



Editorial

Fair and pretty-creams, lotions, and potions – An eternal quest for fairness

Kaliaperumal Karthikeyan¹

¹Department of Dermatology, Sri Manakula Vinayagar Medical College and Hospital, Puducherry, India.



*Corresponding author:

Kaliaperumal Karthikeyan,
Department of Dermatology,
Sri Manakula Vinayagar
Medical College and Hospital,
Puducherry, India.

karthikderm@gmail.com

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The concept of racism and color has been used by colonial masters to subjugate the colored races. Further, the caste system in India is likely to have given impetus to the notion that higher castes have been perceived to be “fairer” and superior, while lower castes have been perceived to be “darker” and inferior.^[1] Marginalization of the dark skin is a phenomenon rampant in our society. While content analyses of matrimonial advertisements have indicated a general preference for fair skin, empirical evidence is scarce.^[2]

Today, in the postcolonial world, globalization has led to increased spread and acceptance of Western beauty ideals in Asian and African cultures. It has been ingrained into society and these prejudices have been promoted by the consumerist market where fairness is analogous to beauty.

In India, “Fairness” is marketed as a desirable trait, and fairness creams are extensively promoted in print and audio-visual media. Fair skin is linked to power, beauty, success, superiority, and better marriage prospects in South Asia.^[3]

For its part, Indian movies mostly cast lighter-skinned female actors. Some popular film songs revolve around the appreciation of the fair skin tone of the beloved. The Indian media thus plays a significant role in spreading colorism.^[3] Multinational cosmetic giants of Indian and South Asian companies play important roles in the Indian fairness industry.^[4,5] Fairness creams are a part of the daily skincare regime for several Indian women. This quest for so-called fairness is eternal and it has led to the youth of either sex in search of a magic potion which will make them fair and hence beautiful. These fairness creams and lotions are market-driven and have become a household ingredient that takes its toll on the monthly budget of a middle-class family.

Indian dermatologists often face patients with a history of application of fairness creams or patients presenting with adverse cutaneous reactions to fairness creams. However, the composition of the fairness creams available in the Indian market has not received sufficient attention.

Indian consumers are exposed to a vast range of compounds in the quest for lighter skin. The presence of sunscreens may contribute to the perceived benefits of these creams. However, consumers are being exposed to several potential allergens including fragrances. Several botanicals are commonly included in fairness creams. Increased awareness of the composition of skin-lightening creams available in the market and strict regulation of the contents of these creams are needed.^[6] The listed ingredients were potential allergens according to the Indian Cosmetic and Fragrance Series. Components of the paraben mix were the most common potential allergens. Several constituents, including fragrances, sunscreens, and botanicals might be responsible for allergic contact dermatitis. Some even contain toxins such as mercury.^[7]

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Further, many people also abuse steroid ointments for fairness which results in steroid-damaged face. This condition is very difficult to manage.

There is a need for strict regulation of the ingredients in the “fairness” cream industry. Awareness of the composition of fairness creams is important in evaluating and counseling the public about the importance of healthy rather than fair skin.

The bigotry of fair skin and guileful advertisements allures the gullible common public toward a panacea that never existed. It requires a colossal transformation and humongous change in mindset to accept the color and complexion of any individual as her or his own identity. Till then, the quest will continue.

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