GLOBALIZATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF BEAUTY – HOW SETTING BEAUTY STANDARDS HAVE VIOLATED WOMEN'S RIGHTS??

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ABSTRACT

Women's rights are human rights – Hillary Clinton

This historic statement was made by Hillary Clinton at the UN conference on Human Rights way back in September 1995. It's a long way since we have travelled through. However in these years globally there is rampant violation of women's rights psychologically, physically, morally, mentally and culturally too. This article looks into the historical perspective of the implementation of globalization in India and its deep rooted influence on the Indian women's beauty consciousness. The market oriented policies that was welcomed with red carpet through LPG gradually spread its tentacles throughout the country and the cultural invasion was one among them. The cosmetic industry grew rampantly and after 1990s all of a sudden Indian women were crowned with Miss Universe, Miss World titles etc., etc., and due to concerted efforts by the Industry, women suddenly started realizing the importance about their physical beauty and all sorts of cosmetics over-flooded the market whose sole purpose was to make realize women of their beauty and hence, appearing good, to look beautiful, to be white in color became important than being natural. At a time when black was beautiful too, to look white in color, to give importance to white skin and the types of soaps, shampoos, skin whitening creams, fairness creams, hair dying creams, etc., occupied our markets and before we even realized what was happening we were shown that this is the way a women should be and were shown of beauty queens as our role models. Globalization and market oriented economy achieved their purpose without the slightest opposition; successfully. Today we find this phenomena ruling the industry and many women have become victims too and their rights also violated. This article deals at length the influence of such policies on Indian socio-cultural ethos its impact on the commodification of women's body.

Black is Beautiful – Preston Mwiinga

INTRODUCTION

The views expressed by Preston Mwiinga that Black is beautiful becomes very relevant today when being a black person, or having black color, or the identities attached to this stigma are ruling us without any slightest hesitation. But what makes a person / women look beautiful and who decides that a person is beautiful. When we look back into history we see each society had its own standards of beauty and attractiveness that was inherent in the culture. We also have heard of the fairytale stories in which a rich lady asks the mirror who is the most beautiful person and the mirror points to snow white. Similarly we also have seen traditions and cultures of different nations being passed on to generations that safeguarded the concept of beauty. However worldwide there is no single standard to say that this is beautiful. To look beautiful, to have a white skin, to be gorgeous (at any cost), to have a zero size body shape or to have a beautiful body are some of the stereotypical attitudes that is dominant today. But what do we mean by being beautiful. As John Keats describes, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever, its loveliness increases, it will never pass into nothingness……….." in his poem. But having beautiful eyes, lips, fair skin, and of course the entire body to attract the fairer sex be considered as a beauty? Again, we have many poets both in India and west who have been inspired by women's beauty and have written many poems. Due to this, many women who otherwise do not have a fair complexion, do not look slim, or do not fit into the glamorous outfit feel low and have been deeply influenced to look as film stars and for that the cosmetic industry is showing the path to them. For many a time this has affected many children and women who do not come under this category.

While the feminists in the 1970s criticized the pervasive western beauty regimes such as dieting and depilation, the concept of western beauty has become much more ingrained into our lives. With the onset of globalization the entire concept of beauty has changed and has added new meaning to it. Beauty that was once considered as an aesthetic value and appreciated gradually became a market oriented, profit making business for the cosmetic and fashion industry.

