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Gender Identity in the Indian Context:
A Socio-Cultural Construction of the Female Consumer

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In this paper, I discuss gender identity issues and the rising consumerism in India, and their joint implications to our understanding of the emerging Indian female consumer. The paper has two parts. The first part of the paper is a theoretical and conceptual analysis of gender as it pertains to the Indian society using a socio-cultural framework of the gender theory. Although, ideally, the term gender should include both male and female, my focus in this paper will be on women since most changes are occurring in regard to their roles and status in the Indian context. The second part includes a discussion of the consumer trends in India and the construction of the identity of the emerging female consumer by the media.

PART I
THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION
OF GENDER IN INDIA

To provide a comprehensive account of the condition of "women" in India is beyond the scope of this paper. There is ample literature available in this regard both in terms of quality and quantity (see Anant, Rao and Kapoor 1986 for a detailed bibliography, and for some relevant areas of discussion, I refer to Krishna Raj and Chanana 1989, Parikh and Garg 1989, Rose 1992, Sharma 1986). Just as the scholarly and critical literature is impressive and growing, so are the number of popular magazines (Femina, Women's Era, Savvy and others) which focus on women's issues, from the serious to glamorous and to the more sordid.

At the risk of simplification, the gender question in India may be encapsulated under two opposing themes. The first theme is the significantly emancipatory nature of women's condition in certain urban contexts (especially the urban middle class group, or career women, or educated/professional segments), where changes are occurring in a dramatic fashion, and the second is a corresponding lack of development among women in various other categories (e.g., urban poor, rural, agrarian workers) primarily due to severe forms of structural, cultural and economic impediments (Mies 1986, Wignaraja 1990). (There are some intermediary positions within these two extremes.) Both themes are running parallel to each other, and in this paper I shall examine consumer implications of the changes taking place among the first group.

THE ETHNOSOCIOLOGICAL CONTEXT

An important way to analyze the situation of women in India must be broadly framed within its own historical, social and cultural contexts. I use the term "Ethnosociological Context" after Marriott (1990) who recently coined the term to provide an intellectual legitimacy to sociological and anthropological research in cross-cultural contexts. Following the serious concern expressed by people like Marcus and Fischer (1986), ethnographic research took an intellectual tailspin in the wake of self-doubt and critical introspection. Although not in direct reference to Marcus and Fischer’s work, Marriott (1990) has addressed this issue in an admirable manner, that is, to construct social knowledge about other cultures on the basis of categories unique to their cultural ethos.

At this point, one is entitled to ask whether Western feminist questions, and theoretical paradigms are applicable to the Indian situation -- more specifically, are the debates in America (or West) relevant to India (or Third World)? The answer to the question is a combination of a yes and no. There are no doubt similarities and differences -- the realities are based on respective cultural, social and historical factors, but at the same time point to certain commonalities in terms of universals such as gender hierarchy, patriarchy, women's family roles, etc. If similarities exist, they may be at the structural or superstructural level, that is, at the level of broad categories but not specific levels of empiricality. While one must
not attempt to impose Western etic models on Indian situations, one must not neglect to find commonalities within bounds of reason and reasonableness, if it helps to understand the Indian question. Otherwise there cannot be a dialogue between cultural discourses.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Indian scholars and reformers who address the gender issue divide the relevant history of India into three periods, pre-independence period, that is, from the beginning of the mid 1800s to 1940s (the so-called historical period of modern India), the second period lasting from 1947 (the year India gained freedom from British rule) to 1980, and the third period from the 1980s to the present. This division is generally accepted in the consciousness of historical writing on India on various social and political topics.

The first period refers to the awakening of the Indian spirit, its articulation and unfolding of the fight for freedom from British colonial rule. The gender issue was buried under the overall issue of colonial resistance without any separate identity of its own. Women were, indeed, invited and encouraged to participate in the freedom struggle at national and local levels, and many upper caste and educated women (e.g., Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali and Indira Gandhi) did.

