Chapter 3

Discrepant (Dis)locations: Indian Advertisements and the Position of the Cultural ‘Other’

The agenda of essentialisation, evident in the culmination of an Indian femininity with default ‘Hindu’ identity, is also operative in creation of the position of the cultural ‘other’ in advertisements. This chapter deals with issues regarding the position of the ‘other’ in the discourse of nationalism in the post-1992 India and its ideological projection vis a vis representation in advertisements and other media forms including films, performance arts etc.

The minorities are treated as the cultural other in India and elsewhere. The term ‘minorities’ in the Indian context refers to religious communities including Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and Parsis/Zoroastrians. However, the term ‘minority’ may also be extended in Indian context to culturally marginalised communities such as Adivasis and Dalits in the sense that these groups have been kept outside the Hindu system of caste.

According to the 1991 census report, Government of India, India has a population of 85-90 million Adivasis and 180-200 million Dalits. The following table shows the religious composition of the Indian population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>80.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
source: Census Report 2001, Government of India

Though bracketed under the general term of Hindu as their identity classification in the Indian Census, these groups are subject to explicit social repression and hostility, like the religious minorities, perpetrated by the hegemonic culture of the dominant. However, they are not considered as crucial a ‘threat’ as the Muslim to the notion of culturally homogeneous nation of the Sangh combine following the Hindutva argument. In fact, the Hindutva notion of the RSS excluded Muslims from their projected Hindu nation. The RSS viewed representatives of different religious and socio-cultural identities as components in stark opposition to its idea of the Hindu ‘nation.’ Irfan Habib notes,

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925, openly espoused the ideal of a "Hindu Rashtra" (Hindu Nation), which, by excluding Muslims (and other minorities), necessarily implied that there are two or more nations in India. (Habib, 1999:27)

The Muslim identity is posed as the archetype of the absolute cultural otherness while other culturally marginalised groups are viewed with less ideological rigidness.

While Hindu Indians are presented distinctively for their ethnic or linguistic/geographical identity Muslims and other culturally marginalised groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or Dalits are represented primarily on the basis of religion or predetermined class position. There are two different parameters for representation. Most newspaper stories about the cultural other, particularly Muslims, as distinct cultural groups portray them partially or completely in unfavourable light unless they
accept subjugation to the socio-cultural norms of the dominant culture. Therefore the media, both local and national, sometimes publishes some positive news about such groups as mere exception. Nevertheless, if the impact of such negative projections of the cultural other in the print media is damaging enough for the composition and stability of the Indian nation, the role of television and other audio-visual media is quite devastating. TV Programmes, news items and films are made in likeness with the ‘reality.’ Audio-visual media as purveyors of authentic information keep themselves incessantly busy in spreading of cultural myths and misbelieve. Particularly in time of racial or communal crisis, such projections of the other may even spread inter-racial or communal violence. Rumours and gossip in such a time are reinforced by the already established image of the cultural other as ‘demonic.’ The fallout of this process of demonization of the cultural other, as a threat to the cultural ‘purity’ as well as political sovereignty of the nation, is either a complete/partial ban on representation or prejudiced representation of such a figure. When the representatives of state power are compelled to partially represent the other, it is an image of the ‘benign’ other, seen no longer as a threat as a result of his/her ‘benign reconciliation’ with the culture of the mainstream.

The underrepresentation of the cultural other including Muslims in Indian context is not something new. What poses the problem is when such underrepresentation (through partial representation that seldom occurs) is interpreted by members of the dominant culture along with the misrepresentation of this group though other channels of communication. Consequently, the underrepresentation is justified by the sweeping cultural
generalisation as to the scarcity of such figures. While the audio-visual media including television and print media projects a negative representation of the cultural other, advertisements as an integral part of the media selectively excludes such groups from its representation matrix. The advertisements, chosen for analysis, show how they appropriate cultural nationalism to a target consumer group. Ethnic identity also is shown as fossilized and otherized as an exotic entity not moving/participating in mainstream national space. Yet any subject of the mainstream is made to look like a buffoon if he does not endorse the brand. The mainstream revolves around the representation of the male. The modern man is effeminized and yet in control, Quixotic yet sane, human yet divine.

