

Research Proposal:

Colourism in the Indian society

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ABSTRACT

As much as it is denied, the presence of colourism is deep-rooted in Indian society. The majority of the population will show their apathy towards the mal-practice of colourism¹, even denial but when it comes to the real life; its practice is extremely rampant. How this practice of discrimination on the basis of skin tone came into being is worthy of proper investigation. Whether these practices were prevalent back in the ages or how did it come into being in the first place and what connection does it share with the caste system are questions that need to be answered. Media's undeniable impact has been solidifying the notion of 'fair is beautiful' almost since its very inception. Furthermore, it has transformed into a lens through which people tend to see themselves and others and thus define their sense of selves.

This paper is an attempt to study this phenomenon in-depth and gain further insight into the subject of colourism in India.

¹ prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Its modern populace is a result of immigration, trade and business, conquests, matrimonial alliances, etc. Needless to say, the population we see today comes from a barrage of different castes, races and ethnicities. People in India do not have the same facial features as the rest of the country. For instance, people from the Southern part of the country, Dravidians are dark-complexioned, brown-eyed and have thick lips while people from Kashmir possess fairer complexion, coloured eyes, slender facial structure. Etc. This difference in facial structures gives birth to the practice of colourism and discrimination. Differences have often led to the unjustified preference of one skin to another.

Colourism's influence has affected the psyche of millions of Indians. The most vulnerable group to this discriminatory practice is women, mostly youngsters. Throughout their lives girls (if dark-skinned) have to bear the brunt of this societal practice, they are not even safe from their family's remarks. The notion, furthered by the Indian media has even come to become a measure of success, prosperity and joy in an average Indian's life.

How did this practice come up is a vital question which cannot be answered without first tracing the origin of India and its peoples, its social norms during the *Mughals* and the Raj and the practices promoted by the media post-independence till the modern era.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to provide an insight into the finer aspects of the Indian society. It basically involves throwing a light on this subtle but equally devastating discriminatory practice

that has become a norm. The practice is quite often not even considered to be discriminatory in nature and it is considered to be completely normal.

The goals of this study are:

1. To provide an understanding into the origin of this practice
2. To highlight the bias present and perpetuated by the Indian media
3. The subsequent impact on the psyche of the victims and the perpetrators

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE Studying colourism in the Indian society

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. Do you think of yourself as pretty/handsome?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, where would you rate yourself? (1 being the fairest and 5 being the darkest)
3. Are you satisfied with your complexion?
4. If given the opportunity, would you like to have a lighter complexion and why?
5. Have you ever used any skin bleaching products?
6. Are you aware of any harmful effects these products have?
7. Does complexion matter to you in romantic relationships?
8. What is your preferred complexion for your partner?
9. Do you consider lighter skin to be more beautiful? why?
10. Are lighter-skinned people in majority?

11. Does having fair skin make life easier? How?
12. Have you ever personally experienced colourism in India?
13. Have you ever experienced an advantage or disadvantage because of your skin colour in life?

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was carried out with the help of a questionnaire method and interviews. The questionnaire was circulated in the month of August amongst different groups of people and was filled anonymously. The respondents were from the same circle and had a basic level of education but came from different backgrounds and classes. While the interviews were conducted during the second week of August. The respondents were enlisted randomly for the purpose of diversity.

The questionnaire was circulated online and was filled by a select group that was quite restricted. This method was chosen because it was the most feasible in the light of the COVID-19 outbreak and it was circulated in the groups that were the most accessible.

Most of the respondents were my acquaintances, which I knew from my college and others were family and friends. The form was also uploaded on the internet platform Reddit, wherein a handful of people from diverse groups filled it.

The sampling technique employed was random. The respondents that filled the form were people who had experienced colourism in one way or another. The form was circulated in relevant groups on social media and the time that was selected was according to the availability of the

students. The time chosen was some time in the evening because that was the time when every single online class was over and the respondents did not have any other academic engagements.

After deciding the mode of circulation, quantitative questions were formed. The questions were mainly quantitative but there were quite a few qualitative questions as well.

