

# Portrayal of Women in Hand-Painted Visual Discourses on the Streets of India

*Uttaran Dutta*

Increasingly, critical-cultural and subaltern studies scholars, embracing de-Westernization perspectives, are raising questions challenging the Euro-centric constructions and representations of women, especially in the context of the Global South (Faust, 2018; Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). Gluck (2015) noted that de-Westernization is an active, ongoing process towards making intellectual and paradigmatic shifts; she argued that de-Westernization seeks to fundamentally de-center hegemonic knowledge production and called for nurturing and establishing academic sovereignty by embracing locally grounded perspectives and values. Ba and Higbee (2012, p. 3) noted that the scholarship of de-Westernization essentially resists and counters “the West’s dominance (real or imagined) as a conceptual ‘force’ and representational norms”. Moreover, while elaborating on de-Westernization, Wang (2011) argued in favor of local-centric and culture specific theories and approaches embracing situated cultural ethos and ways to balance skewed (if not distorted) hegemonic production of knowledge to reflect and represent contextual epistemologies and axiology. Miike (2006) further argued that such investigation and analysis should derive insights from local culture (here South Asian) and identities (e.g., gendered identity) towards pluralizing and historicizing theoretical and methodological discourses.

Uberoi (1990, p. 43) noted that hegemonic discourses oftentimes legitimize ‘objectification’ of women; it portrays them as “objects or things to be appropriated, possessed and exchanged in the social relations of co-operation and competition among men.” Particularly in the context of the Global South, Parameswaran (2001) argued that women are portrayed as a marginalized monolith. Thus, the dominant discourses seek to establish and promote representations of gender in certain historically and culturally specific ways. Such dominant representations (including visual depictions) of gender are also evident in public places (and open spaces). For instance, one might notice such depictions on the streets of India. In India, on the one hand, the nationalist and, on the other hand, Hindu ideologies

and the globalized capitalist agendas shape, define and influence the identity of the Indian female.

Subaltern studies perspective, as an important de-Westernization lens (Gluck, 2015), seeks to represent underserved populations (that is, populations who are excluded and oppressed by the power structures) by giving them a meaningful voice in their struggle for social, political and cultural decolonization. In the contexts of gender-disparities, subaltern studies calls for legitimizing genuine feminine representation to reveal the distorted portrayal of women's identities by questioning and resisting the patriarchal dominance as well as capitalist objectifications and commodifications of woman. Guha (1988) one of the pioneers among the subaltern studies scholars questioned the validity of questioning subalternity from a classical Marxist perspective. Chakraborty (2000, p. 18), another important scholar, emphasized the 'cultural' aspect of subalternity. He opined that "culture is the 'unthought' of Indian Marxism"; thus, his approach can be seen as a departure from 'economism' of Marxist approach. Thus, according to subaltern studies scholars, "the subaltern condition could be based on caste, age, gender, office, or any other way, including, but not limited to class" (Chaturvedi, 2007, p. 26).

Grounded in Gramscian epistemologies, this critical tradition of scholarship fundamentally questioned and examined dominant power structures, nationalist modernist discourses (including Hindu fundamentalist utterances) and capitalist knowledge productions. Embracing subaltern studies perspectives on gender issues as well as principles of Indian aesthetics, this paper will examine two aspects: how female identities and agencies are portrayed in hand-painted visual discourses commonly available on the streets of India through (i) nationalist representations and (ii) sexist representations.

### *1. Issues of representations, marginalization, and gender*

From de-Westernization perspectives, Gunaratne (2010) and Murthy (2012) opined that it is important to read non-Western texts, traditions and contributions in a culture-specific way—to reveal and represent the nuances of contextual local perspectives, dynamics and epistemologies. Gluck (2015) argued that in the current state of scholarship, the global South remains at the periphery of academic research. However, while developing and/or referring to homegrown approaches and theories, Wang (2011) noted that we should not essentialize, romanticize and eroticize local culture

(e.g., Vedic knowledge is the ultimate and absolutely scientific) by over-generalizing and/or overlooking cultural subtleties.

