

## SKIN WHITENING CULTURE IN POSTCOLONIAL ERA

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### ABSTRACT

*Light Skin Dark skin' prejudice, when people discriminate against each other on the basis of the color of the skin. This attitude towards skin whitening has a prominent base on a racial hierarchy, they fuel in intolerance and causing serious social harm. A country like India has both a colonial and a caste legacy which is fixed by other powerful resources like media and advertising that at the top of society have fair skin. Skin color bias affects people psychologically. Young people got complexes which don't let them flourish in an ultimate personality. Despite the negative side effects and potential dangers, all of us are in search of a product which can give promising results for a fairer skin. In spite of awareness it can be witnessed that postcolonial countries are still not free from this complex of white complexion.*

### I INTRODUCTION

This color differences is a big legacy of post colonialism. People from this world admire the fair complexion and slowly with the involvement and impact of their cultures, this part became obsessed for white color. The powerful countries who had acquired the wealth of the colonies did not want to remove this new form slavery of white complexion. This attitude embedded so deeply in the psyche of post-colonial society that this has become a permanent belief of social life that humans were judged on the basis of color rather than their internal qualities and traits. The color of the flesh became the base of their identity. Slowly with the spread of the media and advertisement, this skin whitening culture spread more rapidly and deeply. Post-Colonial era was a completely materialistic and consumerism. Skin whitening became bigger business.

We all can't deny that at some point of life, we all want to be fair and beautiful. Even a smallest scar or freckle make us worried and we don't let any effort to make our face recover. Earlier it was thought to be very natural feminine desire, but with the passage of time we can see the strength equally given importance by male also. "White skin" has emerged as a central desideratum of consumer culture in affluent Asia. Not only does skin lightness affect perceptions of a woman's beauty, it also affects her marital prospects, job prospects, social status, and earning potential. The beauty ideal of white skin in Asia predates colonialism and the introduction of Western notions of beauty. Contemporary meanings of white skin combine Western mass-mediated ideologies and traditional Asian

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cultural values. The popularity of Caucasian and Eurasian models reflects the postcolonial structure of commoditization and consumerism and is still influenced by a colonial past. Western-centrism and cultural hegemony interact with Asian ideologies like Confucianism in strengthening the ideal of whiteness.

“Whiteness” remains an important element in contemporary postcolonial Asian understandings of beauty and has become a commodity in the marketplace. Skin lightening products are popular not only in Asian cultures, but in other non-white cultures as well. Fueled by increasing Asian wealth and growing consumer cultures, skin whitening and lightening products have recorded dramatic growth in Asia during the past several decades. Mass media and the fashion industry play important roles in reinforcing the desire for white skin. The strong preferences for light complexions observed among Indian women. ‘White complexion’ has been considered trendy and desirable in contemporary Japan. This phenomenon should not be understood simply as a reflection of administration for the west, or as an expression of traditional value of female beauty in India. Rather, the skin of people are recognized and expressed as a dichotomy of ‘white’ and ‘black’, which is linked to further dichotomy of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

## II HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the colonial era, and arguably before and after as well, rather than a homogenizing blending of skin color, there has instead been an attempt to distinguish the dark Other as “primitive” and inferior, thereby supporting the mission of the light skinned colonialist to conquer and control the natives of Africa, the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and Polynesia. A part of this project has entailed equating dark skin color with dirt, filth, and defilement of Africa, the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and Polynesia. A part of this project has entailed equating dark skin color with dirt, filth, and defilement. Place based anthropologist research of the late nineteenth century formed the foundation of early cultural geography. This is Environmental- the idea of a culture. Further, adherent of this approach argued that certain cultures were intrinsically superior to other cultures. European imperialism was the result of the natural superiority of its environment and its people.

Differences in skin color are not only perceived as marking physical differences between and among groups of people, but also to mark social and cultural distinctions in terms of racial and historical background. Classism and racism develop socially rather than biologically, but markers may be artificially coded in terms of differences in skin colors. In color-ranking societies like America, “double-consciousness” and a dual perspective were common social phenomena in inter-ethnic interactions. The “light at the top” phenomenon spread over non-white cultures. Those with light skin and Caucasian looking features have also enjoyed more respect in their communities. Euro-centric ideology took root in many cultures with the rise of colonialism in the eighteenth century and with the spread of mass media and consumer goods in the twentieth century. White males occupied the top of the social hierarchy while non-white females, especially black females, were at the bottom. People from non-white cultures, like African Americans, “bleached” themselves in an attempt to blend in the dominant society.

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Race and ethnicity become the signs that lead to the assignment of positions in the overall system of exploitation. Mass media and marketers have aided and abetted this phenomenon by portraying distinctions between races and ethnic groups. Hollywood movies and mass media in the West frequently portray darker skin people as lower class, dirty, and evil, while white or light skin people are depicted as morally purer, better educated, more intelligent, and cleaner. Even Spike Lee's 1988 film *School Daze* emphasizes this prejudice. Dark skin continues to be associated with unpleasantness, dirt, crime, and disruption of society as well as lower social status, while light or white skin is associated with purity and higher social class. This social stratification process exists in non-western cultures as well. Dark skinned people in Japan are perceived as lower class (or farmers) since they work under the sun while light skinned people are more likely to have been sheltered indoors rather than working outside.

According to Lipchitz, The power of whiteness depended not only on white hegemony over separate racialized groups, but also on manipulating racial outsiders to fight against one another, to compete with each other for white approval, and to seek the rewards and privileges of whiteness for themselves at the expense—literally—of other racialized populations. Stereotypes among whites and non-whites spread from the inter-cultural arena to intra-cultural contexts. “Civilized White” and “Barbarous Black” ideologies became internalized in non-white cultures. Light and fair skin tone become the desired skin tone and was perceived as “sign” of prestige within the non-white cultures on each of the worlds’ continents.

