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# INDUS COSMETICS AND ORNAMENTATION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND ETHNO ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY

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**Abstract**
*Indus urbanism along with innovative and modern cultural trends has special range of material objects used for beautification, cosmetics and ornaments along with personal aesthetic manifestation it represents social and religious identity too. This paper deals with the cosmetics, ornaments and other objects used for bodily adoration. Ornaments can easily be traced through the figurines discovered within Indus civilization, beads, pendants, rings, toe rings, anklets, armlets, necklaces, bangles, hair pins, comb, mirror, Kohl, different colouring pigments and fabrics shaped aesthetic sense of Indus civilization, Mohen jo Daro, Harappa, Chanhu jo Daro, Dholavira, Lothal has clear evidences of having cosmetics and ornaments produced locally from different metals, stones and natural pigments.This research paper designs the ethnoarcheological interpretations and observations within the south Asian societies including Sindh, Punjab (Pakistan), and Rajasthan, Gujrat (India) where the same cosmetics and ornamental traditions are still followed. Cosmetics and ornaments used in Indus weren't merely used for bodily decoration but had strong social and personal mode of symbolic expression. Beads and natural pigments along with cosmetic role had medicinal properties. This ethnographic and archaeological study will contribute to understand the continued use of ancient ornamental and cosmetic traditions which are still in practice in south Asia widely.*

## INTRODUCTION

Though Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Indus were contemporary civilizations, but shared distinct cultural traits, technology and social organisation. Indus's innovative & unique life patterns of urbanism, ornaments making, trade system, splendid architecture, and organised way of life has gained the attention of researchers to recognise the social aesthetics, that how peoples got involved in making their social and symbolic identities.

Great number of cosmetics and ornamental artefacts has been discovered from Mohen Jo Daro, Chanu Daro, Kalibangan, Dholavira and Harappa, ornaments include natural pigments for face colour, lipstick, Kohl pots, necklaces, mirror made of copper and bronze, bangles of clay and shell, finger rings, toe rings and pendants made from variety of semi precious stones. Presence of cosmetics and ornaments reflect the adornment as integral part of daily life not as casually.

From archaeological point of view the objects used for human bodily adoration most likely the ornaments and cosmetics has great significance rather than the discoveries related to human social aspects like tools, architecture are more socially symbolic rather than peculiar representation. This can help in understanding gender role, social hierarchy, social identity, age, ethnicity and professionalism. Jonathan Mark Kenoyer writes that sophisticated techniques, quality and standardisation in bead

making not merely reflecting the technological expertise but presence of shared iconographic values, norms and customary practices (Kenoyer, 1998, pp.78-90)

Hence the archaeological research is made on considerable physical evidences which offers limited cultural explanation of artefacts, for example the discovery of Kohl suggests the eye decoration but doesn't clarify its usage for aesthetics, medicinal, or as religious practices, separately or simultaneously. Same question arises about the use of beads and bangles whether these were just symbolic or showed status, emblematic, marital status or any social affiliation.

To deal with explanatory issues, this research follows ethno archaeological methods to extract ethnographic data from south Asian contempoery societies. In Sindh, Punjab and Rajisthan the application of Kohl is commonly in use, not only for decorative purpose but also recognised for medicinal properties, same as bangles show gender and relationship status. Principally to avoid close comparisons, such cultural traditions offer interpretive framework for explaining and understanding archaeological data (Wright 2010, pp. 150-160).

Prominent archaeologists Mortimer Wheeler, E.J H Mackay has reported & documented the evidences of cosmetics, ornaments and artefacts related to adoration, their work rely on theoretical perspectives. Other archaeologists including Gregory L. Possehl and Rita P Wright focused on interpretative rather than theoretical research, explained the significance of material culture explicating its social and economic relation.

**Research Methodology**

This research follows the multidisciplinary research methods including, ethnographic comparative analysis, theoretical approaches and archaeological analysis. The purpose is to go through contextual aspects rather than interpretive analysis of cosmetics and ornaments in Indus Civilization.

