

ALL IS NOT FAIR: THE COSMETICS WAR ON WOMEN IN INDIA

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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I examine the effects of skin whitening and bleaching practices by women and girls of India, and the links between globalization, capitalism, and Indian media. I examine the negative health effects of the use of skin lightening creams, along with the psycho-social effects for women and girls, and the pan-cultural effects of the advertising and marketing by the companies who sell these creams as cosmetics. I argue that the companies who sell them carry great economic power, bolstered by their promotion of colorism and bias toward fair skin. The links between profit, colorism, caste and gender inequality are explored, along with the historical roots of caste and color in India. Media bias for fair skin in India and media are discussed, along with effects on women's efficacy, self-esteem, and the effects of fair skin bias on opportunities in work and marriage. Resolution, education and public outreach efforts are also presented here.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is significant that the Human Development Index, introduced in 1990 only introduced measures for equality of the women of India in 2014. India ranks 137th among 187 countries in inequality for women (UNDP, 2014). Women in India number about 644 million in a country of 1.33 billion human souls as of 2016. For every 1000 males there are only 943 females (Indiapagesonline, 2016). This means that 5.7 percent of females are missing from a natural population ratio of 50/50. The 5.7 percentage represents 57 million women missing from the population. In addition, this inequality for women is the underlying cause for a high societal tolerance of gendercide, including forced and coerced abortions of female babies, death by domestic violence, starvation, health neglect and the flow of resources to males.

United Nations Human Development Reports are key measures that are reported *to* the United Nations Development Programme. These are measures to gauge the “richness” of human life on our globe. The Index is derived from statistics gathered on life expectancy, education and incomes. The HDI represents a change from measuring progress by more than economic growth. It measures, rather, the opportunities and access to opportunities that would result in greater well-being. “Being” is a measure of being well fed, sheltered and healthy, and “doing” represents work, education, voting, and the participating in community life (Human Development Reports, 2015).

For instance, economic growth resulting in more jobs mean nothing if women are denied access to them or are not paid equally or are not treated equally. India, a country

of 1.32 billion people is projected to become the world's most populous nation by 2020. It is often called the world's largest democracy. India is a country that has experienced unprecedented economic growth and development in the past two decades, yet for Indian women society is far from democratic.

Why is it important to explore the role of capitalism and in particular, the promotion and sale of fairness creams in India? Firstly because of the serious damaging health effects and the sheer numbers of those affected by toxins in fairness creams. The scope of the damage to human health was so alarming that the World Health Organization began to study and promote the eradication and strict regulation of these creams as far back as 2007. In 2007, the last year where the number of users of fairness creams was readily available to the public, was around 735 million. If you compare that number against the female population in 2007 -499.6 million, it becomes apparent that the use of skin lighteners was not limited to females, but had spread to males as well. It is likely that the world economic crash, beginning in 2007, became an opportune time for cosmetic companies to take advantage of the resulting societal chaos to use their economic power to build barriers against easy access to these numbers.

In this paper I explore the connection between discrimination against women and girls, gendercide, caste and color inequality and the perpetuation of these practices by cosmetic companies for capitalistic purposes in India. I review the psychological and marketing literature, along with the historic underpinnings of discrimination against women, caste and color in India.

Caste structure in India remains an organizing principal of Indian society, affecting all human institutions, from marriage and family to religion, work and

population distribution. It remains a tool for capitalists and politicians to exploit, and the lower status of women throughout society remains leverage for male power and privilege. Secondly, it remains a tool for family power rankings between married females and mothers-in-law, and family power rankings between lighter and darker-skinned individuals, especially women, within the immediate family and its relatives.

India ranks second in female gendercide in the world, with China ranking first. Contributing to an estimated 57 million missing women in India are deaths from childbirth, starvation, poverty and lack of medical care (Guilmoto, 2012). The missing 5.7 percent of females are lost to female infanticide, fetal abortions of girl babies, including forced abortions, poor pre-natal and natal nutrition and health care, the continued practice of dowry burnings, honor killings, starvation, and other types of violence against women and female children and fetuses resulting in death. In remote parts of India, there are still women killed as “witches” (Guilmoto, 2012).

In India poor women and girls are often malnourished and starved to death because limited food resources flow to male children and men. Male births are celebrated precisely because they are male births while female births cause little comment or a muted celebration. Over hundreds of years, women have been exploited, killed, beaten and subjugated within Indian society with little done to stop the violence or to prosecute the perpetrators. Between 2011 and 2015, the number of violent crimes against women in India increased by 59% (John, et. al, 2015). Some of this may be accounted for by a higher rate of reporting crimes, but it seems a reach to say that it is due to an increase in reporting only. Put baldly, in India, society has decided that females are a liability -of so little worth that they are less than human, disposable. For cosmetic companies, they are

only worth what profit can be derived from them.

In this paper, I will be looking at this social phenomenon of bias towards fair skin in India. I argue that this cultural mindset of fair skin being “superior” is deeply rooted in historical and colonial contexts of India, but the spread and growth of the use of these “fairness” creams, is promoted and maintained by the perpetration of racism and discrimination against women as a result of global capitalist marketing and global media. I have focused on two aspects of this issue; both the capitalism that deliberately promotes colorism in cosmetic marketing, and the psychological, and the social and economic effects for women and girls in India of the effects of the promotion of fairness creams by global cosmetic companies.

In this paper, I ask the question “How do fairness creams affect equality and efficacy among Indian women, and secondly what is being done to address it?” Thirdly I explore future actions to address colorism as promoted by cosmetic companies by the marketing of skin bleaching products.

Thesis Statement

The desire for fairer skin, arising from historical and traditional roots, is promoted and perpetuated by cosmetic advertising and global media images, which continually sustain the idea that fair is beautiful, allowing women more power, and the dark skin is not desirable and robs women of their potential for power. This discrimination notably plays out among Indian communities, even within castes, promoting a color, or, if you will, *shade* bias, labeled colorism, where lighter-colored skin is prized and rewarded over darker skin. The use of fairness creams in India is just one way women strive for power to break barriers in a rigidly caste-driven and

traditionally sexist society. Because of the number of users, health, psychological and racism effects, the use of skin lighteners has become a global health crisis for women of color.

Sandra Lee Bartky, in discussing Michel Foucault's (1979) critique of what Foucault calls the "rise of parliamentary institutions" argues that along with the rise of institutions designed to maintain existing power structures, concurrently there arose a new and "unprecedented" discipline directed at the body -a demand for "production" of the "docile" body. He describes the body movements dictated in societal institutions - *all* body movements which are demanded for the sake of efficiency and economy. For instance, the precise movements and body positions of a soldier handling his weapon, or the body requirements of students to be rigid, upright, and still at a desk, in effect mimicking the desk itself. Bartky notes that the modern version of "femininity" is also socially constructed for maintaining male power: women's bodies should not be abundant, nor their looks natural, nor their movements free. The standard is a standard of youth. A woman's body should be hairless, except for a minimum of pubic hair, the skin "baby smooth," hair on the head should be dressed and "done," makeup should be applied, and for "black" women, dark skin should be made fair (Bartky, 1990).

Driven by media images as well as traditional values and beliefs, skin bleaching is practiced disproportionately within communities of color, particularly in India, where dark skin is linked to lower caste and lower social status. As the world defines and re-defines race, the issue of skin-tone social stratification is also known as colorism, a term coined by Alice Walker in the 1980s. Walker points out that racism is the bestowing of social status, privileges, and treatment based on race, and that "race" remains a term

defined by society. Race therefore is a social construct.

Colorism exists within a single “race,” as well as within society in general, especially in India where skin tone colorism is intense because of its link to caste and opportunity. Colorism is the preference for and privileging of lighter skin, the idea being that as the skin shades become lighter, the perception of beauty and corresponding opportunities are higher and better. It is the theme of a global conversation about white privilege and Western beauty ideals; the idea and reality that acceptance, opportunity and greater income is linked to the color and shade of one’s skin, and for women, the need for beauty -fair beauty -to advance in society, while discrimination and withholding of opportunity are practiced against those with darker skin. According to Walker, through colorism, the differential treatment of an individual is the result of the social value associated with the shade and tone of skin, not from a perceived racial category.

While I will not argue that marketing created a preference for fairness, I do argue that cosmetic companies continue to market “fairness beauty power” under a similar theory to Naomi Klein’s Shock Doctrine. In the same manners as powerful capitalists exploit countries “in shock” during wars and political instability-most often engineered by capitalists with eyes on economic and power gain, cosmetic companies place women in a continual battle between marketed beauty and their sense of their own self-worth. As long as cosmetic companies continue to keep women off-balance, or in a state of continual uneasiness within their very skin, eroding women and girls’ self-esteem through the promotion of colorism and beautyism, they can continue to count on profits when women continue to try to make gains in their battle by using the “cure” for their lack of power and “unfortunate” dark skin -skin bleaching products.

In this paper I focus on the use of fairness products by females in India because:

1. India is the largest consumer of these products, mostly by females:
2. Damaging health effects on health and reproduction along with fetal damage:
3. The link between genderism and discrimination based on skin-tone in India, (colorism):
4. The link between negative self-image and self-efficacy in girls and women.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Social learning theory and social psychology pioneers Gordon Allport and Albert Bandura in studying how humans acquire prejudice agree that our first constructions about skin color are learned from our core societal institutions; family and friends, and valued adult authorities within schools, churches and community groups, and from television and media (Allport, 1949, Gerbner, 1967, Bandura, 1971, Katz, 1991).

