

The Art and Symbolism of Adornment: Women's Connection to Jewellery Across Eras

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Abstract: Jewellery is a form of personal expression for women, ranging from simple ornamentation to a sign of identity, strength, and spirituality. Jewellery has historically fulfilled a variety of purposes. It was initially made of natural materials, such as feathers, shells, bones, and stones. After the discovery of metals, gold, silver, platinum, and copper were used to craft jewellery. Jewellery functioned both as decoration and as a symbol of status, signifying wealth and financial stability. In modern times, women wear jewellery not only to enhance their appearance but also to challenge societal norms and express their identities. Today's women wear jewellery not only to display their beauty but also to question social standards and confirm their identities. The paper tries to explore the relationship of women with jewellery throughout history. This study emphasizes the importance of jewellery in Indian culture, including its presence in traditional ceremonies and alleged health benefits.

Keywords: Jewellery, Indian culture, Women

1. Introduction

Jewellery has been a part of women's lives for generations. Started as simple decoration, has now grown into a symbol of identity, power, and spirituality (Barnard, 2008). For women, it's a way to express themselves and showcase their individuality. Jewellery has long served a variety of purposes. It was originally made of natural materials like feathers, shells, bones and stones etc., After the discovery of metals, gold, silver, platinum, and copper were used to make jewellery. It was not only an ornament in many civilizations but it was also a status symbol for riches, and a source of financial security (Untracht, 1997). Indian jewellery has a rich legacy that dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization. Jewellery has changed in the contemporary era to represent personal preferences and ideals. In addition to making a statement of beauty, today's women wear jewellery to express their emotions, question social norms, and confirm their identities. The jewellery sector still has a big economic impact since it thrives on both traditional workmanship and cutting-edge designs that appeal to modern tastes. The paper explores the link between women and jewellery, looking at its cultural symbolism, historical origins, and function as a tool for empowerment and self-expression.

2. Historical Context

In the prehistoric era, jewellery was made from natural materials like stones, shells, etc. As time passed, the materials changed, moving from copper and bone to silver, gold, and precious stones. An important part of Indian women's devotion is jewellery. They emphasize their femininity by donning jewellery made of gold, silver, and diamonds. Jewellery has always been associated with rank, riches, and authority. Throughout history, jewellery has been linked to prestige, money, and power. Women wore expensive necklaces, bracelets, and earrings as status and protection symbols in addition to being decorative pieces.

In addition to being worn for aesthetic reasons, jewellery has been seen as a safety measure in emergency situations. This is because it may be sold if there is an immediate need for money and is often costly. This is just one more way that jewellery serves as trustworthy insurance.

The tradition of Indian jewellery dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization, with remnants showcasing intricate beaded designs. In addition to being used as decoration, jewellery had a mystical quality and was thought to offer defense against evil forces. For similar defensive purposes, the custom of wearing the nine sacred stones, known as the navaratna, in a particular arrangement, representing the various planets, is still practiced today. Known as the serpent stone, the maniratna served as a protective talisman for the user. Hindu worship rituals still involve the wearing of sandalwood beads, Rudraksha seeds, and Tulsi seeds. Indian jewellery gained a new level of richness with the advent of Mughal power. Even the hidden back side of each jewel was embellished with intricate enamel work called "minakari." Later, jewellery developed as a way to save and offer financial stability, much like a modern bank. In order to protect their financial security, women would sell their jewellery when they needed money (Cronk & Dunham, 2007). It's possible that the Indians' love of gold was first used to accumulate wealth.

The meaning of jewellery changes across different cultures and time periods. In many traditions, it symbolizes things like marriage, fertility, protection, and spirituality (Krishnan & Usha, 2007). For example, in India, brides wear intricate jewellery during weddings to represent prosperity and happiness in marriage. In many African tribes, jewellery is an important part of traditional clothing and has spiritual significance (Raha, 2020). Some pieces are worn for special ceremonies, and their designs and materials often reflect cultural identity. Furthermore, jewellery can be a symbol of empowerment. Many societies have historically limited women's options and prospects. However, jewellery has allowed people to express themselves and be creative. In some social situations, jewellery can be interpreted as a symbol of social rank or money. However, its relevance has shifted throughout time, and women's jewellery selections may not be primarily influenced by cultural expectations (Fram & Baron, 2004). Modern women use jewellery for a variety of reasons, including personal delight, self-expression, and a connection to their cultural background. Women in professional settings can utilize jewellery to convey their style while conforming to relevant dress rules. It might give them a more elegant and professional appearance.

3. Types of Jewellery and Their Symbolism

Indian jewellery has a wide range of designs, from traditional to contemporary. Women in India wear jewels on a variety of occasions, frequently as part of ceremonies. The following are significant categories of jewellery worn by Indian women.