The questions asked during the interview were qualitative.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mishra, N. (2015). India and colorism: The finer nuances. *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.*, 14, 725.

Mishra N. has introduced the concept of colourism to the population of West and East alike. In her paper, Mishra has rightfully included the aspects that trace and explain the origin of this practice. The paper is very comprehensible, concise and compact. The background (behind colourism) provided was backed by historical practices that were cited by incredible sources.

The attention to the details is quite immaculate as the author has even provided the proper etymology of the words that are in use in today's society. The paper has also acknowledged the religious and social practices that might have shaped this malice. The effect of external influences such as Muslim and British rulers has also been elaborated upon.

Furthermore, the author has very well traced the presence of colourism in modern-day society from a socio-economic lens. The data provided here is quantitative in nature as the

author provides the share values for each company that deals in so-called skin bleaching products. For instance, 'Fair and Lovely' holds 76% of the market shares while Cavin Kare's 'Fairever' holds 15%. ²It has also established a relationship between caste and colour where the author has also busted a few myths in terms of the relationship between caste and colour. The relationship between region and colour and its social implications have been explored as well.

The demand of a fair skin-colour in marriages is also explored here.

The data and methodology which was survey and interviews were conducted which seemed to be very effective as they were a miniature reflection of the society. However, the survey was quite restrictive as it only took into consideration the age group of 20-22 which is not very diverse in terms of age. The interviews however, are very diverse and are in-depth; the questions asked were qualitative in nature and were more or less representative of the true Indian psyche.

The questionnaire here also resulted in some important data and info graphics that are essential in proving the existence of this practice from a scientific perspective.

The concluding remarks basically sum up the entire paper in the most correct manner possible and also makes it very relevant by adding a recent example from India's political sphere.

Paul, A. (2016). Beyond the pale?: Skinderella stories and colourism in India. *Ideaz*, 14, 133.

² https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1553&context=law_globalstudies

This paper has critically analysed the practices of colourism as promoted and supported by the media and prominent Bollywood faces that dominate the Indian television screen.

The author has given an explanation behind skin-bleaching which vary from social to historic. It explains the hegemonic structure which was established during the *Vedic* age and further strengthened by British rule.

This consolidation has led to fair-skin domination in films and TV. The news anchors, film stars, presenters, etc on-screen are mostly fair-skinned. Moreover, the social consequence of this hegemony is the preference of fair skin tone in marriages and even the dietary habits the expectant mothers have to adopt in order to satisfy their (or their families) want of a fair-skinned child.

The paper shows that how even men especially the ones from the Southern belt are regular consumers of skin bleaching products. This finding is a small aspect of the larger picture as companies such as 'Hindustan Unilever' has been experiencing steady market growth in India.

The author has clearly stated the main underlying reason behind the bias in the modern sphere which is the advertisements and products endorsed by major TV stars, actors and models ³

Futhermore, the author has mentioned the various campaigns that the concerned tribunals and organisations have undertaken to discourage the hegemony of fair skin. Advertising council of India (ASCI) has issued relevant guidelines to enforce equality. On the other hand, in the

³ <http://www.dnaindia.com/entertainment/report-how-stars-explainendorsing-fairness-products-2067662>. Also refer news article available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/report-online-petition-urges-shah-rukh-khan-emami-to-stop-advertising-fairness-products-1868161>.

Indian film industry, Nandita Das has proved herself to be the lone voice in campaigning for the 'Dark is beautiful' idea in her short film 'India's got colour'⁴

The author has also brought to light the fact that H. V. Kamath, a member of India's constituent Assembly had moved for anti-colour discrimination legislation to be included in the charter of rights ⁵which was later was axed after an objection raised by Sardar Patel

The author has ended the article pondering over several questions and has expressed his thoughts regarding a thorough investigation that needed to be conducted for the sake of the subject.

Nagar, I. (2018). The unfair selection: A study on skin-color bias in arranged Indian marriages. *Sage Open*, 8(2), 2158244018773149.