Diversity and difference has always been central to the cultural and political context of India, be it ethnic, religious, gender, linguistic, or racial. Ethnic communities in India are as internally diverse as they are different from one another, and represent unique heterogeneity in terms of cultural attributes. Unlike the West where the race and ethnicity of the other have traditionally been framed as ‘exotic,’ ‘unknowable’ and therefore ‘excluded’ in most cases, the Indian situation has been founded on an overt emphasis on its cultural diversity as an intrinsic property of the projected ‘Indianness.’ Whereas in the formal socio-political context there has always been acknowledgement, articulation, exploitation and appropriation of ‘difference,’ the context of contemporary advertisements seems to construct ‘Indianness’ as a homogeneous and ubiquitous entity. Organised endeavours can be traced in advertisements executing the plan of cultural homogenization undermining the complex multi-religious, multicultural and heterodox history through ‘motivated
manipulation.’ Under the circumstances the cultural ‘other’ is not represented directly, filtered and arranged through the consciousness and ideological position of the ‘author’ of such texts. It would be rather simplistic to assume that this is done just to introduce variety in the design of the text. In fact, a much more complex cultural context as well as ideological contests lie beneath the architectural plan of such texts. Advertisements as a genre of popular media appropriate themselves as a tool to manifest various ideological agenda underneath the politics of representation. Within the agenda of representation of a particular kind the cultural ‘other’ are either ‘normalised’ or ‘exoticised’ to fit into the construct of ‘Indianness.’ Prior to any attempt to understand the implications of the normative presence of the ‘other’ in advertisements, it is important to understand the ways in which the cultural ‘other’ is represented in such texts.

More often than not the cultural ‘other’ is represented in advertisements either as a point of reference to substantiate the existential difference of the mainstream as well as to create demand, call for intended action [‘even they are influenced by the product, what about you? Being the tacit argument] or as the entity whose identity is turned into a mere normative token of difference. In other words, the cultural ‘other’ becomes a ‘marked’ category in advertisements as in many other media forms such as films, teleserials, columns in newspapers etc. Such binary yet paradoxical [under]representations are both unstable and enduring at the same time. The cultural ‘other,’ though figuring here, appears simply as a willing participant to complete the image of ‘one India one culture’ submerging its difference for the construction of homogeneity so far as the idea of the nation is concerned.
Anyone keen on retaining his/her ‘otherness’ is considered an unwanted outsider for the ‘nation.’

The cultural ‘other’ is mostly made to signify a stereotypical ethnic identity contextualised by exotic costumes, physical features, distant location, language, accent and/or rituals that form their markedness. Religion and language seem to have an indexical relationship to the projected ‘Indian’ culture and identity in that the signifier is preferred to submit to a specific set of meanings. The cultural ‘other’ is portrayed to have a direct connection to the distant location beyond the progressive space that the mainstream seems to occupy. This mode of representation further essentialises the modernity of the mainstream. The modernist correlation between the signifying ‘other’ and their signified culture presupposes an authenticity of the projected image of the cultural ‘other’ at the level of ‘hyperreal.’ The cultural ‘other’ is transformed into a mere token, a spectacle as well as a point of reference for the ‘authentic’ exoticism. Such presupposition banks on the assumption that the reader/audience recognises both the correlation and the depiction as ‘real’ and values the authenticity construed thereof. It also relies on the assumption that the reader/audience as respondents belonging to the ‘homogeneous’ nation buy into this construction of culture and identity of the ‘other.’

Quite complementary to this representation of ‘otherness’ is a normalising frame that keeps any cultural difference from being apparent on the surface. For example, costumed in the context of dominant ‘Indian’ (therefore Hindu) middle-class, the cultural ‘other’ not only signifies the distinctiveness of the culture of the mainstream but also illustrates the former’s ability to adapt to
the context mediated by the chosen commodity of the advertisements. In the process such subjects are first smothered, then mothered and consequently othered. Indeed it is the third $M$ representing the market described by Ray (2011) that takes over the idea of ‘nation’ so far as one’s national [as well as cultural] identity is concerned. Various consumer products that such otherised subjects are made to use in the text seem to mediate in the process of social readjustment and apparent ‘removal’ of otherness to give such texts a gloss of inclusiveness, racial tolerance and secularism, the attributes of the intended projection of the ‘Shining India’ of the BJP-led central government or ‘developed powerful India’ of the Congress-led central government of the present. Their cultural value no longer lies in their difference as well as cultural distinctiveness but from other texts with similar representational matrix and in the pattern of consumption which include them in the ‘nation.’ Religion and language thus remain no longer the indexical referent to culture, but is considered an intertextual marker of normative diversity. Given this context, such types of normalising strategies can even be seen as a type of global representation that challenges the very idea of cultural ‘authenticity.’

