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QUARANTINED BARBIE LIFE OF WOMEN SINCE AGES.

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Introduction

In this research paper I would like to discuss about the unconventional ways that women throughout the ages have been subjected to suffer. One might think this a very common topic, the woes and plight of women since years, however the points that I would like discuss are far from common. In the time when we are struggling to come back to the safer side and stop this pandemic that is eating the world, women who already had mountain of tasks are now in situation where in they have to chew more than they can eat.

Women, a word that encompasses range of emotions and values. A woman is a sister, mother, aunt, grandmother, roles and roles for a single female. She has to remain under scrutiny for as long as she lives. Right from the cradle she is bound to culture, traditions so on and so forth. From the times that have long gone to the times are still to come, a woman has to adhere to the standards of living, breathing, of man. She has to have mental strength, knowledge but cannot portray it in front of the male society. She has to have the physical attributes, beauty but cannot show it to other men. Women writers have spent books writing the hardships they had to face to come up and write something in a free world. Virginia Woolf in her 'A Room of One's Own' has again and again described the importance of being independent financially, mentally and physically so as to live a life of their own. The layers of subjugation that a woman faces are innumerable. This paper deals with a series unconventional and weird traditions that women have had to follow for a long time due to various reasons. These traditions somehow were to make a woman more beautiful, more appealing in the eyes of the male society. These acts were sometimes eldritch to a huge extent. Though the modern woman is no longer in such uncanny captivities of traditions or acts, the elder women are proof enough to drive a saint up the wall.

"You can be killed for just being female"
— JoeAnn Hart, *Stamford '76: A True Story of Murder, Corruption, Race, and Feminism in the 1970s*

One such tradition was wearing of corsets, however in the year 2017 when Emma Watson refused to wear it for her movie 'The Beauty and the Beast', it was decision that

reflected not only her personal opinion on the device that painfully perfected the waist of women, but of several hundred girls who were targeted for their imperfect figures.

“We do not need magic to transform our world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already. We have the power to imagine better.” —J.K. Rowling

Toni Morrison in her ‘The Bluest Eye’, shows how Pecola a tender girl of eleven is ignored by everyone and the poor girl thinks that only if she had blue eyes, she would become beautiful and everyone would love her. Ultimately, she dies of an immature pregnancy all the thinking of her blue eyes.

Women have been subjected to having a perfect figure, like a barbie doll. A perfect waist, blue eyes, tender pink lips are what the society expects from a girl, intentionally forgetting that this image is of a doll. A doll who is a non-living thing, who does not have to worry about things her around her. This type of mentality that the society has formed in the minds of women also is what quarantines them from the reality.

“Men are self-confident because they grow up identifying with super-heroes. Women have bad self-images because they grow up identifying with Barbie.” -Rita Rudne

Women have gone through facets of beautification treatment just to please people around them. Some of these facets are discussed further.

1. Foot Binding

This practice goes back to the 10th century, in the court of Emperor Li Yu, a lady named Yao Niang who was dancer apparently danced in a six-foot lotus flower with her toes. It is said that her feet were in the shape of new moon. The lady relied on her thigh and buttocks

muscle for support, it also gave her a new type of gait. This particular practice had its own erotic overtones.

Soon this practice became one of the favourites of men and women who had the money and the spare time to indulge in such activities. Rapidly it became a trend and then a beauty standard for girls who were to be married. It was also said that women who had this type of feet were supposedly good wives. However, this method had to be done in the early ages so as to make it permanent. And therefore, girls at the age of 5-6 were undertaken to perform this excruciating method.

“First, her feet were plunged into hot water and her toenails clipped short. Then the feet were massaged and oiled before all the toes, except the big toes, were broken and bound flat against the sole, making a triangle shape. Next, her arch was strained as the foot was bent double. Finally, the feet were bound in place using a silk strip measuring ten feet long and two inches wide. These wrappings were briefly removed every two days to prevent blood and pus from infecting the foot. Sometimes “excess” flesh was cut away or encouraged to rot. The girls were forced to walk long distances in order to hasten the breaking of their arches. Over time the wrappings became tighter and the shoes smaller as the heel and sole were crushed together. After two years the process was complete, creating a deep cleft that could hold a coin in place. Once a foot had been crushed and bound, the shape could not be reversed without a woman undergoing the same pain all over again.”

