

Beauty Aid and Cosmetics in Ancient India

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Abstract: Ancient Indians of both genders applied a number of different makeup products. While makeup is generally seen as merely superficial, to Indians, cosmetics were a means of practicing their religion and culture. In some cases, products were reserved for special occasions; in others, they were used regularly to enhance the wearer's luck, beauty, spirituality and status. The concept of beauty and cosmetics is as ancient as mankind and civilization. Women are obsessed with looking beautiful. So, they use various beauty products that have herbs to look charming and young. Indian herbs and its significance are popular worldwide. Herbal Cosmetics have growing demand in the world market and are an invaluable gift of nature. Herbal formulations always have attracted considerable attention because of their good activity and comparatively lesser or nil side effects compared with synthetic drugs. Herbs and spices have been used in maintaining and enhancing human beauty since time immemorial. Indian women have long used herbs such as Sandalwood and Turmeric for skin care; Henna to color the hair, palms and soles; and natural oils to perfume their bodies. Not too long ago, elaborate herbal beauty treatments were carried out in the royal palaces of India to heighten sensual appeal and maintain general.

Key Words: Ancient, India, Art, Cosmetics, Kalidas, Plastic, Science, Women.

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Introduction

The word “cosmetics” comes from the ancient Greek “kosmētikos”. “Kosmos” essentially means “order”, “ornament”, “decorate”. Substances can only be designated as cosmetics when they are intended to come into external contact with the human body (skin, nails, hair), teeth and oral mucosa. If we consider the history of cosmetics, often ancient Egypt immediately pop into our minds. It is considered the birth of cosmetics. Even though oils, ointments and colors were used during the Stone Age by cavemen to nourish their skin, the Egyptians were the ones who passed on their knowledge in written word. They wrote about personal hygiene and changing their appearance with make-up. Cosmetics were not just for women. Both men and women were committed to personal hygiene. Beauty has been highlighted through the images of Nefertiti and Cleopatra, while the charcoal-painted eyes of the pharaohs are also well-known.

The ancient science of cosmetology is believed to have originated in Egypt and India, but the earliest records of cosmetic substances and their application dates back to Circa 2500 and 1550 B.C, to the Indus valley civilization. There is evidence of highly advanced ideas of self beautification and a large array of various cosmetic usages both by men and women, in ancient India. Many of these practices were subtly interwoven with the seasons (Sanskrit: Rutus) and the normal rituals of life (Sanskrit: Dinacharyā). Significantly, the use of cosmetics was directed not only towards developing an outwardly pleasant and attractive personality, but towards achieving merit (Sanskrit: Punya), Longevity with good health (Sanskrit: Aayush and Aarogyam) and happiness (Sanskrit: Anandam). In this context, the earliest reference of a beautician is from the great epic Mahabharata, where the Pandavas were in exile incognito. Draupadi worked for the queen of Virāta (Northern district of India). She called herself Sairandhri (A female attendant in the women’s sections of the palace). There is a reference of her carrying a Prasādhana Petikā (A vanity case containing substances to beautify, toiletries and accessories to decorate). The word cosmetics defined as “Substances of diverse origin, scientifically compounded and used to i) cleanse, ii) allay skin troubles, iii) cover up imperfections and iv) beautify” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1970), is used in this paper in a wider sense to include Oral hygiene as well. Different Lepās (Masks or applica were recommended for different seasons for body beautification. The ingredients used during the cold seasons were quite different from those used in warm seasons. In fact Ashtānga Hridaya (a 1500 year old book of Ayurveda) offers six different formulations to be used for the six seasons of the year. Similarly special cosmetic Tailams (Oils) and Ghritas (Clarified butter or ghee) were used for facial beautification. Superfluous hair was considered to be a stigma and a large number of depilatory agents were recommended to get rid of it. Special ingredients were used for hair washes. Many remedies have been indicated for hair growth, prevention of falling hair and premature graying. Hair dyes, fragrant hair rinses and fumigants were also in use. Fragrant bath powders and body deodorants also find frequent mention. Oral hygiene in the form of care of teeth, mouth deodorants and coloring of lips were daily chores to be religiously pursued. It appears that the whole range of modern cosmetic usage was conceived by the ancient Indians and was practiced with the help of natural resources then available.