In the context of visual depictions, Ellsworth (1997, p. 76) noted, "[r]epresentation presents its subject again, in ways that have mediated it through language, ideology, culture, power, convention, desire". From a de-Westernization viewpoint, representations, on the one hand, produce contextual meanings, and on the other hand, challenge stereotypes, and argue in favor of inclusion of local perspectives. Mitchell (2007, p. 232) asserted that the notions of seeing and representations are "deeply involved with human societies, with the ethics and politics, aesthetics, and epistemology of seeing and being seen". Therefore, an act of de-Westernized visual representation is contingent upon historical, socio-cultural and political contexts.

Bourdieu (1990) observed that the visuals remain meaningful within a specific local context or a group of people. Scholars further opined that any forms of representations (including the visual ones) play two crucial roles: (a) it depicts how we perceive ourselves in our world of perception and (b) it helps us in understanding our roles in the context of socio-cultural dynamics that shape our discursive spaces (Desai, 2000). Thus, in the process of negotiating with the socially constructed images (often created by dominant forces), we also co-construct our subjectivities and contextually situated images. A de-Westernization lens thus seeks to reposition the knowledge (and knowledge productions) of the 'others', and helps in broadening our understanding by including situated experiences, knowledge and values.

Subaltern studies, by embracing a de-Westernization approach, called for critical engagement with local and/or indigenous scholarship and knowledge production to legitimize discourses, voices and agencies from the below. Chaturvedi (2007, p. 28) argued that, in examining and foregrounding the issues of gender and power, subaltern scholars are "centrally interested in interpreting the culture that informed subalternity, while also addressing concerns about history, politics, economics, and sociology."

Historically, in the spaces of the Global South such as India, the hegemonic discourses have disrupted the locally situated indigenous meanings, and erased the voices of the less-powerful populations from the discursive spaces. Consequently, the non-dominant identities (such as women) are oftentimes "'profiled' in stereotype and caricature" (Mitchell, 2007, p. 29). Oftentimes, Indian women are represented as objects of admiration and worship and/or things to be appropriated; scholars argue that such representations essentially subscribe to the views and intentions of the patriarchy and the hegemon. Inelegant ways of portraying women (primarily

center around sexuality and purity) are essentially tied to society's control and intentions to maintain the status quo. For instance, such patriarchal representations tend to view and portray women as pure virgin, obedient wife and as divine mother, essentially intertwined with the agendas and intentions of nationalist and religious orthodoxies. In many ways, the Indian women have to constantly negotiate with layers and complexities of selfhood, womehood and nationhood (Supriya, 2002). Scholars have equated such hegemonic knowledge production with actual and symbolic denigration and victimization of women (Uberoi, 1990).

## 2. *Evolution of popular art expressions in India*

Indian streets are often colorful and vibrant spaces where one might experience presence of various types of images—religious, political, cultural, commercial, etc. While both manually and mechanically reproduced images are used for various representational purposes, this paper will discuss some of the manually painted images displayed on Indian streets. Specifically, local business units and small-scale entrepreneurs oftentimes prefer local painters (a relatively low-cost option) to convey locally situated and customized messages. These local artisans hand-paint images, logotypes (oftentimes using blocks or gaskets), and letterforms on a variety of surfaces (i.e. on plastered/ brick walls, on metallic and non-metallic surfaces) using different types of paints and brushes.

The co-presence of manual and industrially reproduced images is not a new phenomenon in India; since the 19th century, both types of visuals have been used to serve several representational purposes. In 1870s and 1880s, the tradition of urban popular art (also termed as 'Bazaar art') was invented by a group of artisans in the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata). These artisans used wood and metal blocks to produce hand painted calendars, posters, and other forms of representations. After the introduction of mechanical image production techniques, the bazaar art became devalued and labeled as a low/ 'artisanal' art form. Thereafter, the artists (of 'high' art) trained in British art schools posed severe challenges to the 'artisanal' art forms and criticized the bazaar art forms as 'cheap', 'common' and 'vulgar'. Subaltern studies scholars challenged and questioned such denigration of visual expressions and essentially argued in favor of cultural voices and discourses (including visual discourses) 'from the below'.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century painting style of Raja Ravi Verma gained widespread popularity across India; till date his style is used to represent 'Indian Women' in the mainstream. All over India the hand painters have

started using Raja Ravi Verma's style since then, which still survives in the contemporary era of Photoshop and laser printing.