3.1 Rings

Rings, as shown in Figure 1, are circular bands made of metal that are used as decorative jewellery around the fingers. They have deep cultural, symbolic, and personal meanings and are worn for a variety of reasons, including decoration, prestige, commitment, and self-expression. Beyond their visual appeal, rings have been linked to healing abilities and improved well-being in certain cultures and beliefs. Throughout history, rings have played an important role in expressing personal identity and social ideals.



Figure 1: Rings

Healing Properties of Rings (Based on Traditional Beliefs):

- **Little Finger (Mercury Finger):** According to some customs, wearing a ring on the little finger improves one's capacity for thought, logic, and communication. It is said to lessen anxiety, improve decision-making, and foster mental clarity.
- **Ring Finger (Sun Finger):** The ring finger is believed to be directly connected to the heart. It is said that wearing a ring on this finger will increase vitality, boost self-esteem, and enhance general well-being. Because they are associated with the energy of the Sun, gold rings in particular are frequently worn on the ring finger.
- **Middle finger (Saturn finger):** Rings worn on the middle finger, which is connected to the planet Saturn, are thought to protect against bad energy and encourage balance, discipline, and focus. The middle finger promotes stability and anchoring because it is also connected to the Earth element.
- **Index Finger (Jupiter Finger):** Associated with the planet Jupiter, the index finger is thought to control ambition, wisdom, and understanding. Wearing rings on this finger is believed to improve one's sense of purpose, broaden one's perspectives, and strengthen leadership abilities. Rings for this finger frequently feature yellow sapphires or other gemstones associated with Jupiter.
- **Thumb:** It's thought that wearing a ring on the thumb activates the neurons in the brain linked to pleasure and happy feelings.

3.2 Earrings

Earrings as shown in Figure 2 are jewellery that is fastened to the ears via clips or piercings. There are various types of earrings such as Chandeliers, dangles, hoops, and studs worn for decorative purposes but they also carry some cultural and symbolic meanings in several countries.



Figure 2: Earrings

According to traditional customs, earrings are said to provide a number of healing benefits to the wearer. They activate the acupressure points of the earlobes and thus improve energy flow and general well-being.

3.3 Necklaces

Necklaces as shown in Figure 3 predate the invention of writing and have been an essential component of jewellery since the time of ancient civilizations. It is estimated that necklaces date back to the Stone Age, about 40,000 years ago. Jewellery that enhances a woman's beauty and attractiveness. Choker, collar, princess matinee, rope, lariat, ranihaar, and mangalsutra are some of the different types of necklaces.

In India, mangalsutra is used to identify married women. Since they are located above the heart, they aid in regulating the body's blood flow. The men who offer mangalsutra promise to keep the girl happy for the rest of her life. Wearing large jewellery is thought to trigger the Rajaguna and awaken the warrior spirit in women who are highly emotional.



Figure 3: Necklace

It has long been held that necklaces provide spiritual, bodily, and emotional advantages. Gemstones like rose quartz and amethyst are linked to stress reduction, emotional support, and the advancement of harmony and love. They are thought to boost overall well-being by bringing the body's energy centers, or chakras, into balance.

3.4 Bangles



Figure 4: Bangles

Bangles as shown in Figure 4 occupy a unique and essential position in Indian society. These are worn around the wrists and are a crucial component of women's traditional Indian clothing. In India, bangles have a deep symbolic meaning that denotes femininity and marital status. Different materials and colors have different meanings in different places. For like red bangles are associated with love and fertility. They started to promote blood circulation, ease stress, and balance energy.

3.5 Nose Ring

The nose ring (Figure 5), also called nath or nathni, is acknowledged one of the basic jewellerys according to Hindu traditions. It reduces menstrual pain, enhances reproductive health, and makes breathing regular and comfortable.

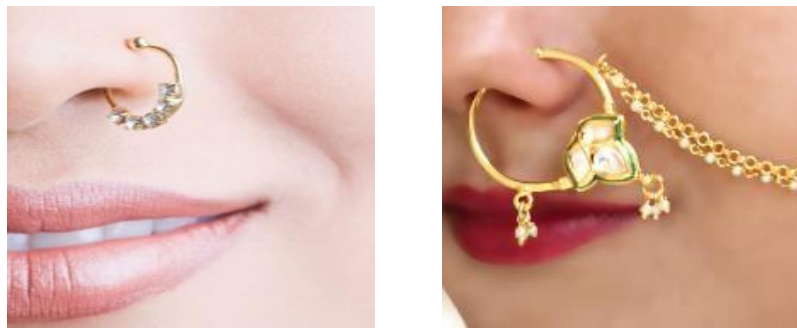


Figure 5: Nose Ring

According to Ayurveda, having a nose piercing increases many health benefits for a female, wearing the nose ring on the left nostril is said to lessen pain during menstruation, and regulate the menstrual cycle by balancing the hormones due to its connection with the reproductive organs. It is further believed to stimulate nerve endings which help ease pain, especially during menstruation.

