

Ontogeny Of Male Adornment, Its Present Form And Meanings In Urban India.

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Abstract

This paper explores the evolutionary history of male adornment in temporal and spatial context. An attempt has made to analyze and document the current picture of urban male adornment in India and the change in meanings attached to its myriad forms. The role of LGBT community to preserve this deeply rooted form of self-expression is also discussed. The paper starts by providing a brief overview of multidisciplinary work on body adornment in urban men and its relation to self-expression, providing an intellectual context in which to conduct study. This research utilizes a multi-methods case study approach (semiotics, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.). From the nature of this research, the sample size is limited and may not be generalized. Thematic analysis is used to analyze, validate and conclude the data. The previous research on this area has focused more on female adornment. This research will help us to understand the emergence and need of contemporary concepts like Gender neutrality, Need of Gender studies and will inform the future designers to understand the vitality of adornment as a means of self-expression among Indian men.

Keywords: Male adornment, self-expression, LGBT community, qualitative, phenotype, semiotics

BACKGROUND

TANGIBLE VENTILATION

Self-expression must pass into communication for its fulfillment ~ Pearl S. Buck

Can we think of a world where people have no innate urge for self-expression? Will then the world be same as it is now? The obvious answer will be NO. 'We' always have had a continuous urge or an innate nature to interact with each other and our immediate surroundings. Human brain has intricately analyzed and synthesized various form of self-expression like Poetry, Reflective Journals, Scientific journals, Clothing, adornment and so forth. And to express its various form, humans have identified various medium like Art, writing, language.

However, 'Art' has been the most widely used medium to reflect our emotions. Art may be viewed variously as *artifice* (both in the sense of skillfulness or craft and of artificiality); as *fantasy* (make-believe, wish-fulfillment, illusion, the ideal, play); as *creativity* (exploration, invention, innovation and self-expression); as *form or order* (the physiological, perceptual and mental need to discover and impose a formal order on experience; pattern making; recognition of beauty as order); as *heightened existence* (emotion, ecstasy, extraordinary experience, entertainment); as *disorder* (deviance and dishabitation); as *sense* (the immediate fullness of sense experience as contrasted with abstract thought, or the sensuous qualities of things such as color or sound); as *revelation* (or innately compelling symbols, of God, of reality); as *adornment or embellishment* (the wish or tendency to beautify, a decorative or configurative urge); as *self-expression*, as *significance or meaning* (interpretation) and as combinations of two or more of these. It is this continuous urge of self-expression that has made our present world so visually and physically interactive.

The need of clothing and Adornment is one of the most exquisite topic of discussion among Ethnographers, Sociologists and Anthropologists. In *The origins of art* Hirn (1900:214-227) discusses the origin of self-decoration. After a careful examination of the ethnographic evidence, and a review of theories of adornment, he concludes there is no possibility of deciding with any certainty the question of why man began to decorate himself. The historical evidences clearly suggest that the Male, Female and the Third gender have developed a certain relationship with different forms of body adornment. Be it social positioning of self or to fulfil the decorative/configurative urge or to reflect our mood, adornment has served every purpose. There is solid evidence that the disposition to decorate the body has its roots in our primate heritage.

Food and sex are direct biological necessities for the survival of *Homo sapiens*. In this sense, adornment of our bodies seems unessential; yet it is ubiquitous. Anthropologists have argued the necessity of clothing, both for warmth and to provide carrying devices which free the hands for other necessities. But body adornment and jewelry, and the decoration of clothing – not to mention changes in fashion – serve more subtle aesthetic and expressive needs. Personal adornment may reflect inner emotional states called Mood. It may reinforce, disguise or create mood. An individual caught up in a certain mood may wish to externalize it so it can be conveyed to and shared with others. Perhaps an individual feels lighthearted and energetic. This clearly suggest, that Humans have accustomed different forms of adornment to ventilate the present state of mind, thus indicating a tacit form of communication.

