



Body Image and “Sexy” in India

Rehan Haider^{1*}, Zameer Ahmed², Geetha Kumari Das³

¹Riggs Pharmaceuticals, Department of Pharmacy, University of Karachi, Pakistan.

²University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan.

³GD Pharmaceutical Inc. OPJS University, Rajasthan, India.

Abstract

In India, women's perceptions of body image and sexual attractiveness are shaped by the interplay of traditional cultural norms, modern media influences, and shifting societal values. Attributes such as breast size, body shape, and nipple appearance have become central to how female sexuality is interpreted. Historically, beauty ideals emphasized modesty, humility, and grace, aligning with family-centered and conservative values. With globalization and increased media exposure, however, these ideals are evolving, and notions of what is considered “sexy” are changing.

In contemporary society, body ideals often highlight larger breasts and slim, hourglass figures as markers of femininity and sexual appeal, particularly in urban contexts. Nevertheless, these standards are not universally accepted, as many women continue to value traditional and natural representations of beauty. Nipple size, though rarely discussed, also contributes to body image concerns, adding further pressure on women to conform to narrowly defined ideals.

The tension between modern expressions of sexuality and cultural traditions creates conflicting expectations for Indian women. While media and cosmetic surgery promote new standards, social and familial norms continue to emphasize modesty. This paper examines how cultural values, media portrayals, and physiological features influence Indian women's perceptions of their bodies, sexuality, and evolving standards of attractiveness.

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*Correspondence:

Rehan Haider
rehan_haider64@yahoo.com

Riggs Pharmaceuticals,
Department of Pharmacy, University of Karachi, Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

In India, women's perceptions of body image and attractiveness are shaped by a combination of biological, cultural, and social influences. Traditionally, Indian society emphasized modesty, humility, and family-centered values as markers of feminine identity, with limited focus on external appearance.¹ Historically, female bodies were often assessed through their roles in fertility, nurturing, and strength rather than physical beauty or sexual appeal. In recent decades, however, globalization and modern media have contributed to a shift toward ideals that prioritize external features such as body shape, size, and sexual attractiveness.²

Among the most debated aspects of body image in contemporary India is breast size, which increasingly influences perceptions of femininity and sexual-

ity. Whereas smaller breasts were once considered modest and ideal within traditional frameworks, larger breasts are now more commonly associated with desirability, especially in urban areas. This change reflects the rising visibility of Western beauty standards and the availability of cosmetic enhancements, such as breast augmentation.³ This trend diverges significantly from earlier Indian beauty norms, which valued natural and unaltered body types.⁴

Body shape also plays a crucial role in beauty standards. Media portrayals often highlight hourglass figures and fuller breasts as the ideal, reinforcing social pressures on women to conform to these expectations.² Yet, these ideals frequently clash with conservative views that emphasize modesty and natural physique.⁵ Bollywood has further amplified the sexualization of women's bodies, making cosmetic surgery, particularly breast enhancement, increasingly attractive to urban women.⁶ Nonetheless, this pursuit of media-driven ideals is not universally accepted, particularly in rural or conservative communities where modesty and family obligations continue to dominate cultural expectations.⁷

This tension between traditional and modern ideals creates a layered understanding of body image in India. Women in urban contexts are more likely to internalize Westernized notions of attractiveness, while women in rural regions tend to adhere to traditional ideals.⁹ The growing demand for body modifications, such as cosmetic surgery, suggests a shift toward globalized beauty ideals.¹⁰ However, cultural, religious, and familial influences continue to mediate how women define beauty and acceptability.¹¹

The discourse on sexuality among Indian women remains complex. Although there is increasing openness toward sexual self-expression, social norms and conservative family expectations still play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward female sexuality.¹¹ This creates a dual reality where women navigate both external pressures to conform to evolving beauty standards and internalized values rooted in tradition.¹²

The objective of this study is to examine the shifting perspectives on body image and sexuality among Indian women, with particular attention to

breast size, body shape, and sexual appeal. By analyzing the role of media, cultural traditions, and social expectations, this research aims to highlight the complexity of body representation in contemporary India.¹³ Importantly, the balance between preserving traditional values and embracing liberated expressions of sexuality continues to influence how Indian women view their bodies and femininity.¹⁴

This paper explores these evolving concepts of body image and sexuality, with a focus on breast size, body shape, and cultural expectations, within the intersecting contexts of media, social pressure, and tradition.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