The cultural tag that was once considered as sacred opened up to the western norms. The western beauty ideals – man made western ideals that have spread to the rest of the world after the implementation of globalization; and are projected as ideals poses a greater threat to the furtherance of society and Indian market being a fertile land, the fashion industry entered the nation without much resistance and even before we could understand its influence. (Yes of course the anti-beauty pageant movement that took place in Bengaluru way back in 1995 was an exception) "With the advent of globalization, westernizing the entire concept of human body became a new form of exploitation and beauty became a homogenous brand" (Zed Nelson). According to a research, India's obsession with fair skin color has gained a whopping 450 million business in a year. The *fair & lovely* which for a very long period of time promoted fairness cream for women has opened up the gates for men too and today we have many products like *Garnier, Fair & handsome, L'oreal, Vaseline,* etc., that cater to the needs of men too and has extended the business to grow in a very fast manner. Although both genders' are exposed to such ideas, it is women's beauty that is vital for market oriented industry. Today, looking fair, beautiful and handsome is not limited to women alone and even men are competing to project themselves as handsome. A study conducted in this regard also found that men were more significantly endorsing these beliefs.
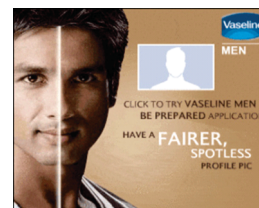
The advertisements that come in through the electronic media have a greater effect on the minds of the people and to look fairer means that they are confident, they can get job opportunities easily, they can achieve is the message that is being spread. Such ads can have a great impact on the younger generation especially those born in post-globalization era.

They consider that to have a dark and brown colored skin gives a negative impression of themselves and they try to be at their best be it at weddings or any other daily routines by using such beauty products. This obsession to look smart and gorgeous has not only given the cosmetic and fashion industry a boost but has deeply imprinted in the minds of a common girl, even a small girl going to kindergarten that she desires to become a beauty queen when she grows up creating in young minds the femininity and masculinity myths. But what's wrong in becoming a beauty queen and a model, after all they too have to use their brains in getting crowned. Is it not that when Aishwarya Rai or Sushmeta Sen or even recently when Manushi Chiller was crowned, they had beautiful answers in their last round which gave them the opportunity to get the crowns? This question is posed always. So what is wrong? But does beauty and intelligence go together? When you are testing their intelligence why expose their body and why make the common person think that is the ideal. While I was writing this article, I read a post "did Deepika Padukone bleach her skin"? Another comes from a bollywood actress who says that being "called sexy is indeed a privilege" to her. What do these mean and does it influence a common women, whose looks aren't like that of these actresses. While these may be the common terminologies that are used among the present generation, (i.e. being called sexy, etc.,) do they really not harm the cultural structure that we had or are such phrases really not the derogatory remarks passed on a woman and how can she tolerate it. Sheila Jeffreys argues that women suffering pain in pursuit of beauty is a form of submission to **patriarchal sadism**. (Wikipedia)

Beauty and misogyny - obsession and violation of human rights:

Due to this extreme beauty consciousness women of today are facing severe health problems due to the dieting they undergo to maintain their bodily figure. In certain extreme cases, they have become victims to anorexia. A study conducted by Thomspon et al shows that 26% of beauty pageant contestants had eating disorders which is by any standard very high. It also mentions that the prevalence of previously reported incidents were (0.5-1%). Brazilian model Ana Carolina had to lose her life in 2005 because she was branded as 'too fat' for the contest. Hence she reduced her eating habits and finally fell victim to the problem. However, Christein McLean, 17 then, was fortunate she could fight anorexia and contest beauty pageant again. Ana was not as fortunate as Christein. The bodily shaming of these contestants had made them to reduce the intake and some had just survived on an apple a day, while some other just on liquids so that they become thin to suit the contest. Adina Antonucci, one of the study's team members of Hope foundation, that conducted a study on the beauty pageant contestants noted, *"In recent years, we've seen an increase in body image awareness that has sparked important conversations about the unrealistic standards of beauty."*

They also found that while *"*The average BMI for American women moved into the overweight range, with the average BMI for contestants in the Miss Universe pageant moving into the underweight range." Another interesting fact that the team could study was increase in the height of the present contestants (that had 3 inches more than the earlier contestants). However Ms.Angelenia Yap from Singapore, who being a victim herself to anorexia has raised her voice against it which is a positive initiative. However, these unrealistic beauty standards that are set up by the industry are really alarming and needs to be addressed.

