

**REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SELECTED
INDIAN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES IN ENGLISH: A
STUDY IN CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

‘Today, anti-aging creams, for example, can no longer make absurd claims for their products, as they did a decade ago. Ten years ago, cosmetics companies regularly declared that their youth creams “erased” signs of age, “restructured” skin on a “cellular” level, and “renewed” tissue “from within”—all of which are physically impossible, since their ingredients were not able to penetrate the epidermis’

(Wolf. 2002: 7).

Naomi Wolf wrote the above lines in the introduction of the 2002 edition of *Beauty Myth*, which was first published in 1990. This statement raises a pertinent question to the new woman of this decade - have we progressed as individuals since 2002 or have regressed to 1990 when Naomi Wolf first started the struggle against the ‘beauty myth’?

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, we provide concluding remarks and discuss suggestions for future research. We have examined the data from the two popular women’s magazines, Femina and Woman’s Era respectively. Femina targets a higher economic class of readers and includes content and advertisements which incorporate global issues, products and services. Unlike Femina, Woman’s Era targets the middle-class readers who are culturally conditioned to give priority to their domestic lives before everything else.

The present study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What changes have occurred in the presentation of women’s magazines and in their approach to femininity and woman issues since the inception of these magazines?
2. How is womanhood reflected, maintained and constructed in these magazines?
How does the discourse in these magazines reflect these changes?
3. How does the capitalist approach affect the discourse in women’s magazines?

4. Who has really benefitted from the genre that is supposed to address and work towards women causes?

These questions are empirically answered in Chapters Four and Five. In the first section of chapter four, I analysed six cover pages, three from each of the magazines. The first covers of both the magazines were selected from their very first issues, second covers from both the magazines were taken from the mid-years since these magazines came to print and the last covers were taken from the very recent years. I have tried to explore the changes in the number of pages in the magazines, the number of ad pages, and the presentation of different categories of ads. The study of the tables of content in the same chapter highlights the changes in the number of articles published on different topics. It explores and compares the topics covered within the articles, editorials, opinion pages, stories and poetry in both the magazines.

In Chapter Five there is analyses of editorials from both the magazine. In the first issue of the magazines there were two write ups from the respective editors. These notes are analysed to highlight the visions of both the magazines. The analyses of editorials provide evidence for the transformation in the content, vision and representation of women in these magazines.

This study illustrates the effectiveness of the tools of analysis borrowed from Halliday's Systemic Linguistics, and Fairclough and van Leeuwen's framework of data analysis in CDA. The framework for analysis helped to explore how language formulated by discursive social practices constructs and sustains power and gender inequality in society. The tools such as Evaluation, Assumption, Legitimization explain the underlined and collaborative networking of tradition, culture and language to sustain power structures through 'coercion' or 'consent' (Fairclough, 1989).

The study was based on the assumptions that womanhood as constructed and maintained in women's magazines ultimately 1. serves the interests of the capitalist class and 2. establishes and reproduces a culturally institutionalized ideological identity for women.

6.1 Key Points of the Thesis: Answering the Research Questions

In the following section I try to provide answers to the research questions with reference to analysis of the data.

What changes have occurred in the presentation of women's magazines and in their approach to femininity and woman issues since the inception of these magazines?

An overview of the cover pages, advertisements and tables of content indicates that the representation of women has gone through a drastic change within the 40-50 years' time span. The women have been altered from completely covered to barely clothed on the cover pages and in ad images. There are changes in body shape and postures and the type of make-up worn by women. Interestingly, these magazines seem to promote that the emancipatory battle of a woman revolves around her physical appearance. She is liberated if she can shop for herself and for the family or can choose to wear a dress of her liking. She is happy if she has a wardrobe full of lovely clothes and accessories or has a sexy figure and gorgeous hair to flaunt. Wolf writes about how a woman is enslaved to her beauty regime even when she is fully aware of the frivolity of it and has to forgo important matters involving her individuality,

'The affluent, educated, liberated women of the First World, who can enjoy freedoms unavailable to any women ever before, do not feel as free as they want to. And they can no longer restrict to the subconscious their sense that this lack of freedom has something to do with—with apparently frivolous issues, things that really should not matter. Many are ashamed to admit that such trivial concerns—to do with physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes—matter so much. But in spite of shame, guilt, and denial, more and more women are wondering if it isn't that they are entirely neurotic and alone but rather that something important is indeed at stake that has to do with the relationship between female liberation and female beauty' (Wolf, 2002: 9).

The quotation above and the analyses of the data highlight that despite education, freedom and economic independence nothing much has changed. The traditional Indian woman has become the modern new woman but both of them are subjected to traditional social and cultural practices associated with womanhood.

