



Impact of bleaching syndrome: The inexorable predicament of dark skinned Indian women

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Abstract

Colorism or skin-color stratification is a relentless dilemma for 'colored' people- in India. Light-skinned people are seen as being highly esteemed over dark skinned people in areas such as: income, education, housing, and the marriage market. India's fixation with fair skin is well documented. A so-called whitening cream - Fair & Lovely cream was introduced by Unilever (1978), spawned by numerous whitening face cleansers, shower gels and even vaginal washes that claim to lighten the surrounding skin. According to a report by market researchers ACNielsen (2010), India's whitening-cream market was worth \$432m, and was growing at 18% per year. Indians reportedly consumed 233 tons of skin-whitening products in (2016), spending more money on them than on Coca-Cola. This paper aims to highlight the idiosyncrasies relating to the hype over fair skin and the inequalities shown by Indians to one another. Attempts would be made to highlight how governments and the community at large can outsmart the white-makeover industries in saving foreign exchange and most important of all uplift the self esteem of those affected by the paranoia of dark skin. Extensive evidence of discrimination based on skin color in criminal justice, business, labor market, housing, health care, media and politics is rampant worldwide thus the mindset of Indians is that having lighter skin tones is seen as preferable. A study by Shadi.com an Indian matrimonial site stated that between 2013 - 2016, 70% of the 300 women and men reported wanting a partner who had light skin. This colorism is what pushes so many Indians to lighten their skin, creating a phenomenon termed - bleaching syndrome - a policy of adapting a superior identity that reflects a deep-set conviction that fair skin is superior, more authoritative and very appealing. And it's not limited to India alone!

Keywords: colorism, skin-color, whitening cream, white make-over, bleaching syndrome, authoritative

Introduction

India, among the oldest civilizations of the world, did not discriminate on the basis of color of the skin. Indians, as we know of them today, are a conglomeration of different races and distinct cultures with many similarities that gradually formed a nation-state known as present-day India. Indians have varied degrees of color as well as facial features based on the geographical area to which they belong. For example, Indians from the northernmost region are fair skinned while Indians from the northeastern region are commonly known as having a yellow skin tone and facial features more akin to our Southeast Asian counterparts. Southern Indians, or those from the Dravidian's family tree, mostly have a darker skin tone. These examples show that physical environment has greatly shaped the physical features of Indians. Consequently, there was historically an acceptance of diversity in physical attributes, and beauty was not accorded on the basis of skin color. It is important to understand how and when skin tone or skin color became an important factor for acceptance in Indian society; therefore, a brief understanding of Indian society is vital.

The impetus for this paper and look at the media's role in perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes of women came from a conversation between the women in my family. My mother, sister and I sat down after my mom saw Aishwariya Rai, a fair skinned, blue-eyed actress in India advertising fairness creams in an Indian magazine. "How can a fair skinned woman advertise a cream that she will *never* use?"

my mother said indignantly. "It's just wrong." I must also say that writing this paper provoked a certain level of emotion within me. I felt angered at the way internalized racism plagues our communities and fuels divisions among Indians. I still hear comments from acquaintances like, "Gosh, she'd be so pretty if she weren't so dark," and "I'm so glad I'm naturally fair." It's an issue that requires honest conversation about our past, our perceptions of what it means to be "westernized" and the economy that we fuel in purchasing skin lightening products. I found that taking a long hard look at the impact of the media created a clearer picture of how women are objectified and denigrated by the patriarchal dominance.

In recent years, it has been argued, beauty standards in India have begun to change. In particular, the claim is that beauty standards have narrowed, with the requirements for ideal beauty becoming increasingly constricted. As a result, women in India have amplified their efforts to modify their appearances to fit the societal standards, leading to the growth of the cosmetics industry and the introduction into the Indian market of products and procedures designed to enhance appearance. The chart given below provides the central motivation for many people aspiring to look fairer thus leading to an escalating demand for skin color enhancement products.

Purpose of Research

This paper attempts to: (1) highlight the idiosyncrasies

relating to the hype over fair skin and the inequalities shown by Indians to one another Whether colorism was prevalent in ancient India (2) whether it is prevalent in Indian society now (3) how and when colorism found its roots in the Indian society (4) how deeply it influences the mass consciousness (5) and what are the reasons behind the prejudice and bias toward dark skin?

Research Gaps

There is a lack of data and research material with respect to the above-mentioned issue.

Methods

Present study is exclusively based on secondary sources only. The data for study collected from various sources such as journals, reports, government reports and websites.



