

Evolution of Beauty Standards in Indian Media and Film: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

This study explores the complex image of fair-skinned women, the prevalent problem of body shaming, and the dynamic growth of beauty standards within the thriving Indian media and film industries. It sets out on a thorough historical trip, uncovering historical details, examining the profound social impact, analyzing the most recent disruptive developments, and examining the powerful influences of advertising, governmental rules, and the emerging #BodyPositivity movement. The goal of the study is to shed light on the complex web of beauty standards and body image depiction that permeates India's thriving and varied media and entertainment sector. Indian beauty standards have historically been significantly affected by cultural conventions and the lingering effects of colonialism. Fair skin preferences during the colonial era have left a lasting impression, sustaining the idea that beauty and social standing are correlated with fair skin. Earlier media outlets routinely promoted fair-skinned actresses as the pinnacle of beauty, which helped to further establish these norms. There has been a noticeable change in how women are portrayed in modern movies. Recent productions have ushered in a more diversified era, both in terms of phys-

ical appearance and character depth, when prior films frequently stuck to conventional beauty criteria. By embracing their natural skin tones and creating complex characters, renowned actresses like Deepika Padukone, Vidya Balan, Taapsee Pannu, Radhika Apte have broken preconceptions.

Keywords: *Advertising, Beauty Ideals, Body Image, Fairness, Media Representation, Societal Impact*

Introduction:

Virginia Woolf, the well-known British writer, once said that “the beauty of the world, which is so soon to perish, has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder” (Woolf, 1929, p.4). In the context of India, where beauty standards and body image have played a significant and complex role, impacted by a tapestry of cultural, historical, and colonial factors, these statements have a particularly powerful resonance beyond its region. Indian customs and values have a rich history, and throughout that history, ideas of beauty have been intricately woven into that tapestry. The country’s ancient literature, including the *Kama Sutra*, emphasized uniqueness and sexuality while praising a wide range of beauty. However, these attitudes underwent a considerable transformation during the colonial era. A Eurocentric view of beauty that valued fair complexion as a sign of superiority was established by British colonization. This colonial history still has an impact on Indian beauty standards today, where the market for fairness creams is still worth billions of dollars. In Indian media and entertainment, the representation of beauty and body image has been a dynamic and changing narrative. Fair-skinned performers have historically dominated the film industry, often known as Bollywood, which has contributed to the widespread misconception that success and attractiveness are directly related to fair skin. But there has been a discernible shift in favor of more inclusive

and varied representations in recent years. Independent of their skin tone, actors like Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone, Radhikan Apte and Vidya Balan have defied the fair complexion stereotype and received international acclaim for their brilliance and attractiveness. The goal of this research study is to analyze how Indian media and film have traveled from the past to the present. It will examine how these altered beauty standards have affected society as a whole, tackling problems like body shaming and low self-esteem. It will also look into how people's opinions and aspirations in a fast changing Indian society are affected by the media's changing portrayal of beauty. The study will use a variety of studies and sources, including academic research, interviews with business insiders, and media content analysis, to conduct this analysis. It hopes to advance understanding of this complex and dynamic cultural issue by illuminating the varied ways in which body image and beauty standards are portrayed in Indian media and movies.

Historical perspective:

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "We but mirror the world. All ... others do" (Web). When considering the historical backdrop of beauty standards in India, where cultural norms and colonial influences have firmly established a desire for pale skin as the pinnacle of beauty and social position, this remark resonates with particular force. The colonial period, which lasted for several centuries, was crucial in forming these ideas of beauty. With British colonization came a Eurocentric viewpoint that gave fair skin preference, fair complexion was linked to ideas of refinement and social hierarchy in addition to being associated with a perception of racial superiority. This colonial legacy had a profound impact on Indian conceptions of beauty, and it still has an impact on current beauty norms. Fair-skinned actresses were portrayed as the epitome of beauty and desirability during this time by the Indian media and entertainment industries, who started to emulate these colonial ideals. Fair complexion was commonly

linked to prosperity and allure in popular culture, which was not just confined to movies but also included ads. This historical context provides the framework for comprehending the development of beauty standards in India and the interplay between societal, cultural, and colonial influences. The ensuing change in Indian culture and entertainment towards more inclusive beauty depictions reflects both shifting aesthetics and the continuous fight to subvert deeply rooted conventions.