In terms of relieving stress and anxiety, it is also believed to have merits. Some traditions say this nose piercing filters the air and increases lung fitness. Furthermore, a nose ring is also said to relieve nasal allergies and sinuses by enhancing passageways of air so that energy may circulate properly in the body.

3.6 Anklets

Anklets (Figure 6) also referred to as "payal" or "pajeb", are part of traditional clothing worn during Indian religious festivals and weddings. They are considered auspicious and represent femininity, grace, and beauty.



Figure 6: Anklets

Anklets are said to promote the constant flow of energy throughout the body, associated with the acupressure on the ankle points. The sound of the anklets ringing can soothe the soul of the wearer and therein relax the wearer from stress.

3.7 Toe Ring

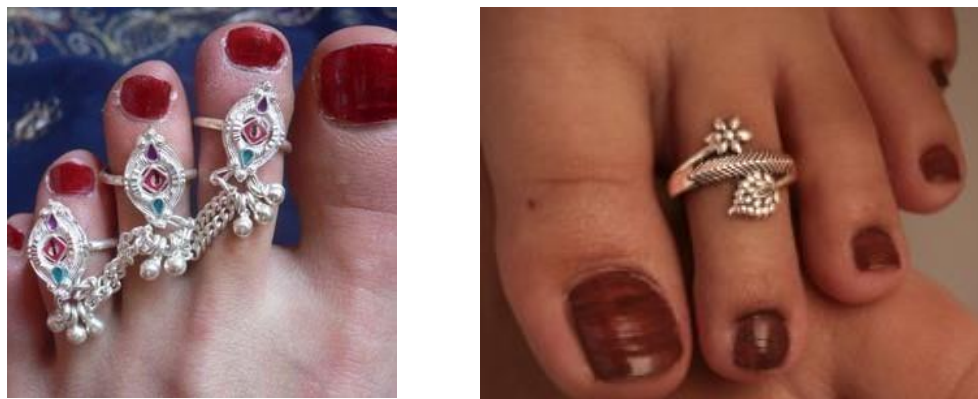


Figure 7: Toe Ring

Commonly called a "Bichiya", the toe ring as shown in Figure 7 is a traditional Indian ornament mostly worn on the second toe of each foot. Worn by married women, it denotes their unity and dedication. It's believed to help keep the menstrual cycle regular and boost reproductive health. It

gently presses on acupressure points located on the second toe to maintain the body's energy balance. Wearing a Bichiya is thought to be a stress reliever.

3.8 MaangTika

The MaangTika as shown in Figure 8 is one of the Indian pieces of jewellery worn above the forehead on weddings and festivities by women. Traditionally, within the Indian culture, the MaangTika is deemed very prominent as it signifies decorated grace and blossomed beauty intended for the bride to wear on her wedding day. Besides its ornamental value, the MaangTika carries a very deep spiritual and symbolic significance. When placed on the center of the forehead, it is thought to direct the wash of energy from the spiritual body toward the Ajna chakra of the astrologer, which correlates with clear perception, intuition, and inner wisdom. This is assumed to firmly enhance the spiritual connection and inner awareness of the wearer.



Figure 8: MaangTika

4. Conclusion

In Indian culture, there is a long tradition of wearing jewellery, which not only looks attractive but is also believed to bring in quite a few health benefits. Wearing rings on different fingers can influence the planet corresponding to that finger, and in turn, improve aspects concerning health and wellbeing. In addition to being a fashion accessory, earrings have an acupuncture effect on the body; certain ear piercings are thought to treat a variety of medical conditions. A clear voice and a clear throat are supposed to be provided by waist key chains. Wearing bracelets on the wrists is thought to increase blood flow.

Wearing bracelets around the wrists is thought to increase blood flow and preserve the body's energy reserves. It is said that nose rings help with breathing and menstrual cycle regulation. Necklaces are thought to have positive energy benefits and are typically linked with married ladies, especially the mangalsutra. Silver anklets are said to conduct energy and maintain the body's flow of positive energy. Married women wear toe rings, which are said to improve reproductive health and control the menstrual cycle. Wearing MaangTika on the forehead represents the sacred union of male and female energy and is connected to the Ajna chakra. Overall, Indian jewellery traditions have a significant role in supporting physical, mental, and

spiritual well-being. It is crucial to highlight that, while these ideas are firmly embedded in Indian culture and heritage, they may lack scientific proof to back up their health claims. The cultural and symbolic significance that these traditions carry for individuals and communities is what gives them value.

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