Fig 1

Dark Is Still Not Lovely In India

Historically, fairness has been an indicator of social status across many societies and. India is no exception especially after been invaded firstly by the thieving moghuls and then later by the caniving British. The economically poorer classes, the peasants and labourers would spend the large part of the days working outside in the sun and thus have a darker complexion in general than the richer classes and nobles. Most Indians show apparent ignorance about the practice of ruling out and prejudice based on the skin tone of a person although it is a deep-rooted problematic practice embraced by both the oppressor and the victim. Ancient India didn't discriminate on the basis of color. Presence and acceptance of beauty, valor and status irrespective of the skin color was time and time again established through the ancient texts. Dark color didn't attach a stigma and was used as a describing feature of a population or person, many times as an attribute of beauty itself unlike the modern times. Beauty ideals are now dictated by the media, which over glorifies lighter skinned models—both male and female—who are worshipped by the masses as 'gods', chosen to promote almost all products over darker skinned models. Television stars, and actors readily promote "fairness" products.

Over 90% of women in India cite skin lightening as a high need area. Shah Rukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Sonam Kapoor, John Abraham, Dia Mirza, Deepika Padukone, Katrina Kaif, Hrithik Roshan, Shahid Kapoor, Priyanka Chopra, Saif Ali Khan, Vidya Balan, Preity Zinta, Sidharth Malhotra, Kareena Kapoor— these celebrities have two striking things in common:

1. They have millions of fans looking up to them.
2. They have all had the dubious honour of endorsing a skin lightening product.

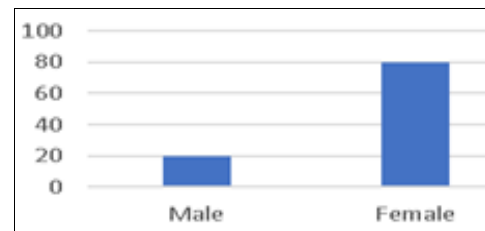


Fig 2: Gender preference to Fairness Cream (%)

Table 1: Gender wise perception of Fair cream users

Gender	Percentage
Male	20
Female	80
Total	100

Interpretation

It has been estimated that males constitute 20% of the total sales for fairness creams in India". Over 90% of females in India cite skin lightening as a high-need area.

Sometime back, 'Dove' made headlines when it aired a deeply problematic (and racist) ad in India. It created enough of an uproar for Dove to come forward and issue an apology – but it's not the first time Dove has come under fire. Many people were deeply upset. Some were furious. Meanwhile, around the same time, there were speculations that the cosmetic giant Anastasia Beverly-Hills may have lightened the skin tone of one of its black models in promoting their latest product to such an extent that the same lip colour looked like a wildly different shade on the lighter-skinned models. In an increasingly globalised world, fair skin has become one of the beauty ideals we are made to aspire to.

In 1978, Fair and Lovely was launched by Unilever in India. The market for fairness creams, bleaches and washes is huge and continues to grow exponentially each year. Indians spend more on skin lightening products than on Coca-Cola. "Let's face the truth. Fair skin is a ticket to a happy matrimony," You're 'lovely' if you're fair and if you're not — "become fairer in just four weeks!". Strangely, most of the advertising billboards have very fair to white skinned foreign models—even for traditionally Indian products like antique jewelry, saris, and other traditional clothing. Market size for "fairness" cream and lotion in India is estimated to be approximately 450 million USD.



Fig 3

The market growth rate for "fairness" products ranges between 15 to 20% on a year-to-year basis. The leading players in the market include Hindustan Lever Ltd. (HLL's)

‘Fair & Lovely’ with 76%] of the market share and Cavin Kare’s ‘Fairever’ with 15% of the market share.”

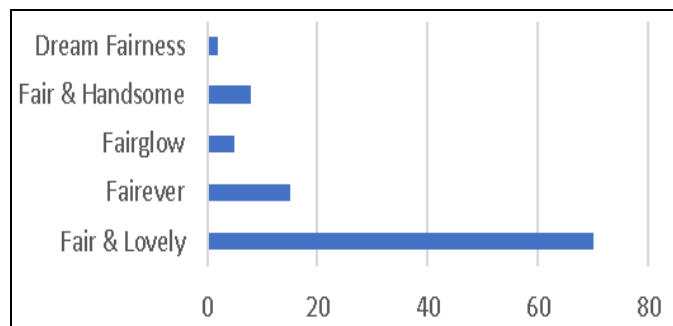


Fig 4: Brand perception on Fairness Cream

Table 2: Brand perception on Fairness Cream

Brand	Firm	Percentage
Fair & Lovely	HUL	76
Fairever	Cavin Kare	15
Fairglow	Godrej	3
Fair & Handsome	Emami	5
Dream Fairness	Ponds	1
Total		100

Interpretation

Fair and Lovely face cream dominates Indian television screen which is why many women (76%) prefers the product offered by Hindustan Unilever.

