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## **Projection Of Single Mothers in Indian Advertisements**

**Doyel Dutta**

*Assistant Professor, D Y Patil International University, Maharashtra, India*

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### **Abstract**

*Single mother is an almost untouched topic in Indian media. Seldom do they find any space in the mainstream popular media. Only a few parallel movies dealt with the topic. In Indian advertisement, it has always remained an alien topic. But, in twenty first century, with the rise in popularity of single parenting, some commercials have started depicted single mothers to make an attempt to destigmatise the society. Various aspects of the lives of a single mother have been projected on screen with great details. The difficulties and challenges faced by them have been addressed very directly. Bold messages have been delivered by popular brands in an attempt to change the society. This paper is an attempt to understand how is the woman of a single mother is painted on screen by Indian advertisements.*

**Key words:** Single mother, Indian advertisement, Patriarchy, Society, Challenges

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### **Introduction:**

Single parenting is a new concept in Indian society. Though widowhood has always been a reason for several persons for raising the children alone but taking a decision voluntarily to grow the children independently is a new trend that gained prominence only in the last few decades. Single mother is still considered to be a taboo in our society. Even in twenty first century it is very difficult to find an example. Since, media is a mirror of society, this concept hardly got any space in media. Historically, Indian media, especially advertisement has always focussed on the conventional nuclear families comprising a married couple with a single child or two or three children. Seldom has there been an exception.

Mothers have always been projected following the gender stereotypes. In eighties, mothers in Indian advertisements have always been shown as home makers, wearing saree and mangalsurta with long hair and solely handling all household responsibilities. Their primary focus has always been family. In nineties, some mothers with slightly westernised clothes found a little space in the media. But, even then, there have always been male partners by their sides supporting them in their challenges of life. Only in early two thousand, independent mothers with modern outlook towards life began to appear in popular narratives in Indian commercials. Single mothers appeared on screen much later. But their depiction continued to remain as a rare phenomenon.

This paper is an endeavour to understand how single mothers are portrayed in the advertisements of our country today by critically looking at how the image of a mother who is singlehandedly raising a child is constructed, how the mother and children relationship is depicted and how the picture of a courageous and self-dependent woman is painted in a

rigid society governed by strong patriarchal values, who by hance or choice landed up in a situation where she is left with no other option than taking the entire responsibility of her child.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The study has following objectives -

- To study the portrayal of single mothers in Indian advertisements
- To analyse the narratives and the style of projections critically
- To examine how Indian advertisements challenge the patriarchal stereotypes

### **Methodology:**

The study is a critical review. Content analysis method was adopted to examine the narratives of the advertisements taken into considerations thematically. Only the advertisements of the post millennium era were considered as there was a remarkable change in the projection of women in Indian commercials after twentieth century and hence the depiction of motherhood also changed. The commercials were analysed both semiotically and semantically for the final conclusion.

### **Change in portrayal of women in Indian advertisements:**

T. Samanta's study examines the portrayal of women in contemporary commercial advertisements and compares how women are represented across different advertising campaigns. The research focuses on understanding whether modern advertisements have moved beyond traditional stereotypes or continue to reinforce gender-based roles and expectations. The paper analyses various advertisements to study the changing image of women in present-day media culture.

The study explains that many contemporary advertisements portray women as confident, independent and career-oriented individuals. Compared to earlier advertisements, women are increasingly shown participating in professional life and making their own decisions. However, the research also points out that traditional stereotypes still remain visible in many advertisements where women are associated mainly with beauty, household work and caregiving responsibilities.

Samanta argues that advertising reflects social change but also influences public understanding of gender roles. Advertisements often attempt to present progressive ideas while simultaneously maintaining conventional expectations about femininity and appearance. The paper highlights that women's bodies and emotions are still frequently used as tools for attracting consumers and promoting products.

The comparative analysis helps in understanding the gradual transformation of women's representation in advertising. Overall, the study concludes that although advertising has become more modern and inclusive in some ways, many gender stereotypes continue to exist in subtle forms within contemporary commercials.<sup>1</sup>

Shoma Munshi's research paper studies the changing representation of homemakers in Indian advertisements during the 1990s. The paper explains how women were mainly shown in the roles of wife, mother and daughter-in-law. Advertisements presented the ideal homemaker as caring, sacrificing and fully responsible for household duties. Even though Indian society was experiencing modernisation and economic liberalisation during the 1990s, advertisements continued to promote traditional gender expectations.

The study highlights that women in advertisements were often shown balancing modern lifestyles with traditional family values. They were presented as educated and stylish but their primary identity still remained connected to the home and family. Munshi argues that advertising played an important role in shaping social attitudes and reinforcing patriarchal ideas in Indian society.

