

## **INDIAN WOMEN AND THE BEAUTY MYTH: A STUDY OF THE PHALLOCENTRIC MARKET CONSPIRACIES**

### **SYNOPSIS**

In the phallogentric society that we live in, the female body is a representation of 'disability.' The female quest for emancipation and equality, throughout history, thus, boils down to her need to be 'liberated' from the body, since the female body has come to represent the female identity. She thus becomes a mere body and all the other aspects of her life are situated behind the curtain of her sex. After the first wave of feminism, beauty remained the sole feminine ideology. Beauty thus became the escape from 'disability.' In the West beauty attained a mythical status and went on to replace religious and cultural stereotypes. It preoccupied women with their bodies and made even those who held positions of power feel inadequate. Naomi Wulf calls this phenomenon as a violent backlash against feminism. It is a recognizable fact that the world is constantly contributing to an idea of female beauty that is by far unachievable for most of the women. Globalization brought in images of 'perfect' women from the West into our country, and thus began the glorification of thinness and fairness.

In India, this manifestation is multidimensional in nature. The global market is a whirlpool of conspiracies that capitalizes on the dusky skins that we Indians are naturally endowed with. The Indian beauty market is worth 1.5 billion dollars and is rising 20% a year, twice as fast as its US and European counterparts. The many global cosmetics and skin care companies are expanding their product lines and budgets in India to capitalize on growth in women's disposable income. India's obsession with fairness is an old story. In the market it began with the launch of Fair & Lovely, a fairness cream that has spawned millions of other such products that flood the market today which even include vaginal washes which is meant to lighten the surrounding area.

Fairness has many cultural implications in India. Here fairness connotes with caste, class and character. This favoritism with fair skin is ingrained deep in the Indian psyche and gets manifested everywhere, inside homes, in social places, at work and very much in the popular culture. With many film stars and sports celebrities endorsing such products, the market is baiting the commoners to adhere to what they propagate as the beauty myth.

This project proposes to analyze the beauty myth and its subtle yet potent role-playings in generating the structures of the female psyche. The global market coupling with patriarchy has established the beauty myth as the yardstick for measuring self-worth and acceptance for women. This gender based conspiracy fed by/into, the popular culture, binds and suffocates the female, further limiting her into the boundaries of patriarchy.