This paper hopes to showcase that there is a clear skin color prejudice irrespective of class or caste. Lighter skin makes acceptance more likely, and even more so for women. Unfortunately, no one wants to acknowledge the issue, speak about it openly, or accept it publicly. One TV commercial aired in India (often referred to as the Air Hostess advertisement) “showed a young, dark-skinned girl’s father lamenting he had no son to provide for him, as his daughter’s salary was not high enough – the suggestion being that she could not get a better job or get married because of her dark skin. The girl then uses the cream [Fair & Lovely], becomes fairer, and gets a better-paid job as an air hostess – and makes her father happy” (BBC News, 2003). Only recently was there the first ever campaign, “Dark is Beautiful,” which was endorsed by Bollywood actress and a dark, dusky skinned beauty - Nandita Das and her slogan, “Stay Unfair Stay Beautiful.”

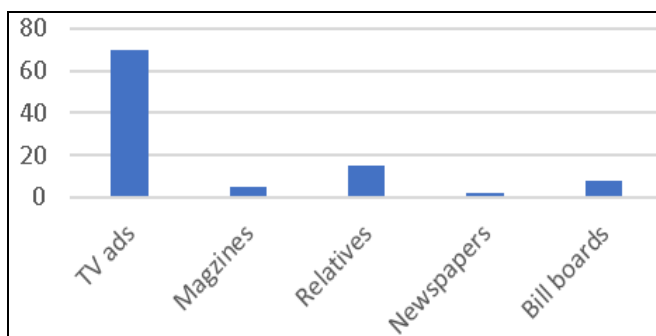


Fig 5: Awareness of Fairness Cream

Table 3: Awareness of Fairness Cream

Source	Percentage
TV ads	70
Magzines	5
Relatives	15
Newspapers	2
Bill boards	8
Total	100

Elsewhere in Asia Bangladesh

A group of academicians, journalists, and NGO workers in Bangladesh have expressed concern about the harmful effects of fairness cream advertising, in general, and Fair & Lovely, in particular. This forum has focused their efforts on getting advertisements for whitening creams, at least the discriminatory ones, off the air.



Fig 6

Malaysia

In a Fair & Lovely advertisement aired in Malaysia, a train attendant fails to catch the attention of her love interest, a businessman who buys a ticket from her every day, until she appears one day with fairer skin as a result of using Fair & Lovely. In another advertisement, an attractive college student can’t get a second glance from a boy at the next desk. “She’s pretty,” he says to himself, “but...” After using the skin lightening cream, the woman re-appears, brightly lit and looking several shades paler. The boy exclaims, “Why didn’t I notice her before?” Even within Asia though, India’s obsession for ‘lighter skin’ is equally matched or outdone by its closest neighbors.

Europe

The European society too have not been able to escape the temptation to the fair skin syndrome. Famous dramatist Shakespeare, has made numerous references to preference to a more fairer skin. Long before Shakespeare, and at least until the Victorian era, "fair" was equated with "beauty" in English society. Shakespeare does however redeem himself in his "Dark Lady" sonnets. Sample this:

*In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slandered with a bastard shame:
For since each hand hath put on Nature's power,
Fairing the foul with Art's false borrowed face,
Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.*

*Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem
At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
Sland'ring creation with a false esteem:
Yet so they mourn becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says beauty should look so.*

Needless to say, the colonial hangover likely does not help things in India. In fact, colonialism even likely inspired increased colorism across Europe, as the darker skinned people they conquered were often held to be uncivilized and uneducated by their European colonizers.

United States

Standards of beauty are not just an academic issue: they are affected by culture, and have an effect on the people measured against them. In America, for example, the desire to be tan leads many women to go to indoor tanning salons that increase their risk of skin cancer. Meanwhile, some sources argue that this ideal of tan skin has arisen from its association with an upper class lifestyle and having enough leisure time to leave the indoor office and relax in the warmth of the sun.

Review of the Literature

(Hughes and Hertel, 1990)^[15]; (Hunter, 1990)^[17] identified discrimination based on skin color, also known as colorism or shadeism, a form of prejudice or discrimination in which people are treated differently based on the social meanings attached to skin color. It was mistakenly thought by Western scholars that Hindu goddess Kali represents demonic powers and ugliness and, as a dark skinned goddess (whose name translates to "she who is black"), is therefore a demonstration of Indian colorism. This however was later understood to not be true, as Kali is actually traditionally viewed positively, seen as a symbol of sexuality, motherly love, violence, and shakti. Lord Ram and Krishna and Shiva have been shown to have dark colored skin and worshipped by sanatani's world over without prejudice.