The post-independence period (i.e., after 1947) established constitutional guarantees for all citizens -- particularly, women and under-privileged castes and classes, with a view to ensuring universal participation in the political process, in education at all levels, and in appointment to the civil service. During this period, the social condition of women improved in the urban areas but not in rural areas. Considering that nearly 70% of Indians live in rural areas, the improvements seen in the urban areas could not be generalized. Even in the urban areas, the changes for the better were experienced mostly by upper caste women who were better situated historically and socially to take advantage of the economic and educational opportunities.

In what may be called the third period, which begins in late 1970s to early 1980s, a new feminist consciousness seems to have awakened in India. Educated women from urban areas with strong activist or leftist leanings began to get involved in rural and village direct-action reform movements (Bhushan 1989, Mies 1986, Rose 1992). Included in this activist group were women who were influenced by the rising global feminist consciousness and various theoretical ideas originating from the West. They refused to see the women's question in India at a benign reformist level but rather in transhistorical and foundational terms. This macro systemic perspective was combined with an urge to deconstruct women's positions at any everyday mundane level.

THEORETICAL ISSUES -- CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER AND IDENTITY

My analysis of the theoretical issues is based on some central works on Indian women and my own theorization based on my ethnographic work (Banerjee 1991, Bhushan 1989, Brock-Utne 1989, Krishna Raj and Chanana 1989, Liddle and Joshi 1986, Marriott 1990, Mies 1986, Parikh and Garg 1989, Rose 1992, Sharma 1986, Saradamoni 1992, Wadley 1977, Wignaraja 1990). For the Western (especially the US) audience, a clear issue is how is the gender question different (or similar) in India as compared to say, the US.

Family, Kinship Issues
First, the gender question in both countries is based on respective historical, political, cultural and social-structural conditions. The traditional Indian culture (specifically the dominant Hindu culture) very clearly specifies the role of women in terms of its household structure, kinship relationships, and caste hierarchies (Dumont 1980). As Lardinois (1992) describes, Hinduism represents a "socially differentiated religious culture based on caste." For example, the most universal model in terms of kinship structure, holding the caste constant, is the tri-dependent relationship. From birth till marriage, the woman is under the protection of her father; during married life, her husband; and during later years, her son (whether her husband is alive or not). These relationships have made it impossible for a
woman to be independent of male omnipresence in theory and practice, or to claim her own social space during her entire life. Her unmarried life is completely spent in preparation for a life after marriage, and in relative seclusion from the outside. In this condition, she is differentiated from a male child because the sons do not leave their biological families after marriage and are socialized from early on into being an integral part of their families, while women are not. Thus the status of women is marked by a liminality, as the conditions of possibility require women to live in borrowed time and the social space of the other. In the West, women pretty much choose their own life partners with relatively little input from the family, and if there is any dependency relationship at all, it is played out somewhat quite differently. First, there is no gender-based differential preparatory status for unmarried women in the West since both men and women leave their families to establish their respective future lives upon reaching their adulthood, or sometimes, even earlier. That is, neither man nor woman has a more privileged status within their biological family. Much of the Western discourse, really focuses on the politics of difference, not so much prior to adulthood (although this certainly exists), but during the adult life.

Matriarchal Religio-Cultural Tradition
Another major difference between Western and Indian discourse is how the politics of difference is played out. In the West, the politics of difference is itself the focus of much debate and discussion, while in India it centers more on the discourse of dependence and exploitation. The politics of difference is so obvious in India that it does not by itself generate much energy in discourse. Differences are accepted by both men and women about their gender constructions and to some extent they are welcomed at the theoretical level. Because of this, it is difficult to import the ideas of Derrida, or Kristeva or Irrigary wholesale into the Indian scene for these ideas are based very much on the specific constructions of gendered differences without regard to kinship patterns, or the social-cultural realities of family life. For example, in India, there is not much dispute as to how women are written up in the literature or religious texts. As evidence of this, the power of matriarchal religious tradition is quite strong in India (Liddle and Joshi 1986). In contemporary India, female goddesses are worshipped by both men and women with equal fervor. The Hindu pantheon is full of goddesses, and the Hindu India is full of temples which are the exclusive preserves of female deities. In many of these temples, female deities are more important and given a higher status than some of their male equivalents. The female goddess worship represents a supreme form of ritual act and metaphysical exercise.

