

Open letter to the Imperial Blue India Marketing Team: **An appeal to take down the slogan 'Men will be Men'**

The 'bois locker room' conversation was received with multiple emotions in Indian society. Disgust, repulsion and anger were accompanied with another, a surprisingly more prevalent response – the silence of stale familiarity. Thinking about it, such a response is not surprising at all. *That* is the effect of this conversation. Not the words used, not the intent of the boys, not the repercussion for the girls but the sheer normalcy with which it settled down in our minds. If it is a conversation that disturbed everybody but surprised nobody, this isolated incident is merely a symptom of the underlying chronic condition of the Indian mindset –misogyny.

Casual misogyny is in small, potentially harmless and seemingly humorous instances; when innuendos of only men's' physical needs is *funny*, when uncles' ability to cook a single meal is *surprise*, when the wife leaving town for a week is *freedom* or when beauty of a woman is *danger*. These instances are packaged well and ingested in small enough doses for us to not even recognise them entering our minds. One such well packaged poison is 'Men will be men'.

Taglines are designed to stick. They stick to those corners of our mind that we already associate with the message it conveys. They become easy and catchy phrases we can name our room of biases. 'Men will be men' has become a funny poster on the misogyny door. The room now belonged the cool kids with the witty poster whose actions are rarely punished.

In the pursuit of appealing exclusively to men, 'Men will be men' has been, perhaps unintentionally, broadcasting licenses for men to get away with their actions on the pretext of their gender. This tagline justifies unacceptable behaviour of men as if it were a part of their DNA. It doesn't stop there. In saying men cannot help themselves but behave like that, it also makes any response by the women uncalled for or even unwarranted. This can be seen in the constant responses that women get '*Eh! Why you reacting so much? It's just a joke!*' Well, it never was.

In an old interview with the creative director of the ad agency that came up with the idea, the campaign was described like this - *"There are lots of male insights, but we don't want to go for the obvious ones because that is not too entertaining. We want to go with stuff that people haven't thought about but when they actually see it happen, they say 'Oh ya, this happens, man!'. That is where you get maximum engagement and connection. It is not easy but fun to do so."*

This probably best explains how much casual misogyny is ingrained in our culture. It has been a decade, but we still find it funny. It is disturbing that even after the #MeToo movement and countless other raised voices, this tagline **continues to be celebrated**.

Globally and in India, feminism has been making multiple efforts towards building an equal, respectful and inclusive society. Countless people are waking up every single day in the belief that we will one day become that society. Such a hope can see the light of day when we are mindful about the words we use and the content we consume. That would mean every mansplaining comment, casually misogynistic punchline and 'bois locker room' joke are no longer subjects of entertainment.

Brands have historically had the power to influence the narrative in the country and Imperial Blue has been one of them. You also have the power, now, to change this narrative. 'Men will be men' being taken down would be a historic step of brands moving towards responsibly producing content that contributes to building a respectful and inclusive society.

- Sneha Kanukolanu and Sahiti Sarva