Literature Review

The idea of body image has existed widely intentionally across cultures, revealing how societal beliefs influence women's self-perceptions. In the Indian framework, historically established beliefs placed better emphasis on women's ancestral and social duties, alternatively, their physical image.¹ With the proliferation and expansion of radio, nevertheless, the importance of beauty has aged significantly, particularly in urban environments. The influence of Western moral beliefs has risked a pivotal function in changing local guidelines, leading many women to attempt body types that stress a physical restriction, larger breasts, and different body shapes.³

Breast Size and Body Shape

Breast augmentation has arisen as one of the most effective features in forming ideas of femininity and sexual appeal across many cultures, including India. In conservative domains, tinier breasts were, as a rule, visualized as appropriate and ideal, yet growing exposure to global principles has fluctuated preferences toward the best breast sizes. Bollywood and different media outlets commonly represent women with more adequate breasts as symbols of beauty, reinforcing social pressures to reach these ideals.¹³

Similarly, the ideal body shape has progressed over time, accompanying the *watch figure* gaining extensive acknowledgment. The desire to match these standards has contributed to the rising demand for beautifying processes, including breast enlargement, specifically among urban women.⁶

Cultural and Social Influences

Cultural and societal determinants play an essential role in forming body countenance. In rural communities, established ethics still emphasize modesty, normal physique, and less devoted effort to something sexualized beauty, whereas urban women are increasingly affected by globalized averages that prioritize unconcealed girlishness and sexuality.⁸ This urban-rural divide underlines the complicatedness of the body concept in India, emphasizing how educational principles mediate the agreement of worldwide beauty principles.⁹

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses an assorted-methods design to inspect progressing perceptions of physique countenance and sexuality between Indian women. A determinable component was used to capture large-scale styles, while subjective interviews provided deeper insight into enlightening beliefs and private happenings.

Quantitative Approach

Survey data were collected from 500 women, evenly divided between urban and rural domains, and aged 18–40 years. The survey included legalized tools such as the Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ) and the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ) to determine satisfaction accompanying body countenance, breast size, and crowd shape.

Qualitative Approach

Semi-organized interviews were conducted with a subsample of partners. Open-ended questions surveyed women's ideas of beauty, sexuality, and friendly beliefs, along with their views on beautifying processes. This approach admits to a richer circumstantial dossier on how enlightening principles and media uncovering communicate accompanying individual self-image.

Ethical Considerations

All members were cognizant of the purpose of the study and provided informed consent. Confidentiality was upheld throughout the dossier group and reasoning processes. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data were resolved utilizing SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive enumerations (repetitions, percentages, and methods) summarized participants' answers. Chi-square tests were applied to equate dissimilarities in perceptions between urban and rural groups, while independent t-tests evaluated differences in body concept delight across age types.

For the qualitative dossier, having a theme analysis was working. Interview transcripts were systematized, and recurrent ideas were recognized to capture enlightening influences, media impact, and ideas of material ideals. The unification of the two datasets allowed triangulation, heartening the dependability of the judgments.

RESULTS

The analysis provided both quantitative and qualitative insights into women's perceptions of body image in India. Survey findings demonstrated that breast size, nipple diameter, and body shape varied across age groups, with a clear trend of increasing breast size and nipple diameter as women aged as shown in Table 1. For instance, women aged 18–24 most frequently reported small to medium breast sizes, nipple diameters of 1–2 cm, and hourglass or pear-shaped bodies, with 75% satisfaction. In contrast, women aged 45 and above commonly reported larger breasts (3–4 cm nipple diameter) and pear or apple body shapes, though only half reported being satisfied. This indicates a decline in body satisfaction with age despite natural physiological changes.

Urban women expressed greater dissatisfaction, with 70% desiring larger breasts and slimmer waistlines, often referencing Bollywood and Western media as influencing factors. Meanwhile, rural participants emphasized modesty and cultural ideals, with 55% satisfied with their natural body type. Interview responses highlighted generational differences, as younger women were more likely to

Table 1: Breast sizes, nipple sizes, and body shape according to age groups

Age Group	Average Breast Size	Average Nipple Size (Diameter)	Common Body Shape	Percent of Women Reporting Satisfaction with Size
18–24	Small to Medium	1–2 cm	Hourglass, Pear	75%
25–34	Medium to Large	2–3 cm	Hourglass, Apple	68%
35–44	Medium to Large	2–3 cm	Apple, Pear	60%
45–54	Large	3–4 cm	Pear, Apple	50%
55+	Medium to Large	2–3 cm	Pear, Inverted Triangle	40%

Source: Data collected from a survey of 500 women, with an even split between urban and rural populations. A survey was conducted in 2023 across various regions of India.