The paper also discusses how consumer culture influenced the portrayal of women. Advertisements linked women's happiness and success with household products and family approval. Through this analysis, the study shows that media representations do not simply reflect society but also influence public understanding of gender roles. Overall, the paper provides an important insight into the relationship between advertising, gender identity and cultural expectations in India during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

### **Change in depiction of motherhood:**

S. Sastry's thesis explores the representation of the mother figure in Indian advertising and examines how myths and cultural values influence these portrayals. The study explains that advertisements in India often present mothers as symbols of love, sacrifice, care and moral strength. These representations are deeply connected with Indian mythology and traditional beliefs where motherhood is treated with great respect and emotional value.

The research analyses how advertisers use the image of the mother to create emotional appeal and connect products with family values. Mothers in advertisements are usually shown as selfless individuals who prioritise the happiness and wellbeing of their families over their own needs. Sastry argues that such portrayals reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations in Indian society.

The thesis also discusses how mythological ideas and cultural narratives shape consumer behaviour. Advertisements use familiar images of motherhood to build trust and emotional attachment among audiences. At the same time, the study points out that these portrayals often limit women's identities only to caregiving roles and ignore their individuality outside the family structure.

Overall, the research highlights the strong relationship between Indian culture, mythology and advertising. It shows how media representations of mothers continue to influence social understanding of femininity, family and gender roles in contemporary India.<sup>3</sup>

S. Chadha's thesis studies the portrayal of the mother-child relationship in Indian television advertisements. The research focuses on how advertisements emotionally represent mothers and children to connect with audiences and influence consumer behaviour. The study explains that Indian TV advertisements often present mothers as caring, protective and emotionally attached to their children. These portrayals highlight the mother as the primary caregiver who is responsible for the child's health, happiness and overall wellbeing.

The thesis examines different advertisements to understand how emotional bonding is used as a marketing strategy. Mothers are generally shown making sacrifices for their children and ensuring the best for them through the products they purchase. The child is often portrayed as dependent on the mother's care and guidance. Chadha argues that such representations strengthen traditional ideas about motherhood and family roles in Indian society.

The research also discusses how advertisements create idealised images of family life. They promote values such as love, trust and responsibility while connecting these emotions with consumer products. At the same time, the study points out that these portrayals can limit women's identities by repeatedly associating them only with domestic and caregiving roles.

Overall, the thesis highlights the important role of television advertising in shaping public perceptions about motherhood, parenting and family relationships in contemporary Indian culture.<sup>4</sup>

S. Sarkar's research paper discusses the experiences of mothers in India and examines the idea of "working for home" and "working from home" through an interdisciplinary approach. The study explains how Indian mothers balance domestic responsibilities along with professional work while facing social and cultural expectations. The paper became especially relevant in the context of changing work environments and increasing discussions around unpaid domestic labour.

The research highlights that mothers in India are often expected to manage household duties, childcare and emotional care even when they are professionally employed. Society generally considers caregiving and household work as the natural responsibility of women. Sarkar argues that this creates pressure on mothers who try to balance both personal and professional lives.

The paper also explores how work-from-home culture blurred the boundary between professional space and domestic space. Mothers faced increased workloads because they had to handle office work and household duties simultaneously. The study points out that despite contributing economically, women's labour at home often remains undervalued and invisible.

Through an interdisciplinary perspective, the paper connects ideas from gender studies, sociology and media discussions to analyse the condition of Indian mothers. Overall, the study highlights the unequal distribution of labour within families and raises important questions about gender roles, motherhood and women's identity in contemporary Indian society.<sup>5</sup>

K. Bagchi's research paper studies how televised advertisements represent and reinforce the idea of motherhood in society. The paper analyses the portrayal of mothers in television commercials and examines how media continues to shape public understanding of women's roles within the family. The study explains that advertisements often present motherhood as a natural duty of women and associate mothers mainly with caregiving, nurturing and household responsibilities.

The research highlights that mothers in advertisements are usually shown as emotionally strong, selfless and completely devoted to their families. Such portrayals create an ideal image of motherhood where women are expected to sacrifice personal desires for the wellbeing of children and family members. Bagchi argues that these repeated representations reinforce traditional gender norms and strengthen patriarchal expectations in society.

The paper also discusses how advertising uses emotional storytelling to connect audiences with products. Motherhood is often commercialised in advertisements to create trust, affection and emotional attachment among consumers. At the same time, the study

points out that these portrayals rarely represent the diverse realities and struggles faced by real mothers in contemporary society.