The primary source of data collection is based on the cosmetic and ornamental material found form major Indus period sited like, Chanhu jo Daro, Mohen jo Daro, Harappa, Dholavira and Kalibangan. The body adornment material consists Mirror, Kohl, bangles, rings of finger & toe, beads and beauty material containers. The composition and material of each beauty artefacts are analysed in term of manufacturing, composing, distribution and their contextual relation. Contextual studies differentiate the usage of cosmetics as industrial, domestics, religious or ceremonial use. In particular the aesthetic material present within house spaces may be deemed as routine adornment practices, and found from ceremonial spaces can be linked to ritual practices (Possehl 2002, pp 200-2010)

Additionally to this archaeological investigations this research work focuses on ethnographic comparison as important method, for comparison the ethnographic information is based on data found from south Asia, especially from Rajhisthan, Sindh, and Gujrat. A careful analysis is made to determine the continuous functionality and symbolic aspects of decorating Kohl , wearing bangles , ornaments and cosmetics, this method is applied very carefully as cultural practices are changed with course of time, such meagre examples of change don't represent holistic aspects for explanation (Wright 2010,pp.150-160)

The roots of this research is based in material culture theory and identity archaeology, the material culture theory explains that artefacts are not merely the social inactive consideration but a key factor in shaping mode of communication. Through identity archaeology it is further elaborated that how embodied practices such as embellishment refers to social identities consisting status, gender and social affiliation. Through these methods this paper aims to bring out the logical reasoning behind cosmetics and adoration practices followed in Indus civilization, shows a complete picture of cosmetics & its role in social life.

**Literature Review**

The research on Indus cosmetic and adoration material has enhanced with timespan rather than relying on theoretical framework, strengthened through evidence based interpretations. The work done by a great archaeologist E.J.H Mackay concentred more on artefacts found from excavation and their classification, beauty containers, mirrors, beads and other ornaments. His work proved

systematics account of cosmetics materials, hence the work majorly remained of interpretive nature (Mackay, 1983, pp 120-125). The work of Mortimer Wheeler has done great work on context analysis of material found from Indus civilization, excluding the symbolic elements which could represent cosmetic and ornamental perspectives (Wheeler, 1968, pp.75-80)

Great turn over by prominent archaeologist, Jonathan Mark Kenoyer reinforced the technological advancement and standardised Indus craftsmanship, Kenoyer work on beads manufacturing centres reflects high precision technology, refers availability of well trained and specialised craftsmanship (Kenoyer 1998, pp 78-90). Jonathan Mark Kenoyer explained social relevance of objects, asserting their homogenous shared cultural values, norms and aesthetics.

The research work done by Gregory L Possehl has more advanced parameters to investigate the significant role of material culture in social dimension. Possehl said that difference in material of ornaments and manufacturing techniques refers the class, status, purchasing power & social identity. (Possehl 2002, pp 220-230).

Rita P. Wright lingers the debate regarding assimilation of material culture for social economic deeper analysis, she focused the interrelation of trade, craft production and social structure, stressing that how ornaments, beads and other commodities work within extensive economic and cultural system (Wright 2010, pp 150-160), Rita also stresses on the significance of studying context in explaining meaning and function of objects.

Regardless of research contribution, the work shows definite limitation. Present state of work done in this field focused on production, typology, and distribution rather than on symbolic explanation. Unfortunately the ethnographic work has been undermined inspite having it potential to furnish significant insights culturally, particularly in cosmetics and ornaments. This research aims to fill the gaps through utilizing archaeological research through ethno archaeological & ethnographic methods for creating holistic picture of cosmetics and ornaments used in Indus Civilization.

## Discussion

### Use of Kohl as Cosmetics

The evidence for Eye makeup through Kohl is consolidated through its discovery from multiple Indus sites. The Kohl pots were manufactured from bronze, copper or animal bones, galena was frequently applied. Wide scale use of Kohl and galena suggests peoples had expertise in extracting and preparing cosmetics from minerals & showing cultural significance related with beauty practices.

Ethnographic studies made in south Asia suggest that Kohl served multiple purposes, along with body décor Kohl prevented seasonal eye infections & glare. Same in Indus Kohl served both functions including symbolic in parallel (Kenoyer 1998, pp 145-150). Eye makeup interpreted wider cultural significance associated with aesthetic, identity and spiritual prospective.