There is a misconceived notion in the West that the ancient Hindus were mostly other worldly and not given to enjoying the material comforts like their counterparts in the West. Nothing is further from the truth as would be evident from the literature of those days. The Arthashastra of Kautilya, The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana, The Brihat-Samhita of Varahamihira, several works of Kalidasa like Shakuntala, Kumarasambhava, Meghaduta, etc bear enough testimony to the fact how people enjoyed the material comforts and how women reveled in the art of make-up and body aesthetics. Cosmetology and the Art of make-up was one of the 64 Fine Arts (called 'Chatusshashti Kala' in Sanskrit) practiced in those days. Even the Sri Lalithasahasranama makes a mention about this by using the epithet 'Chatusshashti Kalamayee', describing Goddess Lalitha as an adept in all the 64 Fine Arts. Even though Vatsyayana's Kama Sutra has been considered as the standard text on the 64 Arts, there are other works in Sanskrit like the Shukra Neethi, Abhilashitartha Chintamani, Natyashastra, etc, which deal with the same subject. While some of the 64 Arts like painting, dance, drama, music, sculpture required special talent and aptitude to pursue, the art of cosmetology and body make-up was common to all the womenfolk. Besides, some women took it as a wide subject for study and research. The following are the broad outlines of the art of Cosmetology prevalent in ancient India:

Perfumery:

This art was classified under the title 'Gandhayukti'. Ancient India had attained the highest proficiency in the manufacture of scents, perfumes, and cosmetics. Besides catering to the needs of the common folk, expensive perfumes and scents were manufactured exclusively for the use of the royal households, aristocracy, and the inmates of the harem. Varahamihira, the famous astrologer of the 6th Century A.D, in his monumental work 'Brihat Samhita' devotes an entire chapter on perfumery under the title 'Gandhayukti'. In shloka number 17 of this chapter, the author says that some specialists in the field of perfumery used to manufacture 1, 74, 720 varieties of scents and perfumes, using just 16 ingredients and mixing them in specified proportions, permutations, and combinations. The fragrance of the perfume depended on the purpose for which it was used and accordingly the ingredients were selected.

Face Powder, Lipstick, etc:

This aspect of body decoration was known by the name 'Angaraaga'. Women in ancient India used Lodhra powder for the face and light Alaktaka color for painting the lips, Alaktaka being the red resin of a particular plant. , Kalidasa uses the word 'Lodhra renu' [dust of Lodhra] for describing the facial make-up of Shakuntala and the word Alaktaka while describing Parvathi's facial beauty in the Kumarasambhavam. For cleansing the body, instead of using soap, an oily substance known as 'Phena' was used which, when mixed with water, could produce plenty of foam, just like soap. The other ingredients used for facial make-up were turmeric, besan [called Kadale Hittu in Kannada], cream, butter, etc. Painting of nails and toes was common and the person who specialized in this art was called 'Nakhalekhaka' [Nakha means nail in Sanskrit] The juice of the Garanti leaves was used to paint the nails. According to Vatsyayana, the main purpose of body make-up was not merely to make it look attractive but the belief that when the body with all its limbs is kept clean and tidy, it would result in a healthy mind.

Hair-do and Hair Style

This was specified by the name 'Keshalankara'. Indian hairdo and hairstyles were popular all over the world as is evident from the sculpture and paintings in different temples at Belur, Halebid, Khajuraho, Ajanta, Sanchi, Barhut, etc. Vatsyayana treats the subject under the title 'Keshamardana'. The term 'Keshamardana' means applying hair oil, massage, and ensuring healthy growth of hair. Different styles of doing the hair like a ponytail, horsetail, modern shingle, curling, etc were known to women. There were specialists in this art who would do the appropriate hair do for the bride on her wedding day.

Lavanya

Kalidasa in his 'Kumarasambhavam' [Chapter 1 and shloka 15] mentions that some young and pretty ladies used to get a lovely luster to their cheeks, shining like pearls, by drinking a kind of wine, specially prepared. It was thought that it improved their beauty by imparting a red flush to their cheeks and enabled them better to enjoy the company of their lovers and husbands.

Herbal Cosmetics in Ancient India: With a Treatise on Planta Cosmetica by P.V. Bole Kunda B. Patkar. This book is the result of a multidisciplinary investigation and constitutes an ethnobotanical contribution to mankind's search for beauty and good health. Though the ancient science of cosmetology is believed to have originated in China, the earliest records of cosmetics and their applications date back to the Indus valley civilization. Excavations of Mohenjodaro and Harappa have shown a highly developed cosmetic culture. Beauty aids are different for different seasons and the ingredients used are also significantly different. Cosmetics were used not only for enhancing beauty but also on health grounds and for achieving punya. A lot of information on herbal cosmetics with special reference to Ancient India is given in this book. The formulations have been classified into five categories-facial cosmetics, oral hygiene, depilatories. Body cosmetics and cosmetics for hair. The author says that a whole range of modern cosmetic usage was conceived by the ancient Indians and were practiced with the help of natural resources then available. Men and women used perfumes and pastes, paints and powders to enhance beauty and achieve merit (punya). A combination of cultural and scientific approach has resulted in this detailed book on cosmetics. The book gives the Sanskrit names, botanical names and words of common usage. How the items are used to manufacture the cosmetics is also given. The chapter on facial cosmetics gives details of face salves, pimple and acne cure, cure for darkness, blemishes etc, cosmetic oils, cosmetics for lips, auspicious markings etc. Oral hygiene formulations include teeth cleaning, mouth washes, mouth odorants, mouth deodorants. Hair promoters, prevention of falling hair, hair dyes and bleaches, fragrant hairwashes, cure for premature graying, cure for alopecia, cure for lice and nits, dandruff are given in the section on hair formulations. Body cosmetics include complexion promoters, bath powders, perfumed oil, fragrant water, body salves, deodorants, cure for moles and other such items. Depilatories list items that remove unwanted hair.

