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Photo-Essays



Image Credit: University of Sussex, U.K. (Instagram Page)

The contradictory approaches to female sexuality
- By Sandhya Kerketta

This photo is taken outside a club-cum-restaurant in Brighton, United Kingdom. It is called Duke's at Komedia. The picture displays a pair of female legs stretched out upwards, perfectly shaped, nicely poised, and at once attention-grabbing and attractive. Given some thought, this idea for the exterior of the restaurant is captivating. Diving deeper, this highlights the use of female sexuality in marketing, which has been practised by the advertising industry for an eternity.

In this patriarchal, heteronormative society, female sexuality is curtailed by gender and social norms. Since birth, female bodies are gendered, discriminated against, differentiated, and regulated. The way women should walk, sit, talk, smile, clothe, etc. are all part of governing the sexuality of women. On one hand, women's bodies are moralised and restricted to be presented in a conformist way. On the other, they are sensualised, manipulated, and represented for the male gaze and pleasure.

This dichotomy has become an opportunity for the advertising industry. In the name of marketing strategy, women's bodies have been objectified and demeaned endlessly. This has not only pushed women into more subservient positions but also hampered and degraded their dignity. A recent advertisement for the body spray Shot caught global attention and faced backlash for the inappropriate usage of language against women's sexuality. This shows how the ad agencies casually dishonour women. Similarly, there are many instances where women are shamed in different ways in order to boost the sales of products.

However, if women want to use their bodies and sexuality for a living, society has a problem with that. If a woman wants to dress in a certain way that she considers comfortable society raises opinions and objections against that.

There is hush-hush speculation if a woman is out till late at night. She is shamed and blamed if something wrong happens. Inevitably, these become issues of morality, honour, and cultural harm.

It is high time that we stop burdening women with the responsibility of upholding morality and honour. Instead, it is important for society to be sensitised towards women and honour and value them. It is time we considered women as human beings and not as mere objects.

About the author



Sandhya Kerketta is a sociologist who graduated from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India. Sandhya is currently a PhD candidate at University of Sussex, United Kingdom. Sandhya's research interests are gender studies, intersectionality, domestic violence among many more. Prior to joining University of Sussex, Sandhya has worked as a Program Associate at Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), New Delhi. She handled important roles such as fund monitoring for welfare projects, planning and allocation of budgeting among others. Sandhya also has enormous field experience as a support worker and has worked extensively with domestic violence survivors.