- [<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-footbinding-persisted-china-millennium-180953971/>]

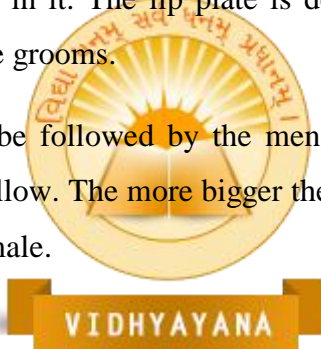
However, as time progressed and different rulers changed, this method of foot binding grew less and less popular. As the practice was an ethnic act of the Chinese women. As the invasions started of Mongols or other tribes, the practice slowly met gruesome downfall. People now saw the pain and problems it caused to women who had the so called ‘lotus feet’. It rendered the women unable to walk in their old age. The last lotus shoe producing was shut down in 1999.

2. Lip Stretching

This practice is as weird as it sounds. It was practised by the Mursi, Chai and Tirma tribes of Africa. It is more evident in the Mursi tribe of Ethiopia. This practice is also called 'lip plate' or in their own words 'dhebi a tugoin'. The history of this practice is not known as it is not limited to the Mursi tribe or Africa. There are many other instances in which other people have practised this type of lip plate. However, it more commonly seen in this tribe. This particular practice is not laid down as a compulsory task for women, yet women undergo this practice probably under peer pressure.

This process starts at puberty, wherein the bottom lip is cut by the mother or any other woman in their colony. It is then held open by wooden plug like objects. Slowly and gradually the objects placed are increased in size so as to have bigger lip. It is increased until a symbolic plate can be inserted in it. The lip plate is decorated by the woman herself to showcase her talent to prospective grooms.

This practice could also be followed by the men in the group. It also showed the hierarchy that the tribes had to follow. The more bigger the lip, the more bigger the plate, the more bigger the authority of the male.



3. Neck Rings

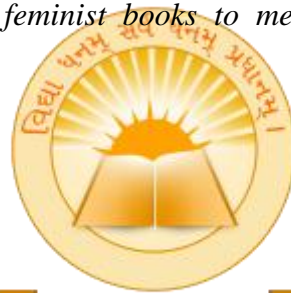
The Kayan tribe of Thailand is famous for wearing the brass rings around their neck. The rings give an elongated look to the neck. There is a doubt regarding the origin and history among historians, some say the practice was originated to make the women less attractive so that they remained safe from invaders who would otherwise kidnap the women. While the other theory suggests that these rings were worn to make the neck long, slim and beautiful in shape. The term that is used in Urdu for this type of neck is 'सुराही दार गर्दन'.

The practice of this tradition has its disadvantages. The rings pressurize the ribs and collarbone down to make the neck look longer. This can result in paralysis and can be fatal. It also impacts the vocal cords of women. The women have hollow but deep voices due to this

practice. the women who have these rings are unable to perform daily chores with ease due to the heavy weight of the rings. The weight of these rings can be up to 20 kgs. The women who work in farms have great difficulty due to the weight. Women cannot drink from water without straws. The removal of these rings after such a long time is also very dangerous. Since the rings have supported for a long time, the muscles do not have enough strength to let the neck stand alone on itself. Thus, swinging of the neck with a jerk can prove deathly.

This practice is a proof of the things expected from women without caring much about their pain and suffering. The barbie as mentioned earlier has a perfectly elongated and beautiful neck. It proves as a replica of the expected woman.

My mom was a big feminist, and when I was growing up, I wasn't allowed to have typical girl toys: she did not let me have dolls. Barbies were banned in our household. She read feminist books to me; my mom was a major feminist. - Leila Janah



4. Corset

Although the corset can be traced back to the Greek culture in ancient times, it was at the peak of its popularity during the Victorian era in England. An ornament worn on torso, particularly to slim down the waist. It was practiced to bring the hourglass figure shape. A practice which was popular among the men too but less than women. The corset gave the woman a figure that all women would desire and men would love.

The corsets were tightly laced body ornaments. With the ever-evolving fashion of times, the corset became an important part of the clothes of the rich and aristocratic families of England as well the nearby kingdoms. It became an undergarment worn to keep in shape the breasts, waist and the hips at almost all times. One witness the importance of this garment in the movie Cinderella [2015] in which the step-sisters are getting ready for the ball at the king's palace. The sisters ask Cinderella to tighten the corset that they were wearing to the extent that their eyes popped out due to the pressure. This incident highlights the mindset of

the girls brainwashed by their mother as well as society, that the slimmer the waist, more chance of the Prince asking their hand at the ball.

Corsets give the hourglass figure but at a cost. It compresses the internal organs when worn for a long time. It also constricts the rib cage causing discomfort to the bone structure. It can also weaken the abdominal muscles in the process of correcting the posture of your body.