### *3. Method*

Initially an extensive literature-search was conducted in print-media to search Indian street graphics related articles. In this respect, graphic-books like Street Graphics India, Graphicswallah were explored to gather images. After a comprehensive search, approximately 200 pictures were obtained. Only a few of them were hand-painted visuals and aligned with the focus of the study. The images were categorized into two main categories- nationalist representations and sexist representations. Some of the images were not selected owing to not receiving appropriate permissions to use them in this article. Guided by the research theme, three hand-painted images were selected through careful screening for visual discourse analysis in this paper. First, the contexts, and then the rationale for selecting the images are discussed below.

Movie posters are one of the most displayed categories of images (if not the most predominate) seen on the streets of India. The first two images are movie posters. The first image (see Fig.1) is taken from a poster of "Mother India" (1957) —a movie that is one of the most revered in India, and leaves a great legacy. The poster in many ways became an icon of women's struggle and emancipation in India (particularly in rural contexts). For movie connoisseurs like Javed Akhtar, "all Hindi films come from Mother India"; in other words, the movie played a significant role in putting India (and Indian cinema) on the world map. Even today, 60 years after its release, the movie still occasionally plays in Indian movie theaters. As shown in Figure 2, the second image is from the movie Devdas (a 2012 Hindi film). Based on a 1917 Bengali novel, several versions of Devdas were produced in various Indian languages between 1928 and 2018. The story captivated audiences of the sub-continent for more than a century, and it is still attracting contemporary viewers. Both films were not only hugely popular among the masses, but were also critically acclaimed (by both Indian and western critics). Both were nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and were included in Empire magazine's list of "The 100 Best Films of World Cinema". In addition, Devdas was named in TIME's top 10 movies of the millennium worldwide. On the other hand, Mother India ranked third in the British Film Institute's poll of "Top 10 Indian Films" (conducted in 2002), and was also included in TIME's list (2010) of the best Bollywood classics. Other than movie

posters, manual paintings for promoting entertainment events such as circus shows are also widely visible on Indian roads. These shows are organized in both rural and urban spaces across India, and have been attracting large audience from a variety of demographics. The third image (Fig.3), displayed on a wall of a circus show, depicts how the bodies of woman performers are commonly represented in public places to attract crowds. In a nutshell, all the images chosen for this article are not only typical and culturally distinctive, but also represent how Indian women's identities are portrayed in public over the years. In terms of rationale—(i) the first image was selected from the post-independent era where messages of nation building were communicated through envisioning and promoting an image of an ideal and sacrificing mother; (ii) the second image examined the relevance of traditional values and patriarchal representation of womanhood/wifehood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; and (iii) the final image was chosen to depict the contemporary objectification and sexist portrayal of a women body in the male gaze.

For analyzing the images, initially basic information about the images were collected. For example, what was the type of images (e.g., Images of movie posters are used for commercial purposes); information about location and use/purpose/application of images was also gathered. After collecting basic information, the visual discourses were analyzed from the principles of six canons of Indian Art or *Shadanga* (*Shad* = Six; *Anga* = parts/elements):

*rupa-bheda pramaana Bhaava laavanya-yojanam*  
*saadrashyang varnika-bhanga iti chitrang shadangkam*

