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Applying lipstick, blush and eyeliner is hardly a cruel act. But in the worldwide multi-billion dollar cosmetic industry chances are your rose red lipstick was created with animal products and tested on live rabbits for eye and skin safety. Immobilized and conscious, fur shaved or eyes pried open, they receive toxic doses of new substances. Then they are killed.

The cosmetics world - ranging from facial creams to shampoos, from toothpaste to after shave lotions - is shrouded in this secret pale of laboratory suffering and death. Men's cosmetic are equally stained. Most household products too: laundry detergents and softeners, bleach, general-purpose cleansers, dust sprays, liquid drain solvents, dishwashing liquids, car and floor waxes, indoor insecticides, mosquito repellents. The list goes on like a chant to convenience, and Lord Yama.

Ironically, no law says these products must be tested on animals. Proven alternatives have been around for years. Warning labels, like those used on paint products, could be put on household goods. Animal testing is the decree of corporate research and legal departments. Vivisection - experimentation on live animals - became standard procedure as companies churned out new products with exotic chemical ingredients.

The antidote to cruelty? Cruelty-free, the adjective that has leapt into the animal rights movement language over the past three years. It is the equivalent of biodegradable or renewable resources in environmental terms. Cruelty-free Simply means that has not been tested on animals, and, ideally, is not made from animal products - such as hydrolized animal protein, collagen, placenta and lanolin. Most are made of natural compounds used for centuries as skin treatments, meaning

they are already proven as safe. Traditional Hindu cosmetic treatments are the original cruelty-free product line. Some of the new cruelty-free beauty aid companies have Hindu names - Indra Make-up - and use Indian substances and recipes.

Cruelty-free is ahimsa, "noninjury" for the 1990's, a marketplace phenomena that is spawning dozens of tiny companies. It is providing the political push to get a national bill through the US House of Representatives that would severely curtail animal testing. But US Hindu women, the ranis of the household, are largely ignorant of this issue. An informal poll conducted by HINDUISM TODAY in California showed that most Hindu women didn't know what cruelty-free meant and were uninformed about animal-testing. Those that did shop cruelty-free learned of it by other ahimsa interests; publications and TV promoting vegetarianism and animal rights. But more and more mainstream women's magazines will be touting cruelty-free in their ads as the major powers in cosmetics are forced into compassion.

AHIMSA IS CHIC: Cruelty-free has gained such a Mahatma Gandhi-like head of steam that it is starting to heat some of the major cosmetics giants into policy reversals. Nonviolence is becoming chic. Leading the pack of new converts are Amway Corporation, Avon and Revlon. Amway - manufactures 300 products - took the first step with its announcement to stop animal testing on World Environment Day, June 5, 1989. Amway says they have been working towards this for about eight years.

Avon announced a permanent end to all animal testing of its products on June 22, 1989. A recent written announcement by the company said, "We're proud of this breakthrough program. For many years we're worked to reduce the use of animals in tests and find alternative ways to test for product safety." But animal politics is still alive in Avon's headquarters. The National Anti-Vivisection Society points out Avon also released a statement saying they were reserving the right to send new ingredients to outside labs for the so-called Draize test, a procedure where rabbits eyes have new ingredients dripped into them. Avon circulated this statement to California politicians to counter anti-animal testing legislation in process.

SKIN VIBRATION: It is the smaller, lesser-known companies that have slowly wrought this consumer revolution. For years they provided alternative skin-care products to people willing to pay the extra price, drive the extra distance or wait a

little longer for their desired products. Several of them have advocated the vegetarian ethic or relied on time-tested ingredients known to women in India for centuries. "There's been a marked increase in sales the last few years," says Pamela Marsen of Pamel Marsen Inc., and importer of "vegetarian cosmetics" produced by Beauty Without Cruelty. Buying products that haven't been tested on animals reflects consumers' "very real commitment to get their lives in harmony with their beliefs," Marsen says. Bhavani Palani, a Hindu housewife in Concord, California, is totally committed to Beauty Without Cruelty cosmetics, using them in combination with an eyeliner from India. She says she likes the vibration of them on her skin.

Bhavani Palani, Gayatri Rajan, Asha Alahan and Bhavani Param are all long-time friends and members of the same Hindu organization, Saiva Siddhanta Church. They are knowledgeable of cruelty-free product lines and have been incorporating them into their beauty routines. Bhavani Param recently bought cruelty-free make-up for the first time. "I just couldn't buy the others any more. If feels nice to be wearing products which I know have caused no suffering to the precious animals God has created."

At the popular Bazaar of India store in Berkeley, California, an assortment of Indian, ayurvedic and specialty herbal beauty aids line the shelves. They are naturally cruelty-free, though not labeled as such. But nobody we talked to, including the employees, knew of or intentionally used these items because of their ethical purity.

One of the store's cosmetic lines is ShiKai Products, manufactured in northern California and based on ingredients in northern California and based on ingredients and formulas right out of the beauty shastras of India. The company has always maintained a policy of no animal testing. "I've always had respect for animal life." ShiKai president and co-founder Dr. Dennis Sepp told HINDUISM TODAY. Sepp, an organic chemist, co-founded ShiKai 15 years ago with Dr. Vasant Telang, a native of Bombay. The two men recognized that "there are a lot of folk-type materials that have been used for centuries" and have been very successful. So they decided to incorporate some of these ingredients in natural shampoos. Telang has since left the company to pursue a career in academics.

PRICE OF COMPASSION: ShiKai's name is derived from the main substance in its shampoos, shikakai, a fruit that grows on the acacia tree. Shikakai means "fruit for

the hair." Its powder has been used for centuries in India as a natural shampoo because its one of "nature's cleaners," Sepp says. The fruit has natural lathering, sudsing and cleansing properties. Sepp says his company has devised a way to use the powder to produce the more common liquid shampoo. Another favorite of Indian women is amla oil, which adds shine and luster to hair. It is the principle conditioning agent in ShiKai Conditioner.

Good consciences, compassion and quality though have their price. Literally. Cruelty-free cosmetics and household alternatives are expensive. Some Hindu ladies are splitting half and half between cruelty-free and mainstream makeup. But they could switch to major brands that have banned animal-testing, though such items still use animal by-products. Pamela Marsen says, "If you really care, is an extra dollar or two going to make a difference? If it does, I would question the commitment." Higher prices haven't deterred her customers. Her sales increased 60% last year. Shikai's Sepp explains that companies who use high-quality, natural compounds, produce smaller quantities and import ingredients from abroad must charge higher prices.

Rue McClanahan, star of TV's comedy show Golden Girls, summarizes the 1990's ahimsa ethic: "Compassion is the foundation of everything positive, everything good. If you carry the power of compassion to the marketplace and the dinner table, you can make your life really count."

Taking a Stand

Hindu women can take a stand for household products that reflect the ahimsa ethic. If your family is not using traditional Indian beauty aids, then make a point to shop for them and for cruelty-free items to supplement what is not available - such as lipstick. Then change your general household items. Two organizations distribute free resource booklets that list address and phone numbers of cruelty-free companies and step-by-step ways you can help fight animal testing. Contact:

1.) National Anti-Vivisection Society, 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60604-3795 USA. (312) 427-6065. Ask for their free booklet Personal Care With Principle.

2.) PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), P.O. Box 42516, Washington D.C. 20015 USA. (202) 726-0156 or (301) 770-7444.

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