George Gerbner, founder of the cultivation process of television viewing and a pioneer in Communication Theory, was the Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania from 1964 to 1989. His research on the cultivation process of television viewing, beginning in 1967, led to the currently accepted theory that television “has become the primary source of socialization and information among previously heterogeneous populations.” Gerbner and his associates found that the daily images and repetition of images, “facts” and myths “bring everyone into a shared national culture,” which both defines the world and “legitimizes a particular social order.” Television, film, internet media, and print media cultivate, over time, consistent messages and images which are absorbed unthinkingly by viewers as “right” and “normal,” transforming cultural indicators and creating perceptions which become societal standards. Through this media cultivation process, this perception begins to become “fact” (Gerbner, 1997). Since Gerbner’s original research the explosive growth of transfer of media via satellite has spread this cultivation globally.

This cultivation begins early – as soon as a child is old enough to watch

television and look at images with some understanding (Gerbner, 1997). Because of this cultivation, girls, as they move into adolescence, with the acute self-consciousness that accompanies formative years, begin to look at themselves in the third-person perspective – as if there were an unseen camera following them, or as if people in society were mirrors, whose reflection tells them who they are. And that who they are should be fixed, improved, better. In a recent study, researchers found that “Women who reported greater exposure to television programming during adolescence were more likely to experience high levels of body image disturbance than females that did not report such levels of exposure” (Serdar, 2015).

But women are not isolated in absorbing these media images and myths. This transfer of media cultural indicators and “norms” effect every level of society where media is accessible. Therefore, the entire global population which is exposed to media absorbs these messages about women, skin tones and, social stratification. Despite counter-trends, these media standards promote the idea that light-skinned women are more beautiful and more desirable than dark-skinned women in every social institution – from marriage to family, education, religion, community groups, and the workplace.

Because the media reinforces every day that what makes an individual worthwhile is based on the information they receive from television and the media, women absorb the daily message that their happiness and success in life depends predominantly on beauty as portrayed by the media, not only in by the scale of their attractiveness to men, but to employers, other women, and indeed all of society. This effect is intensified in India, where the caste system, while technically illegal, remains firmly in place for those seeking acceptance and opportunity.

The number of ads an individual is exposed to during any given day range from a low of 440 to a high of 5,000 per day, depending on which source you consult. Some researchers break it down to “impressions” – ads that flash by are considered an impression but are seemingly ignored by the brain. Nevertheless, it is easy to see that these “impressions” are both frequent and relentless – a flood of images that become internalized as the “norm” for beauty and success.

Since this creates an unfair position for women within society, they struggle to level the playing field - to meet the criteria that advertisements and other forms of media put forth. The media standards of appearance are such that most women cannot reasonably meet them without applying large quantities of makeup or using surgery to alter their body and by using skin whiteners.

CHAPTER III

INTERNALIZING RACISM

In 1940, African-American psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark, working with troubled youth in Harlem designed an experiment to test Black children's self-perception about race. This experiment eventually helped build the case for desegregation in the United States schools in the case of *Brown vs the Board of Education*. In this historic experiment, young Black children were shown dolls which were identical except for skin color. When asked questions aimed at determining racial self-perception, almost all of the children were able to identify the race of the dolls. One doll had light skin and yellow hair while the other had brown skin and black hair. When asked which of the dolls that they preferred, most selected the White doll (Clark, 1940). When questioned about which doll would they rather play with, which doll was the nice doll, which the pretty doll, etc., they showed a clear preference for the White doll.

The experiment showed that the children had internalized the racism they experienced, with the self-hatred especially acute in segregated schools. This case broke ground for a whole field of studies demonstrating the harm caused by stereotypic beliefs based on skin color. This is especially tragic in that this stereotyping and racism becomes part of a child's self-perception, which is carried into adulthood.

Even as early as preschool, children are conditioned to associate dark skin with negative attributes. This same test, repeated in 2000, suggests that this bias remains within the self-perception of Black children (Edney, 2006). This childhood self-image as "bad," "ugly" and "not worthy," based on their skin color, is not only carried into adulthood and but is passed on to the next generation. This self-hatred and self-esteem

issue are not limited to American Black children. Indian children, in fact, all children exposed to negative stereotypes based on “darkness” are just as vulnerable.

In a comprehensive analysis of the effect of media perception on African American and White American women, Milkie found that White women are also damaged by the images, because they promote unattainable beauty, while Black women are unable to relate with the advertisements (1999). This study demonstrates that these advertisements alter the identity of both light-skinned and dark-skinned individuals. Both groups believed that images shown in the commercials are unrealistic, yet they are forced to handle the consequences of these ubiquitous beauty images.

White women reported that they were “put down” by these images in the media while dark-skinned individuals believe that they were relatively unaffected by them. The fact that dark-skinned women reported that they didn’t relate to this problem indicates that they are not represented in most media according to their numbers. This creates a marginalization on two levels – on one hand, darker women are underrepresented as beautiful, and on the other, they are barely represented at all. This lack of representation reflects the struggle between blackness versus whiteness. In all cases, women are not portrayed fairly, but white and light-skinned women are, at least, represented.

CHAPTER IV

BEAUTY PERCEPTION IN PSYCHOLOGY

Studies show that a child's social status amongst his/her peers is positively influenced by their physical attractiveness (Boyatzis, Baloff, Durleux, 1998). For a girl, the perception that she is physically attractive, including factors like facial symmetry, weight and skin tone, is positively correlated with a positive self-image. Additionally, the message is absorbed that lighter skin is synonymous with femininity (Hill, 2002), a message that is internalized and surfaces when women begin to date.

A study in 1992 indicated that a majority of young women believe that men are more attracted to individuals with light skin tones (Bond & Cash, 1992). Even though the majority of the dark-skinned persons interviewed in this study did not believe that skin color negatively impacted their self-esteem, they did believe that individuals with light skin were perceived more positively and that they have an unfair advantage in life.

While the young women surveyed in this particular study were, fortunately, confident with their skin tones, this is not always the case for young women around the world. Those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and low levels of education often associate success with skin color, a message promoted by skin lightening companies. Therefore, in an attempt to rise in their socioeconomic strata, they try to make their skin look lighter. However, because of discrimination, especially in India where dark skin is perceived in terms of lower caste, opportunities don't change much. Even if they are successful in lightening their shade of skin, to change their socioeconomic status is nearly impossible, particularly in India's rigidly stratified society (countrystudiesUS/India, p.l.).

Girls and women become preoccupied with social constructions of beauty and are less able to see other ways in which to gain other types of social capital, like education, civic and community networking, prominent charitable work, and involvement in leadership. This narrowing of perceived possibility results in reduced self-esteem and a rigidity of social standing in society.

A research study was conducted to determine how beauty is perceived. Ultimately, the results indicated that an individual is more likely to find that their self-opinion of attractiveness is higher than the opinions that others have of their beauty. As a consequence, it appears that most people are likely to believe that a person is beautiful if they look similar to them.

Our results show proof for a strikingly simple observation: that individuals perceive their own beauty to be greater than that expressed in the opinions of others... This observation provides insight into our basic behavioural patterns and suggests that there are strong psychological mechanisms in humans supporting self-identification and thereby encouraging the self-confidence and resilience necessary to maintain one's social standing. While the psychological basis of self-confidence is multifactorial, our finding provides critical objective insight. We prove here for the first time that nothing more than the beauty of the beholder is in the eyes of the latter (Springer et al., 2012).

Thus, the concept of beauty is psychological in nature. Human psychology has developed in a manner that dictates that we are most likely to find individuals attractive if they are similar in appearance to ourselves. Therefore, individuals with light skin are

more likely to find individuals with light skin attractive and individuals with dark skin are more likely to find individuals with dark skin attractive. If people are raised in communities in which they are primarily exposed to people of one race, this is more likely to be the case -except when exposed to constant messages that fair skin is more attractive.

Kahle and Homer (1985) researched the impact of physical attractiveness perception on consumer response to advertisements. Put simply, the more attractive a product endorser was, the higher was the likelihood that a consumer would be persuaded to purchase the particular brand of a product. By extension, if lighter skin tones are perceived by product users as more attractive, then skin-tone also plays a role in how receptive a consumer is to a product represented by a lighter-skinned endorser.

The assignment of negative traits for darker skin from both intra-and extra-group stratification models promotes a “hierarchy of social acceptability” (Kahle and Homer, 1985). While it is not the purview of this paper to review in-group/outgroup psychological theory, it is accepted that prejudice leads to discrimination and that even within heterogeneous groups, there is stratification and discrimination based on skin-tone.

CHAPTER V

RACIAL STEREOTYPES AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

Ransford's work on skin color, skin tones and life chances in 1970 began to articulate the relationship between skin tone, social identity, and social status. He shed light on the phenomena of the internalization of racial stereotypes, discrimination and the effect that persistent, pervasive discrimination has on people of color struggling to be treated equally and succeed within core societal institutions (Ransford, 1970).