How is womanhood reflected, maintained and constructed in these magazines? How does the discourse reflect these changes?

The study intimates how ideological and institutional discursive practices affect women's magazines and refashion femininity. The two magazines show variance in their vision, presentation of ads and images, circulation, and the brands that they advertise. However, they both perceive women with a certain feminine identity. The magazines do not hint that a woman could run away from her duties as a woman, a wife or a mother. These magazines manifest upgraded capitalist trends on culture and femininity.

Women for centuries have been described and desired in terms of how they look, what they wear and how they behave. Ads in women magazines are boosters to construct and uphold this image. Many companies would be shut down if the myth of a perfect body and ageless skin was taken away from women's lives. The magazines help in building a certain version of a feminine image and also persuade women to surrender to that image.

The study construes that women today have become a victim of self-inflicted femininity due to the strategic construction of her identity in these magazines. The new woman is raised with capitalist influence and a commercialized womanhood. Commercialized womanhood refers to the super-woman image of a woman in terms of her responsibilities as well as her physical appearance. The new-super-woman has a market at her service stacked with super-efficient gadgets and products that are super easy to use. The new-super-woman has more serious responsibilities as a working individual, a mother, and a wife. She is sharing financial load in the family and also looking after everybody's need in the family. Today, the emancipated, the educated woman is responsible for her children's educational needs as well. A few decades ago women were responsible only for the household chores. The new woman attends parent teachers' meetings, takes care of the home-work and examinations of the children, organizes parties, arranges outings and keeps the house decorated.

Sita Anatha Raman concluding on the social condition of women in India writes, 'Despite poverty and patriarchal traditions, women juggle family duties and work to be their own agents. They care for children and seniors at home, while bringing in an income... . Clearly, Indian women are productive agents today... . Despite such gains, gender

equality remains elusive for many Indian women for complex reasons. These obstacles include entrenched patriarchal and cultural norms; a residual colonial legal framework; persistent high-caste male domination in the bastions of power; electoral politics in a multi-ethnic nation; and commercial globalization that thrives on female and child labour and reduces them to pawns for large corporations. Modernization is not always commensurate with progress, since moribund traditions do not all simply fade away but are often reinvented in the relentless drive for wealth and power' (Raman, 2009: 190).

The man of the family on the other hand is still struggling with the same bread earner role. Generally, it is convenient for the man to be the bread earner as that is what he has been culturally trained to do and eventually, that is what is expected of him from his parents as well as the society. A man sitting at home managing a house hold is pointed out and so is the woman who chooses to be only a working woman. Even if the super smart woman gets it done with the help of a maid or a servant, the primary responsibility of feeding the family and fulfilling their other needs is that of the woman. The parents educate their daughters and make them independent but in due course the girls realize that the so-called emancipation weighs them down with added responsibilities of looking after the family as well as earning money for it.

How does the capitalist approach affect the discourse in women's magazines?

The interests of the capitalist class and social fundamentalists affect media writings and the representation of women in media. It is befitting for the social fundamentalist to keep the patriarchal power structure stabilized because the change would demand overhauling of the entire social structure of power relations and dominance. The change in social structure would entail more power in women's hands, power to say no, power to demand, power to order. The patriarchal practices do not teach men to take orders from women in the family. The girl in the family is raised to become the 'second sex'. They are conditioned to be meek, submissive. Even the most liberal families who raise their girls equally with boys train them to look physically 'feminine'.

The study has shown that consumerism fallaciously modifies real-woman-issues and thus nurtures institutional and gender inequalities. Discursive practices, influenced by the interests of capitalists and dominant classes of society, result in the construction,

transformation and reconstruction of gender-based inequality and the structures of dominance.

Equality in its real sense demands no gender-based magazines at all. And before we achieve that perfect state, women's magazines should work towards raising issues and spreading awareness about gender equality.

Women's magazines are published with an objective to sell not mainly their superficial content but mostly the goods and services of brands which keep the magazine - business running. They endeavour not to highlight or fight for the woman cause but to try and encourage people to find those goods and services necessary which otherwise may have no relevance at all. Companies invest in these ads simply to earn profit by selling their products. They use technology to highlight the benefits of their products. The readers receive the magazines and marvel at the images of the models wearing makeup, jewellery and designer dresses. The magazines appeal to a reader's emotion by giving references to the fun and frolic of the festive season, the ardent need for the bride to look all decked up, the importance of a beautiful wife for a husband, the need to look young and attractive, the need to look modern and glamourous. These strategies create a socially approved feminine image of a woman. This image makes women weak and subjected to practices that are absolutely superfluous for her intellectual and individual growth.