As per *Vishnudharmottara Purana* (or the *Vishnudharmottara*), the six limbs of Indian art were (i) *rupa-bheda*- the knowledge of variety of form and appearances, *pramaana*- perception, measure (including proportion) and structure, *bhava*- embedded emotions and actions of feelings, *laavanya-yojanam*-grace and luster communicated through representation, *saadrashya*-similitude and veracity of representation, *varnika-bhanga*- effective usages of colors and workmanship (including brushworks) (Sharma, 2016). Again, another ancient text, the *Natyasastra*, identifies nine-*rasas* associated with the *bhava* element; they were—*Shringara* (love, attractiveness), *Hasya* (laughter), *Karuna* (sorrow), *Raudra* (fury), *Veera* (courage), *Bhayanaka* (horror), *Bibhatsya* (disgust), *Adbutha* (astonishment), and *Shantha* (tranquility). Originating primarily from the world of performance (theater in specific), *rasas*, according to Dissanayake (2009) are insightful and can be used to explain and analyze embedded expressions and emotions of various art forms. Embracing the principles/guidelines of *shadanga* and *rasas*,

various characteristics of images were analyzed; such as – forms used, the colors applied, properties of lines, textures, visual patterns, compositions, and visual relations between the graphic-elements. For example, from the *varnika-bhagam* angle, the images were studied in terms of type of materials used, production processes and techniques used to produce the images. Finally the images were examined from a meaning-making perspective; several aspects were studied including (a) contents, emotions, and narratives embedded in the images, (b) historical significance of the image (and the associated narratives), (c) socio-political, religious, economic significance of the images are another aspect of the study- for example, representation of class, social-inequality issues (e.g. the pose of the women represented in images), relevance to contemporary issues, and specific contextual issues related to the images were also examined.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Nationalist and Hindu perspectives

Historically the colonizers labeled the people of the colony (such as Indians) and their knowledge-productions as primitive, inferior, backward (Harding, 1985). To challenge and disrupt such discourse, since the late 19th century the Indian intellectuals, politicians, and the elites promoted/propagated the discourse of nationalism and “Indian-ness”. Those nationalist discourses defined modern Indian women in a culturally distinctive way. Such depictions legitimized the importance of the Indian traditions, and foregrounded the pureness of womanhood as an ideological construct to fight the British colonizers. In the backdrop of Indian nationalism, the characteristics like chastity and purity of women were legitimized to create the image of the mother-goddess (*‘Bahrat-Mata’*– the goddess of India). Innumerable patriotic literature and nationalist writings promoted the inspirational figure of *Bharat-Mata*, and influenced the mass (especially the youths) of India to fight for her freedom (Jha, 2004).

Such nationalist agendas, intertwined with religious discourses, eventually played a crucial role in developing an image of the ideal Hindu woman. Elements of such constructions were derived from the traditional Hindu texts and scriptures like *Vedas*, *Puranas*, epics (such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*), and other sacred texts (*Shastras*) (Uberoi, 1990). Guha Thakurta (1991, p. 97) noted, “in fighting the onslaught of colonialism, women were designated their special roles in the nationalist project-as preservers of age-old customs and rituals, as embodiments of religiosity and

virtue, as upholders of domestic order and stability, as nurturing mothers, pure virgin, faithful wives and devoted daughters, all sustaining the male in his public services to the motherland". On the streets of India, women are often depicted as 'goddess'; it could be (a) religious representations of female goddesses, and/or (b) representations of nationalist discourses where godliness of women are symbolically legitimized. In everyday context, people display religious pictures of various goddesses in public places as an auspicious symbol of divinity. Sinha (2007, p. 193) opined that the connection between spectators and the religious images is "a worshipper's relationship of 'seeing and being seen' by a deity". Apart from the above religious depictions, the socio-cultural representation of divinity of woman's character is also equated with Indian nationalism.