Ishita Nagar in this scholarly article has conducted an exploratory research on the subject of colourism in the context of arranged marriages in India. For this study, the researcher has employed scientific method of data collection by enlisting respondents from urban households in the Delhi-NCR region of North India. Since arranged marriages are affairs that are managed by the parents of prospective brides and grooms, the respondents were mainly mothers with children of marriageable age. This particular study aims at the potential skin colour has in over shadowing the effect and importance of everything else.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3kMD32ctTw>

⁵

https://eparlib.nic.in/handle/123456789/4/simple-search?filterquery=1947&filtername=date&filtertype>equals&sort_by=dc.date_dt&order=DESC&submit_search=Update

The cosmetic industry in India is worth nearly \$180 million and is said to have a steady and increasing growth. The presence of this industry implies the idea of fair skin is equated with success and resourcefulness. The main idea behind the promotion of such products is that dark-skinned people cannot achieve success. In the words of the author, “fair is lovely and dark is ugly” Earlier, this industry used to profit off of the dark skin bias in women but now it has included men as well. An example being, *Fair & Handsome* being sold by Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (HUL) the same company that sells *Fair & Lovely*.

The idea of fair skin supremacy is afloat today because of the media which employs major actors to promote the products, a post-colonization and globalized world. The combined forces of these promote the Western standard of feminine beauty in South Asia. This is reflected in matrimonial advertisements That often use the word ‘fair’ as a demand for a potential bride or a groom. However, the word is often thrown around in the ‘bride wanted’ section rather than the ‘groom wanted’ section.

The author has given the example of the duplicity that women suffer in black communities. Even though darker hues are present in both men and women, it is more disadvantageous for women

For the purpose of this exploratory research, the author had two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1- Photograph of dark-skinned individual will receive lower ratings than equally attractive and qualified fair-skinned individual

Hypothesis 2- Photographs of dark-skinned women will receive lower ratings than dark-skinned men.

For the purpose of this study, a scientific method was employed and nearly 10 urban mothers (N= 108) were given different photos of eligible boys or girls (24-30 years) to determine the perfect partner for their child. The photos were of highly qualified and attractive men and women but with both dark and light skins (the skin colour was manipulated using computer software).

The participants were presented with five matrimonial profiles and were asked to rate: (a). their competency levels on a scale of 1 to 7 (b). How strongly they would recommend the girl/boy for their sons/daughters

The researcher, in the results found that in both the cases the mothers preferred fair skinned people to be the partners of their children and considered them to be more competent but by a very close margin. Thus, proving the researcher's first hypothesis by a very close margin. The second hypothesis, on the other hand, was disproven. Even though, the respondents preferred fairer skin, evidence of 'double jeopardy' or duplicity regarding women were not found.

In conclusion, the researcher has also highlighted the limitations of the study which were:

1. It being conducted among urban middle/upper-middle-class mothers
2. The study was conducted in the Northern region of Delhi NCR
3. The children, themselves were absent from the research.

The researcher, in the end, has expressed an interest in conducting the study in a region where education and professional qualification did not hold much significance, the research being conducted in South India and finally, the children being involved in the study instead of parents.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is descriptive. It can be considered to be the most appropriate for studying the Indian demographic. The methods used here are mixed i.e. it uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. The practice of colourism leads to lower self-esteem and discrimination even amongst families and promotes the idea of 'white supremacy'.

DATA

Both primary and secondary data have been used in carrying out this research. The primary data was collected via questionnaires distributed online, followed by brief interviews. The secondary data was collected from movies and ad films on the subject.