Social identity is part and parcel of social capital. Social identity is defined as the part of self-concept that arises from an individual knowing they are a member of a social group, together with that perceived value of that group membership (Tajfel, 1982). Social capital is the intangible (but real) assets a human within society possesses or acquires: Education, income related to work, family money, religious, social and civic group membership, good health, and "good looks" are all important social capital assets. Skin tone is part of social identity, like it or not, and it has a perceived social capital value. Social identity can be said to have three parts: how an individual is "typecast" by outgroup members; how they are seen by members within the group; and finally, how the self is perceived by the self.

Social capital is often based on how others perceive the individual within that group as a member of that sub-group. Even within heterogeneous groups, for instance, Punjabis in India, a lighter skin tone carries a higher value of social capital. Social capital is increased -gaining tangible value, such as better educational, work, and marriage opportunities, or decreased, through blocked opportunities in work, pay, poorer school

districts, neglect or negative messages from teachers and other authority figures, marrying “down” or not being able to marry “up,” or not being asked to marry at all– all based on the perception of a person’s social capital (Wade, 1998, Springer, I.N., Wiltfang J, Kowalski JT, Russo PA, Schulze M, Becker S, Wolfart S., 2012).

These perceptions are too often made in a glance at skin color. However, social identity is also a result of self-perception, including beliefs that one is worthy, intelligent, and strong enough to overcome barriers, or, conversely, the belief that one is unworthy, not as intelligent and not able to overcome barriers. A lifetime of learning that your skin color defines you, especially for darker women in India, makes positive self-perception and self-efficacy difficult and maybe impossible (Bond, 1992, Glenn, 2009).

In analyzing social capital in India, there is an intersection between beauty perception as a psychological phenomenon, and the social capital value assigned to perceived caste based on skin tone.

One basic marketing strategy for advertisers is to use Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943). Maslow presented human motivation as a pyramid, with the basic needs at the foundation: physical needs must be met first, such as the need to eat, followed by a need for safety. In the middle of this pyramid is the need for love, “belongingness” and acceptance, and at the next level, esteem, including self-esteem and respect of others. When these needs are not met, said Maslow, people become “anxious and tense” and are prevented from accomplishing “self-actualization” which he explained as the ability of people to reach their full potential, which caps the top of the pyramid.

CHAPTER VI

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY IN ADVERTISING: DARK SKIN IS NOT ACCEPTABLE

Marketing agencies use proven social psychology tools. In diminishing the self-esteem of women by constantly exposing them to an ideal that they cannot meet, women attempt to compensate by purchasing beauty products to try to meet this ideal. This is an excellent tactic because it allows marketing agencies to create a psychological need by manipulating consumer perceptions of what it takes to be accepted, liked and respected. A cosmetic or “beauty” product marketing campaign is designed in a manner that *intends* to denigrate the self-esteem and confidence of women, thereby enhancing the ability of companies to sell their products. Cosmetic use is linked to the need for belongingness, acceptance, respect and admiration, and ultimately, success (LibertyZone, p.l.).

However, marketers have long been refining their campaigns by using research in social psychology. In 1988, Rutgers University Department of Marketing and Hofstra University Department of Marketing were analyzing the connection between media consumption and buying habits. One study, focused on determining which particular products were purchased more often as a result of a consumer being self-conscious (Gould & Barak, 1988). One determination was that self-consciousness rose along with magazine consumption (Gould & Barak, 1988). While advertisers had been using this approach instinctively, they now had scientific, empirical research to refine their campaigns. They increased the “cues” in cosmetic marketing advertisements with the intention of increasing self-consciousness, which studies show peak in the 18-35 age range, an age where consumers typically do the most spending on non-essential items. On

one hand, they increase self-consciousness and on the other, offer the solution (for acceptance and respect) in the same advertisement. The typical “before and after” ad becomes shorthand for this meme. Before, your dark skin is unacceptable, but after it is lightened, you become acceptable and respectable -simple but devastatingly effective.

Just as girls internalize constructed concepts of beauty throughout their lifetime, boys are also subject to these same beauty and lightness constructions, and also internalize them. Thus, as girls and women strive and fail to meet these standards (without being able to change their own genetics and phenotype) the boys and men she meets within society also automatically rank them on the basis of this internalized ideal, which begins with their skin color.

I reach into learning theory and social learning theory as a way of to illuminate the powerful forces of a lifetime of learning and internalizing racism and the societal influences that help shape it, and are in their turn, shaped by it, to explain how human beings can be taught to hate the very skin they are born with, and how the “package” a child comes in becomes a substitute for her own idea of herself. When a woman begins to believe she is less than worthy, then she accepts that until she is beautiful enough, and light enough, the potential for her life is limited within her own mind. And cosmetic companies are very invested promoting that a woman is never beautiful enough, and in India, never light enough.

CHAPTER VII

CASTE AND CULTURE IN HISTORY

Fair skin is a deeply embedded phenomenon in Indian culture. Earliest caste restrictions in India stem primarily from early affiliations with Hindu upper caste power. Added to later historical caste impositions formalized by the British, the result is that even in modern times, there is a significant cultural clash between individuals living in the northern and southern parts of the country, because Northern Indians are significantly lighter in skin-tone than in the hotter climates of Southern India, where darker skin in the southern India a genetic adaptation to the hotter climate. However, it is also important to consider that the Indian caste system remains a prevalent component of Indian culture and acts as a guiding force of dissent between lighter-skinned and darker-skinned castes. Since this system was introduced by the nomadic Caucasian Aryan groups when they arrived to India around 1500 B.C.E, color-based social distinctions were proscribed in that favored light skin and punished those with darker skin. According to historians, the Aryans engaged in armed conflict with the dark-skinned Dravidian people during this time period, and a caste system was imposed to ensure that the invaders and people that appeared similar to them would not be entitled to the same societal rights as individuals with lighter skin tones.

To resolve this problem and keep the country at peace, the Aryans set up a rigid caste system that would define the societal roles of people according to their skin color and social position. The most important individuals in Indian society were therefore held to be the fair-skinned priests, the Brahmins, which were followed in rank by warriors

known as Kshatryas. Following the Kshatryas were the Vaishyas, or farmers and merchants. The Shudras, or laborers, were at the bottom of the caste system and included many dark-skinned unskilled laborers, such as the Dravidians. At the very bottom of the caste system were the Dalits, also known as the untouchables, which were considered too impure to be included in the caste system. The use of the caste system is an important component of the race dynamics in India because it has been used throughout history and retains importance today. The individuals that are considered to have the most power and status according to the caste system are light-skinned while the common workers and untouchables are darker-skinned.

CHAPTER VIII

CASTE TODAY

The caste system, in its persistence and rigidity remains in India, despite being outlawed in 1961. In *India Studies*, it explains, “In modern times, as in the past, it is virtually impossible for an individual to raise his own status by falsely claiming to be a member of a higher-ranked caste. Such a ruse might work for a time in a place where the person is unknown, but no one would dine with or intermarry with such a person or his offspring until the claim was validated through kinship networks. Rising on the ritual hierarchy can only be achieved by a caste as a group, over a long period of time, principally by adopting behavior patterns of higher-ranked groups” (*Country studies us/India*, p.1.)

While the caste system was used as a method to manipulate an existing power differential in early India, women *never* truly had power in this system. The historical place of Indian women in society was, and remains, lower than their male caste counterparts (*countrystudies.us/india*, p.1.). In general, the “higher” the caste the more a woman’s sexual and social behavior is regulated. In the “lower” castes, beatings, abuse and even killing of wives and females for certain caste transgressions continues as required tradition, despite laws against it. In a sense, Indian women are considered to be a caste of their own, more property than human.

In considering the opportunities for women in India there has been a great deal of political development in India since Independence, however, it has not been easy for the government to reverse traditional social structures. Even though many recognize that

there are drawbacks to these historical perceptions in a modern democracy, this long history of social stratification has resulted in a persistence of the caste system, based on skin tone and generational caste ancestry. The result is a lingering widespread disparity in socioeconomic status (India Times, 2015). In present-day Indian society neighborhood distributions across cities remain delineated on the basis of caste, and in rural areas, villages are almost wholly grouped according to caste (India Studies, p.l.).

Caste remains. It influences education levels, occupation, and socioeconomic status in a de facto, rather than de jure fashion. Inequality deepens over generations, as wealth and opportunity flows upward. Color is positively correlated with caste over the centuries, and has created a highly stratified color society in modern India. After Independence, these divisions have become much more fluid, which is a step in the right direction. However, perpetuation and reinforcement of these ideas through the media and through social mindset continues to create a social issue surrounding colorism and inequity in India today. Thus, the color-based and race-based social stratification of India through the centuries has far-ranging effects on stratification for Indian people even after almost six decades of Independence.

As Indian society has evolved over time, the caste system has become somewhat blurred. While many individuals still refuse to associate themselves with members of different castes, education has allowed people to enter new professions and, therefore, become members, but they are often perceived as “honorary members” of a higher caste within the larger society. However, while it is possible to become a member of a caste that is slightly above one’s original position in society, it is challenging, or nearly impossible, to skip to a level that is significantly above one’s place of birth (Country

Studies, India, p.1). Fairer skin is not a free pass into the next level, despite the implied promises of cosmetic advertisements.

