To my son, Jason,
whose gendered behavior is often surprising,
generally amusing, and always educational.
As a social dimension affecting consumer behavior, gender has been, for the most part, understudied and misunderstood. Two conferences on gender and consumer behavior held in Salt Lake City, Utah, in June 1991 and June 1993, were moves in the direction of correcting these deficits. This book represents another decisive rectifying step. Primarily drawing on the best papers from the two conferences, as determined by blind review at the time of submission, the chapters in this volume cover some of the most interesting issues in the field of gender and consumer behavior.

We know that men and women behave differently, and consumption is a context in which these differences are often apparent. The contributors to this volume explore why, how, and to what extent these differences are manifest in varying situations and circumstances, addressing issues of biology, psychology, society, and culture as they affect gender constructs and gendered consumer behavior. The chapters presented here are representative of the current breadth and sophistication of gender and consumer behavior studies.
Gender Identity in the Indian Context: A Sociocultural Construction of the Female Consumer

ALLADI VENKATESH

This chapter addresses gender identity issues and rising consumerism in India, and their joint implications for our understanding of the emerging Indian female consumer. In the first part of the chapter, I present a theoretical and conceptual analysis of gender as it pertains to Indian society, using a sociocultural framework of gender theory. Although the term gender includes both male and female, my focus in this chapter is on women, because most changes are occurring in regard to their roles and status in the Indian context. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss consumer trends in India and the construction of the identity of the emerging female consumer by the media.

Provision of a comprehensive account of the "condition of women" in India is beyond the scope of this chapter. There is ample literature available in this regard, in terms of both quality and quantity (see

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Anant, Rao, & Kapoor, 1986, for a detailed bibliography; for some relevant areas of discussion, I refer to Krishna Raj & Chatana, 1990; Patikh & Garg, 1989; Rose, 1992; Sharma, 1986). Just as the scholarly and critical literature is impressive and growing, so are the number of popular magazines in India (Femina, Women's Era, Savvy, and others) that focus on women's issues, from the serious to the glamorous and even to the more sordid.

At the risk of oversimplification, the gender question in India may be encapsulated in two opposing, yet parallel, themes. The first 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; the second is a corresponding lack of development among women in various other social categories (e.g., urban poor, rural, agrarian workers), primarily because of severe structural, cultural, and economic impediments (Mies, 1986; Wignaraja, 1990). (There are, of course, some intermediary positions within these two extremes.) In this chapter I examine the implications for consumer behavior of the changes taking place among the women in the former 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 concern expressed by researchers such as 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, by constructing 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 debates in the United States (or the West) relevant to India (or the Third World)? The answer to the question is both 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, and women's family roles. 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 empiricism. Although one must not attempt to impose Western etc. models on Indian situations, one must not neglect to find commonalities within bounds of reason and reasonableness, if this helps us 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: the pre-independence period, the first period (i.e., from the beginning of the mid-1800s to the 1940s—the so-called historical period of modern India), the second period (from 1947, the year India gained freedom from British rule, to 1980), and the third period (from the early 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 involved the awakening of the Indian spirit, its articulation, and the 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 did (e.g., Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Indira Gandhi).

The post-independence period (after 1947) established constitutional guarantees for all citizens, particularly women and underprivileged 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 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 economic and educational opportunities.

In the third period, which began in the early 1980s, a new feminist consciousness seems to have awakened in India. Educated women from urban areas with strong activist or leftist leanings have begun to get involved in rural and village direct-action reform movements (Bhushan, 1989; Mies, 1986; Rose, 1992). Included in this activist group are women who have been influenced by the rising global feminist consciousness and various theoretical ideas originating in the West. They refuse to see the women's question in India at a benign reformist level; rather, they see it in transhistorical and foundational terms. This macrosystemic perspective is combined with an urge to deconstruct women's positions at an 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 theorizing based on my ethnographic work (Banerjee, 1991; Bhushan, 1989; Brock-Usne, 1989; Krishna Raj & Chanana, 1990; Liddle & Joshi, 1986; Marriott, 1990; Mies, 1986; Parikh & Garg, 1989; Rose, 1992; Saradamoni, 1992; Sharma, 1986; Wadley, 1977; Wiguna, 1990). For the Western (especially the U.S.) audience, a clear issue is how the gender question in India is different from (or similar to) that in, say, the United States.

