

India debates 'racist' skin cream ads *LINK*

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A recent row over a television advertisement for a skin-lightening cream has fuelled a debate in India over why fairer skin should be considered more beautiful.

While India has seen a phenomenal growth in the number of skin-lightening products, women's groups in the country claim recent adverts are insulting, as they equate fairer skin with beauty and success.

One advert - for a product named Fair And Lovely - has now been taken off the air.

"It's a highly racist campaign," Brinda Karat, general secretary of the All India Democratic Women's Association, told BBC World Service's Everywoman programme.

"It equates fairness with beauty."

Cultural basis

The advert was known as "the air hostess ad".

It showed a young, dark-skinned girl's father lamenting he had no son to provide for him, as his daughter's salary was not high enough - the suggestion being that she could neither get a better job or get married because of her dark skin.

The girl then uses the cream, becomes fairer, and gets a better-paid job as an air hostess - and makes her father happy.

"Of course, there is a cultural base in India for this kind of market. [Fair And Lovely are] taking advantage of that and exploiting that very backward understanding," Ms Karat said.

"This advertisement, we believe, is demeaning to women and it should be off the air."

The company that manufactures Fair And Lovely, Hindustan Lever Limited, said it acknowledged the concerns that had been raised regarding the campaign.

"Some individuals or organisations have expressed objections against specific exhibitional elements advertisements," the company said in a statement.

"As a responsible company, we have taken note of these objections and will address them."

But they pointed out that only one advert had been withdrawn, and added that they had not intended to show it again anyway.

"This ad had already been withdrawn by us, as it had run its campaign period," the statement continued.

"All the other ads for Fair And Lovely are all on air."

'Polluting' India's youth

But that is not likely to be the end of the row.

The Indian Government is now looking into other adverts, and indeed the whole skin-lightening industry.

"You have to maintain a very delicate balance about that," Rita Vorimer of the ruling BJP party, told Everywoman.

"I do not like the concept of moral policing.

"But some of these ads have really been very irresponsible, and they portray women in a very poor light."

Ms Vorimer was particularly critical of the impact the adverts were having on India's youth.

"They are polluting the minds of the younger generation," she said.

"They think women are the objects of lust - that is a very wrong value.

"Something must be done by the government, and the government has a responsibility to stop all this nonsense."

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