Caste has thus remained a vestige and influences education levels, occupation, and socioeconomic status in a de facto, rather than de jure fashion. Inequality deepens over generations. With the rising economy and a higher rate of intermarriages these divisions have become much more fluid, which is a step in the right direction. However, perpetuation and reinforcement of these ideas through the media and through societal mindset continues to create a social issue surrounding colorism and inequity in India today.

CHAPTER IX

COSMETICS, CAPITALISM AND MARKETING COLORISM

The use of “fairness creams” is the cosmetic industry code for the practice of skin depigmentation, known popularly as skin whitening, skin lightening, or skin bleaching. Skin bleaching is epidemic across developing and developed nations. A quick Google search of the phrase “skin whitening (or bleaching) “epidemic” produces headlines from India, Africa, Nigeria, the Philippines, and even Jamaica (Google.com). According to a report from Global Industry Analysts, the skin lightening industry projected USD 19.8 *billion* in sales globally by 2018, with growth driven by demand from “both men and women in the Asian, African and Middle East regions” (McDougall, 2013).

India is by far the world’s largest consumer of these products, with an estimated 735 million users as of 2007, mostly girls and women (Mercury Policy Project, 2010). These chemical formulas, sold in “fairness” products, include ingredients like mercury and mercury derivatives, potent cortisone (corticosteroids), Vitamin A, and more than two percent hydroquinone, a chemical agent used for developing film.

Because of the negative health effects, many of the ingredients in these products have been banned or are strictly regulated in many countries. The European Union has banned the use of mercury in cosmetic products since 1976. Hydroquinone and high-dose steroids in the UK and many EU states are also illegal when used in cosmetics (Southwark Council, UK, 2013, Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfume Council, 2016). These chemicals are also banned in many African nations, including lately the Ivory Coast (New York Times, 2015). The Philippines have recently joined the U.S. and Canada in imposing strict restrictions on the level of the mercury in these products (US FDA, p.l.,

WHO, p.l., WHO, 2007).

Unilever, Shiseido, L'Oréal, and Clinique are among the world's top producers of skin. Globalization is a significant factor in the growth of these products, and the profits generated by skin bleaching products represent the biggest challenge to global pushback against the use and sale of these products. Global companies like Unilever and Shiseido have major economic power, but it is a power that is fueled by the consumer dollar.

The popularity of skin-lightening products continues to increase in India. At a growth rate of 18% per year, it is likely that new market entrants will copy the advertising messages of the larger companies, contributing to an even more significant light-skin bias. And corporations like Unilever have no interest in losing out on this lucrative market in India. And they wield quite a bit of financial muscle to sustain India's caste and color prejudices.

Unilever is ranked the fourth largest consumer goods company worldwide. In 2011 Unilever's personal care product segment was about 15.47 billion euros (*Statista*, 2016). Skin bleaching products represent about 23% of the skin care product market (Łopaciuk & Lobada, 2013). Thus capitalism and profiteering (regardless of the known health effects) are a major roadblock to public education and a strong movement to eradicate these toxic "cosmetics" and the racism they promote. When a global company has a larger economy than many countries, it is easy to see how promoting skin tone colorism becomes a good investment.

“Of the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are now global corporations and only 49 are countries. The combined sales of the world's top 200 corporations are far greater than a quarter of the world's economic activity. The top 200 corporations combined sales are bigger than the combined economies of all countries -- barring nine. That is, they surpass the combined economies of 182 countries” (Ravindran, 2001).

Currently, cosmetic sales are a multi-billion-dollar industry, which is dominated by three large multinational corporations: France’s L’Oréal, Japan’s Shiseido, and the U.K.’s Unilever. These corporations and others have perfected the art of marketing and distributing bleaching products that appeal to women and girls around the world.

As noted, India is by far the largest consumer of skin bleaching products. A survey by Zero Hg, Mercury Working Group shows an estimated 735 million users in India, mostly women and girls (2007), followed by Nigeria at an estimated 99.5 million in 2002. But millions of women and girls in Africa, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Latin America, the United States and island countries and territories use vast quantities skin whiteners each year. There is still a social sense of whiteness versus blackness that cannot be easily removed from society. In both the historic and modern setting, people with light skin are preferred with those over dark skin in most nations of the world in which people with light skin live. In particular, this is the case in the North America and Europe. However, as shown by the vast number of users of skin bleaching products used globally, as shown in Table 1, on a world scale this perception applies as well.

Table 1. Users of skin lightening products per country*

Country	Survey Year	Percentage	Estimated total number of users
India	2007	65%	735.8M
Mali	1993	24%	2.13M
Togo	2004	59%	3.18M
South Africa	2004	35%	16.45M
Nigeria	2002	77%	99.5M
Hong Kong	2004	45%	3M
Republic of Korea	2004	28%	13.45M
Senegal	2002	27%	2.8M
Philippines	2001	50%	42.11M
Taiwan	9	37%	19.1M

*Source: FACT SHEET: Mercury in Skin Lightening Cosmetics, Mercury Policy Project, 0 Hg, Mercury Working Group. *(Skin lightening products are used primarily by young girls and women)*

CHAPTER X

THE COSMETIC INDUSTRY- PROFITING FROM RACISM AND SEXISM

India's first "fairness cream," Fair & Lovely, came to India's market in 1978 and almost instantly became "a national obsession." (Jewish Business News, 2015). The Unilever brand continues to lead the market and Unilever spends up to \$5 million per year on television advertising alone.

In one television commercial for skin lightening cream, the scene opens in a family's modest living room. The conversation is about their struggle with finances, and the father laments with a sigh, "If only we had a son." The daughter, who is the only support for her aging parents, is crushed by this statement and runs to her room. The mother follows her, bringing with her the ultimate solution to their troubles - a tube of "fairness cream," the cosmetic industry's not-so-euphemistic term for skin whitener. For indeed, the unfairness of her social economic position becomes "fair" along with her skin. She lightens her skin and is soon making more money. The ad closes on her taking her folks out for a nice dinner. The father now approves of her, smiles, and the scene closes with her father affectionately saying "Beta," a colloquialism that shows affection for either gender, but which literal translation is "son." The entire commercial is designed to reinforce gender stereotyping in India. Many of these commercials show the woman gaining a successful male partner, usually a husband, or a better job, but the message remains the same: the fairness cream that lightens her skin allows her access to male power and privilege.

Because of the gender and wealth gap, which is more pronounced for women of

color, most of these agencies market their beauty images using white and light-skinned women, perpetuating an intrinsic stance of racism that marketing companies seem to be unable to remove from their business practices. In addition, they create a self-fulfilling feedback loop: by marginalizing darker women in their campaigns, they reduce real-world opportunities of darker women. Thus, lighter-skinned women used in these media images represent money, power and privilege not granted to darker women.

CHAPTER XI

MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF DARK SKIN IN INDIA

The lack of media representation of dark-skinned individuals doesn't stop at commercials or advertisements. It is reflected in entertainment television, news programming, and films. The image of the fair Indian film beauty rose exploded with the rise of the Bollywood film industry and remains pervasive in Indian films and also on Indian television. Even though the typical "attractive" character has a symmetrical face, light skin, and lightened hair, many media actors, from producers to market researchers and even cameramen in the film and television industry find it necessary to modify the images of their actresses to ensure that they are able to reach ideal proportions, colors, and tones (Rich & Cash, 1993).

When individuals with dark skin are shown in films and television, their numbers are usually underrepresented compared to real population percentages. Many movies and television shows tend to showcase their black and brown characters as having different personality types that help drive the drama of the situation. However, a dark-skinned woman tends to be typecast as a villain or a sinister character more frequently than white women. In the United States stereotypical scary movies are a subject of satirical comedy in that the black person dies first. Blackness is associated with evil in or, in some cases, lack of necessity (Hunt, 2005). Since they are unimportant, they are removed from the film first. Recently, VICE Media Group conducted a study that found that many movies would only last 30 seconds if all of the white actors were edited out, reflecting the

minuscule amount of time dark-skinned characters appear in these early films (VICE, 2015).

Occasionally darker-skinned actors are shown in films and other image media to demonstrate that the media producer is reflecting diversity, but individuals with light skin disproportionately represent a majority of characters (Hunt, 2005). Many media apologists argue that an important reason they do this is to please their target demographic. Since it is assumed that individuals with light skin have more disposable money to spend on entertainment, industry leaders believe that it is more profitable to market to this demographic (Baumann, 2008).

Darnell Hunt, in exploring racial bias in films and television, explains that historically, writers and producers created a film to be marketed primarily to white audiences, thus, the role of the black man or woman was not a significant focus. Black actors were recruited to the film primarily so that the producers could, at least, appear to be using fair hiring practices. However, it is apparent that racial bias exists in most of these early films (Hunt, 2005). While some advertisers and many films have included more dark-skinned characters, the imbalance remains.

Dark women are underrepresented in news as well. Studies have shown that reports of missing girls that belong to minority groups are severely underreported in the United States (Min & Feaster, 2010). This bias shows up in Indian news stories where high-profile murders of women are all “fair” women by Indian standards.