FAMILY, KINSHIP ISSUES

First, the gender question in both India and the United States is based on respective historical, political, cultural, and social-structural conditions. 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 independent relationship. From birth until marriage, a 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. In this condition, she is differentiated from a male child, because sons do not leave their biological families after marriage and are socialized from early on to be an integral part of their families, whereas women are not. Thus the status of women is marked by a liminality, as the conditions of possibility require women to live on 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 their families; if there is any dependency relationship at all, it is played out in ways somewhat different from those found in India. There is no gender-based differential preparatory status for unmarried women in the West, because both men and women leave their families to establish their respective future lives upon reaching adulthood—sometimes even earlier. That is, compared with Indian culture, in the West neither males nor females have more privileged status within their families of origin. Much of Western discourse on gender focuses on the politics of difference, but not so much prior to adulthood (although this certainly exists) as during adult life.

Matriarchal Religio-Cultural Tradition

Another major difference between Western and Indian discourse is how the politics of difference are played out. In the West, the politics of difference are the focus of much debate and discussion, whereas in India the focus is more on the discourse of dependence and exploitation. The politics of difference are so obvious in India that they do not generate much energy in discourse. Differences in gender constructions are accepted by both men and women, 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 Irigaray wholesale into the Indian scene, for these ideas are based very much on specific constructions of gendered differences without regard to kinship patterns or the sociocultural realities of Indian family life. For example, in India, there is not much dispute as to how women are written about in literature or religious texts. As evidence of this, the power of matriarchal religious tradition is quite strong in India (Liddle & 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 Hindu India is full of temples that 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. Goddess worship represents a supreme form of ritual act and metaphysical exercise.

Threshold Theory of Women’s Position in Indian Society

In a complicated element of life in India, one also finds a curious phenomenon not found in the United States or the West in general. When women do manage to attain high positions in political and social life, Indians are willing to give them coequal status and the same esteem accorded men in the same positions. I use threshold theory to explain this. Because 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 that person’s individual background. At higher levels, the gender of the occupant is less material. Thus 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, any 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 or she is no longer the same subordinate individual as before, but a different persona in a new position. This kind of transfiguration from individual to status position seems to be resisted in 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, of course, be some exceptions to this, e.g., in the military). It is the individual as an individual, and his or her characteristics, that is most pertinent in the West. In India, the individual is easily idealized into the position itself. Threshold theory is related to the religio-cultural theory mentioned above; both address the issue of the individual’s position.
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 chapter. One consists of 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 the urban poor. I shall report primarily on the developments taking place among women in the first segment.

Ethnographic Account of Changing Identity Formation

First, I will present a summary from relevant ethnographic work I conducted in Madras, India, a city of about 5.5 million people. My stay in Madras lasted seven months, from June 1992 to 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 past five to eight years has been nothing short of 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 contemporary India is so interesting and affords a great opportunity for many social scientists to study the momentous changes that are likely to occur in the next two or three decades.

India is certainly witnessing some significant changes in the economic and social status of women and the nature of household structure in the urban areas. For the first time, we are able to see trends that transcend the caste hierarchy and reflect 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 attend colleges and universities, and many are gainfully employed. This has given them both economic and social status. Many young women, in contrast to past custom, are choosing their own 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. Selection of a suitable partner remains a family decision more by consensus than by an imposition from the parents.

The attitudes of women with respect to marriage, career, and economic status, are undergoing so many changes that there seem to be intragenerational differences among women within narrow age categories. That is, there are not merely the differences between parents and daughters that one might expect to find, but differences among groups of younger women whose ages are not very far apart. The views and modes of behavior of a 30-year-old woman in establishing her own identity may be radically different from those of a 25-year-old, and the views of a 25-year-old may be different from those of a 20-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 grandparents also. When we combine this shift to the nuclear family system with the emergence of career roles for 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. This does not necessarily mean that the nuclear family system can by itself cause these changes, but it is one of the facilitating factors. The other factors are career opportunities for women, women’s income-generating power, the presence of the elderly in the household or in close physical proximity, the family’s adherence or nonadherence 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 these the attitudes of friends and families that are part of the social network. If the attitudes within the soci
network are progressive (or conservative), the attitudes of the families will also be progressive (or conservative). One cannot, therefore, minimize the social interaction effects in these matters.

I also observed an interesting revival of religious worship and participation among young and 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 nonreligious, or even Western terms. If anything, women in India derive more power by appealing to the religiocultural 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, access to which had, in a very interesting way, never been theoretically denied to women, but had not found expression in practice. In other words, women in India are now looking at their religiocultural roots, selectively picking up threads of possible support, exercising their options in areas that have been up for grabs for centuries, untouched by masculine control, and exploring this virgin territory for their own adoption. 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 religiocultural space meets with strong resistance.

