Conclusion: Voices, Perspectives & Processes of Change in India through Discussions of Advertising & Social Change

The last couple of decades in India have been characterised by impactful change processes. These include political debates and social activism concerning gender, economic growth, and the presence of medialised communication. The Nirbhaya case of late 2012 and its aftermath, in particular, was a pivotal moment in normalising discourses of gender. With the growing presence of 'new media' and changing spheres of medialised communication, these discourses entailed immensely complex manifestations.

As a significant turning point, the circumstances of the Nirbhaya case drew on extant discourses and pulled them into the centre of attention. This became apparent during my visit to India in 2013, where discussions regarding gender in the form of personal experiences and insights from institutional networks were often framed in relation to these events. The 'discourses of change' present during my stay in Delhi, in particular, hence included governmental incentives concerning legal consequences, efforts by established NGOs as well as national and international organisations, alongside reflections by commercial institutions and newly founded initiatives and networks, e.g. the Fearless collective.[128] Employees and activists connected to social organisations focusing on gender saw an intensification of their work. At the same time, in facilitating platforms for meetings to have conversations about the ongoing situation and debate, they built on the existing network and gave way to expand thereon. As part of workshops, open talks, and presentations, participants reflected on previous activist work and the work following and were given opportunities and spaces to voice feelings and experiences. Correspondingly, the advertising industry and private sector found ways to join these debates in

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[128] The Nirbhaya case, for example, prompted the establishment of the Verma Committee, which included representatives of social organisations and feminist groups as consultants for forming a report. The Verma Report stood as recommendations for legal changes regarding sexualised violence significant in the debates of social change (Chaudhuri 2015, p. 29).

the form of, for example, campaigns addressing gender equality and sexualised violence or commenting on current events. The discourses present included comments and initiatives in commercial marketing, as well as expertise and input from the social sector and institutions of the state. The intertwining of these complex arenas hence represents a mirror of exceptionally multilayered 'discourses of change'. The reflections, reactions, and perspectives thereof, therefore, represent a remarkably complex moment establishing a shift in discussing social change. Even though this particular case has been less present in recent years and thereby given room to other cases and debates, the importance stands. As Navneet pointed out:

> Maybe the energy dies down but the realisation does not go away. People still know that this is something very important. Guys who I never thought would be talking about this, are still, if I talk to them they will still reply. Before, if I spoke to them about it they would be like 'whatever, let's have a beer, let's just change', but now the energy is right on, maybe they will not start a conversation by themselves but they will still listen and they will still participate. And I think that is wonderful (Navneet 2013).

The importance of the events in 2012 and 2013 can thus not be overstated. With the opportunities for individuals' voices across socio-economic belonging as well as transnational debates to be included, the pervasiveness of these discussions was overwhelming. The role of 'new media' as part of extant medialisation processes and its use in social activism and marketing strategies, and the 'discourses of change' present built on a long tradition of regional feminist debates and Women's Movement in India, alongside international feminist agendas as well as transnational discourses regarding economic growth and development. With the perspectives of advertising producers serving as entry points to discussions regarding these processes of change, the intertwining of the different advertising sectors, including the individual, institutional, and communicative levels, illustrates an intricate diversity. While the role of media cultures and especially 'new media' in normalising discourses of gender and change built on existing patterns, efforts of directing change processes and influencing the understanding of gender led to inclusive approaches in the production of advertising and its representation. At the same time, possibilities of discursive struggles stand as a fundamental component in the interplay between shifts in systemic patterns and personal change.

