The fact is in our mind, we haven't come across the concept that Trans marriages do exist and transwomen are women. They too have dreams and aspirations. The ad brilliantly conceived the idea of accepting the person as they are. Devoid of any dialogue, the ad effortlessly conveys the love and acceptance received by the protagonist through simple gestures - mainly as the mother waiting while her daughter gets her ears pierced, also her grandmother braiding her hair and giving her ornaments.

In a country like India where trans persons are considered somehow bad and this thought is passed from generation to generation. The journey of a transgender woman is not an easy one. They had to face numerous questions from family, friends and society. And also, they are forced to accept their unreal identity to fit into the social construct. They never find acceptance in society and sometimes, within their own family. Accepting an individual's identity is the most inevitable one. Instead of documenting their hardships, exclusion and so on faced by the trans community, this ad is picturising a positive and an inspiring narrative of what we would like the society to look like, where everyone is treated with equal respect and dignity by accepting their gender identity.

By casting a real transgender person, the story becomes as authentic as possible to do justice to the cause, the person and the community. The ad successfully captured the metamorphosis of a person. In the beginning of the ad, we see a boy who is shy and somewhat reserved and towards the end, we see an entirely different individual who is very much confident in her identity. As the protagonist starts interest in makeup, jewellery and women's clothes, she receives more and more jewellery, more and more support from her family and began to prepare for marriage. Here she is depicted as a blessed one, by having a life, that is true to her inner self, that is her trans identity.

This ad gets its right momentum to spark the much-needed conversations around trans people. The ad goes beyond the aspect of advertising, also making a social statement for the need of accepting people as they are. Being an art form, advertisement media also have some social responsibilities to impart true information and transforming people's mindset. This ad becomes remarkable mainly for its two aspects. Firstly, it challenges the notion of jewellery ads featuring only cisgender woman and secondly it did not do the mistake of casting a cis gender to play the role of a transgender woman.

Mass media plays a vital role in moulding people's choice, attitude, and behaviour. It is a crucial force in moulding society's culture. If normal men and women have the right to live in this society with true respect and upholding their real gender identity, then the question arises here, why not a person who belongs to LGBTQ can live in this society with respect and acceptance.

The main thing behind the society's negligence towards the transgender community is that even our parents are brought up through the same education, societal standards and ethical system. That's why they could not easily accept things that are different from usual social standards. It is not the thinking of a person always, but sometimes the ongoing education and societal standards should also be cursed and blamed. It becomes the need of the hour to setup awareness programs to make people understand, especially the elder ones that this is the "New Normal", that everyone should admit. Everyone has the right to live in this world with respect and dignity.

Bhima's ad titled 'Pure as Love' is a thought-provoking endeavour that awakened the minds of many. Unlike the typical portrayal of transgender community as marginalized sections or the other,

here is an optimistic transformation of a transwoman who was truly supported and accepted by her family. It is a transformed one that dismantled the cliché concept of a gorgeous woman being the model of jewellery ads. First and foremost, the ad presents how beautifully the life of a transwoman gets changed, when her individuality and gender identity are accepted by the family as well as the society without any accustomed tensions or conflicts face by the transgender community. By becoming a glimpse of hope, it is warmly welcomed by the public, as a symptom of accepting the marginalized sections. And this wide acceptance is a sign of a society shifting from transphobia.

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