What I have seen among the urban middle-class people is that the oppressive element of Indian family seems to have been taken out, and more healthy elements seem to have been put in its place. The preservation of the family system at any cost seems to be the motivation for these changes. Much of this arises from what Indians have heard 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 that term means) or seem to approximate Western-oriented independent behavior, it is important to remind ourselves that the individualist 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 would have to say that collectivism is still the preferred model, with various adjustments to individual desires. This 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 will be incorporated into the Indian ethos. There is an important message here for Western feminists (particularly Anglo-Americans) that Indian women’s questions cannot simply be 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 in, say, the United States. 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 many ways, and in India it is simply not the politics of difference.

Rising Consumerism in India

INDIA AS A CONSUMER SOCIETY: SOME GENERAL ISSUES

Recent work on consumerism in so-called Third World cultures and in India shows that this is not a phenomenon (Belk, 1988; Joy & Dholakia, 1991; Mehta & Belk, 1991). There has also been much publicity in the past two years regarding marketing and consumerist-oriented developments in these societies. However, attaching the label of “consumer society” to India begs some questions. What is a consumer society, and why apply that label now—as it to say there was no consumption in India prior to recent history or that there were no consumers to speak of? I use the term consumer society in a contemporary sense, in the way Fox and Lears (1983), McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb (1982), and Marchand (1985) have used it in their sociohistorical analyses.

As is evident from the available literature, what constitutes a consumer society is difficult to define but perhaps easier to describe. India has been known for centuries for its trade, exotic markets, and bazaars...
Gender Issues and Consumer Behavior

(Subrahmanyam, 1990). However, until 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 (Subrahmanyam, 1990). In the colonial period, which 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 was only after independence that India began to develop as a major consumer economy, and only recently have many aspects of consumerism begun to surface with remarkable ease and diffusion.

Specific Factors Accounting for Indian Consumerism

Several factors combine in India to create what may be described as an emerging consumer society. Although the following list is not to be considered exhaustive, these factors are representative of the movement of India toward a consumer-oriented society:

- A burgeoning middle class, with changing values and pent-up consumer demand
- Changing women’s roles, including 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
- Emergence of traveling Indian consumers—immigrants in the United States and England, overseas workers, tourists, business professionals and their exposure to worldwide consumer products
- The resurfacing of hedonistic cultural elements after centuries of dormancy
- The entry of multinational corporations into India

The size and economic strength of the Indian middle class have received much attention recently, both within India and in the foreign press. Estimates place the numbers of people with the ability to afford many standard consumer goods, if not luxury items, anywhere between 200 million and 250 million. An interesting aspect of the Indian middle class is that its median age is lower than that of the middle class 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 high side. Among the relevant economic factors are 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. Cultural factors affecting the economic strength of the middle class include norms that discourage borrowing and spending within one’s means, as well as conservatism in clothing, fashion, and physical appearance, and general discipline of body and mind. Social/family factors include the joint family system, in which resources are pooled and assets are shared to minimize multiple purchases of the same products. Many of these traditional features are now undergoing change. Families are becoming more nucleated, and so-called middle-class cultural norms are undergoing major transformation.

For a number of Indians, participation in a consumer society means becoming more modernized or Westernized in dress, food, and 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 television 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, which brings with it 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 familiarity with English, the universal language of 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 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, as several researchers have described (e.g., Liddle & Joshi, 1986; Sharma, 1986; Wadley, 1977). The changing roles of women are accompanied by similar changes in the family structure and household systems (Saradamon, 1992).

Many women, especially in the urban areas, are becoming educated and are entering professional or career-oriented jobs once reserved for men. There has been 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 in different languages and for different role groups (Figure 3.1 shows the covers of some representative magazines in English, Hindi, Telugu, and Tamil). Women are independent across many dimensions—in transportation, career choice, marriage, and family responsibilities. Recent advertising aimed at women has recognized these changing roles, yet the pull toward maintaining tradition remains quite strong among Indians (see Figure 3.2). This tension between developing a more progressive element and maintaining what is desirable and acceptable in the traditional context is nowhere more evident than in the case of changing women’s roles. The clash between traditionalism and modernism, or the blending of the two, is a perennial theme that one discovers in 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 terms to represent the notion that in some aspects of their lives they are modern, whereas in others they are quite traditional. Among many middle-class women, this ontological tension exists regardless of age, signifying the fear of a possible loss of cultural identity in moving away from imagined notions of Indianess. Figure 3.3 reproduces some print ads showing how consumers are depicted as having 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 demand in India for a number of household appliances. The concept of a modern home as both a physical and a symbolic space has

