



The mirror

My childhood mirror, a constant companion
I held it far, I held it close, seeking truth, a little denial, maybe confirmation
The shiny reflection at a decision conclusively did arrive
Brown.....A Fitzpatrick four ... ha! optimism? actually five
Not much in terms of nostalgia for me
Childhood remains a 'dark' memory!
Taunts of 'black' in different languages still echo in my ears,
'How will she get a 'good' groom?', my parents' worst fears
And then my self-esteem, the little left, went further down
Spots of white sprouted ominously on a backdrop of brown
The skin doctor gave it a name
It's 'vitiligo' he did proclaim
It is treatable ... it will go, slowly but surely
His calm voice reiterated reassuringly
I nodded, unsure, a little confused, a little sad
Why me? The irony was driving me mad
All through life, I detested melanin
The search for light skin, the unholy grail, an illness of society with no medicine?
And now of this hated dark pigment, there was too less?
Dying in spots, leaving me like a tattered board of chess
In self-pity, I dwelt, not sure for how long.....
But time, the great healer (the only?) made me strong
Dark or light, spots or not
I realized, we, just our skins are not!
For the people who shudder and frown
Seeing these islands of white on oceans of brown
My skin isn't a reflection of what I am by far
It can however be a mirror of what they are!

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Note: An article in *Nature*, aptly titled “Vitiligo’s impact is in the eye of the beholder,” by John Harris, delves into the interesting conflict between acceptance of vitiligo, to a point where one celebrates it and would feel that there is no need to treat it at all, and the other side of the coin where patients feel stigmatized and need to be given a chance to make an informed choice to treat vitiligo with the available options.¹ In a country like India this merges into the unfortunate, but very real, problem of defining beauty based on skin colour. It is ironic that in an environment obsessed with fair skin, vitiligo still carries its ‘fair’ share of stigma. For us dermatologists, the key would be balance and transference of that balance to the patients who can then make their own informed choices—as vitiligo, as dark, as any skin colour for that matter, is beautiful and yes, vitiligo can still be treated effectively for those who choose to do so.

Declaration of patient consent

Patient consent not required as there are no patients in this study.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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Reference

1. Harris J. Vitiligo’s impact is in the eye of the beholder. *Nature* 2018;563:S99