**India TV's Top 5 High-profile Murders as of August 2015.
(IndiaTV.com)**



***Top: L to R: Sheena Bora and her accused killer, Indrani Mukerjea; Aarushi Talwar.
Bottom, L to R: Sandhya Singh Pandit; Laila Khan and Naina Sahni***

Failing to report a realistic race balance in disappearances presents the community with a false sense of security, which may be heightened in minority neighborhoods that rarely hear about individuals in their areas being abducted. By focusing on the disappearance of individuals like Natalee Holloway who went missing in 2002 and 2005 in the US, the news did not report the disappearance of a pregnant black and Hispanic woman named LaToyia Figueroa, who was found dead in 2005 (Hines, 2006). While the disappearance of Natalee Holloway was troubling, it captured the attention of the media for days and prevented their ability to focus on other issues. The public social media noted that the same level of media attention would not have been captured for LaToyia

Figueroa even if the news had been slow. At first, it appears that the media discrimination that people with dark skin face appears to be primarily a surface issue, but the lack of news media focus on minority issues demonstrates that this is reflective of a deeper societal problem.

The bias for reporting abductions for fair and white women compared to their dark-skinned counterparts has been termed “missing white woman syndrome,” a term coined by PBS journalist Gwen Ifill at the Unity Convention of Journalists in 2004. This term was used again by Professor of American Studies Sheri L. Parks in a 2006 interview with CNN journalist and US news anchor Anderson Cooper. National discussion of this issue was taken up by internet bloggers and went viral. The heart of the discussion was that news outlets primarily focus on “pretty, white” women, saying those stories draw viewers; missing women who are Black, Latino, Asian, or old, fat and ugly do not (Moody, Dorries & Blackwell, 2008).

CHAPTER XII

BEAUTY IN INDIA -THE INTERSECTION OF TELEVISION, FILM AND CAPITALISM

Capitalism has driven the expansion of this social construction of “fair” beauty. When Unilever launched *Fair and Lovely* in 1978, the success of this product contributed to a rapid expansion of skin lightening products that include facial wash, shower soap, and even vaginal washes that claim to lighten the surrounding skin. While the advent of these products did not create the tensions between light-skinned and dark-skinned people, it did allow dark-skinned individuals to find a way to achieve light skin. The release of these products contributed to a heightening of the bias effect. Dark-skinned individuals were not previously able to adjust their skin color and had to live with the effects of colorism in society. Now, being able to lighten their skin has brought them into this shared bias, coopted into contributing to the belief dark skin is not beautiful, widening the gulf between people of different skin tones in India.

The widespread popularity of skin lightening products has been noticed by ACNielsen, which has expanded from its origins as an American television show rating company to a global information and measurement company, performing market research and data about what people watch, and their consumer habits (Google.com, ACNielsen.com., p.1.)

Additionally, considering that a majority of celebrities and other women involved in media have been coopted into this bias, having been consistently rewarded for having light skin, and often coerced into lightening their skin, it is not surprising that a vast

number of Indian women wish to obtain these complexions. This phenomenon is reinforced when India's world-famous cricket players, along with Bollywood stars add their celebrity glamor to endorse these products.

Ironically, individuals with fair skin are used to advertise these products. A recent publication designed to criticize the use of skin lightening products in India published this conversation:

My mother, sister and I sat down after my mom saw Aishwarya 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." This conversation grew into a short film created by my sister that will eventually become a full-fledged documentary and this thesis paper, a look at the public health implications of an industry that favors "whiteness" as a standard of beauty (Malik, 2007).

In this passage, the author describes an unfortunate truth: light-skinned women are often used to advertise skin-lightening products because they are perceived as already beautiful. Even though many of the women in these commercials don't use the products they help market, a large percentage of the population continue to buy these advertised products, demonstrating that the use of fair-skinned models is an effective technique.

CHAPTER XIII

BOLLYWOOD

Even though India does not have a large population of Caucasian women, the media still personifies beauty through a lighter lens. The most important aspects of Indian entertainment include Bollywood movies and performances, especially in music videos or full-length films. India generates over a thousand films a year. In homes, framed photos of movie actors hang on walls next to pictures of gods and goddesses, which goddesses, it should be noted, are universally fair-skinned. In the US, an A-list actor appearing in a commercial for any product indicates that his or her star is no longer on the rise, but in India A-list actors can often be seen making mundane products look glamorous in commercials, including skin lightener. The commercials mimic Bollywood productions; dramatic, glamorous, and laden with subtext.

India's Bollywood films also consistently show fair skin bias. A list of the most popular actresses in the past few decades show that they are all fair-skinned: Madhubala in the 1940's to 1950's had a fair complexion, followed by Madhuri Dixit in the 1980's and 1990's, to current stars, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, with her light-colored eyes and fair skin (along with her Caucasoid features) and Katrina Kaif, who is half Kashmiri and half British. Kaif's looks represent a minute percentage of the population of India, but her celebrity in Bollywood is a symbol of beauty, unattainable beauty for the majority of women in India.

Dark-skinned actresses like Konkona Sen Sharma, Nandita Das, and Chitrangada Singh, all very talented actresses, are hard-pressed to be hired for mainstream roles. They

are limited to smaller productions and art-house films, where beauty is not a central character trait. The Indian media often refer, patronizingly, to these actresses as “dusky beauties,” a qualifier that is not used for light-skinned “beauties.”

Many A-list stars have used skin whiteners, and the progression from their natural skin tones to a progressively lighter one can be seen when their images over time are reviewed. Deepika Padukone and Priyanka Chopra are examples of darker Indian actresses who bowed to pressure from the media and film industry by lightening their skin with chemicals. These changes are not digitally created – they are the result of regular use of bleaching chemicals.

CHAPTER XIV

HEALTH EFFECTS

Women and girls in India have been under attack by global cosmetic corporations for over three decades, adding a layer of passive violence to the fronts on which Indian women battle -the continued marketing of toxic “fairness” products. bleaching products. Shiseido’s White Lucent formula contains (among other chemicals) monopotassium salt, which the EPA identifies as a pesticide. Lacombe’s Blanc Expert line uses Kojic Acid Dipalmitate. According to a 2012 report by The International Journal of Molecular Sciences, exposure to this chemical can disrupt thyroid metabolism and is a possible carcinogen. Clinique’s Even Better skin bleaching products contain phenoxyethanol and dimethoxy tolyl propyl resorcinol (IJMS, 2013). The National Center for Biotechnological Information reports that repeated exposure to phenoxyethanol can result in reproductive toxicity, neurotoxicity, contact dermatitis, and worsening of eczema (Madlyn Cazalis, p.1).

Reproductive toxicity due to chemical exposure includes effects for women and men upon fertility and sexual function, as well as developmental toxicity in offspring. Dimethoxytolyl propyl resorcinol is known to inhibit tyrosinase, which is the enzyme in skin that produces melanin (Madlyn Cazalis, p.1). These are only two of the many ingredients in various skin bleaching products.

Melanin processes are complex, affecting many neurological and endocrinal processes, particularly in embryonic development (Cichorek, M., Wachulska, M., Stasiewicz, A., & Tymińska, A., 2013). Melanin is still being studied by medicine, but it

is key to human energy conversion, acts as protection against harmful UV rays, and is found in the human skin, brain, eyes, and hair (Clinuvel Pharmaceuticals, 2016). These ingredients plus many other toxic ingredients are often present in higher doses in illegal skin lightening products, but also are often present in toxic doses in regulated products. In addition, these products, numbering in the thousands are poorly regulated. On March 29, 2015 Stephen Hayward of the UK Mirror reported that a raid in High Street shops in London's popular bargain shopping district that "thousands" of products containing high levels of a variety of toxic ingredients, were identified by watchdog groups and seized. Two ingredients identified were hydroquinone, which was banned in the UK in 2001, and potentially lethal doses of mercury, which is only available by prescription. Most came from India, Thailand, Pakistan and the Ivory Coast. The Ivory Coast published a ban on skin whiteners in May, 2015, suggesting that the news of this ban was circulated at least two months prior, in time for vendors of these products to sell them overseas, many of them ending up in the bargain bins on High Street.

Harmful health effects of these products increase with repeated use over time, however, even one-time use of some products can scar and burn. Damage includes skin burning and scarring, neurological damage, skin cancer, kidney and liver damage, high blood pressure, blindness, diabetes, and, over time, organ failure leading to death (Azadeh, 2016).

One prominent Gambian doctor warns that because of reduced pigmentation, lighter skin exposed to sunlight becomes dark again, leading to the use of more skin lightening cream. Eventually, the skin becomes thin, and chemicals enter the bloodstream, causing organ damage, and in many cases, after years of exposure, organ

failure (Azadeh, 2016). Secondary health effects of mercury and toxic chemicals eliminated through human waste pose a danger to pregnant women and their fetuses when they are ingested in drinking water (WHO, 2007).

Many of these products have no effect in skin lightening. Internal organ damage may take years to surface, but skin damage is more visible. Skin often becomes pitted, rough, patchy, and scarred (Azadeh, 2016).

Psychological Effects Damage Communities

The damaging effects of using skin lighteners does not stop at the damage to physical health. Women and girls absorb the belief that they must be pretty, that their looks must be liked and admired, that they must try to be as beautiful as the women they see every day in the media, and this causes psychological harm. These health and psychological effects combine to negatively impact women of color everywhere, by perpetuating colorism and prejudice, and by poisoning billions of girls, women, and babies in gestation. Laying aside, temporarily, the moral aspect of this practice by cosmetic companies, in the end, the resulting economic impacts cripple the potential for development in communities of color, which are most in need of economic and educational development.

