

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

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## ADVERTISING AS FOLK DISCOURSE

One-Sided Love!

G. Sandhya Nayak, Ph.D.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

"Words used in their proper order in a pleasing manner would readily be accepted and obliged by the world," says Thiruvalluvar (Circa 100 B.C., KuRaL 648), an ancient Tamil poet, highlighting the importance of language used in making human communication highly effective. This is true not only of language use in inter-personal communication at an informal level, but also in the fields of education, administration and mass communication at a formal level.

Discourse analysis is a vast field. The analysis is defined as (1) concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence, utterance, (2) concerned with the inter-relationships between language and society, and (3) as concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication (Stubbs 1983 : 1)

### 2. FUNCTION OF FOLKLORE IN MASS CULTURE

Folklore is distinguished from other forms of literary and oral traditions. In this paper, I would like to discuss the relationship between the fast growing phenomenon of Indian Mass culture and folklore. By mass culture I mean modern mass-produced artifacts, a kind of industrial renewal of old traditions shared and circulated in an industrialized society by written, oral or other means of mass communication. For instance, popular films, advertisements, comic books and films, popular music, popular designs, folk cartoons, etc., deliberately use folklore materials. Consumer goods deliberately use folk motifs, folk language, and folklore characteristics to seek recognition from the consumers and thereby promote their sale.

Magazines, radio, and television advertising frequently use folklore metaphors, symbols, designs, motifs, and related ideas are to popularize or boost the modern industrial products and thus have become an important part of mass culture. That such advertisements have more mass appeal is undoubtedly true in a society, which is past-oriented, where religious practices still dominate the life of the people, and where the use of mythical pictures create in the consumer a sense of purity and even reverence and pride. Appeal to purity and originality is made in the advertisements using folklore, illustrating feminine charm and feminine duties, the traditional values followed in Indian communities. Eatable items in particular exploit highly religious motifs.

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the language use in the advertisements published in magazines, radio and television, and to link the same with folk elements/ functions/characteristics used in the advertisements.

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### 3. ADVERTISING HISTORY

According to Chunawalla (1985), the form of advertising for the transmission of information dates back to ancient Greece and Rome, when criers and signs were used to carry information for advertising goods and services. This practice was continued even during the middle ages. During 17th century, when newspapers started appearing in various parts of the world, newspaper advertising began to develop. However, the great break for advertising came only in the late 19th Century, when technology and mass production techniques were sufficiently developed. The field of advertising has been revolutionized after the advent of radio and television as popular media of communication in this century. While the press would cover only the literate population, the radio and television have widely covered both literates and non-literates. Television and radio remain the most popular media in urban as well as rural areas. Recently, during the 90s, the arrival of satellite television, internet, web-marketing, e-biz, and e-commerce, has resulted in significant changes in the field (Madhu, 1996; Kalidas, 1999).

### 4. FOLK VERSUS LORE : SOCIAL ENGINEERING

As Malinowski wrote, there has been growing realization that the questions related to the origin of folklore or its definition are not as important in the present context of rapid social changes and improved means of mass communication, as the problems of uplifting the poor, educating the thousands of people in non-literate sectors of brotherhood and mutual respect. The 'folk' rather than their 'lore' have, therefore, received much greater attention and consideration from social reformers alike.

In India, as elsewhere in most developing nations, folklore was, for a long time, a pet child of the politician, who wanted to arouse in the people a pride for their own past and culture, and an identity consciousness. It appears to me that the close link that we presently notice between advertising and folklore is a product of this trend. Mass communication experts began to notice that the interest in folklore, a medium of entertainment that continued to survive through the ages, could be easily used to communicate contents to help advance social programs.

