



Female Voices in the Popular Ads: A Critical Humanistic Study

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Abstract

The sole management of household chores has made India a challenging place to live in for working females. Betty Friedan raised her voice for the equality of payment to females when work was equal in twentieth century United States of America. In the current scenario, the equality of work for both males and females is equally challenging. Females are not only earning money but organizing their homes solely. This study is Mixed research and is going to textually analyse the popular laundry Ads and a campaign [hashtag] ShareTheLoad through their advertisements available on their YouTube channel in the light of Critical Humanism and digital feminism. This paper is going to study the condition of middle-class working females in India in association with the technology they use for household chores. This research also analysis how far the gendering of technology is done in the Indian Society to engulf females in the old clutches of patriarchy. The research hints about the relevance of the involvement of technology in the life of the people with special reference to the selected females. The market interest of the company behind this campaign is highlighted.

Keywords

Critical Humanism, Household, Sharing, Female

Introduction

Feminists have been working to provide rights to females. British, American, French, and Third World feminists have been working separately with the same cause. Waves of feminism have tried to touch almost every issue to liberate females. Digital feminism has introduced the role of technology in this stream.

Feminists have mixed views on essentialism and non-essentialism. Many of them try to fit females in the constructed structure. "Certainly woman like man is a human being; but such an assertion is abstract; the fact is that every concrete human being is always uniquely situated" (Beauvoir Introduction). Feminists such as Simon de Beauvoir, and Dorothy Parker try to amalgamate the existing notions of Humanism and they want to fit into the definitions of being human. Later feminists introduced the perspectives of essentialism stating that females are different from males on multiple grounds. Robin West has differentiated females from males based on the reproductive system (140). French feminist Hélène Cixous rejects masculine language by condemning it as affected by patriarchy and cannot express female desires (878). Elaine Showalter has suggested the differences by four models (Biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and Cultural) in her canonical essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness". These feminists try to achieve equality and equity among the sexes by one or the other way.

However, there are very few philosophers who have tried to question the existing notions of Western Humanism by focusing on Feminism.

Critical humanism has questioned:

- the myth of the human as the centre of the universe;

- the so-called ‘autonomous rationality’ of the human mind;
- the agency of the individual in effecting changes in his life, and

influencing history (Nayar 22)

Critical humanism has experimented with definitions of feminism as well. Rosi Braidotti has altered the notions with her remarkable statement “Feminism is not Humanism” (21). This statement can be elaborated in the light of Western Humanism. “This common idea of the human often excludes beings that fall outside the white, masculine, wealthy, healthy and heterosexual norm” (Koistinen & Karkulehto). Western humanism is about giving every command in the hands of white males without any consideration of any other living or non-living being. Feminism, in this sense, tries to liberate females from the constructed classes and categories.

Feminist technoscience is a “transdisciplinary field” that studies “the ways in which gender, in its intersections with other sociocultural power differentials and identity markers, is entangled in natural, medical and technical sciences as well as in the sociotechnical networks and practices of a globalized world” (Asberg 299). Many scholars have joined hands in observing the role of Gender in technology. Judy Wajcman has worked on the historical progress of technology concerning Gender. She says that the historical usage of tools such as “needlework”, “metalwork”, “weaving” and so on was initially in the hands of females (16). Slowly and slowly, the command shifted from applied technology to mechanical technology and the command goes into the hands of males (16).

In the current scenario, the usage of machines is back in the hands of females but in a way to satisfy the constructed social responsibilities. Washing Machines and dishwashers are available for women to do household chores, particularly to reduce their manual labour. The tasks given to males are more associated with the usage of the brain. Neutrality of technology clashes with social roles.

Household Chores in Popular Advertisements

The idea of sharing household chores has been in literature for decades. As far as marriages are concerned, the notion of female freedom comes on the surface. Nancy Chodorow has discussed the impact of marriage on a female’s mind. According to her, “Women of all classes are now expected to nurture and support husbands in addition to providing them with food and a clean house” (5). Chodorow has discussed the domestication of females that they are responsible for the household chores and serving their males. An advertisement for washing machines by LG which was published in 2016 shows the generation gap story of mother and daughter. There is a visualization of washing clothes by mother and daughter in their respective adulthood manually and by machine (LG). The movement of the washing machine is compared to the manual washing by her mother (LG Front Load Washing Machine with 6 motion DD Technology 1:02-1:17). Wajcman has expressed her views that the technology makers are not gender neutral (146). “Neutrality of technology clashes with social roles” (Tuli & Nancy 72). This means that the technological intervention may fail to cope with the utopian vision of providing liberty to females. This advertisement objectifies females as their sole purpose is to do household chores.

A Feministic Approach to The Campaign

Ariel and Whirlpool started a campaign, [hashtag] ShareTheLoad, in 2015 to promote the sharing of the load by both males and females. Ariel provides laundry detergent while Whirlpool sells washing machines. There are many advertisements available on Youtube.com on the company’s official channel. In 2015, it held the flag of the question “Is laundry only a woman’s job” high. In 2016, their focus was on passing the legacy of patriarchy from one generation to another. The attention moves towards parenting techniques in 2019 (P&G). The official website states that this campaign is “award-winning” whereas no mention is there about which award and when it was won (Ariel.in). According to a survey report available, there are only 13% of households in India in 2018 which has washing machines for doing laundry. Whereas, the data for refrigerators is quite high 33%, and for television is 77%(Statista). So, it can be the reason that the promotion of washing machines is quite fruitful in India. Washing detergent is the need of every household and there is enough competition in the market. Ariel might have spread the word about the promotion.