Cultural groups and racial identity become floating signifiers without a root in a signified ethnicity that goes instead with an implication of assumed authenticity. Such constructed identity may rely on signifiers to gain its difference; nevertheless it simultaneously manipulates the same. For example, there are advertisements that make use of religion, language and accent as markers to recognise the ‘other’ only to merge the representative otherness into the culture of the mainstream at the end of their respective textual arguments. In this process the inherent cultural identity of the ‘other’ is lost
and hence is lost the ‘significance’ of their representative culture. This trend is most clearly evident in advertisements where the non-Hindu identity represents the normative ‘others’ in larger Hindu groups. However, instances of linguistic and ethnic ‘otherness’ are treated with no better consideration. For example, as shown through analyses in earlier chapters of this dissertation, most advertisements make use of upper middle-class, middle class urban Hindu identity as the unmarked category and context for their representational matrix. Representatives of the marked identity in the predominantly Hindu media contexts are almost always situated in a background devoid of cultural meaning and removed from similar situations that could give clues to larger racial and intercultural relationships. A process of fetishisation of the culture of the margin seems to be in progress as a result. Apparently the representative ‘other’ in such texts is not necessarily vanquished in a culture though s/he is definitely denied of his/her respective cultural contexts. Such a strategy of representation may seem inclusive as well as democratic on the face of it since it no longer denotes exclusive indexical relationships based on religion, language and culture. However, the problem with such representation lies in the denial of historical, cultural, religious, linguistic and social difference for such a position. The projection is no less distortive in its appropriation of the ‘real.’ Neither the stereotyping of ‘exotic’ cultures seen in the discourse on ‘nation’ nor the homogenised ‘India is one’ advertisements of normalization offer any satisfactory representation. Most of these advertisements, instead, depend on previous exoticised and normalised images for meaning and are usually no less revealing of advertisement’s ideologically construed discourse.
Various audio-visual versions of the Coca Cola Advertisement can exemplify what is discussed above. One such advertisements (No 13 – Star Plus/Sony/ Zee TV 2006 – please see p. IL 20) shows a tourist couple at a hill station (probably a Himalayan range near Nepal) accompanied by a local guide who speaks broken Hindi in an accent that the popular media projects the ‘Gorkhas/Sherpas’ to have. During their visit they feel thirsty and take a break for ‘thanda.’ The Sherpa guide’s eye sparkle with their mention of the term ‘thanda’ and he instantly expresses his eagerness to have one. The husband picks up a bottle from the container and hands it over to his wife while taking one himself. The eager guide is shown waiting for a bottle too. The lady picks up a bottle of Coca Cola for the guide. However, instructed by her husband not to give him one but a different type of drink, the lady offers him a tetrapack of some other brand of drink. The guide takes it and smashes the packet secretly. The clever guide out of utter disappointment then begins playing tricks. He proceeds to show them the place further with a peevish smile. He describes a broken house as the Tajmahal. The eager tourist instinctively goes to take a snap of the building and suddenly recognises the strangeness of it. He expresses his surprise when the wife says with sarcastic smile ‘woh kuch local hoga inka’[emphasis mine] [Trans: must be some local thing]. The Sherpa guide then confirms that it is not something local but the one built by Shahjahan. When they proceed further the guide points to a goat grazing in the nearby valley as the goat-eating tiger. The husband on hearing this expresses his suspicion regarding his mental fitness. The guide now offers to show them even Qutab Minar there. While being told that the location of Qutab Minar is in Delhi by the extremely irritated man, the Sherpa guide claims the place to be Delhi. At this point, the couple are out of
their wit’s end. It is at this point that the guide unfolds the logic for such
descriptions – [taking out the smashed tetrapack of the other cold drink saying]
‘hun, jaisa e thanda hai saab, jaisa u tajmahal hai, u tiger hai, aur e dilli hai
sab’ – [Yes Sir, just as this thanda is like any other, this Tajmahal, this tiger
and this Delhi too is the real thing – translation mine]. Hence the couple
realises their mistake and he is given a bottle of Thanda to restore his calm
and poise. The next shot shows the wife opening the bottle and handing it to
the Sherpa. The husband then whispers in his wife’s ears – ‘apne aap ko
Amir Khan samajhta hai’ [‘he considers himself as Aamir Khan’ – Amir Khan is
a Bollywood star who plays the Sherpa]. Hearing this the Guide responds: ‘ei,
samajhta nahi saab, hai...’ [I don’t consider - I am]. Leaving the couple
awestruck the content guide drinks the cola with much happiness. The last
shot takes the viewers to a bonfire where the couple is the spectator and the
guide is the spectacle – he sings in Nepali folk tune ‘thanda matlab coca cola,
o kanchi thanda matlab sherpa coca cola,’ while dancing in the folk rhythm.