![Figure 3.1. Indian Magazines Devoted to Women's Issues in Different Languages](top left, *Women's Era*, English; top right, *Chitralayalu*, Hindi; bottom left, *Sinta*, Telugu; bottom right, *Mangai*, Tamil)
Figure 3.2. Depiction of Women in Traditional Roles: A Key Aspect of Indian Advertising (in English and Tamil)

Figure 3.3. Examples of Advertising Depicting a Combination of Traditional and Modern Roles for Women (in English and Hindi)

NOTE: The ad on the top right reads, "She's modern. She's traditional. She's you."
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. For some interesting accounts of recent Indian immigrants and their relationships to their homes and household possessions, see Joy & Dholakia, 1991; Mehta & Belk, 1991. With families nucleating and women taking on independent or coequal financial responsibilities and making consumption decisions on behalf of their families, women’s roles have been dramatically augmented; they are acquiring goods and making purchases for their homes in a manner not seen before. With the rise of the population, the emergence of nuclear families, and the growth in family incomes, more Indian nuclear families are opting for separate, independent households. The problem of urban space is so acute that land developers and architects have had 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 multipartartment or high-rise complexes. These apartments are being built by professional architects who have been exposed to many Western ideas about 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 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 ascetism in the East that 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. To Westerners, these characteristics seem to stand in opposition to each other, 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 contemplation of spiritual forms (see the seventh-century Sanskrit religious work of Sankara, Sankarapudalam, or The Ocean of Beauty). The exploitation of erotic themes, in both electronic and print media, has a liberatory appeal to Indians that arises out of new sensibilities. For one thing, 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.

**Traditional Market Segments**

In the past, there have been three traditional target groups in Indian marketing: young adult male earners, young marrieds, and people 45 years of age and older. These classifications were employed from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, and to some extent they exist even today in some markets.

**Young adult male earners.** Young adult males were considered important consumers of a number of personal items—clothing, shoes, shaving cream and other personal grooming products, and so on. For anything more expensive, such as bicycles or transistor radios, it was customary for young men to seek the opinions of their fathers. This deference was considered natural and desirable.

**Young marrieds.** in this category, the wife chose the brands of products used for family consumption—cooking oil, detergent, toothpaste, the family bath soap (“one cake for all”), and so on. If she needed face powder or makeup, she could choose that—but only after her family’s purchases were completed and she had money left over. The purchases for “us” came before any purchases for “me.” Decisions on high-ticket items such as radios or ceiling fans were 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.

**People 45+ years old.** This group was by and large ignored by marketing people, except as approvers of the purchases of younger adult male earners.

Members of all three of the target groups usually lived under one roof, as a joint family. 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 the Consumer Revolution

As mentioned above, the Indian consumer society has been shaped by a number of forces. As a result, the media have begun to identify some emerging consumer segments, which are described below. It should be noted that some of these roles have always existed in the traditional social organization, but the focus on them as "consumers" is a recent occurrence. Much of this has no doubt been aided by the traditional cinema vérité that has inspired television, the new defining medium of Indian consumer culture.

Sociologically "conditioned" female consumers. This category consists of the consumer as a wife, providing emotional support and partnership to her husband; the consumer as a daughter-in-law, preserver/protector of traditional values; and the consumer as a mother, the nurturer.

Newly rich urban Indians. This category includes Indian men or women who have either traveled abroad and returned with new tastes and insights or are homegrown consumers who have acquired new sophistication and tastes. Such a consumer may be characterized as the new thinking man, young adult, single or married, or as the thinking woman, a self-achiever, single or married. In the latter case, the consumer is 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 upper-middle-class women or for women with aspirations. As an Indian woman, she is no longer unidimensional. She may be a wife, mother, or girlfriend, but she is now conscious of her individual persona. The boom in women's beauty products also shows that she has none of the earlier guilt about spending money on herself.

Conclusions

This chapter represents an attempt to integrate gender construction from a sociocultural 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 Indian society in general and, more specifically, females as consumers. Major challenges facing Indian women seem to be how to combine traditionalism with modernism and how to combine the best that is available within the culture with emerging change phenomena.

As I have noted, in the analysis of the condition of women in India, imported feminist theories cannot be applied without due regard for India's particular historical and sociocultural factors. I have discussed how these factors come into play through historical continuities as well as discontinuities. Indian women are of course subject to the politics of patriarchy and gender hierarchy, much as are 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 that many Indian cultural values have much to offer. Ignoring these values would be self-defeating; there is always the danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

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