Research Methodology:

This study uses a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. It begins with a literature review of Indian media and films to understand the evolution of beauty standards and body image representation. A content analysis is conducted to examine the portrayal of these standards over time. The study uses quantitative and qualitative data analysis to identify trends and patterns in Indian society's beauty standards and body image. Thematic analysis is used to identify recurring themes in films and media, while adhering to ethical guidelines and maintaining participant privacy.

Evolution of Film Heroines:

In the past, conventional beauty ideals were mainly upheld in Indian movies, which frequently emphasized pale complexion as a sign of desirability. The principal female characters in movies who upheld the conventional standards of beauty played a significant role in preserving these norms. However, the landscape of female representation has changed as a result of the winds of change that have swept through the regional and Bollywood cinema industries equally.

A new generation of actresses that champion honesty and defy conventional beauty standards have arisen in recent years. In this sense, individuals like Deepika Padukone, Vidya Balan, and Taapsee Pannu have become trailblazers. They have not only accepted the skin tones that come natural-

ly to them, but they have also embraced roles that highlight the depth, complexity, and substance of female characters. The industry's approach to storytelling and character development has undergone a considerable change as a result of the departure from the one-dimensional, stock heroines of the past. In addition to reflecting shifting beauty ideals, the image of film heroines has evolved in response to the demand for more relatable and authentic narrative. In addition to paving the path for a more inclusive and equal representation in Indian cinema, it also highlights the diversity and complexity of women in society.

As Indian cinema develops, the way women are portrayed on screen is changing, and it's not just in terms of how they look. It also encompasses the variety of roles and storylines that these women are currently embracing. This change has been crucial in dispelling myths and promoting a more welcoming movie experience. In the past, women's roles were frequently constrained to those of romantic interests or damsels in distress. However, the range of roles available to actresses has expanded thanks to modern cinema. They are now viewed as heroes in their own right who move the story along with their initiative, intelligence, and resiliency. Actresses like Kangana Ranaut, who has played a variety of roles in movies like *Queen* and *Manikarnika* are a prime example of this transformation. These characters navigate difficulties and complexity in a way that connects with contemporary audiences; they are no longer just the male lead's sidekicks.

This change has affected not only storytelling but also how women are viewed in Indian society. Female characters are helping to challenge gender stereotypes and inspire women to reach new heights in both film and real life as they become more realistic and inspirational. The vitality of Indian cinema, which constantly reinvents its stories and adapts to societal changes, is demonstrated by the evolution of its cinematic heroines. It not only encourages actors to develop their skills but also encourages a new generation of viewers

to believe that women are capable of taking control of their lives with grit and perseverance. It essentially captures the larger movement toward a more welcoming and gender-equal environment.

Impact on Society:

The media has had a significant impact on how society views beauty across time, frequently with far-reaching effects. Constantly promoting fair-skinned beauty standards has contributed to a number of ingrained problems, most notably colorism, which supports prejudice based on skin tone. The predominance of poor self-esteem and body dissatisfaction among those who don't fit these ideals is a result of this, in turn. Particularly young girls are hardest hit by this media-induced pressure. Many young girls struggle with feelings of inadequacy if they do not fit the traditional beauty mold promoted by the media since they are raised in a culture where having pale skin is admired and celebrated. This not only undermines their self-esteem but also limits their prospects and aspirations, promoting negative preconceptions that can impede both individual development and society's advancement.

It is crucial to understand that these problems caused by the media can be solved. There is hope for improvement as Indian society becomes more conscious of the need for inclusive and diverse portrayals. A more inclusive atmosphere where everyone may prosper, regardless of looks, can be fostered through promoting a broader notion of beauty, supported by media campaigns and societal shifts. The lives of women today will be impacted by this transformation, but it will also pave the way for a future India that is more accepting and egalitarian.