Since 2014, the changes in the political environment have had an equally drastic influence on 'discourses of change' through debates regarding social change, religious belonging, and freedom of speech in particular. Following the elections in both 2014 and 2019, the BJP formed the government and increasingly

reworked the Hindu politics of the 1990s into state matters.[129] As visible in the election campaign #achhedin of 2014, discourses centring on progress, development, and economic growth made up a large part of the rhetoric of the BJP (Kaur 2015). Therein, the dominance of a Hindu nation and culture found ground through "religious-political synergies" (Schneider 2020, pp. 25–28). Social change in the form of gender equality also became a prominent talking point. As part of the initiative Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (translated from Hindi: Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter), the aforementioned #SelfieWithDaughter campaign to rectify the imbalance of gender was promoted by Prime Minister Modi was a strategy. In the article "The Sociology of #SelfieWithDaughter" (2015), S. M. Hussain, for example, quotes the Times Magazine report saying, "Gender inequality has long been a major problem in India's highly patriarchal society, where female children are being perceived as inferior and even been killed in the womb or as infants – a phenomenon Modi has fought to reverse since he took office about a year ago" (Times in Hussain 2015). The campaign led to an out-pour of photos shared on Twitter depicting fathers and daughters to show support for having daughters (Hussain 2015). It was accompanied by laws to "provide support to women" in the form of maternity benefits instated in 2017 (Titzmann & Schneider 2020, p. 7). While seemingly fitting into the narrative and outcry for social justice and gender equality following the Nirbhaya case, the discourse of the #SelfieWithDaughter campaign, in many ways, illustrated conformity to patriarchal and misogynist ideas (see Krishnan 2015). Hussain, for example, analyses the framing and results of the campaign, concluding that it reinforces hierarchies of gender as well as between the 'good' and the 'bad' 'women'. Consequently, "people located across various ideological positions can now claim to be gender justice crusaders, without actually having to alter anything in their own lives and ideological make ups" (Hussain 2015). These concerns are congruent with the fundamental position of the BJP regarding gender equality and family politics that, on the one hand, clearly places 'women' within the private sphere and as inferior, on the other, equates 'women' with iconic figures of Hindu mythologies (Titzmann 2020, p. 11). This contrast is historically anchored in discourses of colonial India that appointed 'women' responsible for cultivating tradition alongside powerful imageries (Chatterjee 1989, p. 630). Subsequently, the #SelfieWithDaughter campaign, for example, contained notions of fathers being protective of their daughters, which in turn included limitations of daughters' mobility more than any possibility of freedom and equality (Hussain 2015; Titzmann 2020, p. 13). According to Titzmann, the government initiatives to address gender equality were not

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framed by discourses of social change but founded in "a rhetoric in social and economic progress or development" (Titzmann 2020, p. 12). This approach does hence not challenge social constructs of gender but reproduces traditional patterns that suit right-wing hegemonic structures.

Similarly, in the working paper titled "Tea for Interreligious Harmony? Cause Marketing as a New Field of Experimentation with Visual Secularity in India" (2020), Schneider discusses the role of commercial advertisements in debates concerning secularism in times of BJP politics. As part of this debate, the Law Commission of India, for example, deemed it unnecessary to change the religion-based personal laws with a uniform civil code in 2018 (Schneider 2020, p. 15). Thereby, the government prioritised religious belonging before secularism. In contrast, various commercial campaigns addressed "togetherness and communal harmony" and, as such, a form of secular living (Schneider 2020, pp. 5, 17–18). Many appreciated this representation of secularism and depiction of India's diversity, but reactions also included boycotts of brands deemed a foreign influence (Schneider 2020, pp. 17–18). While advertising producers self-identified as powerful voices in 'discourses of change', and "the visualities and imaginaries of secularity in the Indian context" are more varied than often assumed, this dispute made any dialogue difficult (Schneider 2020, p. 28). As described by Schneider, reactions to one particular case "quickly became so polarized that a more nuanced, not to mention critical discussion of its content was close to impossible, or so it seemed, as negative reactions were quickly associated with 'Hindutva bigots' or 'Hindu ethnonationalists'" (Schneider 2020, p. 18). The contrasting views hence saw nationalist politics and ideologies pitted against secularist standpoints. While this is an ongoing debate, the circumstances of a government that promotes traditional ideas regarding gender and Hindu nationalist discussions enable the legitimisation of right-wing viewpoints within the discourse. The political circumstances hence play a vital role in the environment and discursive sphere of advertising producers making social justice campaigns.