Posters and billboards of the popular movies and theatres are commonly displayed on Indian Streets where women are often represented as goddess-like mother figures. Billboard of Mother India movie is an example of such portrayal (Fig.1). This 1957 Oscar nominated epic is still considered as one of the all-time Indian blockbusters (Dissanayake, 1993; Pauwels, 2007), and occasionally played in many cinema-halls in contemporary India. The story of the film depicts the struggle of a poverty-stricken village woman (Radha) who, amid all the adversities, fights against the socio-cultural barriers to raise her sons and survive against an evil force (a loan shark). While negotiating with the lifelong hardship, she projects/provides a goddess-like moral example, as legitimized in the nationalist Hindu discourses. Finally, she kills her own criminal son to establish and achieve greater moral virtue. Through her struggles and sacrifices, she symbolically represents the ideal image of Indian motherhood, and India as an ideal nation in the post-colonial era.

In the visual depiction (Fig.1), she is carrying a wooden plough all by herself, which represents *veera-rasa* (i.e., heroism and/or courage). Her eyes are closed and the facial expression depicts the intense physical and possibly psychological stress. Her hair also represents the state of her physical exhaustion. The background color symbolizes turbulent socio-economic conditions of post-independence India. The dress and ornaments of the protagonist, Radha, is modest; however, she wears a *mangalsutra* ('*mangal*'= auspicious and '*sutra*'= thread; *mangalsutra*= sacred thread—a symbol of marital dignity and chastity). Thus, the picture symbolizes struggle, sacrifice and selflessness of an ideal Indian woman for achieving the larger moral virtue.

Apart from the portrayal of 'women as goddesses,' the Indian nationalism also propagated several binaries to define the Indianness of womanhood. Some of them were the material and the spiritual, the public and the



private, the world and the home. The attributes like the 'spiritual', the 'private' and the 'home' were frequently used to represent the qualities of ideal Hindu women. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the construction of the ideal Hindu woman remained unaltered to a large extent. "Primal innocence" and/or "purity" (Uberoi, 1990) still constitutes the idealized symbolic representation of womanhood in the post-independent India. The image of contemporary educated, progressive working-women are socially constructed within the frameworks of nationalist ideologies without disrupting the above-mentioned binaries and puritan image of the ideal Indian female. Street painters use such stereotypes and/or ascriptions in their art forms, and oftentimes they use such social constructions (of ideal womanhood) as a readymade formula (Guha Thakurta, 1991).

The early twentieth century's nationalist Hindu depiction of ideal Indian womanhood is still relevant in the post-independence India. The success of a Hindi movie, *Devdas* (a Bollywood blockbuster, released in 2002), proves strong presence of such ideologies in contemporary Indian psyche. The movie is based on a famous novel written by Saratchandra Chatterjee, published in early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the billboards of the film, an image of the ideal Indian homemaker (Paro) is used. According to the novel, after marriage Paro learns that her aristocrat husband has no intention of developing a close relationship with her. In spite of knowing the implications, Paro fulfills all her household and social responsibilities and sets the example of an ideal Indian homemaker. The movie further shows that by ignoring all the past miseries Paro always gives her best to serve and save the husband and his family members from adverse situations.

In the billboard, the image of a determined but obedient Indian homemaker is depicted (Fig.2). Influenced by Raja Ravi Verma's style the image portrays a traditional Hindu woman who represents the essence of 'Indianness'; whose image renders subtle *karuna rasa* (i.e., sorrow). The marks of vermilion and the presence of '*mangalsutra*' (or the sacred thread used in Hindu marriage) symbolizes the continuing relevance of traditional Hindu customs in the present era. Her makeup and dress depict sophistication and refined taste of an upper middle-class woman, which is presented by emphasizing the visual-element of *lavanya*. The popularity of the movie (and the image of the ideal Indian homemaker) suggests an acceptance of such stereotypes in the contemporary India.

The dominant patriarchal discourses essentially delegitimize the agentic potentials and voices of women and thereby project them as dependents. Historically, the agencies of women are erased from socio-political discursive spaces, and as a result, they remain confined to domestic spaces. The dominant social constructions of womanhood essentially emphasize the

stereotypical domestic roles of women; they are perceived as ideal mother, wife, sisters, and often caregivers. Guha Thakurta (1991, p. 94) have noted that such depiction “results in the reduction of women both to passive objects for display and appropriation and to signifiers of certain broader notions of ‘culture, ‘tradition’ and ‘nation’”.