Folklore in India today, thus, is regarded and considered as one of the most important and effective instruments of social engineering. Once its potential was recognized, enterprising businesses began to exploit folklore for promoting their products. In general, the resurgence in preserving and celebrating ethnic and linguistic identities and celebrating the traditions and history has resulted in a close link between mass culture, advertising, and folklore in India. And early sign of this linkage could be found in the newspaper advertisements issued in Tamil by the T.V. Sundaram Iyengar and Sons in Tamilnadu for their **Southern Roadways** bus and lorry company in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

### 5. ATTRACTING THE LITERATE AND THE NON-LITERATE FOLKS ALIKE

The advertising agencies are, therefore, forced to use folk elements/ functions in their advertisements to attract the public in general and non-literates in particular. The language plays an important role in this respect. The direct and indirect forms appeared in the advertisements are derived mainly from the folk elements.

We can see this in detail at the end of this paper from the data collected from the advertisements published in Tamil Magazines such as Kumudam, Ananda Vikatan, Idayam Pecukiratu, Mangaiyar Malar, the broadcasts over All India Radio, Chennai, and the telecasts over Sun TV.

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- [Mother Tongues of India, According to 1961 Census of India](#)

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## 6. FOLK MEDIA AND ADVERTISING: BALANCING BETWEEN FOLK AND CLASSICAL TRADITIONS

In India, we have a continuous tradition of classical literatures being orally narrated from one generation to another in order to carry the tradition forward. This holds good both in the case of Sanskrit as well as regional language literatures. So, a certain influence, such as theme, style, rhythm, delivery, etc., of classical literature on folklore texts and the influence of folklore on classical literatures is inevitable. Apart from style, delivery, rhythm and such patterns of affinities between classical and folk literatures, there is still deeper significance in the balancing of a human emotion with the use of alternate modes of expressions like folk and classical traditions.

Folk art has exclusive skill, colour, style, theme, richness, etc.

The advertising situation chiefly consists of four aspects, namely, participants, relevant object, medium, and purpose. The purpose is always to sell the product, promote the service, or instruct moral among the consumers.

Folk media establishes direct rapport with audience owing to its proximity with the community.

The characteristics of folk media defined by Crawford and Rony Adhikary are found in the functions of advertising also. Almost all the advertisements fulfill these characteristics. A few examples are illustrated here.

### 1. Persuasive ability of Folk media assumes importance.

Consider the following example:

inRee mutaliiTu ceyyunkaL (Television)  
to-day-emp invest- (SBM Teak)  
imp.pl.  
'Invest today itself.'

In the case of verbal sentences the use of the imperatives and interrogatives is very prominent and it is closely related to the persuasive function of advertisement. This is true in folk media too.

### 2. Folk media establishes direct rapport with the audience owing to its proximity with the community.

The direct form of address includes the advertiser as the first person and the consumer as the second person. In advertising copies involving address, the advertiser, i.e., the first person does not appear usually in the text.

Consider the following example.

keesavarttini...  
Kesavarthini..  
niiNTa aTarttiyaana kuuntalukkaan=a  
long thick hair- (dat)  
paramparai irakaciyam (Magazine)  
generation secret (Kesavarthini)

However, in certain instances, first person inclusive plural form of pronoun naam 'we' or its oblique forms may be used to indicate the involvement of both the advertiser and the consumer.

Consider the following example.

nam kan=avukaLaiyellaam nan=avaakkum  
our dreams-acc-all bring to reality-fut.rp  
nallatoor va'ki T.N.S.E.  
good-pro-one bank (Radio)  
(T.N.S.E. Bank)

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`T.N.S.E. bank is a good one which brings all our dreams to reality'

The style of discourse here refers to the choice between the formal and colloquial style which is true in Folk media also.

Consider the examples for purely formal style.

ungaLin paacap piNaippil  
your bond of affection-loc  
avar tiNaRaTTumee (Magazine)  
he soffocate-let-emp (Mark Jewellery)  
`let him suffocate in the bond of your affection'

This is true in folk literary dramas too.

## 7. COLLOQUIAL STYLE

The colloquial style, demarcated by phonological and morphological differences from the formal style, is found to be preferred mainly to make the advertisements realistic and simple.