### III FACTORS RESPONSIBLE

It is apparent the multi-billion dollar cosmetics industry is throwing its weight behind advertising and promotion of skin-lightening products in Asia, its fastest growing market. Many consumers buy into the hype and promise of glamour without paying much attention to the small print. Advertisements for skin-related products are too much responsible for exaggerating this analysis. As advertising is one of the important archival records for storing cultural images and texts, we can examine how brands project ideologies and create or reinforce new standards via their images and messages. The beauty business in the Asia-Pacific region is estimated to be worth an enormous US\$80 billion and the skin-lightening market alone is valued at over US\$13 billion.

Since the 1970s, Asia has been the fastest growing sector in the global skin-lightening market. Asia is a lucrative market with high-growth potential because of a rising middle-class with increasing disposable income and centuries-old entrenched cultural impressions of beauty.

India's domestic cosmetics industry is set to grow to US\$3.6 billion by 2014, according to the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India. The skin-lightening cream market alone was worth US\$432 million in 2010 and growing at 18 percent annually.

In China, where the skin care market is worth more than 35 billion Yuan (US\$5.5 billion), whitening products comprise a whopping 71 percent of the market. Elsewhere in Asia, a survey by the London-based market research

firm Synovate found that four out of ten women in Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan use a skin whitening cream.

The cosmetics industry has also started to target men, selling them the same idea that a fairer complexion would make them more attractive. While skin-lightening products for women have been available for decades, products for men have only appeared in recent years, a trend that is rapidly growing. Just pay a visit to any pharmacy or chemist in Asia and you're almost certain to find a dedicated men's skin care section with a growing selection of skin-lightening products on offer. Number of Bollywood stars have appeared in real adverts promoting skin lightening creams. Last year an actor's decision to endorse Fair and Handsome attracted a huge amount of criticism, and led to the creation of an online petition by the Dark is Beautiful campaign.

It can be described as "deep-seated racism" in Indian culture, and the issue appears to be a heavily entrenched one. One 2010 report suggested the market for skin lightening creams was worth £260m (\$432m), and growing at 18% per year.

## IV REALITY OF THE SKIN WHITENING CREAMS

Skin lightening is a well-established procedure and many of the active ingredients found in commercial skin-lightening creams have been successfully used by dermatologists to treat hyperpigmentation. Yet, despite rising incomes in Asia, many still cannot afford professional skin lightening treatments offered by dermatologists. Over-the-counter creams and lotions are an affordable alternative. However, in such formulations, the concentration of active ingredients is often too low to be useful. Moreover, over-enthusiastic use without the supervision of a dermatologist can be dangerous.

One common active ingredient found in skin-lightening creams is niacinamide, a vitamin B3 derivative that functions by inhibiting the transfer of melanin from cells that produce it to your skin cells at the surface. Niacinamide is the active ingredient in Fair and Lovely, a face cream launched in 1978 that kick started the skin lightening industry in India.

Another ingredient is retinoic acid, a vitamin A derivative that stimulates the sloughing off of the upper epidermal layers, which include the dark-pigmented skin cells. Unfortunately, it can also cause skin sensitivity in sunlight, leading to raw and red skin. Alpha hydroxy acids function in a similar way, prompting exfoliation of the skin.

One of the most effective commercially available whitening agents is hydroquinone, a chemical that inhibits melanin production in the skin. But overuse of hydroquinone over months or years may cause exogenous ochronosis, a skin condition which manifests as bluish-black hyperpigmentation.

Finally, kojic acid is a relatively new addition to the cosmetics industry drugs cabinet and is now a commonly found ingredient in lightening creams. Kojic acid is a vitamin C derivative that, like hydroquinone, blocks a step in

melanin production in the skin. However, most commercial creams contain too low a concentration of the chemical in order to be effective.

While this is far from an exhaustive examination of skin-lightening products, the fact remains that not much is known about the potential long-term effects of these products. Unfortunately, until long-term studies are performed, the cosmetics industry is free to promote their products in any way they wish.

So are cosmetic products dangerous or safe in the long term? The jury is still out, says Dr. Joeeta Basu, a researcher from New Delhi's Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science and Research in Al Jazeera, who noted that "studies have not been conducted over many years to study if these [skin-lightening agents] have harmful effects, so [they] cannot be condemned conclusively for any toxicity until proven. Lam and Priver of Wales Hospital doctor Michael Chan tested thirty six creams made by cosmetic makers across the world. They found eight creams exceeded the U.S Food and Drug Administration safety limits for mercury. All eight brands came from China or Taiwan, promoting Lam to predict this could be the tip of the iceberg because these are available in the market from last many years and widely used. While severe side effects are associated with skin whitening chemicals, people still opt for it and are always in search of something best. Harvard graduate and dermatologist Dr. Pranav Pancholi explained that it is really dangerous and people hardly know about the health risks involved in the process of skin whitening.

There is a serious need to change this '**Light skin, dark skin prejudice**' as it is source of color discrimination in modern societies. It is like deep rooted racism in postcolonial era which has spread within own races. Obsession for fairness can be curtailed by stopping big companies to make undue advertisements for selling fairness. Skin whitening culture should be transformed now by the so called highly educated society which is still describing the difference between ugly and beautiful by depicting the illustration of a fair skinned and a dark skinned lady. Such illustrations make a permanent roots in the young minds and they carry it all through their life. And many beautiful souls fall the victim of this discrimination and got complexes which does not let them free and they fall into this trap of skin whitening culture. This is the time now to realize that human beings are all equal and beyond color.

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