A Brown Girl’s Guide to Beauty

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Since the age of 9 I’ve been slapping my face

with fairness creams

Every face wash was a slap in the face

Because I was a skin tone which was … ugly

My chest was too small for a girl who just hit puberty

And my skinny waist and unhealthy thigh gap

was the only thing I wore confidently around

I had a voice and opinion

Byt they muted my sound

Probably because I was told,

Boys only like girls who are … fair and lovely

My cousin brother starving himself

Because skinny abs were easier to obtain than a healthy diet

He read about actors doing juice diets

and decided he wanted to try it

All because there wasn’t a single GQ or Man’s World

That didn’t have abs embossed

We forget that beauty for men

Also comes at a cost

And I’d ask for a penny for your thoughts

But I heard being healthy is wealthy

And it’s both we’ve lost

I am the colour of the strong fragrant tea

Aunty sips while nonchalantly remarking:

“Bipasha would be prettier if she was fair”

The colour of our skin dictates our beauty

And that’s not the only thing’s that unfair

When we brown girls revolt

Against our own reflections

Every single time an Indian magazine puts a light-skinned girl on the cover,

Calling her brown

I ask my mother to get me haldi,

Yellow paste over yellow paste…

… because anything is better than brown,

Anything is better than dark

Only the light skinned with European features

Are considered art

My friend’s face is covered with cream

More than his girlfriend’s kisses

He flinches every time she says

She accepts him for his true colours

How do I teach him to embrace the colour of his skin

When she keeps gifting him fairness creams?

His daily baptism with sunscreen

To protect him from sun tans

Men lathering themselves with the same

behind closed doors…

… because apparently being insecure

makes you less of a man

When I was asked to be an ideal body type,

I was taught

They want the curvy chick

But not the cellulite

They want the big butt

But not the thick thighs

They want the talk small

But the waist smaller

They want the heart big

But the chest bigger

And often women of gender

Reiterate these thoughts

But you see,

It’s internalized

It’s what we’ve been taught

So I ask my Ma…

Instead of looking for grooms who are fair,

Let’s look for grooms who treat people fairly

Because the colour of someone’s skin

Isn’t what we should consider when we look to marry

Virtues, beliefs, opinions and decisions

Scale larger than his stand on a fairness scale

Forget snow white,

Say hello to chocolate brown,

I’ll write my own fairytale.

There isn’t a single person who

Isn’t pulled apart by these expectations,

Brown girls struggle getting the right foundation,

Boys constantly doing weight calculations,

We’re all more than our

Coloration and body types,

‘Cause you and I,

We’re all alike.

With the hope of being able

To some day love another

Let’s begin

by being our own first lovers

Because people aren’t made

to fit or custom-made,

It’s time we realize

Love comes in all shapes and shades.

It’s time we loved,

All shapes and shades.