In the advertisement, a network of cultural tokens, packaging of identities,
accent of different groups/communities and a combination of chosen images
along with colour scheme form macro-indexicalities within the advertisement.
For example all three analogies to prove the authenticity of the projected
product and to negate the competitive product posed in the advertisement can
be taken as cultural icons of India. Together they form a pattern that stands
for the typical globalised urban Indian context as a single cultural space: the
Tajmahal is a unique architectural inheritance of India, The Himalayan range,
of which Mount Everest is a contiguous part, is culturally related to Indian life
in North East India, and the tiger is the national animal of India. All these
come as part of a packaged ‘national’ culture. The language that the couple speaks and the products that they consume or are in possession of guarantee all that come with this package. The ownership of the accent as well as the product is emblematic in this culturally and linguistically homogeneous India. The language is certainly not the language of innumerable Indians from varied cultural, socio-economic and regional backgrounds which is represented by the Sherpa guide. This group is negatively qualified in the advertisement. It must be noted here that such metonymic references are used in the text keeping an assumed relationship between the signifiers of homogeneous ‘Indianness’ that is essentially urban and their received signifieds from typical western point of view. Though one of the architectural wonders of India’s cultural heritage, Tajmahal alone does not represent India to Indians in spite of being a marker of India’s proud cultural inheritance; nor does Mt Everest alone represent the Himalayas; the same stands true for the tiger. The first two are signifiers representing the essentialised India to Western imaginings of the country while the third, i.e. the tiger has an added aura of exoticism. The tiger and the associative exoticism is also a reference to distant location of the culture of the other which the Sherpa represents. In the wife’s reference to something ‘local’ while speaking of the ‘Tajmahal’ of his description further emphasises that. The ‘local’ of the Sherpa is far away from the ‘national.’ Use of such signifiers to represent the essentialised Indianness exhibits but a skilful appropriation of ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) of the ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1991) in the Indian context.
The Gorkha guide represents the cultural ‘other’ who is denied a cultural context in the text. For example, he is *normalised* and inducted into the mainstream as unchallenging and submissive to the culture of the mainstream through the mediation of the product and his consumption practice. His familiarity with the product results in the removal of the essential characteristic exoticism as well as the cultural difference though the same is retained in his physical position, dress and accented Hindi. A close look at his appearance in the following snaps from the audio visual advertisement will demonstrate this point.

The Sherpa wears the traditional *Daura Suruwal* [ethnic Nepali male attire] and a *topi* [ethnic Sherpa headgear] while tying something like the *Khada* [ethnic scarf] around his waist. His identity as the cultural ‘other’ is established in combination of his physical appearance, ethnic attire and the heavily accented Hindi that he uses for communication. His identity is placed in contrast to the identity of the couple in the advertisement representing the mainstream. The identity of the Sherpa is *marked* and therefore foregrounds a deviation from the cultural norm of the nation. Just like the dress code, the use of language is also emblematic in society. Language becomes a political tool in constructing subjectivity and creating a regime of language, as well. In this regime accent is considered to be a marker of ‘normalcy.’ By the same index anything other than a particular variety of the tongue thus standardised is negatively qualified. The Sherpa guide’s accent is indexical of his ethnicity and locational distance from the culture of the mainstream. His language is indexical of his culture and position within the nation. Indexicals are ‘implicit signals in communication that is significant to enable the communicators to
make inferential judgements about the speech communication and the participants in a speech act’ (Jan Blommaert 2006: personal communication). Like speech act, indexical meanings, too, are shared conventions. Indexicality governing the linguistic communication creates not only a discourse but also identities that organise our society into various hierarchies. The Sherpa guide’s Hindi is heavily accented bearing traces of his own language. For example the voiceless alveolar fricative, i.e. /s/ as in the word ‘same’ is pronounced by the Sherpa guide as postalveolar voiceless fricative, i.e. /ʃ/ as in the word ‘shame.’ Instead of saab [Sir] he says ‘shaab;’ instead of ‘woh’ [that] he says ‘u;’ instead of ‘yeh’ [this] he says ‘e.’ All these deviations form the micro-indexicality within the text. Micro-indexicalities are concerned with the individual. The feelings of individual and social opportunities available to them by acquisition of particular accent, consumption of particular product come under the purview of textual micro-indexicality here. Such micro-indexicalities aid the essentialisation of the cultural ‘other.’ The analyses of two more audiovisual advertisements below will further elucidate this point.