The efforts of advertising producers to intervene within the dichotomy between right-wing politics and social-liberal discourse find new approaches in the form of cause marketing. As part of transnational discourses of marketing and exemplifications across national boundaries, this trend is "based on the assumption that especially middle-class consumers worldwide have become more aware of the inequality surrounding them and increasingly want to 'make a difference'" (Schneider 2020, pp. 8–9).[130] As described by Schneider, the cen-

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130 According to market research surveys in various countries, because marketing has become part of marketing strategies in the USA, Germany and India alike (Schneider 2020, pp. 8–9).

tral idea therein is to align "a brand with a cause to produce profitable and societal benefits for both. These mutual benefits can include the creation of social value, increased connection with the public, and the communication of shared value, as well as profit of course" (Schneider 2020, pp. 8–9). Cause marketing campaigns set out to invoke emotional reactions (Schneider 2020, pp. 6–7) and are reminiscent of the marketing strategy that includes sentimental or emotional stories in the communication with audiences, that alongside humour and celebrity use, was mentioned as successful by advertising producers in connection with the communicative level in chapter four. But moreover, it ties into the long history and tradition of linking commercial advertising and social change themes in India in particular. Cause marketing in India hence seamlessly adapts to this global trend and connects to a discourse of social responsibility (Schneider 2020, pp. 9–10). It thus found considerable ground in the sphere of advertising production and as part of the intertwining of the advertising industry and social initiatives. The audio-visual TV spot published in 2017 promoting the brand Vicks against cough and cold that framed the brand through a story of adoption and rights for hijras exemplifies this field. The narrative of the advertisement was based on a true story centring a female-coded child narrating plans of becoming a lawyer to support the hijra adoptive mother. By linking stories of oppression and activism, gender-based violence beyond the binary, and promoting a brand through medialised messages, social sector agendas, the advertising industry, middle-class aspirations, and discourses of gender intermingle. According to the chief strategy officer for Publicis Communications APAC – the advertising agency responsible for the production of the advertisement – E. Booty: "Great brands don't just reflect safe and accepted norms, instead they dare to set agendas in culture at large" (Campaigns 2017). The thought reflected in this advertising producer's comment contains the conviction of advertising as powerful regarding change processes and the individuals involved in making choices to promote brands as 'change-makers'. Thereby, the campaign displays a layering of promoting social equality, commercial perspectives, and advertising producers' experience of their responsibility in creating medialised messages or using cause marketing. The advertisement contains comments on multiple social issues of normativity, i.e. son preference, family settings and adoption, and especially trans rights. As such, Vicks connects to the ongoing struggle and activist movement for trans rights.

With the campaigns release in 2017, it is situated in the discourse between governmental bills in the protection of trans-rights and trans-activists' critique of the same. The Transgender (Protection of Rights) Bill instated in 2016, for example, undermines the bodily autonomy of transgender individuals and reproduces a particular idea of what it means to be transgender as it made 'sex reassignment surgery' mandatory for a person's identification as a transgender

person (Bodwal 2019). While a Supreme Court judgement in 2014 set out to protect the right of self-identification, the bill failed to consider this standpoint (Liang 2014; New Indian Express 2018). Instead, it continued to build on a colonial legacy of enforcing the binary understanding of gender (Bodwal 2019). Due to pressure from trans-rights activists and nationwide protests, the clause for compulsory surgery was amended as part of the Transgender (Protection of Rights) Bill of 2019 (Bodwal 2019). While the definition of a transgender person allows for greater variety on a spectrum of gender, criticism points out a range of problematic clauses which again includes enforcing the need for 'sex reassignment surgery' in cases where individuals wish to identify with a specific gender (for more see Mudraboyina, Jagirdar & Philip 2019). Between these amendments, the discourses present and cause marketing campaigns joining the debate, the political environment since 2014 hence illustrates discussions between values that reinforce the binary understanding of gender and ideologies supporting the complexities of gender identities.

