

Envisioning the Indian Beauty Myth:

A Socio-cultural Dialogue on Stereotypical Depictions

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Executive Summary

Beauty paradigms exist all over the world and one can effectually surmise that it does more harm than it intends. However, Indian beauty paradigms become even more pernicious because of our society's reluctance to accept any deviation from the standard. Our women are expected to be wonder women who excel in all aspects of life, with paramount importance given to the aesthetic ideal. Success is measured in terms of a woman's ability to "look" beautiful and this is where we are wrong. Nowadays, there is an increased awareness about the pervasive damage inflicted by such beauty markers; but not much effort is taken to curb it.

The project attempts to probe into the Indian female psyche and its relentless evocation of an unattainable beauty standard that takes its toll on innumerable young women who feel inadequate and uncertain. Young women equate success with beauty and by pitting these two criteria together; it is often assumed that the ideal is the real. Such cultural markers have become so deeply entrenched that it is difficult to identify the strategies that created it. The project tries to highlight the multifarious ways in which such a cultural coding is established as the norm and how popular culture aids in the reiteration of this norm as the truth.

The project merges various disciplines as the topic cannot be studied in isolation. Insights from the fields of sociology, media studies, psychology and cultural

theory have been incorporated so as to create a composite portrait of how beauty paradigms are manipulated in the modern society. Beauty myths abound not just in literature, but in print and online media as well. The diverse implications of the topic can be gauged by taking into account the sociological and psychological depictions culled from movies, advertisements, social networking sites and blogs. Such an interdisciplinary approach not only provides a more astute glimpse into the pervasive nature of these beauty myths, but also highlights the exigency of launching a counter narrative.

The most disturbing aspect of the problem is when women willingly convince themselves that they are not good enough if they don't have the requisite beauty parameters. It is rather illogical to assume that fair skin or a slim figure can endow a person with success or happiness. Nevertheless, we live in a brutal and callous world where many women believe in such arguments. Beauty in the modern world is not just skin-deep, it is a quality that determines whether one's life is worth living or not.