Threshold Theory of Women’s Position in Indian Society
In a complicated rendition of life in India, one also finds a curious phenomenon not found in the US or the West, and when women do manage to attain high positions in political and social life, Indians are willing to give them co-equal status and esteem with men just as the latter would receive in the same position. I use a threshold theory to explain this. That is, since Indian society is basically hierarchical (Dumont 1980), Indians give a lot of weight to the position itself. Consequently, anybody who occupies the position is given the same high regard, independent of their individual background. At higher levels, the gender of the occupant is less material. That is, Indians may resist giving a higher position to a woman or, for that matter, a man if he is from a lower caste, but once the person attains the position, the resistance melts away. I call this threshold theory because there is a threshold that operates between the person and the position. Once the individual crosses the threshold he/she is no longer the same subordinate individual as before, but a different persona in a new position. This kind of transfiguration from the individual to the status position seems to be resisted in the Western egalitarian societies, where women are still deemed as "women" (and, perhaps rightly so, but that’s not the issue here) and positional statuses are not given great importance. There may be a few exceptions to this, as in the military. It is the individual as an individual, and his/her characteristics that are more pertinent in the West. In India, the individual is easily idealized into the position itself. This threshold theory is related to the religio-cultural theory mentioned earlier, because both address the issue of the position one way or the other.
Recent Significant Developments

How has all this changed over the past few years? There are two aspects to the recent developments in India, or two extreme profiles, as I mentioned in the beginning of this paper. One pertains to the dramatic developments that are taking place in certain sections of the urban communities, and the other is a relatively slower pace of change, or none at all, among rural women and urban poor. I shall report on the first part of the developments and reserve the discussion of the second part in a more complete version of this paper.

Ethnographic Account of Changing Identity Formation

The first part of these two developments is a summary from relevant ethnographic work during my stay in Madras, India, a city of about 5.5 million people. My stay lasted seven months from June 1992 till January 1993. Madras is considered more conservative than Bombay and Delhi although many local informants seemed to agree that the rate of change in the last 5 to 8 years has been nothing but dramatic. It is hard to believe that in a country where one talks of social change in terms of decades or centuries, people are using single digits to refer to periods of change. This is the reason why contemporary India is so interesting and seems to afford a great opportunity for many social scientists to study some of the most momentous changes that are likely to occur in the next two or three decades.

India is certainly witnessing some of the most significant changes in the economic and social status of women in the urban areas and in the nature of the household structure. For the first time we are able to see trends that transcend the caste hierarchy, to a more class based system. This means that caste hierarchy is disappearing among the upper strata of society. This does not however mean that caste differences are themselves disappearing. In other words, economic prosperity has touched people belonging to different castes, and educational levels are increasing along similar lines. Many women from different castes do attend colleges and universities, and are gainfully employed. This has given them both economic and social status. Many young women, in contrast to what had happened in the yester years, are choosing their marriage partners either directly or through some sort of consensus with their parents. Even though many marriages today are still arranged, men and women exercise equal choice in the decision. The decision remains a family decision more by consensus rather than by an imposition from the parents.

The attitudes of women with respect to marriage, career, economic status, are undergoing so many changes that there seem to be intra-generational differences among women within narrow age categories. By that I mean that it is not merely a difference between a parent and a daughter that one expects to find here, but differences among groups of younger women within narrow range of age categories. Thus, the views and modes of behavior of a thirty year old woman in establishing her own identity, may be radically different from those of a twenty five year old, and the view of a twenty five year old may be different from a twenty year old and so on down to younger age groups. These changes are extremely vibrant and turbulent at the same time. They have important repercussions and perhaps healthy ones in the reconstitution of the Indian family system and the society at large.