Another big influence of the modern beauty standards are the cosmetic surgeries that are attracting the young women to shape their bodies – be it the lips, eye brows, eyelids or the breast transplantations. Most of the celebrities in the film industry have undergone such surgeries and since their beauties are appreciated by media and film field, the younger women consider it as the ultimate and are undergoing such surgeries. Their ultimate purpose is to look 'beautiful'. Unscientific breast transplants in the country have cost many lives too. Similarly a study in Korea says most young women today are going for eyelash surgeries so that they can attain the American standard. Now what do these signify really?

Skin Whitening Creams: Studies have recorded that the use of skin bleaching creams have gone up from 27% to 77% in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America which will be worth estimated at US$ 31.2 billion by 2024.

In India it is one of the fastest growing markets with an annual expenditure of US $ 450 million. Despite this, the use of such skin whitening products has far reach consequences on the health – psychological as well as physical health of the user. Agarwal et al tested 23 such skin bleaching products in India and found that more than 50% of these creams contained steroids that can damage the skin of the user (Hemal Sheroff, Public Health Frontier, Jan 2018). Another study found that the use of mercury in fairness creams have significantly risen over the years. But the use of such creams that contain harmful ingredients can cause irritation, affect the babies when used in pregnancy and can damage liver, kidney etc., In India and China particularly since there is no restrictions on the ingredients that are used, the market is flooded with such creams despite their harmful effects. But certain African countries like Namabia, Coloumbia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Zimbabwae etc., have banned the import of such skin whitening products.

Sure, cosmetics makes one look elegant, beautiful and gives some confidence yet the aesthetics of beauty and the myths surrounding it has uncovered the challenges that the cosmetic and fashion industry has posed before us. The use of chemicals in the fairness creams has far reaching consequences. Chemicals such as formaldehyde that are found in hair dye, nail polishers, cosmetic glues and some shampoos are linked to cancer and may damage the immune system.(Karishma Keinzung, 2017). Similarly men who use such beauty products that include paraben may affect their reproductive sperm count. Further, Dr.Batra of Ganga Ram Hospital warns that phateletes found in hair sprays may affect liver / kidney and may cause birth defects both in males and females. (ibid) These are some of the side effects of such beauty obsessions that we have imbibed today.

Another advertisement that caught my attention was regarding slimming. It reads "Are you fat, join our program you will be slim within a few months", "take our pills, you will reduce your size"…. The purpose of such ads is to again project the stereotypical standards set for women, that she should not be fat, be slim, look glamorous etc., etc., which has again affected the health of many. Such practices continue to harm women's health and opportunities for full human being.(Mac Kinnon, 2006)

Thus, the notion that 'white is beautiful' is a concerted effort by the western media and the fashion and cosmetic industry to increase their sales has embraced our lives and has not only considered

women as a commodity but also has seen her in a derogatory manner. The fashion and cosmetic industry today though has provided opportunities for women are not free from the harassment, discrimination and violence. Many instances have been reported in the recent past. The #Me too movement and a movie by Madhur Bandarkar titled 'Fashion' has shown us the other face of the industry which testify the time. At a time when beauty pageants were glorified, we have many beauty queens who protested against the standards set by the industry and have given up their crowns (Venezuelan beauty queen of course died in a protest after she was shot at). However what needs to be done at this hour is to ban such contests which violate human dignity and are derogatory to the women's rights.

Conclusion:
With or without our knowledge we have been obsessed by the fairness concept and looking beautiful, handsome has automatically granted a person of his rights than the other dark skinned individual.

Often Women all over the world are hard pressed to look beautiful and charming. However due to globalization, the so called beauty has been homogenized and has put certain ideals before the younger generation. It has worsened the situation and today as small kids too are following blindly the false propaganda that is shown in the media and are using many creams, lipsticks, shampoos, fairness creams etc., etc., to get that westernized look. But despite these changes, we have to understand that 'beauty doesn't lie in outer appearances but within a person' as 'Black is beautiful too'….. and being black shouldn't make a person inferior. Beauty and Misogyny continue to harm women's health but also about her very identity.

Black is beautiful and I am proud to be born black.
It has the chocklet. Chocklate is sweet no wonder everyone likes it,
so is my skin color. Proud to be born black.
Black is not cursed,

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