The story behind the evolution of beauty and hair care industry is quite a long one. The usage of beauty products and cosmetics has been an age-old tradition in India. Actually, the earliest records of cosmetic products and their application date back to the Indus Valley

civilization, circa 2500 and 1550 B.C, according to an article by Kunda B. Patkar published in the Indian Journal of Plastic Surgery. Ingredients such as clarified butter and oils were used for facial beautification and hair removal in ancient India. While some of the beauty practices were based on routine, some were based on changing seasons. The reference of various natural beauty products and even a beautician can be seen in famous mythological books like Mahabharata and Ramayana. Unique herbal ingredients were used to treat premature greying of hair, hair loss and for enhancing growth. Both men and women followed these beauty routines for generations.

One's first impression of the sculptures yielded in excavations from various Harappan sites across India and Pakistan, is of how prim and proper the Harappans were. Take, for example, the Harappan Priest King who flaunts a gentlemanly, kempt beard with sharp and precise lines around his cheek and jawlines. It showcases the meticulous approach of the Harappans towards grooming and appearance, and the usage of personal care products. The Indus Valley Civilisation covers an area of over a million square kilometers. It extends from Shortugai (Afghanistan) in the north to Daimabad (Maharashtra, India) in the south and from Sutkagan Dor (Pakistan) in the west to Alamgirpur (Uttar Pradesh, India) in the east. Within this radius lies over thousands of sites, among which some of the most famous are Harappa, Mohenjodaro in Pakistan, and Rakhigarhi (Haryana), Dholavira (Gujarat) and Kalibangan (Rajasthan) in India. Among the grooming tools excavated from the many Harappan sites that have been in use since 2500 BCE (mature Harappan phase), some include:

The Mirror

Unearthed from various Harappan sites, the mirrors used during the Indus Valley civilisation were quite different from the glass mirrors that we use today. Dating back to 2000 BCE, they were made of copper and bronze wherein one side of the object was polished while the other side was left plain. These mirrors are oval in shape. Among them, two bronze mirrors that were found at the site of Mohenjodaro possess handles with a hole at the end. On two occasions, mirrors were found in burials with other grave goods. At Harappa, for instance, a copper mirror was found in the water jar along with other pottery and in Kalibangan, a bronze mirror was placed in a grave close to the head of a human skeleton. A Harappan mirror is currently housed at the National Museum of India in New Delhi.

Kohl

While a few Indus Valley Civilisation sites boast of kohl sticks, the others housed caskets with traces of kohl, collyrium and cerussite (a carbonate of lead). Made of copper/bronze, ivory and bone, the sticks are long and round. Procured from the sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, they are pointed at one end with a pin, tooth-pick, ear-cleaner or a decorative figure on the other. However, the kohl caskets were made of bronze, silver, faience, alabaster, terracotta and sometimes stone. The narrow-mouthed and long neck vessel found in Chanhudaro suggests that it was made to store kohl. The vessel comprises minute holes that are drilled on either side. Archaeologists suggest that these holes were considered to have once contained some

cosmetics, and it was thought necessary to hang them up to protect their contents from mice and ants.

Copper implements

A toilet kit with a combination of copper implements such as earscoop, piercer and tweezers were found in Harappa. Over 12 such kits were found in sites such as Kish in Iraq and Ur in Mesopotamia. This could be a result of the trading relationship that prevailed between these civilisations, with some phases of them being contemporary to that of the Indus Valley Civilisation. Besides, a large quantity of razors in diverse shapes were found in Mohenjodaro. They were suggestive of the fact that shaving of the face, if not the body, was extensively practiced by the inhabitants.

Sindoor and Lipstick

Traces of cinnabar— an ore of mercury used to make face paints, sindoor and lipstick among other things— have been found in the Indus Valley Civilisation sites, leading archaeologists to speculate about its possible use by the Harappans. Archaeologists have even unearthed something they suspect to be a lipstick from the site of Chanhudaro. Moreover, figurines at the site of Nausharo (present day Pakistan), dating back to 2800-2600 BCE show traces of a red pigment at the parting of their hair, similar to the sindoor of present-day married women in India.