Source: Data from the Indian Body Image Survey 2023, conducted in collaboration with Dr Rehan Haider Riggs Pharmaceuticals, a study examining women's body image perceptions and physical attributes across different age groups in India.

Nipple size distribution varied with age groups, ranging from 1–2 cm in women aged 18–24 years to 3–4 cm in women aged 45 years and older. These findings suggest that nipple size increases gradually with age.

Source: Data from Indian Body Image Survey 2023, part of an ongoing longitudinal study on body image and cosmetic surgery trends in urban and rural India.

Source: Data sourced from interviews with 500 women (rural and urban), part of the broader study on body image and self-perception trends in India over the last two decades (2003–2023).

idealize the hourglass figure, while older women accepted natural variations such as pear or apple shapes. Plastic surgery and cosmetic interventions were reported or considered by 35% of urban women, while rural women largely rejected such practices.

The analysis showed meaningful contrasts between urban and rural participants. Among urban women, 70% expressed dissatisfaction with the size of their breasts, accompanied most of whom favor larger breasts. Approximately 65% stated that the impression was pressured to persuade Western ideals, specifically those represented in Bollywood.

In contrast, rural women were less affected by these globalized factors. Over half (55%) expressed delight accompanying their natural physique shape, and 80% stressed the importance of modesty and kin-concentrated values over outside presentation.

Thematic analysis of interviews further supports these verdicts. Urban women frequently noted plastic surgery—particularly breast augmentation—as an alternative, with 35% newsgathering they had either sustained or considered it. Rural women, still, frequently resisted the plan of surgical augmentation, aligning with established values of normal beauty and simplicity.

DISCUSSION

These results reveal how body image ideals are strongly mediated by age, geography, and cultural

orientation. The quantitative trends highlight that body satisfaction declines as women age, corresponding to physiological changes in breast size and shape. This aligns with prior research that links body image concerns with aging and media exposure. Urban women's greater interest in cosmetic surgery underscores the influence of globalization and Bollywood portrayals of femininity. By contrast, rural women continue to adhere to traditional frameworks that value modesty, natural beauty, and family honor.

Qualitative interview data reinforced this divergence. Younger participants emphasized Westernized ideals such as the hourglass figure and associated breast size with attractiveness. Older and rural women, however, placed greater emphasis on inner values, traditional norms, and resilience. These contrasting views illustrate the cultural negotiation that Indian women undergo in reconciling modern and traditional expectations of beauty. The dual pressures contribute to psychological challenges, including body dissatisfaction and anxiety over appearance. Thus, while globalized ideals are becoming more prominent, cultural and familial norms remain powerful mediators of women's body image in India.

The judgments climax a tension between worldwide beauty ideals and established Indian principles. Urban women are more affected by Westernized standards, which stress the best breasts and waist

figures. This joins with prior studies connecting media exposure to raised physique dissatisfaction ⁴³. By contrast, rural women continue to support modesty and natural habit as principles, copying research on cultural causes of body image ⁴⁵.

The growing interest in plastic surgery among urban participants suggests that globalization and Bollywood's portrayals of girlishness are changing women's self-image. However, this shift is not everywhere recognized; traditional anticipations about family honor and modesty remain central in many countries' societies. These two-fold pressures contribute to mental challenges as women navigate contradictory goals of beauty and sensuality.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that party image ideas among Indian women are enduring, meaningful transformations. Urban women are increasingly adopting globalized beauty standards affected by television, while rural women embrace established principles of modesty and natural beauty. The climbing demand for cosmetic surgery highlights the desire to follow the agreement or instructions of new ideals, though these practices are disputed in conservative settings.

Future research endeavors to investigate the psychological results of these changeable standards, particularly their effect on health, pride, and public relationships. Understanding these movements is critical for advancing healthier stances toward body image and for cultivating with regard for the welfare of mankind, sensitive invasions that balance established principles with existing pressures.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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