The ideological-identity-strategy works best on women in India because there is already a very strong and deep rooted cultural and sociological background available which the capitalists class exploits.

The study explains that both Femina and Woman's Era have come a long way since their first year. They have adopted newer products and technologies to upgrade the standard of the pages in the magazines as well as the images. Unfortunately, the changes in the representation of women are not in favour of women's struggle for emancipation. The definition of modernity provided in these magazines makes women superficially modern. These magazines fail to offer content that may open up a woman's mind to see beyond the world of their physical self.

Who has really benefitted from the genre that is supposed to address and work towards women causes?

Women by no means are benefitted from these magazines. The premier issue in Femina and some of the articles in Woman's Era in the beginning deal with women issues and appear useful. However, the later issues just aim to please the sponsors.

Woman's Era intends to conserve and promote Indian tradition of familial responsibilities. The editors prescribe womanhood as the ultimate goal for women. The fact that the magazine always had male editors prominently affects its content. There are editorials that deal with politics and other social issues about women. The April 2018 issue of Woman's Era has the editorial titled *Hullabaloo Over SC's Ruling*. The editorial relates to the Supreme Court's ruling in the case of Dr. Subhash Kashinath Mahajan vs. The State of Maharashtra that, 'government servants cannot be arrested without prior sanction of a competent authority' (Woman's Era, April, 2018). The same issue includes an article on *Meet the Triple Talaq Crusader* by Vijay Pant. However, the table of content imparts interesting insights. All the articles on cooking, fashion, beauty, or on planning a party are written by women writers except the two titles quoted above. This is an evidence of how distinctly our Indian social structure defines gender specific interests. The editors of Woman's Era retain a patriarchal point of view and masculine interests even if they run a woman's magazine. They prescribe and preach to woman about their womanhood or they write about politics. The editorial seems out of place in a magazine in which rest of the content is focused on making women better mothers and better wives. One political article will not enlighten a reader who wants to read about new recipes or fashion trends. However, this magazine does not endlessly run after promoting glamour and fashion and aim to benefit the capitalist class.

Femina has transformed into a fashion magazine. The content of the magazine has become global. It includes articles on travel, film industry, art galleries, interior decoration etc. However, the primary aim is to advertise or sell products through these articles. Every now and then the magazine adds a pertinent topic, for example in the issue of 2014 there is an article on *What Not to Say to A Rape Survivor* and in May 2018 issue there is an entry under *She-Conomics – Investing 101: Earn It Own It*. But these articles

get lost among the fashion and glamour entries which cover the rest of the pages. Femina is unabashed about their quest for glamour which is epitomised in the title *Leisure Island: Go Glam or Go Home* (see Appendix VIII) as the first title on the cover page.

It is important to note that the objective of this thesis is not to criticize the growth and technical development of the economy. The objective rather is to question the marketing strategy that on one hand proclaims equality for women and on the other applauds women in an unrealistic super-woman's role. The scarcity of ads showing men using new products adds to this discursive practice of keeping women subjected to home and hearth. The presentation of women as a symbol of beauty and desire keeps women glued to this prescribed feminine image. The ones who break the taboo struggle with their own social network of friends and family. The practice that makes 'femininity' an obligation sustains gender inequality. As Naomi Wolf rightly puts it, 'The problem with cosmetics exists only when women feel invisible or inadequate without them. The problem with working out exists only if women hate ourselves when we don't. When a woman is forced to adorn herself to buy a hearing, when she needs her grooming in order to protect her identity, when she goes hungry in order to keep her job, when she must attract a lover so that she can take care of her children, that is exactly what makes "beauty" hurt... . The actual struggle is between pain and pleasure, freedom and compulsion' (Wolf. 2002: 273).

6.2 Scope for Further Study

We have looked at a wide variety of data from both the magazines. However, tools of CDA could be used for a detailed analysis of the articles from these magazines which would shed useful insights. It would be interesting to examine the changes in the discourse of these articles.

A comparative study can be made using CDA between men's and women's magazines to explore the difference in the representation of men and women in both the magazines.

CDA can also be used to examine school curriculum and teaching learning materials to highlight how these components shape a child's perception and understanding of the society.

Scholars can use CDA to analyse classroom interaction between teacher and students. The classroom discourse can be critically examined to explore the role of a teacher in constructing gender awareness in a gender sensitive environment at school. Classroom discourse between teacher and learners can also be examined to understand the structures of power and dominance in the classroom.

CDA can effectively be used in analysing literary texts to explore the structures of power and ideology. Literature reflects and establishes the fundamental structures of social order. CDA together with Halliday's Systemic Linguistics can help unearth how language is used to build a certain version of a society.