(Franklin, 2000)^[12] observed that since the upper castes were not involved in tedious labor and weren't as exposed to the sun as the lower castes, they used to stay indoors and thus possessed lighter brown skin. The lower castes on the other hand had higher melanin concentration in their skin cells due to continued exposure to sun from working in agricultural fields and outdoors. The idea that higher castes have lighter skin, alongside the issue of casteism, helped fuel colorism in India. Colorism in India has also been fueled due to the events under British colonial rule, where British officials consistently demeaned dark-skinned Indians and favored light-skinned Indians for jobs over dark-skinned Indians. As a result of hundreds of years of British colonial influence, Indian society today still portray remnants of the exacerbated colorism tactics instilled in Indian society by the British. Indians prefer their matrimonial partners to be light-skinned. The deep-rooted color bias has ensured that there is extensive discrimination in the labor market, as people with light skin are generally preferred. (Singh, 2000)^[25], noted in the state of Maharashtra a group of young tribal girls trained to be flight crew through a government scholarship program that aimed to empower women. The majority of girls were denied

employment due to their darker skin-tone. A few of those women landed jobs, but only as out-of-sight ground crew.

(Hunter, 1990)^[17] Pointed colorism as a persistent problem for people of color in the USA. Colorism, or skin color stratification, is a process that privileges light-skinned people of color over dark in areas such as income, education, housing, and the marriage market. This essay describes the experiences of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans with regard to skin color. Research demonstrates that light-skinned people have clear advantages in these areas, even when controlling for other background variables. However, dark-skinned people of color are typically regarded as more ethnically authentic or legitimate than light-skinned people. Colorism is directly related to the larger system of racism in the USA and around the world. The color complex is also exported around the globe, in part through US media images, and helps to sustain the multibillion-dollar skin bleaching and cosmetic surgery industries. India has a 3,000-year-old social hierarchal system rooted in the "varna-jāti" structure. *Jāti*, or caste system, is a socioreligious organization prescribing restricted commensality, endogamy, practices of untouchability, and other regressive practices.

Social life is marked by hierarchal practices and other dogmatic beliefs operated through exercising strict control over women and her sexuality. In addition, the cultural complex of beauty, femininity, chastity, and social status is based on skin color and caste location. Lighter skin is considered superior, whereas dark-skinned is rendered as disability, ugly, and inferior. Skin color in thus many ways is marker of social status, inferiority intrinsic to dark skin color, and superiority associated with whiteness/lighter skin shades. Colorism is the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts (Perry, 2005)^[23]. Colorism is concerned with actual skin tone, as opposed to racial or ethnic identity. This is an important distinction because race is a social concept, not significantly tied to biology (Hirschman, 2004)^[14]. Lighter-skinned people of color enjoy substantial privileges that are still unattainable to their darker-skinned brothers and sisters. In fact, light-skinned people earn more money, complete more years of schooling, live in better neighborhoods, and marry higher-status people than darker-skinned people of the same race or ethnicity (Arce, 1987; Espino and Franz, 2002; Hill, 2000; Hughes and Hertel, 1990; Hunter, 1990; Keith and Herring, 1991; Rondilla and Spickard, 2007)^[3, 10, 13, 15, 18, 17, 24].

How does colorism operate? Systems of racial discrimination operate on at least two levels: race and color. The first system of discrimination is the level of racial category, (i.e. black, Asian, Latino, etc.). Regardless of physical appearance, African Americans of all skin tones are subject to certain kinds of discrimination, denigration, and second-class citizenship, simply because they are African American. Racism in this form is systemic and has both ideological and material consequences (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Feagson, 2000)^[4, 11]. Colorism is actually practiced by whites and people of color alike. Given the opportunity, many people will hire a light-skinned person before a dark-skinned person of the same race (Espino and Franz, 2002; Hill, 2000; Hughes and Hertel, 1990; Mason, 2004; Telles and Murguía, 1990)^[10, 13, 15, 21, 26] or choose to marry a lighter-skinned woman rather than a

darker-skinned woman (Hunter, 1990; Rondilla and Spickard, 2007) ^[17, 24]. Many people are unaware of their preferences for lighter skin because that dominant aesthetic is so deeply ingrained in our culture. In the USA, for example, we are bombarded with images of white and light skin and Anglo facial features. White beauty is the standard and the ideal (Kilbourne, 1999) ^[19]. The maintenance of white supremacy (aesthetic, ideological, and material) is predicated on the notion that dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority. White skin, and, thus, whiteness itself, is defined by the opposite: civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority. These contrasting definitions are the foundation for colorism. (Rondilla and Spickard, 2007) ^[24].

