

bloggers' park

Our daily column on what the world wide web is talking about

INDIA'S FAIR AND LOVELY SYNDROME

India has a mass, collective neurosis when it comes to dark skin. You'd think a people who feature an immense jingoism and gorgeous swarthy complexion would celebrate their exquisite complexions.

Bizarrely, the cult of fairness grips the Indian psyche. Beyond mere conceptions of beauty, it is an indicator of class and even moral worth in the popular imagination.


Parents aspire to bag the lightest skinned brides for their sons. As a consequence, any would-be bride listed in the *shaadi* advertisements of the newspaper classifieds or online matrimonial sites will describe her

tinting within her biodata, along with her religion, caste, education, employment, and family background. The convention of describing skin colour is a three-step gradation: "Fair", "wheatish", or "dark".

My unscientific survey of the matrimonial sites seems to reveal a much higher reporting of "fair" complexion, and a vastly lower reporting of "dark" complexion, than one observes in the general population.

Perhaps, the brides-to-be are contributing to India's Rs 1,400 crore (\$356 million) sales of skin-bleaching creams. Men also indulge in this self-loathing makeover.

According to 2004 market data, men make up approximately 25 per cent of this market; and that percentage, like the market itself, is expanding.



bad day? blog to vent
at Reliance Mobile World > Messaging >
Mblog Buddy

MMS: Rs.5, SMS: Rs.3

RELIANCE
Mobile

* Conditions apply

The media, of course, only reinforces these absurd, pernicious personal aesthetics. Bollywood films feature light-

skinned heroes vanquishing darker villains. This summer, South India's biggest star, Rajnikanth, released the most expensive Indian film ever made, *Sivaji — The Boss*.

To make him appear fairer in the film, he subjected himself to a skin bleach! Shah Rukh Khan, arguably the biggest movie star in the world, is the brand ambassador for Emami's "Fair and Handsome" skin-whitening cream.

The television commercials for fairness creams and soaps invariably feature light-skinned models — men and women who already look downright Swedish compared to the general population — who become miraculously lighter after using the products.

The message is unambiguous: Even

fair is not fair enough. Dark skin is bad, says the media.

Even the big multinational corporations doing business in India play on these bigotries.

Take, for example, the Vodafone hoarding from its new ad campaign, which touts the mobile phone provider's caller screening feature.

The imagery says: "Take the calls of good people and ignore the calls of bad people".

Bad people are best represented by dark skin. Activists have long tried to pass laws prohibiting the sale of fairness products in India. But fairness products will continue to dominate the Indian cosmetic industry until India wakes up, looks in the mirror, and likes what it sees.

<http://memestreamblog.wordpress.com>