



# What motivated you to launch this campaign?



Women Of Worth (WOW) is a women's movement in Chennai, whose goal is to help women everywhere, 'be the best they can be'. Our training initiatives on personality development with school and college students revealed how the issue of skin colour was deeply damaging the self-worth of several girls we were interacting with.

All the counselling and mentoring efforts would produce very little result because of contradicting messages being bombarded at them from family members, teachers, and the media.

I had always wanted to start a campaign to raise awareness against the discrimination that exists. Back in 2009 I came across a collection of artwork created by a high school student who was left ashamed of her dark skin throughout her childhood. That inspired me to use art as a platform for people to express this prejudice without the fear of being judged or worse - mocked.

Thus, the **Dark Is Beautiful Campaign** began.

◆ Kavita Emmanuel  
Founder & Director - Women of Worth(WOW)





# Survey Results

Our interactions and survey on the issue have revealed that women with darker complexions are:

- seen as the second or last option in industries that set beauty norms, such as fashion, entertainment, hospitality and the service sector
- put down and treated differently from their lighter skinned siblings. The use of uncomplimentary words by their own family members and relatives have a long-lasting detrimental effect on their self-esteem
- discriminated against sometimes even at school where lighter-skinned girls are usually chosen to represent the school on stage or in public
- rejected by potential marriage partners
- subject to negative comments made by friends and even strangers from a very impressionable age (Eg. *'She has nice features but she is so dark'* or *'Being dark, she will have trouble finding a good husband'*)

While it would appear that skin colour is an issue that affects women, our campaign has drawn a strong response from men too. Men have reported coming across a strong color bias when it comes to the job market and state that lighter skinned men are deemed more attractive than their darker-hued counterparts.

# What is wrong with preferring fair skin? Are people with dark skin really at a disadvantage?

We all have opinions and preferences. But if our preference for fair skin is due to existing prejudices, then we are either tolerating or propagating colour bias.

People with dark skin are often made to feel that they are at a disadvantage. Brands that promote fairness products ride on people's insecurities, telling them that they need to aspire to be fair, and then promising that a certain product will make them more successful and more beautiful.

We all know that skin colour bias exists. So instead of addressing it, why are we feeding it?



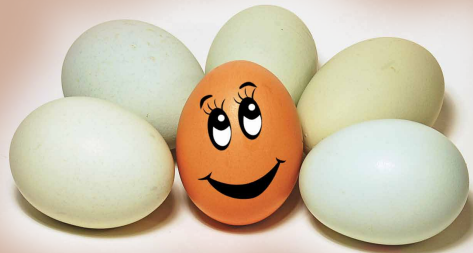
**Why does the campaign seem to put so much emphasis on celebrities? You have asked celebrities to stop endorsing fairness products, and you've also featured Bollywood celebrities and models who are speaking out against skin colour bias.**

This question cannot be answered without considering a longstanding debate on fan-following versus hero worship in our society. In our research, we found that men,

women and children emulate celebrities. Any product endorsed by their favourite actor automatically wins a favourable vote. Brands allocate a large portion of their marketing budget to get celebrity endorsements for that very same reason. Celebs play a pivotal role in building brand loyalty. In the midst of this advertising formula, there is very little education on evaluating media messages or evaluating the products available in the market.

We are not against celebrity endorsements. We just happen to believe that celebrities have a huge influence on our nation's youth, and they do have the ability to turn things around.

Celebrity endorsements have certainly given the *Dark is Beautiful* campaign a boost. Some people have even assumed that because some Bollywood figures and models have voiced their support, that the campaign is elitist and not "of the common people." When we launched the campaign in 2009, we were a grass-roots, volunteer-driven organization of people who care deeply about this cause. Today, through our small team and because of the support of thousands who've banded with us, skin colour discrimination has become a topic of national - and global - conversation. There is much more going on in the campaign than the celebrity buzz.



## Which projects are you working on now? What do you hope to achieve in the future?

We have requests from people wanting us to take the campaign to other locations both in India and abroad. Presently, we are recruiting volunteers and partners to launch *Dark is Beautiful* chapters in Bangalore, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Delhi. This is a movement that has to spread across cultural, ethnic and national boundaries for us to begin to see change.

In India, media literacy among students will be our major thrust in the days to come. We are working on a training module for high school students. We want to educate our young people to be smart customers.

The campaign is also working on projects to inspire change in the advertising industry. We are open to working with various brands to re-envision the way they promote their products. We would like to see more dark-skinned models and actors who would be a realistic representation of how our people look. Our hope is to foster appreciation for all different skin colours.