In many former European colonies, there remains an overt legacy of Eurocentrism and white racism in the culture (Memmi, 1965) ^[22]. Whites or light-skinned elites continue to hold powerful positions in the economy, government, and educational sectors. Embedded in the leftover colonial structure is a strong and enduring value of white aesthetics (e.g. light hair, straight hair, light eyes, narrow noses, and light skin). This is evident in Latin American popular culture, for example, in the *telenovelas*, where almost all of the actors look white, unless they are the maids and are then light brown. Movie stars and popular singers in the Philippines are often *mestizos*, half white, or extremely light-skinned with round eyes (Choy, 2005) ^[8]. African American celebrities are typically light-skinned with Anglo features (Milkie, 1999). They reinforce a beauty ideal based on white bodies (Kilbourne, 1999) ^[19].

Colorism is not just relevant to media images, however. A rising number of discrimination cases based on skin tone have found their way to the courts. In 2002, the EEOC sued the owners of a Mexican restaurant in San Antonio, Texas, for color-based discrimination. A white manager at the restaurant claimed that the owners directed him to hire only light-skinned staff to work in the dining room. The EEOC won the case and the restaurant was forced to pay \$100,000 in fine. In 2003, a dark-skinned African American won \$40,000 from a national restaurant chain for color-based discrimination from a fellow black employee. The plaintiff argued that he suffered constant taunting and color-based epithets about his dark skin from lighter-skinned African American coworkers (Valbrun, 2003) ^[27]. These are just two examples of how colorism affects people of color on a daily basis. Most people of color will not end up in court over color bias, but nearly all people of color have experienced or witnessed unfair treatment of others based on skin tone.

The relationship between skin color and perceptions of attractiveness may be particularly important for women on the job (Hunter, 1990) ^[17]. Many feminist scholars have argued that beauty matters for women in much the same way that 'brains' matter for men. Of course, women's job-related skills are crucial for a successful career, but cultural critic Naomi (Kilbourne, 1999) ^[19] has suggested that 'beauty' has become an additional, unspoken job requirement for women in many professions, even when physical attractiveness is irrelevant for job performance. If this is the case, then in 'front office appearance jobs', like restaurant hostess or office receptionist, beauty, and therefore skin color, must matter even more.

Skin colour and ethnic identity

The economic and social advantages of light skin are clear. In societies where resources are divided by race and color, light-skinned people get a disproportionate amount of the benefits. However, light skin may be viewed as a disadvantage with regard to ethnic legitimacy or authenticity. In many ethnic communities, people view darker-skin tones as more ethnically authentic. For example, light-skinned and biracial people often report feeling left out or pushed out of co-ethnic groups. They report other people's perceptions of their racial identity as a common source of conflict or discomfort (Brnsma, 2001) ^[5].

It is tempting to characterize the problem of colorism as equally difficult for both light-skinned people and dark. Dark-skinned people lack the social and economic capital that light skin provides, and are therefore disadvantaged in education, employment, and housing (Albu, 2000; Keith and Herring, 1991) ^[2, 18]. Additionally, dark skin is generally not regarded as beautiful, so dark-skinned women often lose out in the dating and marriage markets (Hunter, 1990) ^[17]. On the other side, light-skinned men and women are typically not regarded as legitimate members of their ethnic communities. They may be excluded from, or made to feel unwelcome in, community events and organizations (Hunter, 2005). At first glance, it may seem that there are equal advantages and disadvantages to both sides of the color line. Upon closer examination, this proves to be untrue. Although exclusion from some community organizations may be uncomfortable psychologically or emotionally for light-skinned people of color, it rarely has significant material effects. More specifically, emotional turmoil about ethnic identity does not have significant economic consequences.

However, the systematic discrimination against dark-skinned people of color in the labor market, educational institutions, and marriage market create marked economic disadvantages (Mason, 2004) ^[21]. Without minimizing the psychological trauma of exclusion from ethnic communities, it is important to clarify that the disadvantages of dark skin still far outweigh the disadvantages of light. When compared in this way, it is not simply a case of 'the grass is always greener on the other side'. Although there are downsides to both ends of the color spectrum, the penalties are more common and more severe for dark skin than for light. Although colorism affects both men and women, women experience discrimination based on skin tone in particular ways. Skin tone is an important characteristic in defining beauty and beauty is an important resource for women (Hunter, 1998). Beauty provides women with status that can lead to advances in employment, education, and even the marriage market (Hunter 2005). Light skin color, as an indicator of beauty, can operate as a form of social capital for women (Hunter 2002). This social capital can be transformed into other forms of capital and used to gain status in jobs, housing, schools, and social networks. Social networks can increase capital in a wide variety of ways, and one of the most important is through one's spouse.