#### 4.2. Sexist representations: Globalization and neoliberal influences

In the backdrop of nationalist and Hindu construction of ideal womanhood, the contemporary women also have to negotiate with the values and markers promoted by the Western capitalist world. In 1990s, the Government of India adopted the economic ‘liberalization’ process; consequently, the effect of globalization became more apparent in the socio-cultural contexts of India. Harvey (2005, p. 3) showed that, traditional knowledge, cultures, values, institutions, power and social relationships often became delegitimized in the process of neoliberal ‘creative destruction’. Mentioning its market-centeredness, he further commented that, “neoliberalism values market exchange as ‘an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs’,... and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of market” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). Scholars like Skaria (1997) perceived such scenario as an instance of ‘recolonization’, where the west-centric neoliberal discourses once again influence and shape the domains of gender identity and representation.

The women's identities (e.g. their bodies and sexuality) become the material and symbolic sites where negotiations among various hegemonic constructions, ideologies and expectations are operated (Oza, 2001). In the neoliberal popular representation, the women's identities are oftentimes stereotyped as a commodity or an object of desire. Many times the notion of ‘sexy’-ness is promoted through such images. Lester & Ross (2003) observed three patterns of such sexist depictions in advertisements and public displays: (a) “sexy women are thin... so skinny you can see the outline of her breastbone and several ribs” (p. 141- 142), (b) “sexy women are cleavage and lots of it” (p. 142), (c) “sexy look for women is smoothness so extreme that, in many cases, it looks like plastic than human flesh” (p. 143).

Images of ‘sexy’ women can be noticed in various contemporary representations on Indian streets. For instance, as an entertainment option, circus is very popular all over India, and it mostly targets the middle class and lower middle-class audiences. An image (Fig.3) of a woman and a panther is displayed near the entrance of a circus in South India (such images are

widely used in circus shows across India). The picture is painted on a metallic surface (marks of the rivets can be noticed) using oil paints. The open display of images of women in gymnastic costume (often the circus-performers wear just bras and panties, maintaining the colonial legacies) oftentimes satisfies the male desires (refer to rape-culture in contemporary India). Visually, the painting embodies traces of *shringara rasa* (in the female image) and *bhayankar rasa* (i.e., terror) as depicted through the panther's gesture. Here the young woman wears a blue colored bra, panty and shoe. She is thin but not skinny (in Indian context skinny women might represent an image of poverty). Her cleavage is displayed openly and prominently. The pictorial representation of her gymnastic performance on the one hand represents her ability as an athlete and on the other hand, it legitimizes smoothness (less human flesh and more like plastic) of her body. Interestingly, the presence and the gesture (and size) of the Black Panther depict the intensity of male gaze and desire. Apart from the popular entertainment mediums, such non-emancipatory representations (also in the domain of business and corporate communications) essentially project the identities of women as commodity and 'sexy' objects.

## 5. Discussions

Wang (2011) showed that a de-Westernization lens legitimizes the urgency for re-examining the ways culture and cultural differences are studied. Criticizing the uncritical dependency on West-centric knowledge production, Miike (2002) argued that no particular scholarship, theory or paradigms is limitless. Therefore, Wang (2011) reminded us that we need to "relook" at the culture's paradigms and perspective afresh from a non-Western viewpoint.

In the context of the power of representation and marginalization (such as the depiction of Indian women), scholars like Desai (2000, p. 119) noted, "images play a crucial role in defining and controlling the political and social power". De-Westernization scholarship notes that it is crucial to examine non-Western societal spaces to better understand how the communicative practices of representations emerges as the site of negotiations of gender identities. Such negotiations operate within the context of historical, socio-cultural realities, identities and situated gendered experiences (Bourdieu, 1990; Desai, 2000). For example, contemporary women have to negotiate with both types of dominant representations, i.e., nationalist and neoliberal. Essentially, both depictions deemphasize the position of women (with no or limited scope of emancipation) in the spaces of discursivity.