DATA INTERPRETATION

The questionnaire that was distributed on 8th August 2021 was formulated around the subject of colourism. The platform, 'Google Forms' was used to do so. The form was distributed amongst students of Patna Women's College, who are well educated and who come from different backgrounds. The form received 31 responses. In the form, the following questions were asked:

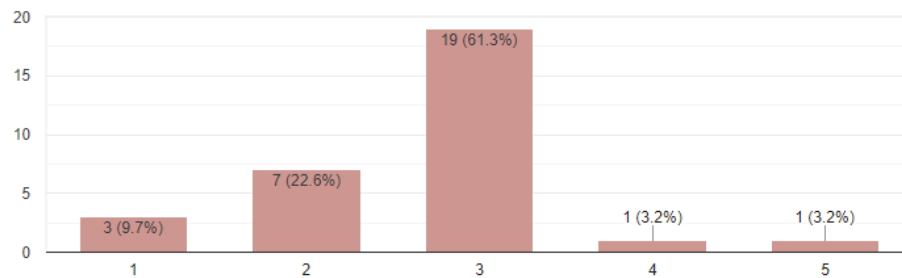
14. Do you think of yourself as pretty/handsome?
15. On a scale of 1 to 5, where would you rate yourself? (1 being the fairest and 5 being the darkest)
16. Are you satisfied with your complexion?
17. If given the opportunity, would you like to have a lighter complexion and why?

18. Have you ever used any skin bleaching products?
19. Are you aware of any harmful effects these products have?
20. Does complexion matter to you in romantic relationships?
21. What is your preferred complexion for your partner?
22. Do you consider lighter skin to be more beautiful? why?
23. Are lighter-skinned people in majority?
24. Does having fair skin make life easier? How?
25. Have you ever personally experienced colourism in India?
26. Have you ever experienced an advantage or disadvantage because of your skin colour in life?

The responses received were more or less of the same nature. They were reflective of the educated perspective that was a characteristic of this demographic. With reference to the

On a scale of 1 to 5, where would you rate yourself?

31 responses



second

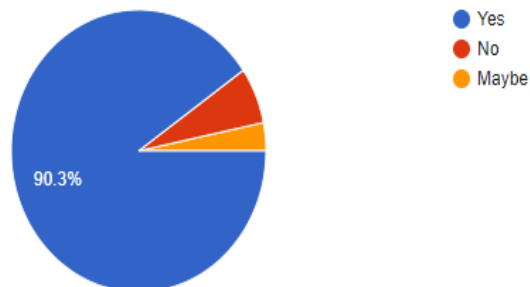
question, the response was received in the following manner-

Figure

In the first figure, the respondents were asked to rate their skin tone on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being fairest and 5 being darkest). The answers given were very realistic as nearly 61.3% rated themselves 3, which shows that the respondents were quite self-aware. While 22.6% rated themselves 2, 3.2% rated 4 and 5 each. However, 9.7% of respondents also rated themselves as 1 which can be considered as the skin tone characteristic of Caucasian descent yet people still went for it.

Are you satisfied with your complexion?

31 responses

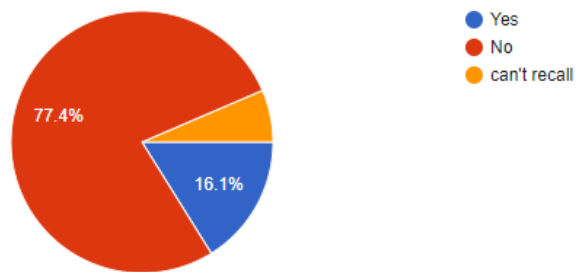


Figure

For the above question, nearly 90.3% of respondents were satisfied with their complexion while merely 6.5% answered 'No' and the rest were not sure. This finding was contrary to the assumptions that were in mind.

Have you ever used any skin bleaching products?

31 responses



Figure

As shown in figure 3, nearly 77.4% of respondents denied using bleaching products while only 16.1% admitted to using them

What is your preferred complexion for your partner?