A major contributory factor in maintaining both patriarchy and gender hierarchy has been the nature of controls in the household system and the generating and sharing of resources. The joint family system is certainly a major structural arrangement that ensures male domination within the household through traditional gender-based household patterns of behavior. More and more, the joint family system in India is giving way to a nuclear family system. In India, the nuclear family system has both narrow and broad definitions. In the narrow definition, it includes husband, wife and their unmarried children, or couples in the empty nest stage. The broader definition includes older parents also. When we combine this shift to nuclear family system with the emergence of career roles of women and their ability to generate independent income for the family, there is no question that women's role in household management and decision making is getting stronger. It does not necessarily mean that the nuclear family system can by itself cause these changes to occur but it is one of the facilitating factors. The other factors are, career
opportunities for women, their income generating power, the presence of the elderly in the household or in close physical proximity, the family's adherence or non-adherence to traditional norms of behavior, and attitudes toward changes that have the potential to alienate the families from traditional patterns causing anxieties in daily lives. Add to this the attitudes of friends and families that are part of the social network. If the attitudes within the social network are progressive (or conservative), the attitude of the families will also be progressive (or conservative). One cannot, therefore, minimize the social interaction effect in these matters.

I also found an interesting revival of religious worship and participation among both young and the old alike. Modernization and changing family structure seem to be accompanied by a search for internal cultural processes as appropriate mechanisms of change. Thus one has to be very careful to describe the progressive tendencies in India in purely secular, or non-religious, or even Western terms. If anything, women derive more power by appealing to the religo-cultural aspects of life, for here the freedoms are plentiful. Women are able to separate the religious from purely ritualistic practices, and even in the latter case, many women feel privileged in terms of their ritualistic roles. Religion has suddenly become a refreshing avenue for exploration among the liberated middle-class. Today, there is a lot more close reading of Indian epics and mythological stories (e.g., Ramayana and Mahabharata) and an incredible and almost revolutionary search for cultural icons that give women immense spiritual strength. Such revivalism can be seen in music, art and other cultural practices, which in a very interesting sort of way had never been theoretically denied access to women, but not found expression in practice. In other words, what I am saying is that women are looking at their religio-cultural roots, selectively picking up threads of possible support, exercising their options in areas which have been up for grabs for centuries, untouched by masculine control and now presenting themselves as a virgin territory (no pun intended) for their own adoption. I must say that such social spaces are denied to women in the Western context, where religion is so organized, so male-oriented that every move on the part of women to capture an inch of religio-cultural space meets with such strong resistance.

What I have seen among the urban middle class people is that the oppressive element of the Indian family seems to have been taken out and a more healthy version of it seems to have been put in its place. The preservation of the family system at any cost seems to be the motivation for these strategies. Much of this arises from what they learn about the West (whether true or not) that families are breaking apart, older parents are being sent away to the purgatory of nursing homes, detached from their families when there is the utmost need for people to be together. As Indians modernize (whatever the term means) or seem to approximate Western oriented independent behavior, it is important to remind ourselves that the individualistic philosophy of the West is not totally embraced by Indians. If I were to describe how the individualist and collectivist principles are being played out in contemporary modern India, I have to say that collectivism is still the preferred model with various adjustments to individual desires. This principle is the cardinal principle of the difference between India and the West and the indications are that it will remain so even as India is changing. I do not think there is anything in contemporary thought and practice in India to suggest that an individualist framework would be incorporated into the Indian ethos. There is an important message here for Western feminists (particularly the Anglo-American) that Indian women's questions cannot be simply forced into the Western antagonistic model of male versus female however tempting this might appear. Gender hierarchy does not mean gender antagonism. I find less hostility in male-female relationships in comparable groups in India than say, the US. No doubt, the situation of many women in India still leaves a lot to be desired but one cannot assume that this is based on a politics of difference. Systemic changes can be brought about in so many ways, and in India it is simply not the politics of difference.
As is evident from the available literature, what constitutes a consumer society is difficult to define but perhaps easier to describe. In the case of India, it has always been known for centuries for its trade, exotic markets and bazaars (Subrahmanyam 1990). However, until the European penetration, the market structure in India showed no evidence of being a "spatially sophisticated economy with production and consumption zones" that characterize modern industrial economies. In the colonial period that coincided with the industrial revolution, India was basically a primary goods producing economy and most consumer outlets were small distribution centers for indigenous products. It is only after independence that India began to develop as a major consumer economy and only recently that many aspects of consumerism have begun to surface with remarkable ease and diffusion.