TRASITION FROM HOMERIC PAST TO SUBTLE PRESENT

From Paleolithic age to venerable Harappan age. From iconographic forms of King Kanishka to famous Mughal emperor Akbar, we can clearly see the love for all means of adornment. Be it a diamond studded ring or an intricately enamelled handcrafted waist belt, the male fraternity had openly broken all the conventions that are still considered as a taboo in Urban India. If the male phenotype shared a mutual relationship with adornment since time immemorial, then, what happened in 21st Century? The topographic representation of body as a tool for self-expression has evolved at a surprising rate across both the genders. But in males, it has taken a whole new dimension.

This paper aims to explore the reason(s) behind this paradigm shift in India. It is a common trend to blame Globalization. Although, is it Globalization to blame? Or our personal preferences have changed? Is it the process of continuous refinement? Or is it the corollary of British Raj? Are all these factors work separately or in-relation?

There is a rich literature on female adornment, its forms, meanings and evolutionary history. However, there are very few informal resource that trace out the sequential development of male adornment esp. in urban India. As the technology is advancing and with an availability of new mediums, the traditional and social significance of bodily adornments in males has totally altered.

SETTLING THE UNSETTLED

“One of the unsettled issues in the discussion of clothing in the social sciences is that of definition. Adornment, clothing, ornament, dress and attire are frequently employed as general terms. Also there are practices such as head deformation, scarification, cosmetics, body painting, and hairdressing, all of which are a form of bodily modifications.” By the time social scientists settle this issue, in this paper, I have used Adornment as a common term to define different forms of jewellery, as every form of bodily modification has a deep history, which requires a separate intricate study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TRADITIONAL FUNCTIONS OF JEWELLERY

The study of forms and functions of jewelry is indeed fascinating. The artifacts are the material representations of beliefs, ideas and social institutions which form the base of anthropological generalizations of human behavior in cross-cultural perspective which is derived from the material diversity of the common principles of humanity (Ford, 1977). Flint has succinctly summarized various aspects of jewelry as "It is important to note that such jewelry has the primary function of promoting life (especially the fecundity of the wife and of females in general, and the fertility of the soil) and protecting against bad influences that cause sterility or disease. Form, techniques and materials help fulfill these functions, as well as support the jewelry's social role. Form and function cannot be separated in rural art and craft. A piece of jewelry is at the same time a utilitarian object (fibula functioning as a pin and as protection and promotion), a social emblem (de-noting membership in a group, or conferring prestige), a symbol (expressing a psychological or religious meaning) and an economic investment" (1973; translated from the French by R. Liu). In most of the cultures, jewelries are given in the form of wedding dowries or stored as wealth. Alternatively, jewelry has been used as currency or trade goods like the use of slave beads. Many items of jewelry, such as brooches and buckles, originated as purely functional items, but evolved into decorative items as their functional requirements have diminished over a period of time.

BEADS AND BANGLES: STYLE ARISES FROM FUNCTIONALITY

Although, the concept of Urban in India didn't come up until Indus valley age, the pre-historic man was already translating his ideas on out-there material like Ostrich egg shells, bones and teeth out of 'configurative urge'? As the technology progressed, with the help of fine tools, the choice of material diversified and new styles emerged. "Chronologically, the first evidence for art in the Indian Upper Paleolithic were beads recovered by S.A. SALI of the archeological survey at Patne in the campaign of 1972-73 (SANKALIA 1974:227). It is appropriate that the first piece of evidence for art activities in India at this time was an object of human adornment. There is also an evidence of ostrich egg shell beads. The early human adornments were raw due to lack of specialized tools. The Paleolithic use of ostrich

eggshell, for utilitarian containers and for decorative or ornamental purposes, is not at all restricted to India. The early use of ostrich eggshell is in fact of major importance to paleoart studies. Shells are among the first ornaments to have been uncovered in India (Francis 1981:140)". There are evidences of Oliva shell bead and Ivory being used as an adornment. "A single cylindrical bead, fairly well shaped, made of some dark brown material (possibly bone) was found in the upper layer of cave; it was associated with numerous bones, but no other articles of human workmanship. The perforations on the beads is well drilled, and the aperture at each end slightly enlarged by the use of larger sized drill". (FOOTE 1885:234) "The careful shaping of the bead suggests it was made in a more elaborate manner than the bone head subsequently uncovered by Murthy. This may also strengthen the suggestion that the material involved was ivory, not bone."