31 responses

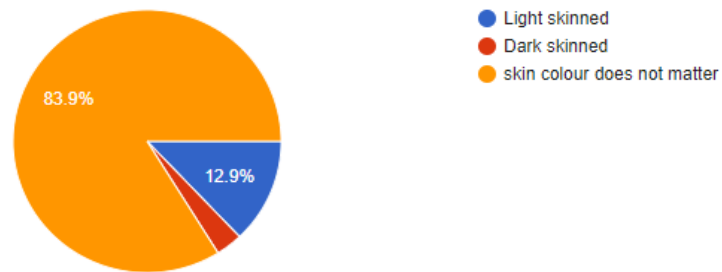
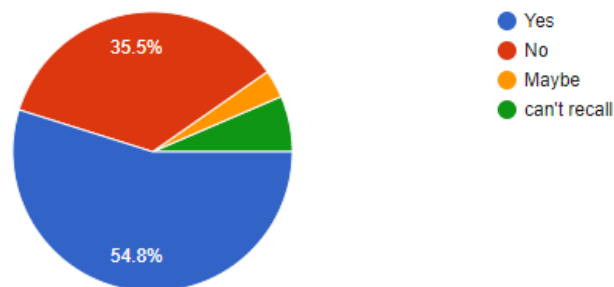


Figure 4

83.9% of respondents did not consider skin colour to be a decisive factor in a relationship. Sadly, 12.9% of the respondents preferred a light-skinned partner and only 3.2% preferred dark-skinned.

Have you ever personally experienced colourism in India?

31 responses



Figure

However, the most important finding of the research confirmed the presence of colourism by confirming that they had been victims of such discrimination in the past. 54.8% of the participants (more than half) answered 'yes' while only 35.5% answered 'no'.

Hence, looking at the data, it seemed as if there are practitioners of colourism and yet it still affects the common person. The implication drawn from the results is that the desire for lighter skin exists but only within a minority of people. However, it is to be noted that the questionnaire was distributed only within a certain group, whose mean age was 20-22 and consisted of well educated young women. Keeping this in mind and considering colourism to be a very complex topic, the results seemed inadequate. Therefore, interviews were conducted with respondents being from different social groups. The questions were open-ended.

INTERVIEWS

In order to get different responses, interviews were conducted with a handful of people. The people interviewed came from different backgrounds. I knew some of the respondents either as the relatives of my acquaintances or as social media friends.

Zoya Naqvi, 17, a high school student talked about her experiences, "*When it comes to skin colour, I have been subjected to such discrimination. My family is very loving and progressive but my neighbours are not. I once had a neighbour who compared my skin colour to that of my younger brother. She expressed her opinion that I would look even better if I had his complexion.*" She elaborated on her frustration regarding society's point of view on the topic

and said, “ *I just want people to embrace their natural skin tone.... Nobody has an ugly complexion!*”

Zoya, just like many Indians (and brown people) is not the only one. Moses Abraham, 54, a government employee shared his story, “*As far as colourism is concerned, my own mother often said that I resembled like a Black bear cub... according to her, I was so dark-complexioned at birth that my skin seemed like black fur!*” He also shared a few stories from his workplace, “*My co-workers did not actually discriminate on the basis of skin colour but they often passed snarky remarks as ‘jokes’ aimed at my skin colour.*” Abraham even admitted to using bleaching products like face creams and face washes in the past but added that he had discontinued that practice.

Shanti Devi, 72, a homemaker and mother of four revealed her anxieties about the skin colour of her unborn grandchild, “*Meri beti expect kar rahi hai aur mujhe thodi chinta hai. Kahin baccha gora nahi hua toh uske liye zindagi mushkil ho sakti hai...*” (My daughter is expecting and I am worried about the complexion of the child. If the child is not light skinned then he/she might face difficulties in life). “*Mere zamaane mein, bade- buzurg raang-roop ke bare mein kaafi baat karte the*” (In my younger days, my elders used to comment a lot on the complexion and skin tone of others). She ended her remark on a very sarcastic note, “*Duniya ko kabhi rang se zyada kuch zaruri laga hi nahi!*” (The society never considered anything other than complexion important!)

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Kaushik, A. (2019). Bala. Maddock Films, Jio Studios.

The director in Bala has tried to convey the problem of colourism in today's Indian society with the help of the character, Latika (Bhumi Pednekar) who is a major secondary character. The character is a successful lawyer who is always arguing with the lead character. The characters, despite being childhood friends are always at each other's necks. The director, with the help of the relationship between the two, has tried to show the problem of colourism. The character suffers greatly in the movie which is a deliberate attempt by the director to focus on the problem of colourism rampant in society.