Specific Factors That Account for Indian Consumerism

Several factors can be used to describe India as an emerging consumer society. While these factors are not to be considered exhaustive, they are representative of the movement of India towards a consumer oriented society. The factors are:

- Burgeoning middle class, its changing values and pent-up consumer demand,
- Changing women's roles, their labor participation, financial independence, and the changing structure of the family,
- Rising consumer aspirations and expectations across many segments of the population and particularly among women,
- Increased consumer spending on luxury items aided by past savings and the introduction of the credit system,
- New types of shopping environments and outlets,
- Media proliferation, satellite and cable TV, and the thriving film industry,
- The emergence of traveling Indian consumers -- immigrants in US and England, overseas workers, tourists, professionals and their exposure to worldwide consumer products,
- Resurfacing of hedonistic cultural elements after centuries of dormant state,
- Entry of multi-national corporations into India.

The size and the economic strength of the Indian middle class has received much attention both within India and in foreign press. The estimates of its size vary anywhere between 200 and 250 million people with an ability to afford many standard consumer goods, if not luxury items. An interesting aspect of the middle class is that its median age is lower than in most Western countries, as is the case with many third-world countries, thus suggesting the potential for rapid growth in income generation and wealth accumulation. Because of a number of economic, cultural and social/family factors, the savings rate of the middle class has been slightly on the higher side. Among the economic factors, we include various government schemes for savings, the availability of a limited number of brands in consumer markets, and the emphasis on utilitarian goods rather than symbolic goods.

In the cultural factors, we include those norms that discourage borrowing and spending within one's means. We also include conservatism in clothing, fashion, and physical appearance, and general disciplining of body and mind. In the
Social/family factors are included the joint family system where resources are pooled and assets are shared to minimize purchases of multiple items of the same products. Many of these traditional features are now undergoing change. Families are becoming more nucleated and the so-called middle class cultural norms are undergoing major transformation.

For a number of Indians, the participation in a consumer society means becoming more modernized or Westernized in dress, food, and in the use of many grooming products and cosmetics. While showing such preferences, Indians are also conscious of Indianizing their experiences, for too much Westernizing means giving up their unique cultural identity. Consequently, we are witnessing an interesting development of what might be called an Indian version of modernization. Western ideas and products are adopted with an Indian twist as can be seen in many commercials and print ads.

For residents within India, who may not travel abroad, global consumerism is also rendered possible by the diffusion of satellite and communications technology, and their exposure to international advertising for the latest products on various cable TV channels, CNN, BBC, MTV and the like. This global participation is further enhanced by a familiarity with English, the universal language of the late twentieth century commerce and culture. Not far behind these forces are the proliferation of local media within India and their marketing activism.

The Female Consumer

India is witnessing some of the most significant changes in the economic and social status of women. The attitudes of women with respect to marriage, career, and their roles in the family and society are undergoing radical changes and there is considerable literature describing these changes (Liddle and Joshi 1986, Sharma 1986, Wadley 1977). The changing roles of women is accompanied by similar changes in the family structure and household systems (Saradamoni 1992).