Women and men of color have ever-increasing opportunities to alter their bodies toward whiteness. They can purchase lighter-colored contact lenses for their eyes; they can straighten kinky or curly hair; they can have cosmetic surgeries on their lips, noses, or eyes. But one of the oldest

traditions of this sort is skin bleaching. Skin-bleaching creams go by many names: skin lighteners, skin whiteners, skin-toning creams, skin evening creams, skin-fading gels, etc. Essentially, they are creams regularly applied to the face or body that purport to ‘lighten’, ‘brighten’, or ‘whiten’ the skin. They are marketed as beauty products available to women to increase their beauty, by increasing their whiteness. The skin bleaching industry is thriving around the globe, particularly in Third World, postcolonial countries (Milkie, 1999). Skin lighteners are commonly used in places including Mexico, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Jamaica, the Philippines, Japan, India, Tanzania, Senegal, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, and less so, but also USA (Charles, 2003; Chisholm, 2002; Easton, 1998; Kvalesski, 1999) [6, 9, 20].

Whiteness is such an important commodity that many women overlook what they perceive to be minor risks in order to attain for themselves or their children the benefits of light skin. Skin whiteners are increasingly used by men, as well. India's best-selling ‘Fair and Lovely’ lightening soaps and creams launched a new line for men in 2005, appropriately branded, ‘Fair and Handsome’ (Perry, 2005) [23]. Skin color continues to shape our lives in powerful ways in the USA and around the globe. The cultural messages that give meaning and value to different skin tones are both deeply historical and actively contemporary. People of color with dark skin tones continue to pay a price for their dark color, and the light skinned continue to benefit from their association with whiteness. Only a slow dismantling of the larger system of white racism, in the USA and around the globe, will initiate a change in the color hierarchy it has created. But this is not to say it will be easy. Talking about colorism and internalized racism can be challenging

In the 20th century there has been a shift towards a preference for darker, tanned skin in white communities. The beginning of this change has been attributed to Frenchwoman Coco Chanel making tanned skin seem fashionable, luxurious and healthy in Paris in the 1920s. Tanned skin has become associated with the increased leisure time and sportiness of wealth and social status while pale skin is associated with indoor office work. A few studies have found tanned skin is regarded as both more attractive and healthier than pale or very dark skin, and there is a direct correlation between the degree of tanning and perceived attractiveness especially in young women

Issues

Sadly, light skin is not just promoted by the “fairness” product market: almost 90% of all advertisements show lighter skinned models. Consequently, lighter skin is depicted as the parameter of exquisiteness by the media. Fairness is not just desired by women who can resort to Unilever’s “*Fair and Lovely*” cream, but also by men who can now use Emami’s “*Fair and Handsome*” cream, which comes with a skin tone measuring scale to check results, endorsed by superstars Shahrukh Khan, Garnier Men, and by Bollywood’s John Abraham. Indian markets are flooded with whiteness creams and bleaching products: “Garnier White Complete,” “Ponds White Beauty,” “Natural Glow Fairness Cream by Himalayas,” “Olay Natural White,” “L’oreal White Perfect,” and Nivea Day care fairness cream. Even Vaseline for Men

shows Shahid Kapoor, a famous Bollywood hero, transformed from darker skin to relatively lighter skin.

A famous Bollywood actress Kajol, who was earlier seen endorsing Olay cream, received a lot of condemnation when she was shown in the advertisement with a much lighter skin tone than her natural skin color. That advertisement was stopped shortly thereafter, but Kajol, who was among the few darker skinned actresses in the Indian movie industry, must have been personally influenced by her lighter appearance in the advertisement because her skin now appears at least six to seven shades lighter. Skin whitening creams and bleaches in the Indian market do not stop at lightening facial or body color—some products are transformative turning brown colored vaginas and nipples lighter and pink.

There are few actors or actresses in the Indian movie industry who have dark skin tone, which means most of the movies, television, and print advertisement portray fairer skinned models and actors. This is ironic because India’s population is largely comprised of darker skinned people. The villains and the negative characters in the movie industry; however, are brown colored men fighting the fair skinned heroes. The media’s obsession with using fair skinned images greatly influences the general population to look like these lighter skinned models, and therefore use every means to “become beautiful” by using fairness products. The problem, however, is that the general population now identifies beauty based on standards that are set by media moguls and industrialists who dictate market forces and have vested interest in creating such ideologies. In the eighties and nineties, India’s multi-million dollar “fairness” product advertisements concentrate on “becom[ing] fair [and] becom[ing] beautiful;” today, “fairness” products resell this mantra with “become fair and become empowered,” which often shows fair girls find more success in jobs and careers.