The movie makes a good effort to show the difficult childhood that Latika had to suffer. The character under study is often typecast into roles that are considered to be 'ugly' by society at large. However, both the adult and child actors are deliberately 'Brownfaced' which is an ironical step. The movie did the right thing by using slangs such as, '*dammar ka dibba*', '*kali kubja*', etc in order to portray the exact attitude that the real world has towards people of a darker complexion. Character's self-loathing is shown in the right manner; the self-loathing is shown in with the help of the right camera angle and effective direction, which makes it very realistic. The character has a hard time finding a suitable partner just like real problems that people (mostly women) face due to regressive societal attitudes. Latika is a no-nonsense woman who does not believe in suffering in silence. She calls out the protagonist whenever he engages in colourist and sexist behaviour. It successfully parodies the real-life advertisements that skin-bleaching companies resort to in order to sell the same. The women who have fairer skin are referred to as *pari* or angel.

Latika, unlike many women in the society is confident of herself. She is not only shown to be a successful lawyer but also assertive and comfortable in her own skin, regardless of what the world says to her. The character at one point goes on to express her pent-up emotions by saying

to the protagonist that, “*sharmindagi..ghutan bachpan se jhelte aaye hai hum*” (I have suffered embarrassment, suffocation since childhood). The character has a lot of notable lines that exact sympathy from the audience and shed a light on the problem. For instance, “*Ek das saal ki ladki ko jab kala bulaya jaata hai toh use kya mental aur emotional trauma hota hai who tum kabhi nahi samjhoge...*” (you won’t understand the mental and emotional trauma a ten-year old girl goes through when she is called ‘dark,)

The character is very opinionated and outspoken. She not only questions the malice that rots society but also the religious scriptures. In one instance, while watching a school play with her friend based on Hindu mythology (*Ramayan*), she doesn’t hesitate to question even God, asking him if changing the appearance of *kubja* was the right thing to do. She is a very competent lawyer and a good orator which again is a step forward in the right direction.

Other characters substantiate and promote the presence of colourism. A notable character in this category is the boss, who says, “*hum is badsoorat desh ko sundarta bech rahe hain*” (we are selling beauty to this ugly country). It also shows which tactics and strategies such companies resort to in order to sell their products. For example, the boss says to his employees that, “*jaao jaao iss Pradesh ki saanvli urf kaali mahilaaon ko unki badsoorti ka ahsaas dilao*” (go my brave soldiers, make all the dark women in this state realize the extent of their ugliness)

In the end, the movie gives Latika a cathartic ending by pairing her up with a man who truly loved her and never taunted her for her complexion. By choosing to pair her with a worthy man instead of the film’s biased protagonist, the movie avoids a problematic ending. She gets the man who is truly worthy of her and who valued her right from his introduction. The character is very

practical, realistic and logical as well. She explains to the protagonist the difference between a rebound and true love.

Conclusively, the movie is a very good effort to alleviate the awareness around the problem of colourism. The movie has done most of the things right with reference to Latika's character and the society around her. Even though it is a good effort, it is all undone by 'brownfacing' the actors. Instead of 'brownfacing' the actors, the movie should have hired an actor with the appropriate skin-colour. The make-up which has been used to make Bhumi Padnekar's face is also overt and laughable. The movie has chosen a very problematic path by doing so. Hence, the entire character is regressive in spite of all the positives attached to her character.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The literature review is more than enough to prove that colourism in society is as rampant in society as it had ever been. Everything that was mentioned in the paper was seen in practical life. Colourism affects many Indians and it affects females even more. The present psyche of the Indian mind was shaped and formed by an imperialist ideology of the British that supported 'white supremacy'. This post-colonial mindset was fed and nurtured further by the media which again preached the so-called supremacy of the white skin while completely ignoring the fact that discrimination was, in every way, against the people of the same ethnic group. The study was focused on lower and upper-middle-class families but it would have been a more dire picture had the lower class families been included as well.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The answers received from the questionnaire circulated were answered by nearly 31 students and proper consent was taken from them. Based on the responses, it is safe to say that due to the lack

of face-to-face interaction people were not very honest. Especially while answering the qualitative (open-ended) questions. As a matter of fact, many of them did not even answer those questions. Some of the qualitative questions have only 26-28 replies out of 31 respondents. Some questions were answered but were not elaborated upon despite being asked to do so. For instance, when asked, *“If given the opportunity, would you like to have a lighter complexion and why?”* a respondent simply answered, *“yes”*