The relentless barrage of media messages about beauty ideals results in damage to girls and women's self-esteem and self-efficacy (Grabe et. al., 2008). Skin bleaching affects not only societal perceptions of women's beauty but also affects their marital and job prospects, social status and earning potential (Saifee, 2005). In addition to physical health consequences, the self-perception by girls and women that they are not white or light enough gives rise to psychosocial effects, including "lower self-confidence levels as

well as perceptions of inferiority” (Saifee, 2005; “India Debates” 2007).

The advertising that accompanies the marketing of these products, with the intrinsic message that dark skin is not beautiful, carries not only a deeply personal cost of loss of self-esteem, but a high cost to communities of color. In communities of color, human capital is a critical resource. Women who become educated, move into professions and interact in community forums are a valuable resource, a resource that helps lift families and communities out of poverty and ignorance. Women who reach their potentials also serve as role models and leaders for young people, creating a generational effect that sustains communities. A woman damaged by these internalized beauty demand struggles to believe she is good enough. She struggles to break from traditional gender role demands, struggles to believe she can set and reach educational and professional goals and struggles to believe she has anything worthwhile to contribute to her community. If she does overcome the psychological damage, she may still pay the physical cost that robs the community of a fully vital member.

CHAPTER XV

MARRIAGE OPPORTUNITIES

Another important, and sometimes heartbreaking impact of colorism for women in traditional Indian families is that a dark skin tone negatively impacts her chances for marriage. Not being chosen for marriage carries significant shame for the family. Often the family will deal cruel taunts to an unmarried relative if she is darker than her family members (Interview, “Sandara”, 2016, Phillips, 2004).

Many Indians believe that without a husband, a woman is “nothing” (Phillips, 2004). While the dowry system was officially outlawed in 1961, it remains socially “compulsory.” In the marriage market, a fair complexion can often compensate for shortcomings in caste level or socioeconomic status related to income, work or education (Glenn, 2009). For men, skin tone does not weigh so heavily. In a survey of marriage ads in the *Hindustan Times*, Glenn notes, only 2.8% of men mention their complexion while 13.5% of women mention theirs. The majority mention skin tone only if the skin is fair.

An academic paper can reflect societal conditions and theory, but living in India as a “dark” child, and a “dark” woman means a lifetime of being treated as less than others. Shade bias in India is overt, and cruel, linked to caste and becomes a daily burden to darker-skinned females beginning in childhood.

I interviewed Sandara (not her real name) about what it was like for her growing up as a girl in India with darker skin:

My name is Sandara and I live in Northern India state Punjab. I belong to a middle-class family. I belong to a conservative family where a woman’s role in life is to worship her family and husband. I am 34 years old and I live with my parents and an older brother. I should have been

married 15 years ago but I am not because of my skin color; I don't meet the "fair skin" standards of India.

From childhood all of my immediate and extended family mocked me and my mom, saying that I did not look like her daughter because she was super fair and I was dark. My relatives embarrassed my mom by telling her she would have a hard time finding me a guy. As a little kid it didn't bug me as but as I got older it started getting worse. After any family event, I would go home and cry and curse god for making me the ugliest girl ever. I was not only put down for my skin color but also for the colors I wore. People always told me to stay away from dark colors because they made my complexion look darker than it was. I was not allowed to wear bright colors.

All of my friends at school called me "blackie" or a "black cat." Some people wouldn't want to look at me the first thing in the morning because it was not "auspicious" and their day would go bad. At school, I was never involved conversations that involved movies, guys, crushes because I was told none of the guys at school liked me because I was a "blackie."

The older I got the more I started avoiding family events because it was embarrassing to always be the center of attention due to my skin color. If I ever went to any events, I would put on a face that nothing affected me, but inside I would be torn into pieces and would manage to hide every little tear that wanted to drop on my cheek.

At a very early age, I started using fairness creams. I would go shopping and the shopkeeper would take my mother and I aside and suggest fairness products, assuring us that they would make a difference. I have used over 20 different kinds of fairness products, including going to salons for bleaching and fair skin products. These products didn't make me any lighter but my skin is definitely not smooth like it used to be.

To this day, I am suffering from this curse. I have had a number of guys and their families come to my house rejecting me on my face. No one bothers seeing my talents, capabilities. All people care about is the skin tone. I was never enough, even if excelled at other things such as school or housework. I was always a disgrace to the family.

I stopped talking to my father three years ago because we both got into a huge argument over a guy who came to see me. My father told me to just marry whatever I get. He told me I had no right to dream or desire a dream guy because I am dark and should just be happy if I get married; that I should consider myself fortunate if I get married.

I sew clothing, make paintings and have a number of clients whom I sew for, but despite all this, they still have the guts to pity me, saying “poor girl is not married because she’s a blackie.” Hearing such comments tears me apart. (Interview, March 2016).

CHAPTER XVI

MARRIAGE AND CASTE

Earliest caste restrictions in India stem primarily from early affiliations with Hindu upper caste power. However, Kevin Hobson, in an analysis of British colonial rule and British formalization of caste separation for census purposes which began in India 1871, also acknowledges arguments which characterize this self-identification of caste within the census as also “a political tool” to help reinforce British rule. Nevertheless, he argues that this new self-identification of caste, which returned “a bewildering array of answers” both reinforced and altered perceptions and the perceived characteristics of existing caste systems. Hobson points out however, that the caste system is thought to be over 2,000 years old (Hobson, 1998).

The structure of caste in India, with its prohibitions against marrying outside of caste, has such deep roots that population geneticists, separating the DNA markers from female lines showed:

...there is indeed a significant genetic distance, as by the number of differences in the DNA, between women in the higher and lower castes. The differences can be explained by a low level of gene flow carried by women moving one way in a firmly layered system. If women moved both ways, or not at all, there would be little difference between the castes (Wade, 1998).

While an in-depth analysis of caste in India is beyond the purview of this work, the perception that darker skin is a marker of the lower castes remains. The initial visual/mental identification of the caste of a woman is based on skin-tone, and marriages are not finalized until caste and lineage can be determined. Women's roles within castes are strictly proscribed throughout most of India.

India Studies, in "The Veiling and Seclusion of Women" offers a succinct picture of the role of women in India. While in affluent urban areas the practice of veiling and wearing purdah garments is considered unsophisticated, social restrictions of caste bind women and men to marriage within their own castes. In the 2011-2012 India Human Development Survey of over 42,000 households represented by class and social group, the result was that only a little over 5% of marriages were intercaste, with the higher rates being among the "backwards" castes, and lower rates among the higher ranks (Hindu.com, 2014). It is significant to note that 73% of the population live outside of these urban centers, and purdah restrictions in these areas remain rigid, along with higher caste restrictions (Countrystudies.us/india, p.1.). The social restrictions of women within castes are reflected in purdah requirements among Hindu castes:

In much of northern and central India, particularly in rural areas, Hindu and Muslim women follow complex rules of veiling the body and avoidance of public appearance, especially in the presence of relatives linked by marriage and before strange men. Purdah practices are inextricably linked to patterns of authority and harmony within the family. Rules of Hindu and Muslim purdah differ in certain key ways, but female modesty and decorum as well as concepts of family honor are essential to

the various forms of purdah. In most areas, purdah restrictions are stronger for women of high-status families. The importance of purdah is not limited to family life; rather, these practices all involve restrictions on female activity and access to power and the control of vital resources in a male-dominated society.

The Indian constitution, in article 14 and 15, gives equal status to women, and there have been important laws passed: to grant women rights to divorce, to inherit property, the prohibition of dowry, (which often leads to abuse of women), and laws specifically laying out punishments for husbands or other relatives abusing women, especially for unpaid dowry or dowry disputes. However, in Hindu castes, Goa, and among Parsi castes there are laws giving inherited property to the husband, laws allowing marriage of children from one to 10 years old, laws giving no right to marital property in the case of divorce or widowhood, and laws allowing marital rape (Madhok, 2014). Today, with few exceptions, the farther a village is from city centers, the less power women have and the less often crimes against women are reported or prosecuted (BBC News India, 2014). This domination of the male paradigm reinforces the concept of fair skin and beauty.

The caste system, in its persistence and rigidity, remains in India, despite being outlawed in 1961. It affects job opportunities, and income remains higher in the higher castes, as well as access to higher status work (Times of India, 2015).

In marriage opportunities, fair skin may offer a woman an opportunity to move up one step in the middle and lower castes, but rarely in the highest castes. In India Studies it explains, “In modern times, as in the past, it is virtually impossible for an individual to

raise his own status by falsely claiming to be a member of a higher-ranked caste. Such a ruse might work for a time in a place where the person is unknown, but no one would dine with or intermarry with such a person or his offspring until the claim was validated through kinship networks. Rising on the ritual hierarchy can only be achieved by a caste as a group, over a long period of time, principally by adopting behavior patterns of higher-ranked groups” (Country studies us/India. p.1.). However, as noted by Hobson, women can and do “marry up” – if only to the next highest caste, and usually only if they are considered “fair.”

Matrimonial ads in India reflect this bias, where female-placed ads mention fairness over six times more often than men (Glenn, 2009). Advertisement shorthand for this is f=fair, vf= very fair, and vvf= very very fair. This social ranking based on color does not stop with male/female relationships but is applied throughout society. Furthermore, present-day society and neighborhood distributions remain delineated on the basis of caste, and in rural areas, villages remain almost wholly divided by castes and sub-castes.