The first frame of the advertisement (p. IL 20) creates a demand picture that denotes the distance – the guide points to Mt Everest in this frame. The Sherpa is given greater salience within the frame of reference than the couple. If we extend the vector to the pointed object beyond the frame, the figure of Sherpa is placed closer to the pointed object, i.e. Mt Everest, than the figures of the couple hence granting the Sherpa greater salience. The allotment of salience denotes comparative distance between characters placed in the picture and the cultural metonym, i.e. Mt Everest. A greater
salience of the Sherpa in the frame may also signify greater distance of the couple in terms of their position in the mainstream and the location of the ‘otherised’ culture. The ‘culture’ of the mainstream and that of the ‘other’ are mutually exclusive. Both cannot and does not occupy the same space of identity. Such positions are divided by exclusive cultural boundaries. However, such a distance is shown to be bridged by the Sherpa’s familiarity of the culture of the mainstream, signifying his willing adaptation to the culture of the mainstream as default. The Sherpa knows that Taj Mahal was built by Shahjahan, that Qutab Minar is located at Delhi and that Coca Cola is called ‘thanda’ representing the stereotype of urban beverage though the couple knows nothing of the Sherpa’s culture. The dilapidated building can even be taken patronisingly of an ‘invented [local] tradition’ that characterises the culture of the ‘other.’ The signifier of identity of the cultural ‘other’ has a shifted signified consequently, i.e. that of the hybrid identity reflective of a hybrid culture.

Another audio-visual version of the Coca Cola advertisement essentialises the racial ‘otherness.’ The following advertisement was made in the context of a controversy regarding the safe-ness of the beverages made by Coca-cola and Pepsico in India. A Delhi-based NGO called the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) argued in 2003 that the aerated drinks produced by Multinational companies such as Coca Cola and Pepsico carry alarming amount of toxins that can harm the immune system as well as cause cancer. They also found out that such drinks produced and marketed in India contains 36 times the level of pesticide residues permitted under the regulations of the European Union while samples from the US showed no such residue. Quite
expectedly the companies vehemently protested against this argument. In addition to the charge of using non-standard ingredients to produce the beverages for Indian market there were also protests against American Multinational companies that seem to spend some part of their revenue in India funding the American aggression in Iraq.

There was an organised campaign against the US Multinational companies, particularly Coca Cola and Pesico, by people against war and imperialist aggression in India in 2003 in reaction against the American aggression on Iraq in the name of Iraq’s disarmament of supposed Weapons for Mass Destruction (WMD). The controversy in 2003 over the use of water with alarming quantity of pesticide residues to produce twelve major cold drinks marketed in India by Coca Cola and Pepsico added fuel to the fire. The mass opinion in Bengal on these issues assumed the shape of a spontaneous movement with participation of people from all walks of life. This caused a big reduction in business in Indian market. As a result a whole lot of advertisements were made and released to convince their consumers in favour of consuming the product. The Company used Indian popular media icons such as Amir khan of Bollywood and Smriti Irani or the Indian Television for this campaign as ‘demigods’ delivering prescriptions of safe consumption of particular product. Interestingly the actor Amir Khan appears in different regional identity though none of them are of a Muslim in spite of being a Muslim himself. Smriti Irani, however, appears as Tulsi the archetypal Hindu woman ‘belonging’ to ‘protecting’ the ‘purity’ the inner core of the nation. In the one in which Smriti Tulsi Virani Irani represents the nation, the representation matrix seem to be inclusive of the homogeneous members only, the other part
in the audience with a blurred referential existence may have the peripheral cultural ‘other.’ The one in which Aamir Khan plays a Bengali intellectual it is the effeminised cultural ‘other’ that figures prominent in the text. Portrayal of archetypal Indian in several advertisements of which two examples have been sited above seem to align itself in the venture of writing history of nationalism as ‘histories of exclusion.’ (Lal and Nandy 2006:xix) They note that

earlier histories of nationalism were predominantly written in registers of inclusion, increasingly they are being written as histories of exclusion. Even as nationalism attracted entire communities that might otherwise have been at odds with one another, it privileged some communities over others and, much worse, had no space within its parameters for various others.

(Lal and Nandy, 2006:xix).