Using a sociological perspective, the research explains how media not only reflects cultural beliefs but also actively shapes social attitudes towards women and family life. Overall, the paper highlights the continuing influence of television advertising in constructing and maintaining traditional ideas of motherhood in Indian society. (6)

### **Single mothers in Indian advertising:**

Single mother has always remained an unacknowledged theme in Indian advertisement until 2013 when Tanishq came up with a groundbreaking campaign popularly known as “Remarriage” to launch their new wedding collection. The ad film opened with a bride dressing up for her wedding. Then, a little girl appears on the screen. Within a few seconds, it was revealed she is the daughter of the bride through her addressing her as “Mamma”. In the next scene, while walking around the sacred fire of the wedding mandap, the groom took her into his lap, showing acceptance and also breaking the patriarchal stereotype that a man cannot very easily accept someone else’s child as his own. Also, the campaign acknowledged the ground reality that there are many single mothers in our country who are overburdened with the responsibilities of running the home, parenting and other family responsibilities. Their struggles are hardly talked about. Also, seeking a dependable partner and companionship is everyone’s right. Single mothers are not exceptions. The campaign was directed by Gouri Shinde, and the creative agency was Lowe Lintas and Partners.<sup>7</sup>

The next advertisement campaign to address the theme in India was “Bold is beautiful” by Myntra launched in 2015. In the campaign, a young unwed woman was shown to raise a child singlehandedly. She was modern, independent and was living alone away from her family in the city where she worked. The background narration, a monologue by the woman, made it clear that she is a victim of numerous verbal abuses in the rigid patriarchal society because of her free thinking, modern approach towards life and self-dependence. It was clearly narrated that wherever she goes, people criticise her. She faces many challenges. “I become a topic of conversation whenever I move to a new location.” Even the child becomes a subject of soft verbal abuses because of the absence of a father in her life. Finally, the woman declares that it is her life and hence she only will take the decisions. She is not answerable to anyone. The campaign was scripted and directed by Shamik Sen Gupta and produced by Hectic Content.<sup>8</sup>

Another highly talked about campaign to pay tribute to single mothers was “I am enough” launched in 2000 on the occasion of ‘Mothers’ Day’ by Voltbek Home Appliances Private Limited, popularly known as Voltas Beko, a joint venture between the Indian brand Voltas and a European consumer durable brand, Arcelik. The digital video campaign was conceptualised by Mompresso. The promotional film shows a single working mother torn between the responsibilities of home and office and struggling for work life balance. She is overburdened in office yet manages to take care of her daughter. The daughter is troubled a lot by her classmates in school because she does not have a father. But she is strong enough to tell them, “So what if I don't have a father? My mother works day and night to take care of me and she gives me the love of a mother and a father both”. The mother’s facial reaction shows great relief. The film ends with the mother saying in the background while hugging and kissing the daughter on the screen, “Being a single mother was never my plan but being a good mother was. And, I am so. I have started gaining confidence now that ‘I am enough.’”<sup>9</sup>

### **Analysis & Discussion:**

Indian advertisement never failed to acknowledge the fact that the path of a single mother is always full of thorns. Society is still not ready to accept them openly. There is always a question, why is she raising the child alone. She is always a topic of conversation. The “Bold and Beautiful” campaign by Myntra made an attempt to address the issue. The mother in the film says, wherever she moves, she faces criticism in the locality. This statement indirectly communicates that she does not stay in a locality permanently and keeps moving leaving the audience to wonder why does she keep moving? Does it become difficult for her to stay in a place for long? The women in the surroundings always keep questioning, how can an unwedded woman become mother? No one is ready to acknowledge that wedlock and parenthood are two independent concepts and does not need each other for existing. Her appearance, boldness, free thing everything is criticised and she is always labelled as a bad woman. It clearly shows that the attitude of society is generally negative towards the single mothers. But the advertisement finally states, “Bold is beautiful”.

The woman in the Voltas Beko’s campaign is not a single mother by choice. The campaign indirectly makes it clear that she is a victim of marital abuses and decided to move out of a toxic marriage. It is clearly shown that even the people in a workplace tries to take advantage of a woman who is living alone with a child. If not sexually abused, they are overburdened by works as it is believed by the surroundings that they have no one to stand behind them. Balancing work and family responsibilities become a tough challenge for them every day. Even the children living away from fathers’ face discriminations in schools. They become victims of verbal abuse from time to time. But the final message the campaign delivers is a woman is enough to face all challenges in life and win every battle.

The campaign by Tanishq touches an emotional chord of every person’s heart as it talks about a single mother’s dilemma about her own life and the future of her children. Sometimes staying alone becomes highly challenging and marriage becomes a need but in such a situation, what makes a mother worried is what will happen to her children. Even today it is a big question, whether her would be partner will accept her children normally and treat them well. But the campaign ends with an optimistic note and finally shows that the man accepts the daughter and takes her to his lap indicating that he will be a caring father. It gives the message that the society is changing.

### **Conclusion:**

Indian advertisement has started addressing the challenges faced by the single mothers though there are only a few such campaigns. Light has been thrown on various aspects of life. Social struggle, professional challenges and emotional issues have projected with minute details. The difficulties faced by the children of single mothers have also been projected nicely. Attitude of society has also been clearly shown. But, still, there are many aspects which are yet to be touched. In a nutshell, Indian advertising has started depicting single mothers with details but still there is a long way to go.

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