CHAPTER XVII

WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Unfortunately, this bias is also applied in work opportunities. In *The Beauty Bias*, Stanford Law Professor Deborah L. Rhode convincingly makes the case that women who fail to meet conventional beauty standards are often passed up for promotions and suffer from the economic effects of people's perceptions of their attractiveness (Rhode, 2010).



In this ad for Fair and Lovely in India, the Fair and Lovely Foundation, which offers educational scholarships to women, the overt message is that education leads to success. But the subtext, that opportunity is linked to lighter skin tone, is not so subtle. One excerpt from the Foundation website says *“In the 2000s, when society believed that a woman’s place was at home, Fair & Lovely encouraged her to choose her own career. And today, when despite much progress, women still don’t get equal opportunities and society continues to impose barriers for women, Fair & Lovely will give women the*

confidence to overcome their own hesitations & fears to achieve their true potential”
(Fair and Lovely India/Our Story).

Decoding this message, it is evident that the “barriers” that “society” imposes means caste barriers and skin tone barriers, especially when accompanied by their advertising images showing dark skin becoming progressively lighter. It is clear that the company advertising itself is promoting the idea of skin tone as a “barrier.” The word “confidence” is code for the idea that lighter skin will afford women more “confidence” to overcome “their own hesitations and fears,” squarely blaming women for the lack of confidence in their own skin that Fair and Lovely ads continue to promote.

CHAPTER XVIII

RESOLVING ISSUES OF BEAUTY IN INDIA

Ultimately, it is both racism and sexism that present the greatest challenge to India being perceived as a true democracy, and the greatest challenge to an anti-fairness cream movement. The goal should be to improve the UN Development Programme scores on gender which would show real progress toward ending the discrimination, violence, and decimation of women and girls in India. In setting sustainable goals for 2030, one of the priority targets of the UNDP goal is ambitious: to end gender inequality globally.

Media and Bollywood Pushback

Overall, the images put forth by the media are unhealthy to the extent that some Bollywood actresses have joined a growing movement against fairness creams. On March 17, 2016, actress Kalki Koechlin, an Indian actress known for roles which defy the stereotypes of Indian women, joined a live online Reddit American Medical Association panel for International Women's day, where she attacked this idea behind the use of fairness creams. "I don't think there is anything wrong with being fair, but when an entire nation bases its idea of beauty on being fair, it's sad, because there are such beautiful people who are dusky or of a different skin tone" (Reddit.com, 2016).

Beginning around 2008 there has been a global pushback, led by women's groups, medical professionals, and public health awareness campaigns. This has met with much success, mostly because of the effective use of global social media in discouraging the use of fairness creams, and the inherent racism this fairness meme promotes. Perhaps the

largest current social media campaign, #unfairandlovely, was inspired by Pax Jones, a 21-year-old black student at the University of Texas at Austin. Jones created a photo series of “stunning” images of her South Asian classmates, sisters Mirusha and Yanusha Yogarajah (Flint, H, 2016). #unfairandlovely received a boost at the latest annual International Women’s Day, but critics in India, where the event is celebrated in a big way, call this feature of the campaign in India “tokenism,” saying it is just another “excuse for discounts on fashion and beauty products - including the ubiquitous skin-whitening creams.” (D’Silva, 2016). The growing popularity of anti-skin bleaching campaign news can be found on dozens of video posts on YouTube. For example, in Senegal, activists and celebrities joined the viral campaign for Black is Beautiful, and BBC news recently posted a YouTube video, “Women Speak Out on Skin Lightening” (BBC News, 2016). Unfortunately, when these key phrases are searched, there are often four or five more “related” video posts on how to lighten skin that appear as well.

Indian Actress Nandita Das in 2013 joined the ongoing “Dark is Beautiful” campaign against this pressure to lighten skin, frankly labeling it “racism.” Das became part of the Dark is Beautiful campaign along with Women of Worth, whose missions are to raise awareness and create a counter-movement to the media bias for fair skin, and to celebrate beauty beyond color. Das noted that because of her darker skin, she was shunted into “lower caste” roles, or urged to lighten her skin ‘slightly’ in order to play “upper caste” roles. She sparked a national conversation about actresses who started with their own natural skin tones who became noticeably lighter as their careers progressed. She criticized the directors’ demands that her skin must be lightened if she were to play a role of an urban, affluent woman (Saif, 2016).

Advertising companies design their advertisements to appeal to their target demographic. When developing marketing campaigns, marketing agencies use research and focus groups to determine how to best attract their target group and how to make the products desirable (Marketing Overview, 2012). When beauty products are being marketed to women in India, advertisements recruit women that reflect the beauty “ideal,” a “fair skin” ideal which is present in historical Hindu and British colonial memes, but also implanted in Western media ideals, beginning around mid-century in the US. The current advertisements frankly link “fair” beauty to success and “escape” -the idea that making the skin fairer will allow a dark woman to break through societal barriers of discrimination in India (Jagtap, 2010).

In 2014 the Advertising Standards Council of India responded to the growing protests against the sexist and racist content of many of these ads by voluntarily imposing guidelines to address them. One Fair and Lovely ad, where the father wishes he had a son, to solve their financial problems, is resolved when the daughter lightens her skin to land an air hostess job, was taken off the air. Also removed was a “Fair and Handsome” ad which targeted men, a “Clean and Dry” ad for vaginal bleaching and a Garnier “Men Power Light” ad (Digiday, 2014).

However, the advertising guidelines only served to make the sexism and racism slightly less overt. Unilever in Hindustan anchors their marketing firmly on linking power and beauty -the power to rise above your socioeconomic level by lightening skin tone. The branding phrases “Rescripting Destiny,” and “beauty that empowers a woman to change her destiny,” according to Hindustan Unilever, are at the core of the Fair and Lovely marketing strategy -it is the “brand-essence” of “Rescripting Destiny.” It stands

for “beauty that empowers a woman to change her destiny” – a slogan supported by the establishment of the Fair and Lovely Foundation, which offers women educational scholarships yet advertises that it takes “beauty,” (fair beauty), for a woman to “change her destiny” (Jagtap, 2010).



Unilever Fair and Lovely Foundation Advertisement

The use of skin whiteners and the inherent racism and sexism in the media should be a major target of civic groups, public health groups, and women’s groups to help reduce the discrimination against women in India. One aspect of potential change lies in the raw demographic population make-up of India. As of 2014 an astounding 46.6 percent of the population of Indian citizens are under 25 years old (Indexmundi.com. p.1.) The increasing numbers of young people, along with rising numbers of higher education are numbers which offer hope: new generations tend to shed old ideas.

In order to address racism, caste prejudice, and gender inequality, India needs to address the foundations of racism and sexism with education. Racism, sexism and caste

prejudice are learned, and they can be unlearned, or learned differently by addressing media, nutrition, education, public health information and public information outreach.

Addressing Colorism Through Journalism

In a March 2015 report published by the International Federation of Journalists, (as part of research and surveys ongoing through 2017), Indian media researcher Sujata Madhok reports that going against a Western media trend of diminishing print publications, in India print publications are on the rise, from 5767 in 2012-2013, to 6730 in 2013-2014. Satellite television numbered 821, with 404 being news and information stations. News radio stations are still government regulated. Madhok points out that while women are entering media in increasing numbers, they are still a minority. However, many local language regional stations are owned by local politicians, and currently cross-media monopolies are being built, and are almost wholly advertising-funded, therefore the information and advertising is strictly biased toward corporate interests. This male-dominated industry, they note, has little interest in issues of gender equality or caste equality. Even in social media freedom of speech is hampered by certain provisions of the Information Technology Act of 2000, which allows people to be arrested by the police for messages that are deemed offensive or false. Free speech in India as represented in the media is under attack on many fronts, but global groups like the IFJ have a strong organizational network to oppose these attacks (Ifj.org, 2015).

The survey study of women's roles in the media suggest growing journalistic industry support for the rights and presence of women journalists, but current conditions for women journalists are oppressive. The IFJ study reports:

An excellent qualitative study by the Women, Media and News Trust, in 2014 reinforces the finding that Indian journalists usually belong to the Hindu upper castes. The study found that less than a fifth of editorial staff in four states of North India were female and even these were mostly upper caste Hindus with a sprinkling of Muslims. Dalits did not figure at all. The conditions in which these women work, particularly those who are stringers in the district towns, are unimaginable. They face innumerable hurdles because of gender bias, coupled with poor wages and lack of facilities including a poor transport network, lack of equipment and lack of support from colleagues and seniors.

Within this mix, with corporate and advertising interests overseeing media, darker Indian women news anchors, similar to advertising and entertainment numbers, are visibly missing.

A Google (India) search query for images of female newscasters in India (*and the US*), reads like a list of pornography magazine article headlines. The search headlines scream “The 10 Hottest News Anchors” followed by a long list of similar search titles referring to women media representatives with words like “hottest” (most frequently), followed by words like “cleavage” and “busty” (GoogleIndia.com, 2016). These “fair beauties” are being let in according to their looks, and are presented as sexual objects meant to increase viewership rather than true journalists, despite their qualifications.