Consider the following example.

beeS beeS romba nanna irukku (Television)  
Wah Wah much good-perf-pr. (Narasus coffee)  
`Wah this is very good'

Folk media are simple, but strong. Folk media appear to be effective and good for all time. One of the characteristics of folk media defined above by Crawford and Ronny Adhikary is used in the above example. A Brahmin Poojari (Brahmin priest) is appreciating his wife for giving him good filter coffee (Narasu's coffee), a south Indian household delicacy, signifying time, effort, and love that go into making coffee! And a Brahmin priest is supposed to be in a religiously sanctified and clean ("maDi") posture or state most of the time! The style used in the above example is colloquial and the advertisement shows a Brahmin Poojari whose words will be considered by all as true and holy, for all the times. So, the advertiser exploits this sentiment, which is religious for some upper castes, and folklore for others, for the above advertisement.

A few examples from magazines, Radio and TV are given below, in which folk elements are exploited.

ma`kaiyarai ma`kaLakaramaakkum ku`kumam  
women-acc make auspicious-fut.rp kumkum  
koopuram ku`kumam (Radio)  
Gopuram Kumkum (Gopuram Kumkum)  
`Gopuram (a brand name) kumkum is the one which makes women auspicious'.

puruSan nalla iruntattaanka puu nilaikum (Radio) husband  
be healthy-cond-emp flower remain-fut-3ns (Lion Dates) -  
addr(resp) `the flower, which is symbolic of married life, will remain only if the husband is healthy'

It is customary among traditional Hindu women to adorn their foreheads with Kumkum and wear flowers after marriage. The advertiser has used this folk custom for Kumkum on one occasion and on another occasion the advertiser utilizes the custom of wearing flowers.

cingam poola strength enakku (Television)  
Lion like strength me-dat (Lion Dates)  
`I have the strength of a lion.'

Lion is the King of Forest. This young man compares his strength with Lion and this the advertisement for the brand name Lion Dates.

kaNNa... kaiye vekkaadee (Television)  
Kannan- hand-acc dont-put-imp.net-s (Tastemea Milk)  
'Kannan, Don't touch'

Consider the above examples. A grandmother is advising her grand daughter not to touch the laddus which she has either prepared or kept aside to offer first to her deity. It is a custom that the things to be offered to a deity should not be touched (polluted by touch) before the commencement of pooja (rituals) by anybody. This pollution-free state is implicitly transferred to milk that is being advertised! It is untouched by anybody and so it is and must be pure!

Saarataas muhoortta pattup puTavaikaLukku  
aTirSTamaana iTam (Magazine)  
(Sharada Silk Show Room)

In the above example, the Sharada Silk Show Room is shown as a lucky place so that the girl who buys a sari for her wedding from the shop will be blessed by everyone and will get everything she desires in her married life!

In another magazine advertisement, NK Jewellers shows a picture of Gold Mangal Sutra (*taali*), which is put around the neck of the bride by the groom on the day of marriage to signify that a marriage is solemnized! This is a very powerful sign, because people believe that a mere act of "tying the three knots with this *taali*" makes a couple husband and wife, inseparable for life. Many kinds of jewels like rings, earrings, bangles, and necklaces are sold in a Jewel shop. But the mangal sutra that signifies a powerful sign, an element of religion, tradition, and folklore, has been chosen for their advertisement to attract people.

Until the 1960s, the works of creative writers in Tamil and the movies that depicted family life and Puranic stories, revolved around the sacredness of *taali*. Yet from this mythical belief it was only a small step to a folkloristic belief of love unfulfilled in this life being fulfilled in the life hereafter. For example, one of the undoubtedly great creative writers of modern Tamil fiction, Kalki, never made it possible for lovers who went against the social traditions, to get united in this life. However, his story about the ladylove of a thief, *KaLvanin Kaatali*, who could not get united with her lover because she was already married to an old man, abounds in suggestions that the love was being fulfilled in the life hereafter!