There are compulsive evidences of using *bos* incisors as ornaments. "A second class of ornaments were uncovered at Pedda Pavuralla Badde Gavi (Cave) by MURTHY (pers comm.). These ornaments are three incisors of *Bos* sp., each of which has had two shallow grooves nearly cut around, the one just at the point where the root and enamel meet, and the other about a millimeter above the first mentioned. The use of animal teeth for adornment is wisely attested and, indeed, has never gone out of fashion.

INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION: PRECURSOR TO THE MODERN INDIAN CITIES AND STYLE

Indus valley civilization (popularly known as Harappan culture) is one of the oldest and most widely studied civilization in terms of Society, Culture, Architecture, Measurements, Clothing and Adornment. There are no written texts that provide us a clear insight about the different forms of adornment prevalent during that time, as the historians are still not able to decipher the script used by Indus valley people. "Although there are no written texts of the Indus period to tell us the value or meaning of specific ornaments we can make some general inferences on the basis of problem oriented ethnoarcheological studies". The Harappan people have brought various material to their creative use. From common Steatite, terracotta and shells to exotic and complex Faience, Onyx, Carnelian, Amazonite, Fuchsite/Quartzite, Copper, Stoneware, Gold and Silver. The Quality and finishing of Early Harappan phase (approximately 6500 B.C.) adornments are comparatively aesthetically raw as it coincides with the Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic phase. The late Harappan phase (approximately 1500 B.C.) adornments show a usage of more diverse and complex materials and are better finished. "By the beginning of the Urban phase of the Indus Tradition, around 2600 B.C. some of the processes used to manufacture ornaments were extremely specialized." There is a clear evidence from the male figurines that Bangles of different shape, size and color were quite prevalent among men in Harappan period. "During the Harappan phase, some female figurines depict three or four bangles at the wrist and two or more bangles above the elbow, often with equal numbers of bangles worn on both arms. A similar style is seen on a male figurine from the Early Harappan phase at Nausharo". "The famous seal depicting a seated male with horned head dress show both arms filled with what have been interpreted as bangles. In one seal the bangles appear to be of different types. A bangle with projecting section was worn at the wrist, followed by four flat bangles on the forearm. Another projecting bangle is seen above the elbow followed by four flat bangles on the forearm. A final projecting bangle is worn on the upper arm. On the basis of burials from the Neolithic period at Mehrgarh and later figurines from the chalcolithic period, we can determine that bangles or bracelets were worn by both men, women, adults and children."

Occasionally, shell circlets were worn as hair ornaments on men. During the Neolithic and Chalcolithic period at Mehrgarh, beads were used in a wide variety of ornaments. They were worn by infants, children and adults, both male and female. During period VII, male figures are depicted with three to five discs and a single pendent bead reaching to the middle of the chest. Apart from this particular style, men used to wear Chokers or short necklaces with three to four long pendent beads.

CULTURAL COULDRUN: EXPANDING VISUAL CULTURE

There are "The jewellery and torcotics of the Kushan period were noted for their artistic standard and many were genuine works of art". "The Gandhara jewelry displays a variety of styles and techniques. The Gandhara sculptures depict male and females, wearing ornaments on the large scale. The representation of jewelry on statues through light on the Kushan Fashion. Men wore jewelry as much as women, whereas before and after the Kushan, wearing of personal ornaments was the privilege of ladies alone" It is only during Mauryan and Sunga period, one can clear picture or typical ornaments and jewelry in common use. The sculpted figures of gods and goddesses, kings and queens and the common people display these ornaments from top to toe. The head, the forehead, the ears, the nose, the neck, the breast, the arms, the wrists, the fingers, the waist, the hips, the legs, the feet, the toes-nothing is overlooked.