Representation of Diverse Beauty:

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's adage, "In a gentle way, you can shake the world", we see a subtle yet significant revolution in Indian media and entertainment that shifts the

focus from highlighting homogeneity to highlighting diversity and beauty. In recent years, Indian media and cinema have led the charge in advancing a more diverse and inclusive conception of beauty. The appreciation of actors with darker skin tones who are defying conventional beauty standards is the most striking example of this trend. Nawazuddin Siddiqui and Radhika Apte are two performers who have achieved success and recognition, underscoring the industry's growing appreciation of diversity and honesty.

Additionally, film storylines now embrace body positivity and address societal problems like colorism and body shaming. In-depth exploration of these themes in films like *Bala*, *Dum Laga ke Haisha*, *Double XL* has sparked crucial discussions about the urgent need for more inclusive beauty norms in Indian society. This paradigm changes in how beauty is portrayed in Indian media is proof that it has the power to favorably influence societal perceptions and ideals. The industry is not only reflecting shifting cultural attitudes but also assisting in the creation of a more inclusive and equitable society by embracing different beauty and challenging long-standing biases. It conveys to the younger generation the idea that skill, character, and the substance of one's heart and intellect are more important than one's outward look. In this way, the media continues to be essential in rewriting the story of beauty for India in the future.

Influence of Advertising:



When taken into account in the context of the substantial impact that advertising, particularly the marketing of fairness creams and cosmetic products, has had on the evolution of beauty standards in India, these types of advertisements have a potent effect. Advertising campaigns, particularly those that promote fairness creams, have had a considerable impact on how India's standards of beauty are defined. By promoting the idea that fairer skin signifies superiority and success, the fairness cosmetics industry has expanded into a multibillion dollar behemoth. These commercials frequently spread the damaging idea that having pale skin is vital for both social acceptance and personal fulfillment in addition to being desirable.

Some regulatory initiatives aiming at limiting such messages have been made in recent years. For instance, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) published recommendations to prevent the promotion of prejudice based on skin tone in commercials. The Fair and Lovely Cream's name has also been altered to Glow and Lovely Cream in order to encourage inclusivity rather than just fairness. Despite these constructive actions, it is still difficult to enforce and completely eradicate these damaging narratives.



Advertising affects people's self-esteem, perceptions, and goals in addition to aesthetic standards of beauty. It is critical that the advertising sector and society at large acknowledge their respective roles in altering these standards. While regulatory actions are a positive step, more must be done to

rethink beauty standards, encourage inclusivity, and foster self-acceptance for a more just and peaceful India.

#BodyPositivity Movement:

As the great American poet Maya Angelou accurately put it “It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength. We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter their color; equal in importance no matter their texture” (Angelou, 2014). The revolutionary impact of social media and grassroots movements in challenging traditional beauty standards can be powerfully reflected in this feeling. A loud chorus of voices has recently emerged calling for a more tolerant and inclusive definition of beauty. In India, the #BodyPositivity movement has become a potent force that has inspired influencers, activists, and common people. Its main points are on self-acceptance, celebrating different body types, and embracing who one is regardless of cultural beauty standards.

This movement has acquired significant traction as a result of the social media platforms’ expansive reach, with people expressing their own paths to self-acceptance and inspiring others to follow suit. Influential people and activists are using their platforms to challenge damaging stereotypes while reiterating the idea that everyone deserves to be loved, respected, and made visible. Parallel to this, India’s entertainment sector is gradually adopting body-positive stories. Characters with a variety of body types are starting to appear in movies and television shows, defying the one-size-fits-all philosophy that has long dominated the screen. This change fosters a more welcoming and sympathetic society in addition to reflecting shifting cultural beliefs. The #BodyPositivity movement is proof of the effectiveness of group effort and people’s ability to redefine what is considered beautiful. India’s cultural landscape is a rich tapestry that

weaves threads of acceptance, self-love, and empowerment, allowing each person to stand tall and proudly embrace their individuality.