Indians feel affectionate for fair skin. No one directly wants to talk about it but the love is so apparent that many actions reflect it. Matrimonial advertisements of all castes and religion in national newspapers can provide a great insight into the one constant attribute needed in a potential partner—fair skin.



Fig 7

Though many Indians still feign lack of knowledge about social discrimination based on skin colour, the country’s fixation with whiteness can also be violent. In recent years, the fear of black and brown skin has also spurred harassment and attacks on African students living in India.

Why do Indians so hate their own colour?

Throughout medieval and modern history, the Indian subcontinent has been on the radar of various European

settlers and traders, including, from the 15th to 17th centuries, the Portuguese, Dutch, and French. The subcontinent was invaded and partly ruled by the Mughals in the 16th century, and colonised by the British from the 17th century onwards until independence in 1947. All these foreign “visitors” were of relatively fair complexion, and many claimed to be superior. Being subject to a succession of white(ish) overlords has long associated light skin with power, status, and desirability among Indians. Today, the contempt for brown skin is embraced by both the ruling class and lower castes, and reinforced daily by beauty magazine covers that feature almost exclusively Caucasian, often foreign, models. It’s been the dark man’s burden in this majority-non-white nation to desire a westernised concept of beauty, and post-colonial activism has not been able to change this.

Results and Implications

Colorism in the western countries emerged with the belief of alleged attached superiority of white skin of European race who were the power holder for a very long time as against the subverted class with a darker skin, who were taken as slaves. India however consists of varied color tones of its subjects ranging from very dark to very fair skin owing to the very different climatic and geographic conditions. Again, in Indian scenario, power was determined by more than just skin color-factors like caste and class played vital role in determining the acceptability of a person. See (Charles, 2003) [6]. Still, in the last 4 - 5 decades it clearly evident that fair color of the skin is becoming more and more acceptable. The Findings revealed that India's obsession with fair skin is well documented.



Fig 8

In 1978, Unilever launched Fair & Lovely cream, which has subsequently spawned numerous whitening face cleansers, shower gels and even vaginal washes that claim to lighten the surrounding skin. In 2010, India's whitening-cream market was worth \$432m, according to a report by market researchers ACNielsen, and was growing at 18% per year. Last year, Indians reportedly consumed 233 tonnes of skin-whitening products, spending more money on them than on Coca-Cola. Cricket players and Bollywood stars regularly endorse these products. But now the film star Nandita Das has taken a stance against the craze and given her support to the Dark is Beautiful campaign which challenges the belief that success and beauty are determined by skin colour. "I want people to be comfortable in their own skin and realise that there is more to life than skin colour," she says, adding that an Indian paper had written "about my support for the campaign and then lightened the photo of me that went alongside it". While she

agrees that there is a long history behind the obsession with skin colour, owing to caste and culture, she thinks the current causes should be targeted first. "Indians are very racist. It's deeply ingrained. But there is so much pressure by peer groups, magazines, billboards and TV adverts that perpetuate this idea that fair is the ideal," she says. Das has often faced directors and makeup artists trying to lighten her when she plays the role of an educated, upper-class woman. "They always say to me: 'Don't worry, we will lighten you, we're really good at it,' as a reassurance. It's perpetuating a stereotype that only fair-skinned women can be educated and successful."

In 2005, the cosmetics company Emami launched *Fair & Handsome* for men, with an ad featuring the Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan tossing a tube of whitening cream to a hopeful young fan, which the Dark is Beautiful campaign is seeking to have withdrawn. "Shah Rukh Khan is saying that to be successful you have to be fair," says Das. "Don't these people have any kind of conscience?"