These search findings speak volumes about Google searches, and male perception of women in the news and male attitudes about women in general, however within the

advertising-supported and male-dominated Google and male-dominated tech industry (less than 5% are black and women) it is not surprising. Regardless, these Indian female news anchors are invariably lighter complected, young, and beautiful (NDTV.com).

Addressing Gender Equality Through Improvements in Public Education

People that can't read often miss the benefits of public education and outreach programs, which rely heavily on print. While literacy rates in India have risen steadily, the overall literacy rate in India is 71% in rural India, and 86% in urban centers. However, only 2.2% of females and 4.2% of males reached levels of graduation and above in rural areas (Economicstimes.com, In. 2015). Within these schools the curriculum needs to include teaching for both boys and girls about the unacceptability of racism, sexism, inequality and gender violence, particularly in rural areas. Bringing education up to first-nations standards has been a priority in India, but dropout rates remain high. School completion and higher education must become a priority. According to the Brookings Institute:

With enrollment reaching at least 96 percent since 2009, and girls making up 56 percent of new students between 2007 and 2013, it is clear that many problems of access to schooling have been addressed. Improvements to infrastructure have been a priority to achieve this and India now has 1.4 million schools and 7.7 million teachers so that 98 percent of habitations have a primary school (class I-V) within one kilometer and 92 percent have an upper primary school (class VI-VIII) within a three-kilometer walking distance.

Despite these improvements, keeping children in school through graduation is still an issue and dropout rates continue to be high.

Nationally 29 percent of children drop out before completing five years of primary school, and 43 percent before finishing upper primary school.

High school completion is only 42 percent.

While low levels of education are not directly linked to racism and prejudice, there is evidence that “low intelligence” is a predictor of racism and “right wing,” (or fundamentalist) thinking and low intergroup contact (Hodson & Busseri, 2012).

Education across castes and gender combats both genderism and racism.

But it must be considered that “low intelligence” is often a result of poor pre-natal and natal nutrition and the nutrition needed during childhood for normal brain development. Bringing education for all into communities can educate both men and women about the importance of pre-natal and natal nutrition for mothers. In disseminating natal health care information, one study notes that in rural villages, male small business owners, storekeepers, and even washermen are the respected sources of information and are trusted by women villagers. So while many studies focus on the providing women in India with health knowledge and access to health, one study denotes the reality: that women depend on men, and secondly their husbands’ families for access to health and health advice, and as a result, treatment for pregnancy, childbirth and health care delivery in general are often delayed until it is too late (Das, Ashavaree, and Sarkar, 2014).

Money for schools often means money for school lunch programs. According to an article from PRI.org, India’s school lunch program is the largest in the world, feeding

over 120 million children a mid-day meal. Research on this nutrition programs shows a huge positive impact on malnourished children, according to Dipa Sinha, an economist and researcher at the Center for Equity Studies in New Delhi, appointed by the Indian government to track the impact of these programs said, “It’s usually believed that once a child becomes malnourished, it’s almost impossible to catch up,” Sinha said. “But this Young Lives study shows that catch-up growth is also made possible by the mid-day meal scheme” (PRI.org, 2013).

Rebecca Winthrop, in an article written for the Brookings Institute (2013), *Promoting Gender Equality through Education in India*, notes that in Uttar Pradesh, The Study Hall Foundation, which funds schools at a much lower cost than public schools, are not only exceeding the national graduation rate by 30%, but that their girls emerge “empowered.” By in-class dialogues, talking to and cajoling their parents, and urging other girls to not marry too early and finish their educations, they are making strides against genderism. They convince their parents to let them finish school, and an astounding 88% move on to higher education. Importantly, they initiate community-wide discussions against gender violence as well (*The Brookings Institution*, 2013).

Addressing Gender and Color Equality Through Public Education

Schools should be part of community education for both children and adults. While this has been implemented in many first nations in rural areas, for poorer rural area in India the challenges remain. Lack of money, long hours of subsistence striving, and apathetic attitudes about education remain barriers to schools as community education centers. However, efforts to public outreach and education should be continued.

In poor villages, schools should also function as a community center in the where

adult education and information is available. In non-school hours, these centers should have access to satellite media for adult education, news, community health bulletins, and information on all aspects of community life, including local programming access to improve agricultural education and to present local community issues. And certainly public education should include information about health effects of products such as skin lighteners, including health effects on sexual reproduction and babies in the womb, and the chemical poisoning of groundwater through the human waste containing cosmetic chemical poisons. In a male-dominated society such as India, it is logical that men would want to give advantages to potential sons through healthy nutrition for pregnant mothers and their fetuses -if this information becomes known to them. These centers should include public announcements decrying racism, caste prejudice, and family and gender violence. What they should *not* be is a conduit for further commercial programming. Additionally, school may represent nearly the only place where children and adults can learn about things not considered traditional classroom subjects. A greater emphasis on health classes and healthy behaviors, including teaching against gender violence should be part of all public health and education programs (PRI.org, 2013).

Not only do schools need a change in curriculum and teaching methods, but money must be put into infrastructure for schools so that Health Centers can be built, with access to clean water and water purification, sanitary facilities such as bathrooms for both genders, and electricity are in place. Electricity and water to rural schools and rural health centers is critical.

Equal Health Access for Both Genders

Electricity and water remain basic and critical needs in communities. Health centers are important not only for access to basic health treatments, but birth control and family planning and education related to nutrition, pollution, sanitation, and violence (Singh, Sandeep, & Badaya, 2014). Lack of medical personnel, money and infrastructure in rural areas continues to hamper the development of gender equality in India.

Improving Gender Relations: Women as Community Leaders

Women who begin and own businesses and in poor and rural communities promote gender respect, leadership for women in communities and equality, especially when they contribute part of their funds to community welfare projects, such as helping to bring clean water and electricity, and creating scholarship funding for children for certain fields that will help promote equality, such as media education for women, law and justice and women and racial studies.

Very recently women's entrepreneurship received official support from India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. The "Start Up India" initiative is aimed at increasing women-owned startups among women of Scheduled Classes and Schedules Tribes communities in India, traditionally the poorest and most disadvantaged in India. The scheme aims to facilitate loans in the range of as low as Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore. This is not a new movement -entrepreneurships for women in developing countries has long been promoted by worldwide organizations and many in India have been implemented by Indian students, however, leadership in these goals from the Prime Minister will undoubtedly give momentum to this movement (Gene. D. 2016).

But money alone will not cure racial and sexual discrimination in India. Parents must learn to teach their children, both boys and girls, that the media promotes a false

perception of beauty and worth. They must stand up together to learn and teach that this standard is false and to reinforce the understanding that a natural look is beautiful in spite of what others say. Establishing this sense of self-confidence among young children of both genders will help to overturn some of the oppressive prejudices that Indian society has towards individuals with dark skin and women, hopefully bringing into this generation and the next generation a belief that diversity is beautiful and worthy, and that women are equally needed in a progressive democracy. A daunting task, but one that can be accomplished.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION

Even though the recognition of women of color is currently growing, it is important to bridge the disparity among these groups. There are many challenges in place, and it is important for dark-skinned communities to promote the concept that achieving success in academics and in careers is an important way to gain social capital as it pertains to socioeconomic status. Because of the persistence of caste-system mindset, the challenges to change the discussion are many, but they can be met. It is important to focus on the education of our children so that they have opportunities that are greater than those the generations before them. It is important to include in children's education discussions about colorism, racism, stereotyping, and equal opportunity. In this manner, society will evolve to create a reality in which skin color is irrelevant in the success of an individual. Social media and civic groups need to continue this conversation about color and skin tone.

It is important to allow young women of color to understand that their community is aware of the challenges they will face as a consequence of their skin color and that they are always able to discuss these issues in a productive manner. Encouraging conversation is an important component of the therapeutic process and it is helpful for young girls to learn that they can talk about racial discrimination and perception issues with family members, friends, classmates, and members of the online community (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1999). These discussions could be used to promote progress as well. Not only should these conversations be used as a coping mechanism, they could also be used to help young women determine next steps in their

school lives and careers to ensure that they are able to work towards success in spite of the difficulties arising from perceptions of skin tone.

Young women should continue to engage in many academic undertakings and careers that directly fight against the perception of dark-skinned women in society. Pursuing media careers in particular will help ensure that equal representation of dark-skinned women is gains foothold in the media. Media must take on a higher responsibility of their part in eliminating India's racism and sexism. With more women gaining higher education, it is important that they continue to move into media positions and use this to help create a more equal society.

Furthermore, actively petitioning media companies and other corporations to cease discriminatory acts is useful as well. It is important for the media community to understand that women will fight for equality and once this is recognized, the paths for dark-skinned women will begin to open.

As time continues, the world is becoming more multicultural, and it should follow that society become more accepting of diverse people. Even though people have different skin tones and cultures, it is still important to consider that race is more of a social construct than a biological one. In India, where racism is so entrenched and even approved, this is a daunting task.

India, as it is becoming the world's largest democracy, needs to break the economic power of global corporations that continue to advertise and sell skin bleaching products. It is a demand created by public health goals, by equality of gender improvements, and by what should be a public demand to become truly developed, not just economically developed. Women need to have their voices heard, and to be protected

from harm by the demands for corporate consumption. All people in India must understand that it is important to respond to public need, and not be pushed by the demands of corporations of profit by any means.

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