

## YOUTH CORNER

### **I'm Enough: This Is My Indian Heritage**

Thanvi Nimmagadda

---

I'm not good enough, in what sense? Is it my fairly larger ethnic nose that feels to not fit my face shape, or is it the stomach that slightly droops over my body? I'm a 16 year old tan-skinned, Indian woman that is 5 foot 5 ½ inches and approximately 123.8 pounds, and yet that is not good enough for other people. Other people, specifically meaning, the Indian aunties and uncles with high, unhealthy standards. This discernment is completely hypocritical considering that it's even demeaning to them as we share the same features; if they just looked into the mirror, they would simply see the proud remnants of being an Indian. But, how do we define these unhealthy standards? There's this specific image that we women have to follow, and if we don't fit this spitting image, then we're automatically discouraged and highly judged for looking how we are, rather than what we're supposed to look like. It feels like two hawk eyes are watching our every step, every move, and if one foot goes wrong then we're getting a two-hour life talk of every single thing we can do better on. From the second we're born, we've been the target point for discrimination from everyone, including people of our own.

There is this stereotypical idea that is set as our role for the rest of our lives, and that is to grow up to learn how to cook and clean to take care of our future husbands and families. Sure, times have gotten a little

better, and that social stigma is slowly wearing out, but it doesn't mean that it's one hundred percent gone, and looking logistically, it will never truly be gone. Times will never really change, and generations down the line, women are still unfortunately going to have to go through what all of us Indian women are today. We still to this day grow up with the thought of having to be a "traditional" woman or else we feel unworthy of following marriage and having a family life. When looking for marriage in our Indian culture, what is on the checklist? Fair skin tone, knows how to cook, knows how to clean, needs to be devoted to her husband, doesn't need a job, needs to be extremely religious for Hindu rituals, etc. Principles as such are completely unfair to what Indian women bring forward and are atrociously demeaning to discourage our hopes and dreams. "Be more shy, be more religious, don't be loud, don't be a rebel, don't go out in the sun or get dark, don't go out at night, don't wear that, don't drink this, don't question so much, don't use your phone so much, and don't do the things the boys in the family still get away with doing," says IndianExpress, in what sense do us, Indian women, have any control over what we do and what we say?

There have been century-old history novels of chapters and chapters dedicated to what being a "good" Indian woman looks like, however, a more realistic

description is how one embodies her essence in her skin and is genuinely a superior daughter, mother, and wife to a man who respects her. As young girls like me, having that idea to bloom to be this specific way is completely demonizing, and is enough to ruin the childhood experiences we so wish to have. Being a young Indian girl, what a primetime to live, right? Wrong.

Currently living through what it's like, it's a time where we only have ourselves, we only know our true and pure selves. We hide behind this mask to make our parents happy, our relatives happy, and everyone around us happy, but are we happy? The discomfort of being someone we're not slowly building up until these young girls start to rebel. By rebelling, it means not having a loving, open relationship with our parents, and having to find that comfort in other people to feel okay. Sneaking out at night, saying you're going somewhere but going elsewhere, lying about grades, and wearing a hoodie over a crop top to take it off after you leave the house are all simple activities these young girls have to do to feel free. Also to mention how loved ones will cleanly cut your diet to make sure your weight is a certain number, or your body is a certain figure shape. Every day, the one consistent thing that is said in the household is, "Why are you eating that? You will gain weight" or "You're becoming too thin, you need to eat more." Statistically, over 25% of Indian women deal with eating disorders that deal with binge eating, purging, and even over-exercising. Not only does this affect physical, but also mental state. Over time, confidence only wanes and takes over our minds and soul because we feel like a disappointment. Sometimes, it truly feels

like a burden to be an Indian woman.

Indians, in general, typically believe that men should play more important roles in the home than women. Nearly two-thirds of Indians agree with the idea that a wife must always agree with her husband, and about nine out of 10 agree that this is true. According to a survey, which was conducted in the past two years, Indian women are just "somewhat less likely than Indian men" to say they agree that wives should always obey their husbands. Gender equality is a topic that India has been battling for centuries now, and sexism along with domestic abuse for women is considered one of the highest in India. Numerous cultural obstacles prevent women from advancing in society. Only a few examples include discriminatory family norms, a lack of education, and cultural stigmas. The government is under increased pressure as a result of increased media attention to these injustices to change how women are treated in institutions as well as to advance the conversation on women's rights in a fast-modernizing society.

I want to go to medical school and become a doctor, I want to travel the world and cliff dive in Europe while experiencing new things before settling down, I want to enhance my colored skin beauty by starting a skincare line that specifically cares for people of color. I will NOT have these old-world ideas bring my ambitions down. I will NOT allow for the mindset and attitudes of other people to not let me live my life to the fullest. If I'm seen as disrespecting the Indian culture for not following their contract, then so be it because in my heart I know that there is no such thing as that anymore. Not just me, but millions of other girls that have the

same dreams as I do, and our goals shouldn't be stamped down just to have a man live the life he wants while our only job is to make sure he's accomplishing it. There is no rulebook of what being an Indian woman looks like in our modern-day age. That old rulebook is expired and very much outdated, as we can build a new one that achieves comfort for all women.

This isn't the nineteenth century anymore, times have changed, and so have women. If the world can grow new advances that accommodate everyone, then I think the world can grow to accept that Indian women are more than just dolls for people to mess with.