However, looking at the responses that were in minority, reveals a pattern. When asked, *“Do you consider lighter skin to be more beautiful? Why?”* Three people were in favour of changing their skin colour and one of the respondents gave the reason for her choice to be, *“Yes, because everyone likes the lighter skin tone”*

When the question, *“Does having fair skin make life easier? How?”* was asked, as many as eight people answered ‘yes’. Some of the answers were, *“Yes, because everyone find them very attractive and they start being nice to them apparently without knowing them personally and obviously taking in consideration to job they have got good chances in various fields effortlessly.”* Another answer was, *“Yes, Because in today era everyone demand lighter skin, and also they make their own decision like they are darker skin, definitely he/she will be from village or he/she will be uneducated.”* Some other respondent opined that, *“It attracts mostly cus we live in a tropical country and having a fair skin would be taken as wealthy and beautiful”*

Looking at the above responses, there is one recurring pattern that prompts people to prefer lighter skin, the perception of society. For people who support and promote colourism, society’s opinion of them is very important. It is obvious that colourism is not only present in society, it is also thriving.

THE INTERVIEWS

In order to further give depth to this research paper, interviews of different people from different backgrounds were taken. Three people from different generations, genders and religions gave interviews on their experience with colourism.

The interviews gave more insight into the actual human psyche. The interviewees were more honest and were not hesitant in providing their views. The interviewees included Shanti Devi who was the oldest of them all gave a glimpse of what was prevalent during her time, which is why it is safe to say that her thinking is a product of its time.

Based on the reactions of both Abraham and Naqvi, one thing is clear that no one was willing to openly admit that their own families were in some ways responsible for promoting the colourist ideal of light skin supremacy.

The societal pressure and its unrealistic standard of beauty

The literature review, content analysis, the questionnaire and the interviews all point towards one thing that is keeping this draconian practice alive, societal pressure. The victims of colourism never experience it at the hands of their own families but they experience it at the hands of society. Neighbours, relatives and even friends can inject this idea of light skin supremacy into the minds of normal people.

The societal pressure is different in every demographic. For example, in high societies where people are more open-minded and have ample resources, dark skin will not be taboo, it might even be considered 'exotic'. Whereas in societies where people are not so open-minded and the income level is quite low, dark skin colour is considered to be a gift.

The connection between caste and colour

People in India often hold the opinion that people who belong to lower castes (Dalits, Shudras, etc) tend to be darker. People, who belong to lower castes, are often involved in labour-intensive jobs, such as manual scavenging, trash picking, cleaning, labour, etc. This increases their exposure to the sun and results in increased melanin and darker skin. However, to assume that every lower caste person is dark and every Brahmin or upper caste person is light-skinned is very wrong as there are members of both the castes who have both kinds of skin colours.

Impact of foreign forces

The impact of foreign forces is more than evident in India. There were Greek traders who came to India and even settled, resulting in locals with Greek heritage ⁶(thus, light-skin and eyes), there were Jesuit missionaries, The Portuguese, The Dutch and The French. But the major two forces which actually made an impact on the fabric of society were mainly the Mughals and the British.

First, Mughals who were of Persian and Afghan origin came to India as invaders but then settled down with the locals. The Mughals⁷ were, as per descriptions/paintings and available historical evidence lighter skinned. Them being ruler perpetuated the myth that light skin is superior and belonged to the ones who rule others.

Towards the turn of 18th century, the British came to India and colonized the entire sub-continent. It is no secret that the British practised racism quite deliberately. In fact, inscriptions such as, “Dogs and Indians not allowed” were quite common in public spaces. In other words, the

⁶ Basham, A. L. (1968). **The wonder that was India**

⁷ Mishra, N. (2015). India and colorism: The finer nuances. *Wash. U. Global Stud. L. Rev.*, 14, 725.

colonizers considered the locals as being equal to dogs. This colonial idea found a home in the minds of people and today we see its watered-down version in the form of colourism.

