

## Plastic Surgery: Bollywood, Miss Universe, and the Indian Girl Next Door

Translated from Gujarati Magazine (Sandesh)

*Women of South Asian descent are getting plastic surgery in record numbers. According to 2005 data from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, Asian Americans had 437,000 cosmetic surgeries in 2005, a whopping 58 percent jump from the previous year. The most commonly requested procedure by Asian Americans is rhinoplasty (nose job).*

*Critics point out that many South Asian women are honed into the belief that a “Western look” is the only option of beauty. These critics feel that South Asian women feel the need to change their appearance not to look more beautiful on a South Asian scale, but to look more “westernized”. On the other hand, supporters of plastic surgery would contend that South Asian women are getting plastic surgery to look and feel more attractive on a South Asian standard of beauty, and that improved accessibility and economics has made plastic surgery a realistic option.*

Pria is a young successful, hard-working professional, who happened to dislike the appearance of her nose. “For as long as I can remember, all I could see when I looked in the mirror was the bump on my nose.” Pria had it all; she had graduated at the top of her class, had secured a job at a top advertising firm, and had purchased a swank new apartment. However, Pria was still single, not because she wasn’t attractive, but because she did not feel beautiful.

“Whenever I would talk to people, I was self conscious about the size of my nose. I couldn’t help think that people were staring at it. It seems silly to think something as minor as a bump on my nose could affect the way I thought others viewed me, but I felt it did. I never made time for dating. At first I thought it was because of my work, but then I realized it was an excuse because of my lack of confidence.”

The constant pragmatist, Pria decided to take action and have her nose fixed. Pria eventually decided to have her surgery performed by Dr. Anil R. Shah, an acclaimed plastic surgeon at New York University specializing in plastic surgery of the face, particularly in ethnic populations.

Pria’s friends had recently undergone surgery with Dr. Shah so he had come with the highest of recommendations. Her consultation included a virtual image of her nose, a picture of what her nose would look like after the operation.

In order to pay for this operation, Pria elected to use a payment plan, where she would pay for the operation over the course of a year at a low interest rate. According to 2002 data from the American Academy of Facial Plastic Surgery, the average rhinoplasty costs \$4857 with some variation dependent on the difficulty of the case and the surgeon’s experience.

Dr. Shah performed an “incision-less” rhinoplasty, where surgery was performed without an external scar. The recovery period was surprisingly easy and pain free. Dr. Shah did not use nasal packing, which aided in Pria’s comfort, and used alternative medications to help alleviate bruising and swelling during the recovery period. Once the cast was removed, although her nose was still swollen, Pria could see that the shape of her nose had already improved.

“I see myself in the mirror now and feel confident and beautiful.”

Although Pria has not found a husband yet, she is much more confident about her prospects. Like Pria, more and more South Asian women are turning to plastic surgery. Many women’s perception of beauty is derived from Bollywood’s influence. India’s obsession with glamorous actresses and beauty pageants contestants rivals that of any country as evidenced by India reaching the illustrious feat of crowning five Miss World Pageants, more than any other nation.

The expectation and standards of attractiveness seem to be becoming increasingly harder to reach. Shymla Abdul, a hairdresser in England comments, “I think it is nice to see the world as a whole recognizing the allure of women of India. On the other hand, more and more of us are expected to look like a beauty queen.”

“Within India and Pakistan are a wide variety of beautiful faces. Limiting what constitutes beauty in a country of over 1.1 billion people to a handful of actresses and beauty pageant contestants is socially irresponsible,” states Dr. Shah.

Why are South Asian Women seeking plastic surgery? Are they trying to appear Caucasian? Dr. Anil Shah, “I don’t think South Asian women are attempting to look less South Asian. South Asian patients who seek rhinoplasty in my practice request to have the nose blend in harmoniously with the rest of the facial features.”

Western influence in South Asian designer fashion has pushed the limits of tolerability each year. More revealing designs has caused an increase in body consciousness and resulted in more South Asian women seeking breast implants and liposuction. Diet and exercise are the first and most important option before plastic surgery can even be entertained.

Sarita, a California native states, “I have tried diet and exercise, but I could not lose weight around my midriff. I turned to liposuction because I wanted to be able to wear a bikini or a sexy sari design and not worry about my stomach.”

A large influx of South Asian immigrants to the States in the late 1960’s. This first generation is now seeking to look and feel young. The first generation South Asian differs from their American baby boomer cohorts regarding plastic surgery. The South Asian culture focuses on natural and healthy lifestyle choices; anything that looks plastic is unacceptable and detrimental to social interaction. According to Dr. Shah, Indian “aunties” are seeking minimal invasive options such as BOTOX, Restylane, and minimally invasive facelifts.

More than ever, South Asian women are cognizant about their appearances and attractiveness, with some turning to plastic surgery. Are these women seeking to look beautiful on a South Asian standard, or are they trying to appear Western in appearance? As lines become blurred between East and West, these questions become much more difficult to answer. With the wide variety of beautiful faces within India/Pakistan, it is hopeful that South Asians who do seek surgical change, do so within the context of their South Asian ethnicity, and avoid conforming to strict Western views of what is beautiful.