Lal and Nandy (2006) cite the case of the film Lagaan as a venture ‘misleadingly’ to be ‘written’ in the inclusivist mode.’ However, the representation of the position of the other [through presence of Kaachra as the stereotypical dalit] is not devoid of agenda of exclusivist position. Kaachra as the representative of the other is essentialised, is made to appear physically deficient and the source of his extraordinary capacity is his physical handicap. It spite of its exterior manifestation of an inclusivist discourse, such instances can be taken as examples of exclusivist practice. Advertisements as part of the popular media reflect similar tendencies.
While the advertisement mentioned above takes recourse to non-fictional narration by a popular media figure, the other advertisement (No 14 – p. IL 22 - 23) in which Amir khan plays the lead role makes use of fictional narration and caricature to establish its argument. The context is as follows. During this phase of Coca Cola controversy West Bengal witnessed a serious protest against consuming the product expressed through banning the sale of such soft drinks in university canteens and other places. Students and teachers of Jadavpur University even ventured into preparing organic raw mango drink for sale among students and members of staff as a token of protest against consuming such harmful beverages. Hence the caricature of representative Bengali intellectual figures prominent in the text. The stereotypical Bengali intellectual can be considered as the cultural ‘other’ since he desires to retain his cultural and linguistic difference. This position is exoticised and subsequently otherised through use of micro- and macro-indexicals negatively qualifying the position. However, the induction of the cultural ‘other’ to the ‘mainstream’ is made possible by the end of the advertisement through submission represented by consumption of the beverage declaring it ‘safe.’ In this text the cultural ‘other’ is suggestive of a distinct cultural identity contextualised by typical costumes of the Bengali Hindu urban elite, physical features and accented language that forms the markedness of such a position.

It shows a middle-class urban Bengali family. The husband is wearing white Dhoti and Punjabi, a typical marker of the Bengali male Hindu ethnic identity. The wife is wearing red and white bangles, vermilion on her forehead and a red-bordered saree in a typical Bengali style; a red-bordered saree, the red
and white bangles and vermilion are indexicals of married Hindu female identity. Interestingly these markers are not accessible to Hindu widows. The Husband and wife represent two contradictory views of the product. While the wife represents the argument of the company, the husband seems to uphold the popular argument regarding the product. The husband is made to appear intellectually stubborn as well as hollow in essence. He appears to be much inclined to the opinion that consumption of the Cola should be avoided. This inclination does not come as a result of any sound logic or research but on the basis of second hand information obtained through writing of ‘other people’ against it. The wife as the spokesperson of the patron group vehemently opposes such an opinion. She supplies with counter-argument much along the line that the company promotes though logical it appears. The exchange between then is as follows with English translations next to each turn of speech:

Waiter: Boudi, order bolun [Sister-in-law place the order]
Wife: han ei shobaike liye thanda lao to [yes, bring Thanda for all]
Husband: ei no Thanda [ No thanda]
Wife: Kyun [Why?]
Husband: ushme gorbor hai [there’s some problem in it]
Wife: [to waiter] Tum lao to, [ You please bring] [to husband] kya gorbor hai? [What problem?]
Husband: ushme kuch hai, wohi log bola na? [Something is there, those people said]
Wife: huh, kal wohi log bolega baal katna kharab hai to? [if those people say tomorrow that trimming the hair is bad? Then?]
husband: to pura family ko Hippy banayega, Howrah bridge mein up down karayega [then I’ll make all in the family a Hippy and make them walk to and fro on the Howrah Bridge]

Wife: Koi bolega baat karna kharab hai to? [If tomorrow someone says that it is bad to talk, then?]

Husband: To mukh bondho korke gunga ghume ga [then shutting the mouth I’ll go around speechless]

Wife: bah, koi bolega kapda pahanna kharab hai to? [wonderful, if someone says that it is bad to wear clothes, then?]

Husband: kapda utaarke nanga... [then removing clothes will go around naked] [realising where the argument is going says to his wife] ei bindoo beshi bokbok mot koro, log bolta hai ar dekhun... [Listen Bindoo don’t blabber too much, people say this and see here...]

Wife: Ei je, matha use koro matha, shou shaal purana company hai, dosho country mein log thanda pita hai, are they fool? [hey you, use your brain, hundred year old company, people drink their beverages in two hundred countries, are they fool?]

Husband: Tum hamara baat nahi shunega, arre baba laboratory mein test hua hai test [You won’t listen to me, these have been tested in laboratories]

[As this commotion is intervened by another fellow visitor to the restaurant]

Man: ei dada ki hocche? [oh brother what’s up?]