The advertisement of 2015 compares the economic condition of females in 1962 and the contemporary times. The salary of a female in 1962 is shown as Six rupees whereas that in 2015 is shown as more than her husband. The mother-in-law of the protagonist says “This is great time to be a woman” (#IsLaundryOnlyAWomansJob? #ShareTheLoad | English – Ariel 0:20). The video ends with food for

thought when her husband asks her why his green shirt has been washed by her (0:22). It is stated in the title of the video that whether the laundry is only a she-job? The economic stability has been expressed as a moment of enjoyment by Rich(13). However, economic stability is represented as a failed process for liberating females in the ad. Susan Levine has suggested while reading Betty Friedan that females with economic liberty may not be able to enjoy freedom completely due to the additional assigned household tasks to her (43). The ad shows the Indian context that females, even if they earn more than their husbands, cannot enjoy freedom completely due to the household workload.

Ariel and Whirlpool specified their ideas in the next ad. “In 2016, we asked Dads to #ShareTheLoad, striving to break the cycle of prejudice that was passed down from one generation to the next” (Ariel.in). The protagonist is an employed one. She has been shown as managing everything solely; cooking, washing, child rearing, attending and departing guests cleaning home, and so on.

The father of the protagonist points out the gender discrimination games such as “ghar-ghar”. He says, “I am so proud and I am so sorry” (0:30). He recalls how his daughter used to play with toys like a kitchen set and act as a home-maker. Her husband might have faced the same situations such as acting as a husband while playing (0:20- 1:10). In another advertisement, a married female wants to quit her job because of the household load. Her mother notices her son as he knows nothing about how to manage household tasks (1:30). Both ads question the parenting techniques of Indian society. Gender discrimination on the grounds of toys, games, and emotions is quite common (Tuli 7). Ariel has taken a step to highlight these discriminations in society.

This ideology reinforced the traditional role of women in household production. The ideology has been promoted through advertising campaigns that continue to depict laundry as the domain of women (Shehan and Moras). In the March 2020 ad, there is again a female who is employed. She solely manages the whole household chores right from laundry, cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, narrating stories to the child, home management, and almost everything. The ad ends with the message “71% of women sleep less than men due to household chores” (2:33). Also, it has been said, “Lack of adequate sleep or the presence of sleep disorders can greatly impact a woman's daily life, including her societal roles in the workforce and as the primary caregiver in the family” (Mallampali& Carter). This means that overloaded household work is seriously hampering the health of females.

All the ads show that there is a clothes washing machine available in their homes. Whereas, manual labour tasks handling machines like dishwashers and tortilla makers are not highlighted. There is a message floated in all the ads that if he cannot be a perfect cook, he can do the laundry. This can be so because washing machines are available in their homes. Cooking and dishwashing is a challenging concept when it is done manually. This side of ‘share the load’ has been overlooked.

There is “How to Share The Load” available (Ariel.in). They suggest methods of washing and there is literature about tags on the clothes. Ariel and Whirlpool have completely ignored other methods of washing or other detergents by showing the picture that describes which clothes should be washed with what methods in the washing machine. Another picture is with the title “How to use and dose Ariel liquid detergent” (Ariel.in). This line hints at the idea that the agenda behind this campaign is merely to promote their own product.

Beauvoir has rejected the idea of othering of females as a mere myth (Beauvoir Facts and Myths). The female protagonists are shown as handling everything and this appears quite nominal to the males. In the March 2020 advertisement “Unequal division of household chores is keeping women awake. #ShareTheLoad - for equal sleep”, the female is shown preparing breakfast and doing the whole work. She has been shown as eating in a hurry and trying to take a nap on the way to the office. Day and night, she has been shown as working for her husband and daughter by not giving a single minute to herself. This idea calls for the need for Critical Humanism to be shown in Media and Literature. The lady has been presented as entirely sacrificing herself for the constructed norms of society; giving acceptable nurture to her daughter, serving her husband, and going to a job to earn an acceptable lifestyle for her family. She has lost herself to humanistic ideologies without paying any heed. Here, the ideas of Beauvoir and Critical Humanism intersect to present the contemporary situation of an employed female.

As far as the sharing of the load is concerned, there are multiple sociological and literary interpretations available. Adrienne Rich has rejected this sharing altogether by giving references to the history of females and how they have been degraded and classified “witches, femmes seules, marriage

resisters, spinsters, autonomous widows, and/or lesbians” (Rich 15). When these issues are seen in the light of Critical Humanism, it becomes quite relevant that Rich has been coming closer to the philosophy by rejecting heterosexuality.

Conclusion

Ariel and Whirlpool have pretended to promote equality between the genders. They have tried their best to enhance their market interest by enhancing the need for Laundry Washing Machine. The literature available on their website has shown the methods of sharing the household chores only in favour of using Ariel Liquid Detergent. Statistical data shows that there is enough market demand for Cloth Washing Machines and this is a fruitful area for investment by any company. These advertisements hide the claims of heteronormativity in favour of market interest. Technology has helped in easing the life of humans but it has objectified females as well.

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