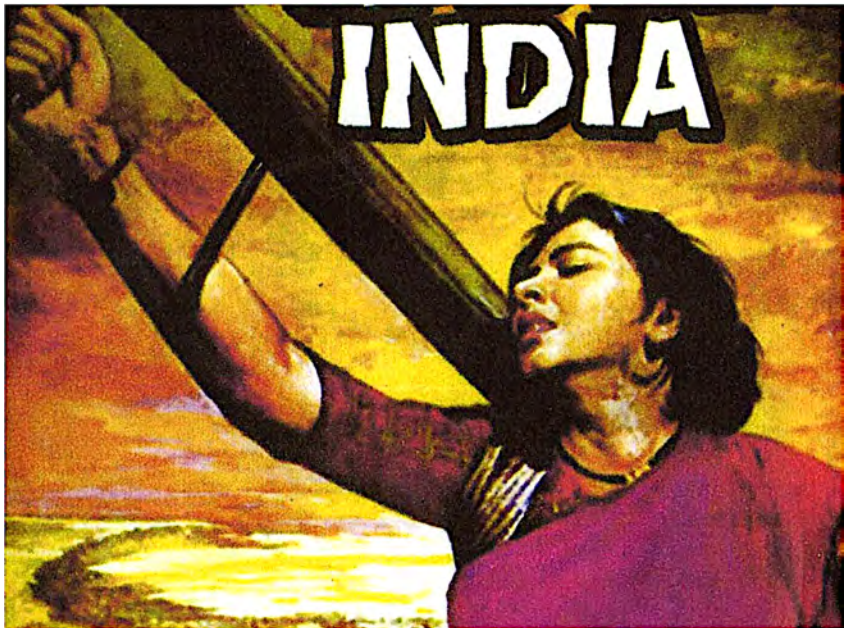
Again, the socio-political scenario of contemporary India reinforces delegitimization and derogation of women identities and agencies. For instance, the recent surge of right-wing 'Hindutva' politics (which essentializes nationalist Hindu ideologies) legitimizes the 'traditional', 'national' (Indianness) discourses of ideal Hindu female. Also, incidents like the Indo-Pak Kargill War (in 1999) and 26/11 (Terrorist attacks across Mumbai in 2008) incidents (including other bilateral conflicts) have given the nationalist elites an opportunity to re-propagate the images of 'Bharat-Mata' (India-the Mother Goddess) in the mainstream discourses. Both the aforementioned scenarios essentially legitimize the dominant constructions of woman as the pure, sacrificing mother, obedient homemaker (Fig.2), god-like mother, etc. As an emerging economy, India is experiencing the impacts of neoliberal interventions; consequently, the Indian psyche gets exposed to western advertisements and representation of women, which oftentimes portray women as 'sexy' objects (Fig.3) or commodities.

Finally, from subaltern studies and critical-cultural perspectives, it is crucial to study contemporary women's portrayals and marginalized conditions in the discursive spaces. Moreover, de-Westernization views suggest that to de-center and problematize mainstream perspectives, it is important to include evidences from the rest of the world in the process of knowledge-production. In the context of the Global South, especially India, above-mentioned scholarships challenged both the nationalist, patriarchal and neoliberal approaches of interpreting and representing the marginalized realities and identities of women. From critical-cultural perspectives, feminist scholars like Mohanty (1988, p. 66) noted that in the dominant discourse the Global South women are often portrayed as "a composite, singular 'Third World woman'-an image which appears to be arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse.". Subaltern studies perspective noted that according to many nationalist discourses of the Global South, women are supposed to be confined in the "inner world" (the household and the spiritual) spaces; whereas men are portrayed as the controller of the external domains of the material world (Chatterjee 1992; Skaria, 1997). Spivak (1999) maintained that in the mainstream discourses, the women's capacity is portrayed by the hegemonic forces as 'devoid of agency'. According to Chatterjee (1992), the market-driven international processes like neocolonialism and globalizations further marginalize women of the Global South. Therefore, critical-cultural and subaltern studies scholarships argued that both the representations essentially deemphasized the capabilities, freedom, and identities of women; the above two schools of thoughts criticized and challenged the acts and attempts of portraying

women as ideal Hindu/ Indian female (Fig.1&2), and 'sexy' or objects of desire (Fig.3).

