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# Why isn't anyone talking about the obvious?



HIRA MAHMOOD



FOLLOWING

They asked me why I was so dark skinned when I entered my father's village. They questioned where I got my looks from, because a father with a Shah Rukh Khan complexion and a mother who was Katrina Kaif skinned couldn't reproduce such a thing. I was advised not to spend too much time in the sun. I hear the word forsha, which translates to "light skinned" being a synonym for good looking. Because when people ask how the new bride, or the newborn looked, forsha was the adjective to sum up the situation.

The desi boys knew it. I knew it as well. I wasn't attractive in their opinion. The way my dark colored big eyes were against my dark mocha skin tone didn't attract them. And it didn't have to. I grew up disliking myself a bit. All the "love yourself" talks in the world could not eliminate the subconscious thoughts roaming around my head about beauty and how it really feels and looks like.

We, dark skinned South Asian women, have a different lived experience. Our solidarity with the communities of African American sisters is there, but our experience wasn't quite the same. Coming from a region with the highest skin bleaching rate in the world, as well as being able to buy some Fair & Lovely with our paneer, we live a different experience. We see commercials selling skin-lightening cream for vaginas, while our immigrant parents watch their favorite television drama. We are nicknamed kala, or black one in our homes and communities, with the constant fear of not being approved as good looking enough by future suitors our parents might attempt to marry us off to.

We, dark skinned South Asian women do not all live the same experience, but it is different. We watch our sisters get married in our homeland, and sometimes in the states we grew up in, with pounds of white face powder to glorify their features. We face the classical patriarchy that Deniz Kandiyoti conceptualizes, as we bargain with the same patriarchy that enforces strict systems of inferiority and sexual repression. We face cultures that are deeply embedded in the systems that normalize the repression of women socially, politically and economically. There's a lot lived within the experience of a woman. Particularly a South Asian woman. And more specifically, a dark skinned South Asian woman.

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