Despite the persistence of the binary understanding of gender contained in representational and language choices in advertising, addressing the spectrum of gender and diversity entered the debate slowly (Navneet 2013). With the so-called generation of post-liberalisation, in particular, individuals born in the 1980s or 1990s, the discourse on the role of advertising includes an experience of intense growth of the commercial advertising industry and vivid discussion regarding gender equality. The respondents' experiences and perspectives often contained ideas of a new generation leading the movement for change. They saw an unspecific group of youth or "young people" as part of the current debates fuelled by frustration, a "passion boiling", and energy in order to contribute with new insights, new engagement, perspectives and vigour while simultaneously building on the work of previous generations and challenging them (Suhas 2011; Navneet 2013). This generation contributed a range of new campaigns displaying new opportunities of representation as visible through, for example, the Fearless Collective that entailed spontaneous contributions through 'new media' as well as NGOs and other social organisations established in the last 20 years alongside the ever-growing advertising industry. Changes in normative gender roles were hence connected to generational shifts and thus find ways to be represented in visual and communicative strategies of advertising. The consideration for systemic patterns of gender beyond the binary, for example, is expressed in a poster created by the individuals involved in the Gotstared.at campaign and challenges the critical stance towards the idea of giving 'women' more power in relation to 'men' while the foundation should be the abolition of the binary and hierarchical thinking (see Fig. 13).

The understanding of gender existing on a spectrum beyond the binary has thus become part of the agendas of social organisations and has been inclu-
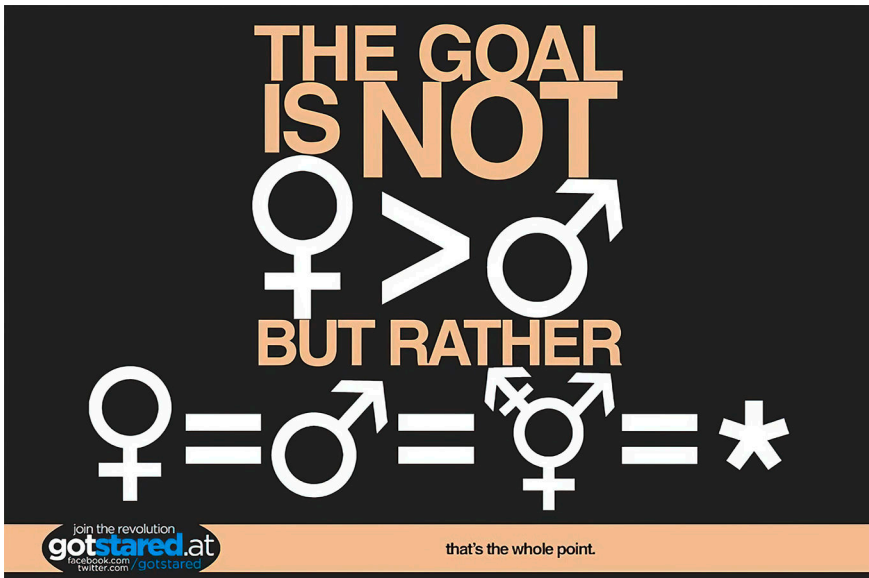
Fig. 13. "The Whole Point", Gotstared.at (2012). Courtesy of Gotstared.at.

ded in narratives of campaigns. Consequently, the representation and depiction of personas in social advertisements also show greater investment in consideration for diversity in gender imageries. The people of the Must Bol campaign created the poster below in 2013 (see Fig. 14). This particular piece was part of a yearly focus regarding pressure, expectations, and violence in romantic relationships and challenges heteronormativity on several levels.