Husband: e you, return return. [hey you go back]

Wife: test hua hai shuna, result nahi shuna, tum na adha shunta hai, adha shamajta hai, rosogolla ka rosh khata hai aur gulla fenkta...
hai. [you have heard that there was a test but didn’t hear about
the result, you listen to only a half of it and understand only the
half, you take rasogolla to eat and drinking the juice you throw
the sweet]

Husband: huh

Wife: India, England, Netherlands shobka laboratory mein test hua hai,
bola hai ok hai fit hai, fir? [it has been declared safe and fit by
laboratories in India, England and Netherlands, then?]
[in the meantime four bottles of coca cola arrives on the table]

Husband: Fir? Hun fir hum khud tesht karega [then? Then I myself will test
it] – [he drinks all four bottles in spite protest from the other
three of the family and burps in contentment saying] – thanda
hai [its cool]

Wife: [frustrated] Dhyat [exclamation]

Husband: e bindoo [singing a song]
E mere mishti Bindoo [oh my sweet Bindoo]
E meri chotpoti Bindoo [Oh my quickwitted Bindoo]
Main maan gaya sach [I accept your words as true]
Sach hai teri baat [what you say is right]
Tu mujhe thanda pila de [treat me with some thanda]
[to the waiter..]
Thanda la re [Bring thanda]
[To wife]
Tu mujhe thanda pila de [you treat me with some thanda]
O bindoo re.... [Oh dear Bindoo]
This particular advertisement performs a twofold function: firstly it bitterly mocks the Bengali propensity for caveat and intellectualism as was expressed through their protests against the use of beverages during this period, and secondly it carries forward its hidden propaganda in favour of the safe-ness of their product. In the process it not only essentialises the Bengali ethnic identity as the cultural ‘other’ but also excludes non-Hindu, non-middleclass Bengalis from the group. Here too the accented Hindi and code switching by the archetypal Bengali couple negatively qualifies the language that they use. For example, the vowels in the Bengali Babu’s speech deviate from the vowels in the target Hindi speech thereby making his speech marked and of negative qualification. In his utterance ‘Ushme kuch gorbor hai’ – several speech sounds are ‘incorrectly’ produced. Following is the phonetic transcriptions of the sentence as is spoken by him and the one that is accepted as standard.

1. /uːme kʊːtl hʊdʊd hæː/- The projected speech in the text
2. /usme kutl hʊdʊd hæː/ Standard Hindi

Several segments are presented in the projected in line with the popular media reception of the Bengali speech such as long vowels and can be seen in the sentence 1 above. The voiceless alveolar sibilant /s/ is produced as voiceless postalveolar sibilant /ʃ/. The central unrounded vowel /ə/ of the standard Hindi speech is changed into back rounded vowel /ɔ/. The front open vowel /æ/ of the standard Hindi speech is manifested as long back open
vowel /aː/. Apart from phonetic deviations such as above the speech of the couple is also characterised by extensive code-mixing, making use of Bengali and English words into the Hindi sentences. For example in response to waiter’s invitation to place the order [which is delivered in Bangla] the lady responds:

‘han, ei shobai-ke liye thanda lao to
Bangla bangla bangle Hindi Hindi Bangla/Hindi Hindi Bangla/Hindi

It is to be noted here that the syntax of this utterance is that of Hindi though in a seven-word sentence there are four Bangla words. Such extensive code-mixing may refer to less efficient linguistic communication skills and thereby, is indexical of the cultural otherness. Here the stereotypical Bengali intellectual serves as the cultural other who by virtue of his desire to retain his cultural and linguistic difference is exoticised in this version of the campaign who is brought back to the mainstream through consumption of the particular product.

Coca Cola in its campaign makes use of urban spokesperson from the group of the cultural or social or gendered ‘other’ to play off social conceptions of class, gender, race, language. However, the textual arguments are always structured in conformity with the ideology of the State. For example, in the advertisement (No 15 – p. IL 24-25) Amir Khan appears as a Jat. His racial identity is posed as the ‘other’ projected through his physical location which is a remote village along the highway, probably in Haryana. He speaks in a heavily accented Hindi with traces of his own language which is not a
standard variety of Hindi. As opposed to his position as the other are posed three women characters as the representatives of the mainstream.