As mentioned earlier the refusal of Emma Watson on wearing the corset is a great step in accepting your body as beautiful the way it is. The people propagating the view of wearing the corset are increasing the insecurities of girls or women who do not have the perfect hourglass figure.

“Feeling beautiful has nothing to do with what you look like, I promise.” -

Emma Watson



5. Nightshade Eyedrops

Deadly nightshade is another name for a poisonous plant. Its other name is Belladonna [Atropa Belladonna]. It is native to parts of Europe and Asia. The name itself means ‘beautiful lady’ in Italian. The fruits are like small berries. A person who eats the fruits and leaves of this plant can die almost instantly. A small brush can leave a rash on the exposed area of the person.

This nightshade was used by women in their cosmetic regime. The ingredients were used a very small proportion and that to mostly diluted with some other ingredient, hence the ill effects were not seen soon. They used the leaves and berries to make a pigment used as a blush for their cheeks. The other use that they had was inserting a drop or two in the eyes. This resulted in dilating of the pupils. Women thought that this enhanced their eye beauty giving them an overall gorgeous look.

“Blinding ignorance does mislead us. O! wretched mortals, open your eyes.” -

Leonardo Da Vinci.

By the time the ill effects of this plant became known to the lay people, it was already being used as a poison for eradicating people of the aristocrats. If ingested in small amount this plant can give the person hallucinations, delirium, convulsions and later on death also.

Some researchers believe that Shakespeare refers to this plant when he talks about Juliet eating something and getting poisoned. There are several instances in history where death is splayed across the kingdoms because of this plant's poisonous elements. The Roman military dipped their arrows in the poison of this plant and then launched it at their enemies resulting in gruesome death. Some scholars even say that kings like Macbeth the emperor of Scotland, Augustus emperor of Rome, Claudius of Rome have been said to have died because of this nightshade.

6. Eating Tapeworm

Victorians have never been able to stop the beautification process for the females. Each time they come up with something new to change in their body structure, it can be dilated eyes, rosy lips, blushed cheeks. However, they are somewhat obsessed with keeping their waistline measures below normal at all costs.

They now came up with something that was totally unhygienic and audacious. They invented a pill with tapeworm eggs inside it. The person had to ingest this pill and once the egg hatched, the worm would eat a part of the food that the person had eaten, and had come in the digestive chamber. Thus, rendering the person to eat as much as she pleased without the worry of increased weight.

“A culture fixated on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty, but an obsession about female obedience. Dieting is the most potent political sedative in women's history; a quietly mad population is a tractable one.”

— Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*



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Once the worms had done their work, they had to be removed from the person's body. Since surgical operations were not that common during those days, people used to insert cylinders with food in to the digestive tract and then not eat for a few days. The worm would be hungry and in search for food go in the cylinder, which would then be taken out of the person. Many people died due to choking because of this treatment. The other way that they thought of was placing a bowl of milk near the anus of the person in the hope that worm would find its way out.

This method was quite popular until started dying because of infection. If not detected earlier these worms can grow up to nine metres in length and can cause diseases like epilepsy, meningitis, dementia.

This method has been banned almost throughout the world due to its obvious health hazards. However, on some illegal online sites people have seen the advertisements of tapeworm diet pills.





CONCLUSION

Having had a look at the obnoxious ways that women have tried to maintain the façade of beauty is truly an eye opener. Women have always wanted to have perfect features facial or otherwise. The things that they have tried to maintain a superior image of beauty in front of other women and men is unflinching. I have compared ideal image of woman's beauty to that of a barbie doll because of the similarities in the ideals when the doll was created. She was considered an epitome of beauty by these women only, having the perfect beach bikini body, twinkling blue eyes and a perfectly toothed smile.

The ugly duckling is a misunderstood universal myth. It's not about turning into a blonde Barbie doll or becoming what you dream of being; it's about self-revelation, becoming who you are. - Baz Luhrmann

The unconventional beauty methods were all implied-on women by peer pressure as well societal pressure to always look as their perfect version. It is a norm even now in the modern world to look as perfect as possible but women have stopped going through such crazy methods for getting a good figure or better facial features. She is now opting for a healthier version of herself and accepting the way as she is. The quarantine time that she might get after having served her family might be the time that she can invest in herself.



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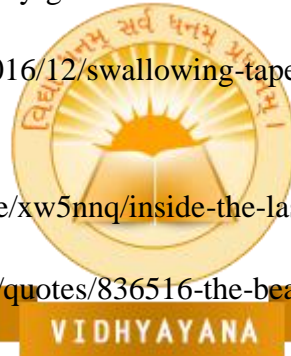
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