The fathomless love of Mughal men for jewellery can be seen through various sources like Treatise, Miniature paintings, Autobiographies and so forth. Mughals brought various intricate techniques and motifs, which blended with local traditional jewelry. A similar list of male decoration is given as follows: a properly kept beard, a clean and properly washed body, the *tilaka* mark on the forehead, rubbing of saints and scented oil all over the body, gold ear-rings, a

suitable tunic (*qaba*) with bands on the left side, the golden ends of a turban or a *makuta* (kara) tucked up in front, a sheathed sword which was carried in the hand, a dagger tied to the waist, a finger ring, proper footwear, and finally the chewing of betel-leaf.

BRITISH RAJ: BIRTH OF MALE-(FE) MALE COMPLEX BINARY EQUATION

Traditionally, there were no rigid gender norms esp. in context of physical appearance and adornment choice. Before the advent of British rule in India, both men and women wore multifarious bodily adornments with only difference in material and style. Both men and women also wore necklaces and rings, with men usually having larger pieces and women having more intricate ones. Men wore turban and arm ornaments, while women had a range of hair ornaments, ear rings, and nose rings. In the wealthier social strata, jewellery was made of fine metals and gems and worn regularly, but individuals in the lower strata also had similar styles made from earthenware and cheaper metals to be used in religious ceremonies and on special occasions such as weddings or harvest festivals. However, British Raj plenary changed this concept. The gender norms as well as gender roles got more specialized, which we can still witness in most parts of the country. Females, to some extent ingeniously able to redeem their ways of bodily adornment. However, males totally homogenized their ways of bodily adornment with what was considered elite i.e. Victorian dressing. Some scholars argue, that this process of homogenization was inevitable, keeping in mind the duration and intensity of British Raj in India.

Fashion is not only about clothes, it is a lifestyle issue, but clothes reflect completely the fashion of the times and more importantly they reflect the identity of the wearer. India's identity was changing. There was a huge impact and influence of the British rule which resulted in the fusion of Indian and Western dress. Such hybridization begins to appear in the clothes of the Indian rajas as early as 1860s. This can definitely be interpreted as the Maharaja's (Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh of Jaipur in the 1860s) willingness to adopt new features in dress as well as the desire to stay connected with his roots. Does present urban Indian male also has a desire to stay connected with their roots in their own personalized way?

Similarly, jewellery began to be seen as exclusively female, although male rulers still wore them when putting on ceremonial or courtly robes (Stronge 2016). Thus, clothing not only became a part of the imperial rhetoric through its ridicule of Indian armour and styles, but then began to reflect the success of this rhetoric by changing to fit British norms. Symbols of the native body and its autonomy were a direct contradiction to the supposed supremacy of anglicised morality and values. By the time the Crown took control of the Raj in 1857, the British perception of gender was one where roles and norms were rigidly defined and projected as a male-female binary (Spurr 1993), while texts from even the early years of the Raj showed that this was not the case in the subcontinent.

LGBTQIA: SURVIVORS OR SAVIOURS?

Every year, hundreds of LGBTQIA people march on the streets of New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai, beautifully adorned in all forms of bodily adornments. Although, their love for Jewellery is worth watching. Apart from LGBTQIA community, the Gender fluid and Gender neutral men also prefer to wear jewellery, as they do not consider Male-(Fe)male binary very rigid.

