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## How Paayal Mahajan is Bringing Luxury Skincare to India

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“A single, intelligently formulated product can in fact bring your skin back to its best.”

For Paayal Mahajan, the founder of [Essential Body Couture Skincare](#), beauty has always been more than skin deep. Her longtime fascination with products and ingredients combined with a three-year-long weight loss journey led to her starting her own line in her native India. With a focus on powerful, plant-based ingredients and a less-is-more approach to beauty, Paayal has carved out a special space for herself within the Indian beauty market. We caught up to hear more about her products and beauty philosophy.

TELL ME A LITTLE MORE ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND — HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY?

I suppose entering the beauty industry was a long time coming. As a little girl, I used to admire my mother’s collection of Shiseido and Chanel products. My love of shoes, skincare, make up all comes from her.

I have always been fascinated with products and their ingredients. I would habitually read labels and ingredients for everything that came into sight. I admittedly also experimented heavily on myself—even giving myself glycolic acid peels at home (do not try)! During college I had a part-time job at a high-end spa in Princeton, which really nurtured my love of the science behind and philosophy of skincare.

The accompanying subtext to my life has been my weight. At my highest, I weighed 263 pounds. But I was the “pretty girl who was sadly too fat.” After moving back home to Delhi, I finally decided I’d had enough. In 2014, I embarked on a three-year journey of losing weight.

When I started my weight loss journey, my skin was the first to show all the stress. The fatty tissue was diminishing, the collagen was breaking down—and I felt miserable! All my favorite products failed me. I tried everything! And I was a sworn cosmeceutical believer! It led to my experimenting and making my own plant based products, which I started giving away to friends and family. I was consistently told I should sell my stuff. I finally decided, why not? If I had struggled so much and not found an answer, there had to be people out there like me who wanted a solution too. And so, Essential Body Couture Skincare was born.

WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THE ESSENTIAL BODY FORMULAS?

I tried nearly everything to help my skin. Nothing worked. I realized two key things: I needed something that would help calm down my neurosensory system and build strength back into my cells. What if I took all the most potent ingredients and combined them to create something that would work effectively, give me results and eliminate my need for using 10 different products?

I am *deeply* respectful of my heritage and the value of my ancient traditions and sciences. But I wanted to give the world something that had never been done before—India’s first real couture skincare—a modern, minimalist approach to self-care that is steeped in adaptogenic phytoscience, is a luxury for the senses, heals in a *very* real way, and stands up to the best brands in the world.





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#### WHAT MAKES THIS COLLECTION UNIQUE?

I formulate my products myself, blend every batch myself in my lab, and only make 100 bottles of product at a time. I do not use preservatives, synthetics, fillers or anything that is not on my ingredient list. Every single ingredient in my products serves a real therapeutic purpose.

I'm also taking ultra-luxury beauty in the direction of minimalism and sustainability. My products come packaged in handcrafted leather bags. India has a long and rich heritage of leather craftsmanship—it was important to me to showcase this craft on a global level. Sustainability is very important to me and not just because it's becoming trendy. I want future generations to inherit a better planet and for us not to destroy it with our over-consumptive behaviors. This reflects on every single level in my product line.

My products are formulated to work across most skin types and for most skin conditions—safely and effectively. In addition to my retail line, I make bespoke formulations for my clients who have specific requests—which always thrills the formulator in me!

#### YOU USE ALL PLANT-BASED INGREDIENTS, WHY WAS THIS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Plants have been a source of healing since they first came into existence. They are quite literally an infinite database on intelligence—and we haven't even begun to scratch its surface. Yes, I have a massive background in organic chemistry—but I never stop learning or studying!

When you get into studying skincare and the massive landscape of the beauty industry, you realize just how much toxicity is floating around in products. Our skin is the largest organ of our body. I see people spending large sums of money on eating clean, organic, plant-based diets, but using absolute poison on their skin. I don't use that word lightly. If you're going to put time and attention into what you ingest, why wouldn't you give the same level of care to what you apply *on* your skin?

A big part of my work is educating people on ingredients. I spend a lot of time studying research and medical journals and collating them with academic findings, real-world reviews and user experiences on the health impacts of preservation systems, commonly found fillers in skincare and makeup, and ingredients that have been touted as healthful. I am also helping people to understand that just because something is natural, it doesn't automatically mean it is safe to use on your skin!





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#### HOW DOES YOUR HERITAGE INFLUENCE THIS PHILOSOPHY AND YOUR PRODUCTS?

As an Indian I'm expected to offer up ancient philosophies and traditions. Modern India is a brilliant confluence of tradition and modern living! We also sadly are still reeling from a lot of beliefs that are remnants of our colonial heritage—especially our obsession with light skin.

I don't currently, and never will, make or sell anything that offers to “lighten” or “whiten” the skin. My goal is to return your cells to their best inherent intelligence and undo years of confusion that is inflicted upon this intelligence, due to product overuse, environmental factors etc.

I also want the world to understand what India is today. My heritage is that of powerful women who have never been afraid to follow their calling and have made tremendous impact on this world. I come from a lineage of game-changing women—women who didn't succumb to societal norms and expectations of their lives.

That's the heritage I'm carrying forward. I'm continuing the legacy of not conforming to norms, of never being afraid to take risks, of staying authentic to my belief system, being a good human being, and helping more people understand that real self love is the courage to be yourself.

#### HOW DO YOU DEFINE YOUR BEAUTY PHILOSOPHY?

I am a believer and preacher of the church of less-is-more. A single, intelligently formulated product can in fact bring your skin back to its best natural self. I want people to let go of these concocted notions of beauty and perfection. I recognize this is near impossible these days what with filters and apps that let you brush away all your perceived “imperfections.” I want to give my clients freedom from stressing about their skin and skincare routines. Most importantly, I want people to understand the deep connection between what goes on in the mind and how it manifests into cellular inflammation, and exacerbated health problems and skin conditions. My personal philosophy is my brand's philosophy and my own beauty philosophy. We are not separate.

I have gone from being a skincare and make up maximalist to an absolute minimalist. The less you mess with your skin and hair, the healthier it will be. Less is more. Beauty trends, just like fashion, repeat in cycles. I believe in minimalist, luxurious sensory experiences that benefit the cells, return them to their best health and leave you free to actually live your life!