The position of the otherised Jat is not only created on the basis of the accent of the language that he speaks but also on the basis of his attire, attitude, behavioural pattern and physical location. Frame two in the above still pictures from the audiovisual advertisement shows a stark difference in terms of appearance of the girls and the Jat. While the characters of those girls represent the faces of the ‘Shining India’ of the first decade of this century, the figure of the Jat exemplified a fossilised cultural backwardness bereft of the global economy of ‘progress’. Such attempts of writing history of the contemporary times are, indeed, a part of the exclusivist nationalist agenda written in the registers of ‘essentialisation’ and cultural ‘exclusion.’ Such an essentialist discourse, in fact, ‘privileged some communities over others and, much worse, had no space within its parameters for various others.’ (Lal and Nandy 2006:xix)

There are distinct parameters for the representation of otherness in these advertisements, as can be seen from the close readings above. Such parameters include religious identity as in the case of Muslims, cultural as in the case of the Sherpa, and the Jat, ideological difference as in the case of Bengali identity, spatial and popular patriarchal modes of contempt for women’s abilities in the public sphere.

The identity of Sherpa, though posed as the cultural other with regard to the projected dominant culture, enjoys the privilege of being patronised by the
latter. This patronising acceptance of the Gorkha is possible on the ground of the close religious association between this otherised group and the mainstream Hindu majority. Gorkhas worship Hindu gods and Nepal, the original homeland of Gorkhas, is the only Hindu nation in the world. Despite the fact that the Gorkha separatist insurgency in India creates considerable problem of security for the Indian State, thus this acceptance to this Gorkha is granted. Having a predominantly Hindu identity, in spite of otherisation, is not viewed as a potential threat to the Hindutva.

In the advertisement that shows a Bengali couple, the Bengali identity is otherised. Two arguments, one pertaining to globalisation and other to religious nationalism, converge in the praxis of cultural otherisation of this particular position. The Bengali identity is marked by a distinct history of rationalism and communist ideology. While Bengali rationalism is antithetical to religious nationalism, the communist ideology is absolutely critical of globalisation and the open market economy to which Hindutva politics adhere. The Bengali identity with its characteristic rationalism and communist ideology cannot fit into the Hindutva reconstruction of identity. Hence this position is ridiculed and otherised. Interestingly, the Bengali woman appears as the spokesperson of the global economy as the ‘other’ in contrast to the ‘hostile’ otherness of her husband. She reinforces the Coca Cola Company’s commercial interests and social commitments. Her ‘dissent’ voiced against her husband, the ‘hostile’ other, is thus shown as an insider’s challenge, representing the instability of the rational communist other. As the ‘benign’ other the Bengali woman strongly voices the Hindutva critique of rationalism and communist idea; thereby promoting the logic of Hindutva. As a result the
power of the Bengali identity is diffused through such easy appropriation of the Bengali woman as the very spokesperson of the globalised logic of Hindutva.

The process of otherisation in the advertisement that shows the Jat with three women is based on the negation of both the unsophisticated rural male and westernised female identity. The Jat identity is ridiculed and otherised with regard to the logic of globalisation while the women are otherised on the basis of spatial strategies of Hindutva. Within the premises of Hindu nationalism women appear the religious space. The three women who appear in the advertisement do not live up to the parameters of Hindu nationalist femininity as is evident through their western clothes and their spatial location in the outer domain of the society. Hence they are ridiculed and otherised. The Jat fails to live up to the parameters of the Indian global cosmopolitan masculinity owing to his location in a distant place beyond the space of global ‘development’ and his indigenous identity exemplified through his attire and accented language. Therefore, he is ridiculed and otherised.

In the Hindu nationalist discourse, the Muslim position is posited as the ultimate ‘otherness’ with no possibility of reconciliation within the Hindutva notion of nation. No other group of the cultural minorities is viewed in with such vehement cultural antagonism. Therefore the very Muslim presence with its autonomous cultural identity appears as an impending danger to the Holy Land which Savarkar conceptualised in 1923, and which is still maintained as the goal of Hindutva agenda of the combine. Such identities, considered as threat for national homogenisation are kept beyond the
boundaries of the imagined nation-space exemplified through underrepresentation of these identities in Indian teleserials based on the idea of Hindutva and in advertisements as the narrative extension of those serials.

Advertisements telecast as fillers to the prime time serials do not have a single representation of the Adivasi or the Dalit identities, though one instance of representation of Muslim is seen in the advertisement of Tata Salt that I discussed in Chapter 1 as the archetype of absolute cultural otherness. There is clear hierarchy in the levels of threat that the culturally exclusive Muslim identity poses to the Hindutva idea of the nation and the ones that the identity of Dalits or Adivasis pose to it. The former is more threatening than the latter so far as the view of the Sangh combine is concerned both in terms of demography and religious difference. Hence the focus is on ‘taming’ the identity of the most ‘hostile’ other, i.e. the Muslim, and harnessing it to the interests of the nation.