Government Regulations:

The Indian government has taken action to limit the marketing of fairness and the maintenance of unrealistic beauty ideals in response to growing concerns about the effects of such goods and commercials. To stop deceptive marketing that guarantee fairness as a result of product use, regulatory bodies like the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) have created guidelines. These rules aim to safeguard consumers from dishonest marketing techniques and promote more open and honest advertising. The effectiveness of these rules in opposing established beauty norms and addressing deeply ingrained beliefs, however, is still up for dispute. Although they are important first steps, altering cultural attitudes and eliminating long-standing biases is a difficult and continuing task. It necessitates a broad strategy encompassing media, education, community activities, as well as regulatory bodies.

It is crucial to understand that while legislation offer a crucial foundation, real change also necessitates cultural transformations, thoughtful consumer decisions, and a proactive dedication to diversity and inclusivity promotion. The ultimate goal of changing beauty standards and developing a more welcoming society involves collective work, unshakable devotion, and a persistent determination to achieve the desired transformation. Government rules can act as catalysts for change.

Future Directions:

“Beauty is very individualistic. Beauty is what makes you happy. Beauty to me is God’s handwriting. It’s who you are – your character, your determination. Your sex appeal lies in who you are as a package. I don’t want to look at you and go ‘wow’ and then be totally put off when you open

your mouth” (Sen, 2015). The future of beauty standards in Indian culture and movies is illuminated by these timeless words by the former Miss Universe Sushmita Sen, which hold the promise of diversity and body positivity. A ray of hope for a more just and body-positive future can be found in the changing terrain of beauty standards in Indian media and movies. A rising understanding of the need for change is reflected in the industry’s continued commitment to questioning traditional standards and fostering diversity. Redefining ideas of beauty is largely being accomplished by actors and filmmakers that support inclusive stories and different representations. The industry must be steadfast in its efforts if it wants to guarantee a better future. This entails not only including varied characters but also actively supporting programs that boost good body image and self-acceptance among people and communities. As a result, the media and entertainment industries can act as potent drivers for societal change.

Government policies are also very important in determining this future. These laws must be strictly upheld in order to bring about long-lasting change by fostering a climate in which deceptive and damaging advertising is immediately and successfully handled. Government agencies can keep working together with business participants and advocacy organizations to make sure that the media and entertainment industries reflect shifting public values.

Additionally, the #BodyPositivity movement, which is supported by grassroots activism and social media, has to be amplified. Its messages of self-acceptance, honoring diversity, and self-love ought to be heard throughout Indian culture. We can create a more inclusive, sympathetic, and egalitarian future where every person is honored for their individuality and where beauty genuinely has no bounds by utilizing the collective power of voices that question conventional beauty ideals.

Conclusion:

Albert Einstein once said, “The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.” The path that Indian media and movies have taken to redefine beauty standards, address fairness ideals, and solve body shaming issues is brilliantly captured in these words. The story of beauty in India has been deeply impacted throughout history by a complex interaction of societal, colonial, and cultural elements. As a result of television and film, the emphasis on pale skin as a sign of attractiveness and social standing has been profoundly engrained. However, there has been a notable shift in recent years toward more inclusive and diverse beauty ideals that contradict accepted norms. The effects of this progression on people and society at large are indisputable. On the one hand, it creates opportunities for increased self-acceptance, empowerment, and the appreciation of a variety of body forms and skin tones. It enables people to let go of the restrictions imposed by conventional beauty standards and embrace their individuality.

However, the path to inclusivity is not without its difficulties. It takes time for deeply ingrained perceptions to shift, and people—particularly the younger generation—continue to struggle with the lingering effects of previous beauty standards. The fight against colorism and body shaming is still going on. All stakeholders, including the media, the entertainment sector, and policymakers, must collaborate on this revolutionary path. In order to undermine ingrained norms and promote diversity and body positivity in Indian society, collaboration is essential. Media is a potent tool for change since its influence on forming views is obvious. Steps toward a more inclusive and varied India include enforcing and tightening legislation to ensure ethical advertising, embracing diverse narratives, and elevating the voices of movements like #BodyPositivity.

The ability to accept change and work toward a future where beauty is not constrained by strict standards but

instead embraces the richness of diversity and the beauty that dwells within each human is ultimately the best indicator of our collective intelligence.

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