This advertisement illustrates the interlinkages between the utilisation of media culture and discourses of personal and systemic change processes in the form of gendered norms through the visual, imagery and message. The composition of the gendered representation in connection with the message of self-love that ultimately creates a dynamic of change processes containing not changing stands as an example of social change in the form of challenging heteronormative gender attributes and relationships while encouraging self-reflective change processes. It is targeted directly at everyone in the audience for their personal growth and personal gain. The picture displays two figures that leave some room for interpretation of what type of relationship the two have and if they are male-coded due to the hazy photography, shadowing, and the overlap of photography and text. As Karam explained:

> Whatever message we do generally, we try to sort of keep it of a nature that addresses multiple identities and realities of people. So I think the choice of two men, in the background was in a sense it is just innocuous, it is just

Fig. 14. "Be Happy", Must Bol (2013).

> there, that is why they are blurred. Because it could be any two people. It is not a very specific point of sexuality, but should just say you know, there are different kinds of relationships. And when we are talking about relationships why do we always think a man and women, it could be two boys it could be two women, it could be anybody. So it is just to keep it part of the messaging I think. So that is where that is coming from, where it is in a sense inconsequential who the two people are (Karam 2013).

The posture of the two suggests a sort of intimacy and challenges different ideas of gender norms depending on the allocation of their gender while suggesting a relationship does not secure its conditions. The coding does not follow clear-cut lines of masculinity and femininity and hence provides figures challenging defined realities of a binary gender understanding, including trans- and non-binary identities. The text plays on ideas of romantic relationships in that an initial suggestion is to rely on another person to be happy. However, by crossing out the word "with" the message changes to inspiring self-reflective attitudes that encourage change towards an ideology that gives the opportunity of being their own self. It visualises the gender-media-change dynamic in that it contains an ideological perspective and agenda for addressing the representation of diverse possibilities of gender and sexuality with an idea of change communicated through a visual medium on a social media platform. This advertisement hence introduces perspectives of social change and highlights choices made in

production that interlink these different aspects of design, message, and ideology. Challenging gendered norms, as seen above, merge a message of personal self-reflectivity and social change and thereby paints a picture of linking individual levels with an agenda challenging a dominant paradigm. Adding layers of possibilities in a picture out of focus puts the discursive reality of heteronormativity out of focus. As concluded in discussing 'discourses of change' through perspectives of gender, media, and change, perspectives regarding processes of change, voices from diverse arenas and promoting various agendas reflect an ongoing process of discursive struggles through negotiating conflicting points of view.

The political changes since 2014 entailed the intensification of said struggles and thus influenced the environment of advertising and its production. The governmental shift enabled greater legitimisation of viewpoints that challenge processes of social change and promotion of equality and diversity of gender. The debates represent ongoing negotiations of change processes while intensifying these struggles. Therein, the grouping of the young is often seen as a stand-in for challenging perceptions that promote the binary understanding of gender even though they are not homogenous and may contain a variety of attitudes and viewpoints. Despite the growing legitimisation of right-wing perceptions, producers of advertising continue to carve out their role as 'change-makers'. Their self-perception regarding the possibilities of influencing audiences and social change processes persists (Schneider 2020, pp. 9–10). Their position as part of discourses that continue to highlight the use of medialised messages in social initiatives, as seen in the #SelfieWithDaughter campaign, increasingly finds a place among cause marketing and changing political environment. Thereby, the role of media cultures and media producers as part of discursive struggles is undiminished. However, their ideology is increasingly challenged by political circumstances. Cause marketing in the context of India represents a field in medialised communication that more intensely deals with inequality present and consumers' awareness and interest concerning societal disparities. The sphere of commercial advertising and social change initiatives are thus building on ongoing engagement with processes of social change and rooted in social reform politics. This way, advertising producers are continuously a vital part of 'discourses of change'. With advertising as a prominent expression of the negotiations as well as a potent environment of knowledge production, 'discourses of change' persist in entailing navigation of extant power relations and discursive truths.