Many women, especially in the urban areas, are getting educated and are entering professional or career oriented jobs once reserved for men. There is a rapid increase of women in the labor force. Women's income has now been recognized as a major factor in the creation of a family's wealth. Women's magazines have multiplied in unbelievable numbers both on terms of different languages and for different role groups (see Figure 1 for Sample magazines in English, Hindi and Tamil). Women are independent across many dimensions, in transportation, career choices, marriages, in family responsibilities. Recent advertising aimed at women recognizes these changing roles, yet the pull toward maintaining traditions remains quite strong among Indians (Figure 2). This tension between developing a more progressive element and maintaining what is desirable and acceptable the traditional context is never more evident than in the case of the changing women's roles. The clash between traditionalism and modernism, or the blending of the two, is a perennial theme that one discovers while studying India, and is played out in different ways depending on the social and historical contexts. From an etic point of view, one can find Indian women who are traditional, or modern, or progressive, or even Westernized, or some combination thereof (Chakraborty 1991). From an emic point of view, similar labels are used by Indian women to describe themselves, although the term "Westernized" seems the least favored (based on personal interviews). Indians use a combination of this terminology, to represent the notion that on some aspects of their lives, they are modern, while on some other aspects, they are quite traditional. Among many middle-class women this ontological tension exists regardless of age or gender, signifying the fear of a possible loss of cultural identity in moving away from their imagined notions of Indianness. Figure 3 has some print ads showing how consumers are represented in a combination of traditional and modern values. Elsewhere, I have discussed in greater detail how the play of gender roles in contemporary India is marked by this tension.

There is a demand for a number of household appliances. The concept of a modern home both as a physical space and symbolic space has not been a generally accepted theme in the Indian cultural context until recently, although traditional physical spaces have always projected very high
symbolic meanings of their own. (See Joy and Dholakia 1991, Mehtha and Belk 1991 for some interesting account of recent Indian immigrants and their relationships to their homes and household possessions.) With families nucleating and women taking independent or co-equal, financial responsibilities and consumption decisions on behalf of their families, their roles have been dramatically augmented in acquiring goods and home purchases not seen before. With the rise of the population, the emergence of nuclear families, and a growth in family incomes, more Indians are opting for separate, independent households. The problem of urban space is so acute that land developers and architects have to come up with innovative schemes and new buildings to meet this demand. In a number of urban communities, older homes are being torn down giving way to multi-apartment or high-rise complexes. These apartments are being built by professional architects who are exposed to many Western ideas of use of space and construction materials. Thus one can see many modern style apartments with many gadgets and appliances.

Historically, Indian tradition allowed for hedonism in various aspects of life. The Hindu religious texts are full of descriptions of goddesses and gods whose physical appearance has been a major subject of textual description. In this respect, Indian culture presents a seeming contradiction to the Western eye. First, there is an asceticism of the East which seems to suggest that all material possessions and goods are to be avoided. At the same time, Indian culture is known for its joviality and eroticism. Normally, these seem to stand in opposition to each other. The reason why they seem to stand in opposition to each other is because in the modernist West, the body and mind are separated, the body being considered inferior to the mind. In Indian thought, such dualisms exist but not in any antagonistic way. Contemplation of the human form in Indian culture is as important as contemplating spiritual forms (see 7th century Sanskrit religious work of Sankara, Soundaryalahari - trans. The Ocean of Beauty). The exploitation of erotic themes, both in the electronic and print media have a liberatory appeal to them arising out of new sensibilities. First, the younger generation no longer feels compelled to obey traditional authorities on these matters. This is particularly true of women whose exposure to Western Media combined with their search for Indian cultural norms/forms of the past has given them a certain amount of legitimacy and cultural pride in these matters.

VISUAL MATERIAL AND EXAMPLES

Traditional Market Segments
Three traditional target groups in Indian marketing are identified here. This classification has lasted since the early sixties to the mid-eighties, and to some extent exists even today in some markets.

Here is a commercial for a brand of scooters (Brand name - Bajaj) which gives a picture of a proud and happy member of the middle class.

1. TV Commercial presentation for Hamara Bajaj (Language: Hindi, Trans: Our Bajaj)

Group 1. Young-adult Male Earners
This segment was considered important for a number of personal items -- garments, shaving cream, shoes, personal grooming products. For anything more expensive, like a bicycle or a transistor radio, it was customary for the young man to seek the opinion of his father. This deference was considered natural and desirable.

Group 2. Young Marrieds
In this category, the wife chose the brand of the product she used for family consumption -- cooking oil, detergent, toothpaste, the family bath soap ("one cake for all") etc. If she needed a face powder or kohl for her eyes, she could choose that - but only after her family's purchases were completed and she had money left over. The purchases for "our" and "us" came before "I" and "me."

