



Harmful Ads

The world of advertisements shows women as creatures of extremely poor intelligence. They are depicted as a subhuman species whose sole concern is to discover a better washing soap or some new *masalas* or a novel recipe; their only triumph is the discovery of a nappy which will keep the posterior of their children dry or a detergent which will make sparkling white the shirts of their husbands. They team up with their mother-in-laws to wash the utensils in the kitchen better. Their greatest triumphs are when they can whip up a quick meal of some multinational product for their family. The great happenings of the world leave them untouched, the new millennium is around the corner but they simmer and dance with a particular tea brand. They are elated in being draped in some textile product or in wearing sparkling jewelry.

What then of all those of educated professional women who work efficiently as ministers, corporate heads, doctors, professors and programmers? And even if we take unfortunately illiterate or half literate the large numbers of housewives who silently labor to bring up their families as best they can, with their little developed intelligence, the advertisements do not do justice to exploited women because most women possess an inborn dignity and intelligence. They are neither simpletons nor glamorous dolls. Nor are they easily duped by the

Reader's Forum

advertisers of luxury goods. Most of them have to struggle to save every paisa. Where is there time or money for them to dress or buy expensive clothes? Yet, in the false and vitiating world of advertisements they are made to act either as glamour dolls or smirking subhuman beings. They are depicted as having the intelligence of a five-year-old or even worse, as being morons.

Do you think it is something innocent and harmless, that these advertisements can be ignored as the business world's excessively enthusiastic marketing strategy? Such things, when viewed over a long period by the simple and uneducated masses, have disastrous results. A woman may not covet the saris or luxury goods that her common sense tells her are out of her reach, but when things are shown as absolutely

necessary for a child's growth and health, she is duped. This is the one field where a woman will sacrifice everything to assure the health and long life of her child - the instinct which makes a mother lie on the wet sheet and shift her baby to the dry side, the instinct due to which hundreds of women go hungry so that they may feed their children.

Experts are bewailing the fact that due to about half a century long blitzkrieg of baby-milk and baby-food advertisements, which extolled their superhuman virtues, young mothers who had enough milk to breast-feed their children, fed them these artificial products instead. This has been detrimental to the health of countless babies. Now governments are trying to educate the young mothers about the desirability of breast-feeding their babies. Due to the constant



advertisements we read and see about the need and efficacy of vitamins, poor mothers in the Third World give vitamins to their infants, sometimes buying them with the money which should have been used for buying milk and fruits. They give up the time-tested neem stick for cleaning their teeth to buy expensive toothbrushes and tooth-pastes, which in the absence of running water, soon harbor bacteria and cause mouth diseases.

The October-November 1995 Indian-New Zealand cricket series, sponsored by tobacco giants of the world, was telecast live on Indian television. India won the series. The brand name Wills was splashed boldly and prominently around the stadium, on the clothes of the players and even on their bats. According to a recent issue of *British Medical Journal*, two months after the event Dr. Jayant Vaidya, a cancer surgeon at the Royal Marsden Hospital in London with his colleagues at the Goa Cancer Society carried out a survey of children aged 13-16, from 53 of Goa's high schools.

It is heartening to know that of the 1,948 students who were surveyed, more than 74 per cent knew that tobacco was as addictive as heroin, caused cancer and heart disease and reduced life span. Even then 100 of the 1,275 children who watched these matches were tempted to try cigarettes afterwards. Among the 605 children who had not seen the matches, only 29 tried cigarettes.

Many of these children made false associations between smoking and sport. Not even one of the players of the 1995 Indian team smoked but at least 1,110 children thought that at least one player did, while 428 children thought at least four members were smokers. Some of the children thought that smoking made you a better player. Seven per cent of the children thought that cigarettes made you stronger and six per cent

thought they improved your chances of winning. What is shocking is that this distortion in perception took place in spite of the children's knowledge of the dangers of smoking. This detailed survey is being quoted to show what harm even silent advertising can do, leave aside the loquacious and exaggerated type.

We in India have not been able to ban advertising of chewing tobacco and related products like *pan masala*, even when a clear connection has been established between the chewing of tobacco and mouth cancer and even though we have amongst the countries of the world probably the largest number of patients suffering from mouth cancer.

The question is: till when will the decent majority remain helpless and silent against the greed and corruption caused by the business world?