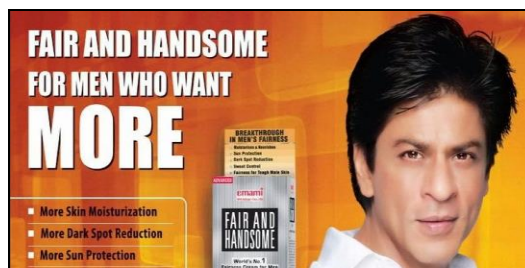


Fig 9

You can't be naive; you know what kind of impact you have and yet you send out the message that says: 'Forget about working hard, it's about skin colour.' The brand Clean and Dry took bleaching to new levels in 2012, when it began heavily advertising for a new wash to lighten the vagina. This time, women had had enough. In 2013, the activist group Women of Worth launched their Dark is Beautiful campaign, which was endorsed by the Indian theatre actress Nandita Das. With other feminist groups, the women compelled the Advertising Standards Council of India to issue guidelines in 2014 stating that “ads should not reinforce negative social stereotyping on the basis of skin colour” or “portray people with darker skin (as)...inferior, or unsuccessful in any aspect of life particularly in relation to being attractive to the opposite sex”. This guidance is in keeping with the Indian Constitution, which provides for equality for all (article 14) and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth (article 15). Sadly, light skin is not just promoted by the “fairness” product market: almost 90% of all advertisements show lighter skinned models. Consequently, lighter skin is depicted as the parameter of beauty by the media. Fairness is not just desired by women who can resort to Unilever’s “Fair and Lovely” cream, but also by men who can now use Emami’s “Fair and Handsome” cream, which comes with a skin tone measuring scale to check results, endorsed by superstars Shahrukh Khan, Garnier Men, and by Bollywood’s John Abraham. Indian markets are flooded with whiteness creams and bleaching products: “Garnier White Complete,” “Ponds White Beauty,” “Natural

Glow Fairness Cream by Himalayas,” “Olay Natural White,” “L’oreal White Perfect,” and Nivea Day care fairness cream. Even Vaseline for Men shows Shahid Kapoor, a famous Bollywood hero, transformed from darker skin to relatively lighter skin.

Unfortunately, the law can do little to stop the subtler forms of racism and bigotry present in Indian society. And, to date, that vagina bleaching product is still on the market. The “bleaching syndrome” goes far beyond skin colour, with Indian women also questioning their hair texture and colour, speech, marital choices, and dress style, raising real concerns about female self-esteem. This colourism is what pushes so many Indians to lighten their skin, creating a phenomenon termed “bleaching syndrome”. Bleaching syndrome is not a superficial fashion, it’s a strategy of assimilating a superior identity that reflects a deep-set belief that fair skin is better, more powerful, prettier.

An inventive and growing market of creams and salves has cropped up to fill this demand, which now pulls in over US\$400 million annually. Some of the most widely-sold products include Fem, Lotus, Fair and Lovely, and its gendered-equivalent Fair and Handsome. Most of these appealingly named creams are in fact a dangerous cocktail of steroids, hydroquinone, and tretinoin, the long-term use of which can lead to health concerns like permanent pigmentation, skin cancer, liver damage, and mercury poisoning, among other things. The obsession with fair skin is being called the ‘Snow White Syndrome’ in India where the market for fairness and so-called whitening creams are far larger to those of beverage sales such as Coca Cola and tea. Countless firms all dealing with fairness creams, lotions, splash on are vying to capture the huge slice of the market which grows ten fold each year. You are looking at a multi billion dollar industry which is bound never to go out of business and keep their shareholders happy financially off thanks to the high standards of beauty imposed on young girls and women which is entirely built on their insecurities about the size, shape and color of their bodies. 9/10 women and about 7/10 men in India very strongly believe that due to their fair skin alone gives them an added advantage over others in terms of education, approvals in business start up, success at interviews, being chosen as leaders, and very much marriage material in the Indian society. In North India, about (5%) of men are largely comfortable with skin color and appearance, whilst in Southern India, where 98% men have dark to very dark skin color, these are the fervent purchasers of whitening creams. The Indian cosmetic market is humungous at a rate of nearly 20% a year and the market is worth an estimated \$500m USD or Rs32,500m, which surpasses the amount spent on education.

Conclusion

One can understand the extent to which skin color matters in India. Such issues are not given their due importance till date, and hardly any constructive dialogue has taken place on the same. Ironically, when the highest law making body of the Country knows about discrimination on the basis of skin color, why is there no law framed to regulate such discriminatory practices with more than 67 years of independence? Colorism forms a formidable form of

discrimination but it is hardly raised. A soul shaking rape forces the whole nation to do a candle march and the loud voices in protest over the rape was not easily silenced, yet we all tend to accept each others attitudes and beliefs and behaviour regarding our skin color whether its fair and lovely or dark and not so lovely. This conscious attempt by the system in power to make the deeply embedded problem look oblivious is a sad reality and putting the attention away from asking the woman question. The ideal of beauty that has been ingrained in the mind of a common man through generations of colonization has been deepened through the fair skinned images all around via the growth of media and popular culture. This same ideal of beauty is now influencing and shaping the behavioral practices and preferences. It is only regrettable that a country boasting of its cultural and geographic diversity irrespective of the same chooses a similar ideal when it comes to skin color.

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