

Under the Blue Sky by Golden Child

The Fairness Obsession

Have you ever tried fair and lovely or some other cream boasting of miraculous and life changing phenomena induced by its ability to lighten your skin colour? Or spread turmeric, sandalwood or some other skin whitening home “remedy” all over your face? Perhaps you have felt insecure about your skin colour or wished you could be fairer. Have you ever requested that your future husband or wife be fair skinned or judged someone’s beauty based on how dark their skin was? If you answered yes to any of the aforementioned questions, then you may be one of many Sri Lankans who are hooked on the fairness obsession that has taken over our culture for hundreds of years.

So where does this obsession stem from? I proclaim that this fairness obsession is a vicious cycle that must be eradicated.

Often young girls and even boys are exposed to a plethora of fairness creams and other beauty products being highlighted in the media and amongst consumers, from a very young age. They grow up viewing advertisements about women and men who have darker complexions being rejected by a lover or prospective employer. A wise friend or all-knowing relative then recommends a fairness cream, insinuating that their rejection is to be blamed on their dark skin colour. Having tried the cream, the main character is shown to be getting fairer. Magically all their problems disappear and they land the job or attract a new lover immediately, living happily ever after with their new found success and of course whiter skin. They are also exposed to light skinned actors and models looking glamorous and successful, but never get the opportunity to see dark skinned people having such successes. Imagine the impact such advertisements and shows have on our younger generations? They grow up seeing how lighter skin gets you jobs, amazing opportunities and makes you attractive to the opposite sex, something that while having dark skin one simply could not achieve. Who does not want something that opens up so many doors for you? So instead of loving the skin they are born into, they end up resenting it and seeing themselves as less attractive and successful than their lighter skinned counterparts.

These young girls and boys now grow up into adults believing that lighter skin is more beautiful and desired. If these young adults are not the white skinned “beauties” that society demands they be, then they may grow up with self-esteem and self-hatred issues. They may think of themselves as ugly and simply not worthy of success or lack the self-confidence to attract a partner. They are told that they have “nice features, for a dark person” or constantly see others around them get described as “white and beautiful” – so then is dark not beautiful, they question. This in turn leads them to of course use creams, skin bleach and surgical methods out of desperation in order to conform to society’s beauty standards. Furthermore, these young adults will wish for a lighter skinned partner (they are obviously more successful and attractive right?), so their parents place advertisements in newspapers “seeking a fair, educated and well-mannered boy/girl” for their child. They may reject some amazing potential partners based on skin colour as they only want a fair skinned partner, this is the definition of attractiveness now ingrained in their minds.

They marry their fair skinned partner and have children of their own – but oh no! Their children aren’t as fair skinned as they’d hoped for. All their relatives start commenting on how “cute, but dark” their child is. So now, this new child grows up surrounded by people who tell him/her that they should use a whitening cream, or how they are not as light as their siblings or parents. They grow up surrounded by a bunch of dark skin hating ignorant individuals who cannot recognise that beauty and success comes from ones hard work and confidence and not by having light skin. But can you blame them? This was how society moulded their thoughts from a very young age. This cycle passes down destructive thoughts from one generation to the next – destroying the confidence of dark skinned individuals along the way by forcing them to feel inferior to their lighter skinned acquaintances.

Instead of pushing (or worse encouraging) others to resort to drastic methods such as skin bleaching, which could potentially be cancer causing and dangerous, shouldn’t we as a nation celebrate the different skin colours present in our community? Shouldn’t we be teaching the younger generation that success is attained through hard work and dedication and not by just being fair-skinned? That attracting a partner has everything to do with the confidence and personality you emanate from the inside and not what your skin colour is on the outside?

So before you tell someone “you’ve gotten darker – why don’t you try this cream” or “you’re not as white as your mother, why don’t you try whitening laser surgery?” or “She’s dark BUT beautiful”- think about the bigger picture and the grave injustice you are committing to all the dark skinned beauties in the world. Dark is beautiful just as light is – let’s stop killing the confidence and self-esteem of the dark skinned people around us. We must all work to change our attitudes in order to end this cycle of colour-shaming. When a westerner thinks of a typical Sri Lankan, they imagine a darker skinned individual. Sri Lanka is a country predominantly inhabited by dark skinned people – why can’t we all be proud of that?