Shyam Kumari, Pondicherry

Movement for Education

Leaving aside the fundamental inability to deal with the question of poverty, with the glaring (and increasing) disparities between rich and poor, amongst our most blatant failures has been the completely abysmal situation regarding elementary education. We continue to boast of our achievements in producing a section of educated Indians who can take their place with the best in the world, viz the constantly trumpeted statistics of the '*third largest pool of scientific and technological manpower in the world*'. But these people, living in India comprise some 10 to 15 per cent of our population. The other 85-90 per cent continue to live in 'Bharat' - whether located in urban slums or rural areas. We need to understand that the future of 'India' and 'Bharat' are intrinsically tied up with each other emotionally, culturally, historically and geographically! We have talked about

"education for all" in cliches for 50 years!. However, the assumption has been that this was the job of the government, and we, the rest of the citizens had nothing to do with it. In fact a greater burden of responsibility must clearly be borne by those of us who have been privileged to enjoy in the greatest measure the fruits of all that 50 years of Independence has provided, namely the best of education, opportunities, employment, housing, power and other forms of privilege.

There is a need to mobilize every sector - from media, advertising, politicians, bureaucracy, education — to make universal primary education the top priority. If each of us makes this a part of our agenda, I believe it is possible to create that critical mass which could inspire a mass movement that can act locally in small manageable decentralized units.

Objective: get all children into school and make learning fun and relevant for all.

- Build a lobby on education at all levels. Focus on both Quality and Quantity
- Review teacher recruitment policy. Induct people who love children, enjoy teaching!
- Volunteer curricular and extra curricular support to enrich schools
- Enable and encourage parents and communities to actively engage with the school
- Pressurize at local levels for improving quality of the school, classroom, curriculum
- Mobilize supplementary support to improve the provision of basic facilities in schools
- Mobilize resource — human and material — to provide libraries and playing fields
- Seek, induct and encourage talent from the community, housewives, residents, for special inputs by way of creative activity — music, drama, art, maths and science teaching, etc.

- ❑ Persuade media to provide space for matters dealing with basic education, especially in local and vernacular press. Demand the right to information regarding education budgets and expenditure at every level down to the *panchayat*, and the ward, etc.
- ❑ Mobilise pressure for prioritizing allocation of adequate resources at *all levels*
- ❑ Evolve mechanisms and create bodies for constant monitoring of actual learning outcomes within the classroom at every level - in partnership with teachers and local bodies where possible, but through citizens and parent-teacher bodies which should be created where necessary. Create and build a network of resource centres at all levels.
- ❑ Levy a Special Education Tax or provide other forms of incentive to industry for investment in education related activities - especially in deprived areas.
- ❑ In addition, we need a National Library Movement starting from the primary school and village level.
- ❑ In my view, one of the best ways of creating access, especially in a country with the kind of widespread poverty and scarcity of reading material which is fun and creative is to put in place a system of libraries in every school from the primary school upwards.
- ❑ Form library committees/core groups at all levels - from State and District to Block and village
- ❑ Identify and mobilise all industry - private and public sector - individuals and organizations with any form of capacity for such a role and investment
- ❑ Develop a basic model and accompanying budgetary profile for the basic costs, including



capital and recurring cost for a library-cum-reading room in every school in every district — variables would be whether it is primary/ middle/higher/secondary level, etc.

- ❑ Identify and provide some basic training to an interested young person from the village to operate and manage the library
- ❑ Create a list of books in different languages at different levels which can be fed into the ZPs and other appropriate bodies

- ❑ Actively involve institutions of formal education at the higher level, colleges and technical training institutes in volunteering time
- ❑ Identify and adapt from existing micro level innovative library and reading room programs already implemented in different parts of the country - viz bicycle libraries, other forms of mobile book clubs and library extension projects in all schools, colleges and other institutions.
- ❑ Developing libraries across Total Literacy Districts would be one way of reinforcing and strengthening the Literacy Movement in the country.
- ❑ A national sports and youth policy has never seriously laid out a base level strategy whereby the primary and secondary schools in the country become the nurseries and training grounds for building the capacity of our formidable human resources in every field of sporting activity.

The immense side benefits and by-products of this kind of investment are too numerous and too self evident to be listed in detail, but the channelising of youth energy in a creative manner is just one of them.

**Lalita Ramdas, Alibag,
Maharashtra**

MANUSHI

Handsomely Bound in Maroon Leather in Seven Volumes

Price for India, Nepal and Bangladesh :

Vol. I	Nos 1 to 19 (1979 to 1983) :	Rs. 450
Vol. II	Nos 20 to 37 (1984 to 1986) :	Rs. 400
Vol. III	Nos 38 to 49 (1987 to 1988) :	Rs. 300
Vol. IV	Nos 50 to 61 (1989 to 1990) :	Rs. 300
Vol. V	Nos 62 to 73 (1991 to 1992) :	Rs. 300
Vol. VI	Nos 74 to 85 (1993 to 1994) :	Rs. 300
Vol. VII	Nos 86 to 97 (1995 to 1996) :	Rs. 300

Postage in India : Rs.30 per volume

US and Europe : Vol I : US \$ 95; Vol II : US \$ 90; Vol III to VII : US \$ 60
(includes airmail postage) Send payment by cheque, draft or MO payable to
Manushi Trust.