Comb

As opposed to the plastic and wooden combs used today, the combs used by the Harappans were made of ivory. They were found in a variety of shapes and sizes, from numerous Indus Valley sites namely Mohenjodaro, Kalibangan, Chanhudaro, Harappa, Banawali and Rakhigarhi, among others. Some were typically designed to brush long hanks of hair while a few were deliberated to remove lice. Additionally, Indus-style combs together with a plethora of other Harappan objects were unearthed from the sites of Ras-al-Jinz and Tell Abraq in the Oman Peninsula, suggesting vigorous trade between these regions. Harappan sculptures, as well as the excavated materials, speak volumes about how grooming and primping was as important for them as it is for people today.

Cosmetic operations form a special corner in medicine – much in demand and yet often much maligned for being unnecessary or frivolous. This assumes a clear-cut division between a narcissistic desire for an improved appearance, the correction of a disfigurement or injury that altars appearance in an alarming way without altering physiologic function, and the real disability and danger caused by a disease. Whatever the clarity of the division, the demand persists and also reaches back into antiquity. The undisputed father of the field of cosmetic surgery is Suśruta, a surgeon, educator, and compiler who lived probably around the sixth to eighth century BCE, though his possible dates vary greatly from 1200 AD to well before 1000 BCE. No original texts of his great work, the *Samhitā*, exist today. It has been edited and revised throughout its history, the most significant contributions made by Nāgārjuna, who lived most

probably in the second century BCE. The definition of an ideal surgeon according to the great surgeon Sushruta is “A person who possesses courage and presence of mind, a hand free from perspiration, tremor less grip of sharp and good instruments and who carries his operations to the success and advantage of his patient who has entrusted his life to the surgeon. The surgeon should respect this absolute surrender and treat his patient as his own son.” Surgery forms a major role in general medical training. The ancient surgical science was known as Shalya Tantra. Shalya means broken arrow or a sharp part of a weapon and Tantra means maneuver.

The roots of cosmetic and reconstructive procedures go back more than 2500 years. It's a common misconception that the “plastic” in “plastic surgery” refers to an artificial material when it actually derives from the Greek word, *plastikos*, meaning “to mold” or “to give form.” During the 6th Century BCE, an Indian physician named Sushruta – widely regarded in India as the ‘father of surgery’ – wrote one of the world's earliest works on medicine and surgery. The Sushruta Samhita documented the etiology of more than 1,100 diseases, the use of hundreds of medicinal plants, and instructions for performing scores of surgical procedures – including three types of skin grafts and reconstruction of the nose. Skin grafts entail transplanting pieces of skin from one part of the body to another. Sushruta's treatise provides the first written record of a forehead flap rhinoplasty, a technique still used today, which a full-thickness piece of skin from the forehead is used to reconstruct a nose. At that time, patients in need of that procedure generally included those who had lost their noses as punishment for theft or adultery. Today, surgeons use skin grafts to restore areas that have lost protective layers of tissue due to trauma, infection, burns, as well as to restore areas where surgical intervention has created a loss of skin, as can happen with melanoma removal. Some grafts include blood vessels and muscle, such as in reconstructive breast surgery. Amazingly, these techniques are all explained in the Sushruta Samhita.

According to the book called Kamasutra, there is a description of a substance called phenol. It is like a soap-like thing, according to the researchers. But in that era, the role of soap was amalaki. Bath oil and powdered amalaki were used with it. Damodardev's Chittagong inscription indicates the use of kajal on women's eyes. The Manhauli inscription of Madanapala indicates the use of camphor in women's cosmetics. The Bhagalpur script of Narayanapal is known to use colors. From Narayanapal's Bhagalpur inscription and Keshavsen's Idilpur inscription, it is known that women wore garlands of flowers around their necks and tied flowers on their heads.

Rajasekhara in the third chapter of his “Kavyamimansa” describes the adornment of women of Gaur as follows:

“Adrardro chandan kucharpito sutrihaar:
Seemantchumbisichoy: sphootbahumul: .
Durbagrakanda Ruchirasvagurupbhogad
Gauranganasu Chiramesh Chakastu Vesh: .”

That is, wet sandalwood on the chest, thread necklace around the neck, Shirobasana up to the sinthi, bare arms, Aguru sandalwood on the body---all in all, the women of Gaur are as dark as Durbadal. Dhoyi's poem “Pavandoot” also mentions the ear ornaments of Brahmin women.

Conclusion

It is evident that the lack of factory-manufactured cosmetics did not affect the makeup routine of ancient Indian women. Rather, they used the safest products for the skin. The mixtures of natural elements fulfilled the desire of glorifying as well as protected their skins. Today also, almost the same elements are used to achieve a simple makeup look. The only difference is that the enriching natural elements are switched with the synthesized chemicals. The ancient methods can be employed today as well and just like those women we can follow a proper routine to nurture our natural beauty with the help of nature.

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