METHODOLOGY

The author has followed a mixed-methods case study approach (Personal observation from last 12 months, Informal unstructured interview and online questionnaire (50 Respondents, Age group: 18-40 yrs., Gender: Male).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Thematic analysis is used to validate and conclude the data. Major common themes emerged from the data are as follows

CULTURAL CUES

22/50 respondents who sometimes, rarely and never wear jewellery, believe that it is an integral part of Indian tradition and is as old as Paleolithic age. Finger Ring, followed by Bracelet/Bangle and Neck-chain are the most preferred form of adornment among these men. This trend is quite visible in married men as most of them wear an engagement ring, and a Bracelet/Bangle and Chain as a symbol of Love and marriage, traditionally given by the Parents-in-law of the Bride. Many men wear *Kada* (Bracelet), as an Ethnic Identity or it has some religious significance.

GLOBALISATION AND THE ALTERED PERCEPTIONS

On one hand, Globalization has erased all type of boundaries. On the other, it has brought a new concept of "Minimalism" among Indian Male population. Can we blame our "Minimalistic Space"? Now a days, most product manufacturing company produce ergonomically sound clean-cut design. Thanks to sustainability. But, this new affair of being contemporary with an Indian essence has a deep impact on Indian males. This trend is completely visible in Corporate and Service sector, where 29/29 men restrict themselves either Finger ring, Bracelet/Bangle or Neck chain. According to S Rao, the process of globalization is changing people's 'perceptions of time and space'. On one hand, it

is broadening and widening boundaries and on the other hand, strengthening and firming existing boundaries of self, identity and culture. Some globalist believe, in a deterministic sense of the world, that the mere presence of global forces is prima facie evidence that local culture can have no power of resistance, and that globalization requires “That local to surrender, now incapable of radical resistance”

One of the most fascinating and traditional function of jewellery viz. “Social Positioning of self” has taken a backseat. With an availability of global brands in house, men prefer luxury mobile phones, cars and clothes over Jewellery. Men can only be seen wearing other jewellery like Necklace, Brooch and so forth, either on their marriage, family function or on a religious ceremony.

FOLLOWING A CAUTIOUS APPROACH

00/50 men wears a Septum ring. Even if we see the historical records, there is no mention of Septum rings being worn by Indian men except the native tribal people. In many clans in India, wearing a Septum ring, Eyebrow ring and a Nose ring are looked upon as an extreme form of Adornment and is generally considered as bizarre and queerish. Majority of men, who go for a septum ring, either falls in the age group of 20 – 25yrs or are from Creative fields. Most of the men, who live outside in urban cities and choose to wear a Septum ring, generally removes it whenever they visit their home, as the acceptance rate from parents and relatives is remote.

Most of men, who exhibit any form of bodily adornment esp. Jewellery prefer to keep facial hair. Is the Male-female binary so fundamental?

IS IT ONLY ‘CONFIGURATIVE URGE’?

18/50 men wear jewellery as a form of self-expression. And only 2/50 respondents wear it as a Status symbol. 13/18 men, who wear jewellery ‘as a form of self-expression’ are from Education sector.

CONCLUSION

LOOKING FOR A DEBATABLE ANSWER

As we come closer to the present century, the process of “Diversification” is clearly evident resulting into a more complex form of “Culture”. Within every culture, the Societal and Gender roles have got more specialized and rigid. Similarly, the choice of material and craftsmanship have also got more diverse and specialized. With the concept of “Urban”, which emerged in Mid Harappan age, a clear urge for “TANGIBLE VENTILATION” can be seen. Both Configurative urge and social positioning of self, played a dramatic ‘parallel role’ in shaping our material culture. The British Raj tottered the foundation on which the ideology of Gender roles and their physical appearance rested since Paleolithic age. This upheaval has resulted in more Gender biased bodily adornment styles. At present, dictionary of Bodily adornment has artistically alchemized. Now, less is more, effortlessly chic, urban, edgy are some of the common words that most of the men spell.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

1. The sample size was small.
2. The sample size may not be generalized.
3. Lack of scholarly literature and direct references of Male bodily adornment.

This research has paved a revelatory and cerebral foundation for Sociologists, Ethnographers, Psychologists, Designers and other Scholars, to thoroughly investigate and look for answers

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