The media and the market

The most obvious reason for the thriving colourist culture in today's world is the media. The ideal promoted and endorsed by megastars like Shahrukh Khan, John Abraham, Tiger Sheroff, Priyanka Chopra, etc, give it unrequited weightage. According to Annie Paul in her study⁸, *“Consumption of fairness creams and other skin-lightening products is boosted by a battalion of television, magazine and social media advertising using top Bollywood actors such as Aishwarya Rai and Shah Rukh Khan as models. Unilever, one of the largest manufacturers of fairness creams, even employed Facebook market its products with an application that allowed men to upload photos of them, lighten their skin colour and then use the modified images as their Facebook profile photos, much as they promised their new lightening cream would deliver. Bollywood star Shahid Kapur was the face of the campaign. A plethora of descriptors is employed to promote the cosmetic processes: ‘lightening, brightening, clearing, whitening, antipigmentation, freshening, anti-dullness and even illuminating’ (Shantanu Guha Ray, 2010a). In one instance the product promised to deliver a “pinkish-white glow” with a choice of ‘pale white’ or ‘pinkish white’. Most advertisements show the fortunes of young women, transformed by the skin lightening product in question, displaying a drastic, Cinderella-like upturn. Post-skin lightening, they are revealed attracting the best bridegrooms, jobs and lifestyles. The plugs often show a woman seeking a man’s approval after having her skin lightened with the help of the products concerned. These preposterous fairness narratives are barely credible and are often*

⁸ Paul, A. (2016). Beyond the pale?: Skinderella stories and colourism in India. *Ideaz*, 14, 133.

scoffed at in the public sphere, yet the products continue to sell suggesting that many consumers are suspending their disbelief long enough to buy them.”

Moreover, the Indian film industry, with its songs and movies further support the idea of fair skin. Songs like ‘*Beyonce Sharma jayegi*’⁹, ‘*Goriya churana mera jiya*’¹⁰, ‘*Kaala chasma*’¹¹ etc support and purport this so-called ideal. The industry is also guilty of the colourist crime, brownfacing several times. Hiritik Raushan in ‘*Super 30*’, the characters of *Angavai and Sangavai in Shivagi* (Tamil), Ranbir Singh in ‘*Gully Boy*’, Bhumi Padnekar in ‘*Bala*’, etc. Are a few examples of brownfacing¹². It is to be noted that this phenomenon is more common in the North than in the South.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As much as people in India deny the presence of Colourism in India, it does not change the fact that it is present. The practice has been so normalised that it has become a background static. The study done here might present a rosier picture that colourism is on its throes in India but one has to keep in mind that this study was a bit restrictive owing to the outbreak of COVID-19. The study would have been more closer to reality had it included participants from South India where dark skinned people are more in numbers or if an entirely different demographic was taken into consideration, one that was from lower classes. It would have even been more realistic if interviews were conducted with people running marriage bureaus or people of marriageable age looking for a prospective bride/groom.

⁹ https://www.jiosaavn.com/album/khaali-peeli/2DijcCKLqfw_

¹⁰ <https://www.jiosaavn.com/song/husn-hai-suhana-from-coolie-no.-1/BgUzeUZjUEo>

¹¹ https://www.jiosaavn.com/album/baar-baar-dekho/K18aCvZnNwK_

¹² <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/india-bollywood-brownface-hnk-intl/index.html>

A very recent instance of this deep-rooted ideology was witnessed when the Union minister Subhas Sarkar, during a visit to Visva Bharati University said in context of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, “Tagore’s mother and some other relatives would not hold him in their arms because he was ‘dark-skinned’”.¹³This shows that not even revered figures of the Indian history are safe from it.

Regardless of the results of this paper, the situation is more than dire. The society rests on the base of discrimination. Change might be visible at the horizon but there is a long way to go.

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