

FAIRNESS ADS: Playing a 'Fair' Game?

The Viewers' Forum and Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) would like to express our solidarity with the women's group in their initiative to bring to notice certain discriminatory television ads.

We take this opportunity to share our stand on the issue by means of this press release. For the last few years, we have been consistently impressing upon the industry that **through the visual imagery** in these fairness cream ads, **they are stigmatising dark complexion** unscrupulously.

But the advertising industry has been defending itself by saying that they are merely reflecting the social reality. Last night again, on a leading news channel, the spokesperson of the industry justified this depiction by presenting the same argument.

We would like to reiterate here that we find these ads for fairness creams not only discriminating but also **using unfair trade practices**. By creating this kind of differential values, this business of superior and inferior and **using a social stigma to sell their products, these advertisers are violating commercial norms. Every single ad for fairness creams** that we have traced in the last two years, has **visually depicted dark complexion as a painful experience**. Often the girl is shown as depressed, with low self-esteem and almost ostracised by the family. **Not only do we find these images regressive, but commercially unacceptable.**

Viewers' Forum and CFAR have been representing various audience groups. We have documented some very serious concerns from women of all age groups regarding the television ads for beauty products, especially the fairness creams.

While the people with disability are concerned with the fact that there is hegemony of perfection or normality, which often gets depicted on television. There have been many others who find this sudden transformation of the protagonist using the beauty product in the ad into a 'new self' extremely disturbing. Young girls say that ads for fairness creams cause them serious anxieties. But more than anything stigmatisation of dark complexion has been one of the major concerns with the Viewers' Forum members.

In fact, in contrast to this assumption that fairness is the single most important determinant for beauty, in a survey that we did in Delhi, Lucknow and Ahmedabad on *Portrayal of Women and Men in Advertising and the Image of the Self*, the data marked that women do not rate fairness as vital a criterion as other more important ones like features and figure.

Thus, we think that the time has come for an informed, sustained, strategic consumer response, based on dialogue, and perhaps with the assistance of legal aid. The Viewers' Forum would like to call upon concerned men and women to take this debate further. Let's get together and make a difference.