



## lotions, potions & rituals

A SENSE OF BEAUTY HAS ALWAYS EXISTED AND EXERCISED ITS FASCINATION OVER MANKIND, **SHAHEEN PERVEEN** WRITES. IT WAS THIS SEARCH FOR BEAUTY AND ETERNAL YOUTH THAT HAS LED WOMEN TO TRY EVERYTHING THAT NATURE HAS TO OFFER AS A POSSIBLE THERAPY OR TOOL OF SEDUCTION. THIS HAS EVOLVED INTO CENTURIES OF TRADITION THAT COMES TO THE FORE WHEN A BRIDE, ANY BRIDE, ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, IS PREPARING FOR HER BIG DAY. AN ENTIRE ARSENAL OF BEAUTY SECRETS IS UNLEASHED ON THE BRIDE-TO-BE TRANSFORMING HER INTO A GODDESS ON HER WEDDING DAY.

A run-down of these rituals makes for an ideal beauty compendium. Solah Shringar or the Sixteen Steps to Adornment (one for every part of the body) reflects the Indian beauty treatment since time immemorial. It all begins with a body massage with scented oils and pastes (of cinnamon, saffron, sandalwood, myrrh, etc) for several days before the wedding. The idea is to tone up the skin and impart a radiant glow.

In most Asian countries turmeric is still used to dye the bride and in a few places she is even married with it still on. Javanese Lulur, reckoned as the queen of beauty treatments and practised in the palaces of Central Java, is all about the golden glow rendered by turmeric. Lulur is simple to make. Prepare a paste blending sandalwood powder, turmeric powder and finely ground rice powder (in the ratio of 1:2:3) in fresh yoghurt. Add a few drops of jasmine and use it for massage.

Raw turmeric stick is the first choice and it can be rubbed against any rough surface, adding water at the same time to form a paste. In some places the bride's body is anointed with turmeric and mustard oil paste. An ideal facemask may be prepared by stirring turmeric paste in milk and adding a few drops of honey. Lemon can be substituted for honey and it becomes a skin toner. Its regular use improves the skin complexion and renders it soft and smooth.

In China the beauty buzzword is pearls. Yes, precious pearls have been the top favourite of the Chinese royal court for centuries. Queen Mother Cixi of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), regarded as the epitome of Chinese beauty, took a spoonful of pearl powder daily and applied pearl facials. She was equally fond of her jade face roller. It worked on reflexology and kept the blood circulation finely tuned; an additional bonus was the cooling properties of the jade. Cixi, the last of China's Empress dowagers is still remembered for her wrinkle-free, lustrous and youthful looks.

The Chinese have used pearl powder traditionally as a tooth whitener, beauty tonic and to heal wounds. The precious little pearl comes packed with dozens of valuable minerals and a number of amino acids that nourish the skin. Pearl powder, applied externally, boosts the skin's natural metabolism, tones up the complexion and prevents wrinkles. Pearl powder can simply be mixed with milk or olive oil and the paste applied to clean and dry skin. Wash it off after 15 minutes. Pearl powder is better utilised as a supplement and consumed internally. Use hydrolysed (dissolvable) natural pearl powder and simply place 1gm of it on the tongue or mix it with a glass of hot water. It is readily absorbed into the blood stream through the digestive tract

and works wonders for the skin and works other miracles for the body.

A ceremonial bath is a universal custom that symbolises the purification of the bride. The water needs to be sui generis and the bride given enough time to de-stress from the impending nuptials. The Egyptians will prefer water from the Nile while the Jewish ritual bath, Mikvah, is made up of rainwater. Others work on perfumed water enriched with aromatic herbs made up of saffron, cinnamon, nutmeg, camphor, myrrh, musk, lotus, etc. Jewish brides follow a year - long purification process with myrrh whilst Chinese brides massage jasmine. Indian brides have been using sandalwood, jasmine and rose since Vedic times. Even the treatise of Kama Sutra recommends these aromatic oils to whip up the passions. Since ancient times it has been a custom in India to paint the breast with sandalwood paste (Arabs use saffron) and to anoint the bride's feet with aromatic oils.

Mandi Susu, or the milk bath is common in various countries such as Morocco, India, and Indonesia thanks to Cleopatra who initiated the milk and honey bath to enhance her beauty. Milk is an ideal softener and moisturiser. Biologists stir the power of milk into products that moisturise, exfoliate and improve the beauty of your skin. Unflavoured, unsweetened milk from a goat, sheep or cow is preferable, making the skin radically soft and pure to the touch. After a milk bath it is essential to rinse off thoroughly as it tends to invite bacteria. However, in Singapore the therapists at the St Gregory Spa advise you not to rinse after soaking your body in the especially prepared milk.

In countries like Hungary, Morocco, and Turkey brides go to the baths or the lavish hammams more often to make use of the mineral rich water or the steam baths that will spiritually cleanse them and keep and render the skin soft and supple.

Henna - one of the oldest documented cosmetics comes next in the list of beauty arsenals associated with marriage rituals in various countries. Henna, a natural plant dye that yields the strongest natural colourant known to us, is believed to have mystical, protective and holy properties. In North African countries, the Middle East, the Indian sub continent and other parts of the world the bride is the star of a henna party. The henna, used to ornament the bride's hands and feet is a constant, while other details differ depending upon the region. The bride receives the most intricate and elaborate design that includes fertility symbols (like a tree, snake, fish), the couple's initials and other good luck signs and symbols. Indians believe that the darker the colour it leaves on the palm corresponds to the deep love and affection the bride can expect from her husband. Moreover, the bride is exempted from housework until the fading of the henna and