The decision on high ticket items such as radio, or a ceiling fan, was deferred to the husband and the wife accepted this very naturally. In fact, she would have been surprised had her husband asked for her opinion.
Group 3. The 45+ Years
This group was by and large ignored by the marketing people -- except as approvers of the purchases of the younger consumers described in Group 1.

All these three groups usually lived under one roof -- as a joint family, as the following commercial shows.

2. TV Commercial presentation for Woodwards Gripewater - A digestive syrup for babies.

In sum, the market segments for many products were simple; themes of borrowing and credit were totally absent; and the advertising media were mainly newspapers, magazines, and cinema. Older people were never depicted as having material needs (a cultural value) in the traditional culture. At the most, for the elderly market, one saw occasional ads for savings and retirement plans.

After the Dawn of Consumer Revolution
Earlier, I referred to the shaping of the Indian consumer society due to a number of forces. As a result, the media have begun to identify some emerging consumer segments as follows. It is to be noted here that some of the roles mentioned here have always existed in the traditional social organization but a focus on them as "consumers" is a recent occurrence. Much of this no doubt has been aided by the traditional cinema verite which has inspired the TV, the new defining new medium of Indian consumer culture.

The sociologically "conditioned"female consumer
The consumer as a wife, providing emotional support and partnership to her husband.

3. TV Commercial presentation for washing detergent (Brand names - Wheel and Top Star), tea (Brand - Lipton) The consumer as a daughter-in-law, preserver/protector of traditional values.

4. TV Commercial presentation for a food ingredient, Channa Masala, (Brand name - Everest), Pressure Cooker (Brand name - Prestige) and detergent (Brand name - Ariel) The consumer as a mother, the nurturer.

5. TV Commercial presentation for various children's food products; protein drink (Brand name - Maltova), noodles (Brand name - Maggi)

The newly-rich Urban Indians
The Indian male or female who has either traveled abroad and returned with new tastes and insights, or is a home-grown product who has acquired the necessary sophistication and tastes. The new thinking man, young adult, single or married.

6. TV Commercial presentation for Men's clothing (Brand name - Raymonds)

7. Greeting cards targeted to men (Brand name - Archies)

The consumer as a thinking woman, a self-achiever, single or married. Vocal about what she wants, confident in herself but not a feminist (as the term is popularly understood), yet. She is presented as a role model for any upper middle-class woman or women with aspirations.

8. TV Commercial presentations for a cosmetic product (Brand name - Lakme moisturizer), and a refrigerator (Kelvinator)

She is no longer unidimensional. She may be a wife, mother or girl friend but she is now conscious of her individual persona. The boom in women's beauty-care products also shows that she has none of the earlier guilt about spending money on herself.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper is an attempt to integrate gender construction from a socio-cultural perspective and the emergence of the female consumer in India. Women belonging to either traditional upper castes, or upper economic strata are forging ahead and heralding changes that are likely to continue into the next century. In the meantime, we are also seeing how consumerism is shaping the society in general, and more specifically, females
as consumers. A major challenge facing Indian women seems to be how to combine traditionalism with modernism and how to combine the best that is available within the culture with emerging change phenomena.

The paper also shows that in the analysis of the condition of women in India, imported feminist theories cannot be applied without due regard to the particular historical and socio-cultural factors. The paper shows how these factors come into play through historical continuities as well as discontinuities. Indian women are of course subject to the politics of patriarchy, gender hierarchy in a manner not dissimilar to Western women. In addition to these two factors, Indian women are also subject to caste hierarchy and its own imperatives. Students of gender studies should be careful in understanding these forces because they do not act in the same way as in some other cultures. Indian women believe that there is a lot to be preserved in the traditional family system and many Indian cultural values have much to offer. To ignore these values would be self-defeating. There is always the danger of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

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Figure 1: A sample of Women's magazines.
Figure 1: Four ads depicting men and women in a combination of modern and traditional roles and attires.

Figure 2: Four ads depicting men and women in a combination of modern and traditional roles and attires.