This is to say, on the one hand nationalist ideology acknowledged the domestic and spiritual aspects, thereby confined the women's identity within the spaces of households/ temples (Fig.1&2), and on the other hand neoliberal market driven epistemologies legitimized the market-driven and material realms which portrays women as objects and commodities (Fig.3). Thus, all the street images of women discussed in this paper depict the intentions of the dominant power structures, in representing the women's identities as marginalized, to accomplish the hegemonic aspirations and attitudes.

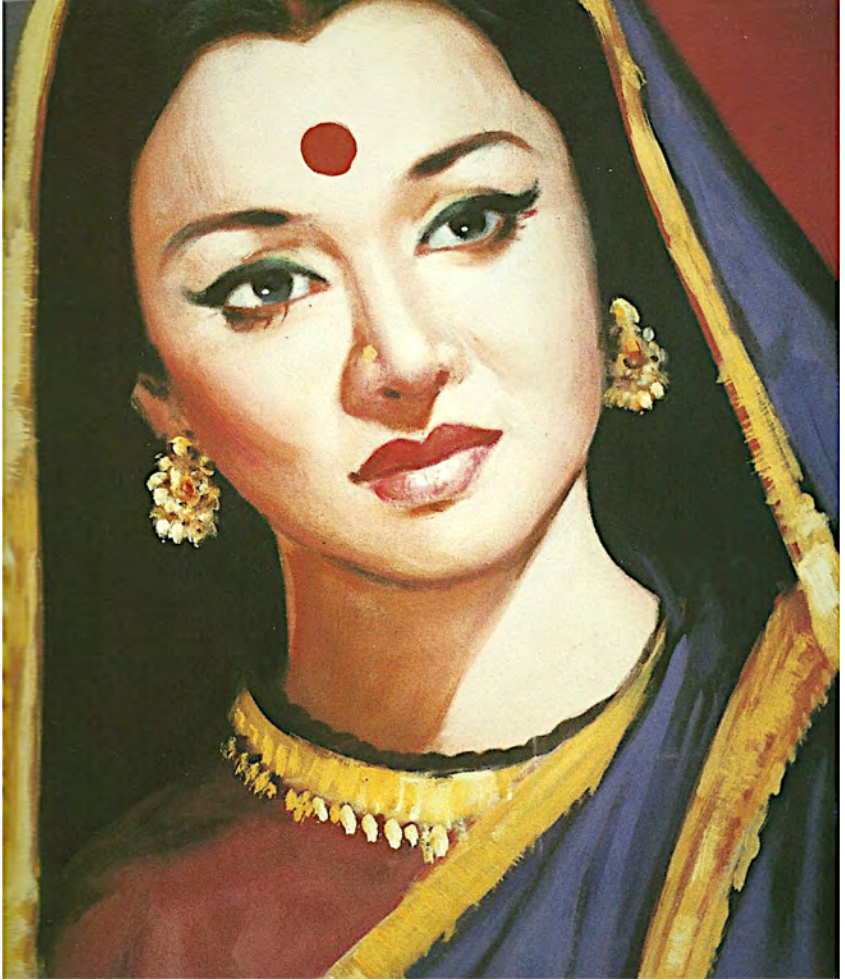
*Figure 1*



Source: Lovegrove, K. (2003). *Graphicswallah: Graphics in India*.

London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd.

Figure 2



Source: Lovegrove, K. (2003). *Graphicswallah: Graphics in India*.  
London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd.

Figure 3



Source: Dawson, B. (1999). *Street Graphics India*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

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