## 7. PROSODY AND ADVERTISING

Prosody refers to the versification of a statement. The aspects of prosody widely used in advertising language are alliteration, assonance, rhyme, rhythm and jingle. Rhyme is related to the use of an identical sound, letter or syllable at the end of adjacent words or line.

vantaan=ee Pothy's raaja vantaan=e  
came- came-  
tantaan=ee pala pala paricukaL tantaa n=ee (Television)  
gave- many many gifts gave (Pothy's Shop)  
'Pothy's Raja came and offered so many gifts'

Rhythm is formed by a harmonial succession of sounds contributing to the musical flow of language.

murukan= meTTal en= Raalee  
Murugan metal hear of-cond-euph  
mukam malarum ta n=n=aalee (Magazine)  
face blossom-fut-3ns on its own' (Murugan Metal Mart)  
'the moment one hears of Murugan metals his/her face will blossom on its own'

Both the examples have folk elements of rhyme and rhythm in them. Also in the first example it is shown that a man will come and change the old dresses of two girls into new by showing a magic wand. The Pothy's shop is giving some gifts along with the purchase of new clothes. They show it by using a folk element and also by using folk music.

## 8. CONCLUSION

There is no end to this interesting matrimony between business and folklore. Some advertisements certainly are unlawful matrimonial relations! Perhaps they fall under the category of common law man and woman relationship!

Will business ever court anything that is not profitable?

Our only hope is that this relationship between folklore and business advertising will help develop folklore themes and forms. Sometimes truth becomes a casualty, as for example, in the advertisement which seeks to sell a product that supposedly stops hair fall, helps weight reduction, and such other modern cravings, exploits the figures of angels! Heavenly help is thus assured!

Advertisers have found it profitable to use folk music, folk elements, and folk functions along with an appropriate choice of language in almost all the advertisements in the Magazines, Radio, and Television. Will Folklore, that sublime medium that survived all attacks on it by the elite cultures throughout Indian history, benefit by this one-sided love?

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adverts are here investigated as a global discourse worthy of critical investigation. In particular, the exploitation of the human body, in promotional discourses, is seen as having an important role in the construction of gendered and racial identity representation. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's ground-breaking volume, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996), the chapter does not aim, however, to present a complete and exhaustive account or theory of visual grammar. Inozemtseva N.V., "DISCOURSE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING ADVERTISING REALTOR ANNOUNCEMENT SMALL FORMAT TEXTS (ESARA SFDϕ)". *Meždunarodnyj naučno-issledovatel'skij žurnal (International Research Journal)*, (2013): . Wed. 04. Sep. 2013. Inozemtseva, N.V. (2013). Discourse characteristics of the english-speaking advertising realtor announcement small format texts (esara sft) [discourse characteristics of the english-speaking advertising realtor announcement small format texts (esara sfñ,)]. *Meždunarodnyj naučno-issledovatel'skij žurnal Advertising*, as no other professional discourse type, presupposes extensive use of expressive linguistic means specially designed for producing emotional effects on the addressee. This research... Advertising as specific discourse type: ontology and functional pragmatics. In *SGEM2018 Vienna Art Conference Proceedings of 5th International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts SGEM 2018*, [www.sgemvienna.org](http://www.sgemvienna.org) (Vol. 5, Issue 3.1, pp. 3-10). <https://doi.org/10.5593/sgemsocial2018h/31/s10.001>. The text in advertising discourse refers to linguistic forms and is separated from context for the purposes of analysis (Cook 2001: 4). Context on the other hand, includes components such as substance, paralanguage, co-text, participants, and the functions of advertisements. The choices concerning language in market-driven discourses, such as advertising, are rarely made without careful consideration, as Kelly-Holmes (2005: 8) claims. Consequently, language can have various functions in advertising, for instance informational, expressive and vocative ones. Plain Folks means using people from plain folks instead of people who have power or higher than others. In this campaign, the ads maker uses an image of average-looking women. The typical features of the advertising discourse on different levels were studied using the examples taken from English and German advertising. With the help of the classification suggested by John Algeo the most productive patterns of coining new words were singled out. In advertising English those are compounding, affixation, abbreviations and clippings; while German copywriters rely on affixation and borrowings. For years, Russians have failed to develop the ability to adapt to financial vulnerability – that is, to the risk of falling below the poverty line. This is associated with the fact that Russians are less satisfied with life and rate their well-being lower as well. With the prospect of falling poverty an ongoing problem, these indicators have not improved. 5 October 2020.