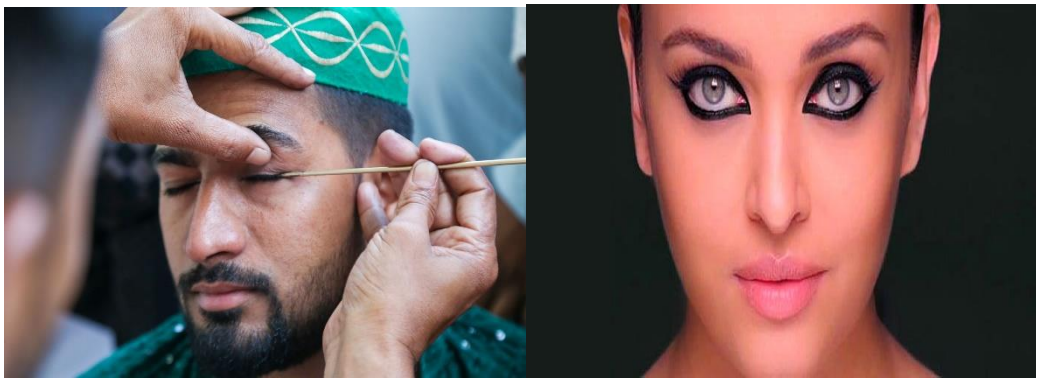


**Fig No.1-2 -Kohal is being used by male & female, Source: Britannica/ Desiblitz**

**Natural colouring Pigments**

Excavation carried out by E.J.H Mackay reveals insightfull results regarding presence of cosmetics containers with fine quantity and quality of natural colouring pigments for probable use for coloring face and lips along with applicators were discovered. This discovery of colouring pigments strengthened the idea of urban cosmetics methods in indus civilization (Mackay 1943, Kenoyer 1998)

**Role of Mirror in adoration.**

Bronze & copper made mirrors make addition to cosmetics objects, well polished glossy surface reflects sophisticated metallurgical expertise for clear visual appearance. The availability of mirrors in local context defines cosmetic practices were part of daily routine instead of occasional practices linked to privileged class.(Mackay 1983, pp 250-255).

Conceptually, mirrors has important role in personality development, self-visual assessment, which can reconfigure individuals look. Mirror might have iconic religious significance related with security and ritual purpose (Wright 2010, pp 170-180).

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**Fig No 3-4, 3- Indus mirror & Kohl pot,4- Modern Mirror, Source: Reddit**

**Beads as ornament & commodity.**

Precious and semi-precious Beads making are one of most sustainable example of Indus civilizations tangible culture, variety of Indus beads were made of lapis lazuli, carnelian, steatite, faience & agate explicit the high level of precision with sophisticated technology

including drilling, polishing through heating stones shows specialised craftsmanship
Imported raw stone material shows trade relations of Indus with Afghanistan and central Asian regions (Pessehl 2002, pp 230-240). Beads weren't merely for décor but were also used for bodily adoration as well as economic commodity, sign of identity, status, wealth & social association.

**Bangles, Symbol of female aesthetic.**
Bangles are symbol of female aesthetic, has been discovered in large number in every Indus period site, common material for bangle making was clay, T.C bangles, shell, ivory, faience & metal. Indus bangles has variety of texture and form, typology of bangles defined gender, marker, social status, gender & age.
In contemporary south Asian societies bangles were the strong modem of expressing identity along with ethnographic parallel. Availability of bangles on broader scale in local and ceremonial context up rise its cultural significance (Wright 2010, pp 200-210)




**Fig No.4-5, 4- TC bengals from Mohen jo Daro, 5- Ivory Bangels worn in Thar, Source: Harrapa.com/ Granna.com**

**Ornaments**
Indus ornaments consist variety of aesthetic material and types of ornaments, rings, and pendants make it more diversified. Ornamental presence in context of cemeteries define their symbolic and religious importance, it strengthens the belief in after life (Wheeler 1968, pp80-85).
Indus ornaments contained geometric and animal designs, might be signifying their socio economic affiliation, these interpretations are proved through ethnographic work, such symbolic depictions shows their marker, & identical security. (Possehl 2002, pp 240-250)

**Conclusion**
The investigation/assessment/interpretation made on Indus cosmetics and ornaments illustrate a complicated mechanism of cultural practices are deeply rooted in social life. These traditions weren't only ornamental but fulfilled numerous purposes, including enhancing beauty, health & hygiene, symbolic appearance, and social status.
Addition to archaeological evidence with ethnographic comparison, this research illustrates that cosmetics & ornaments shaped communication of identity. Body being mode of cultural expression where social norms & values were concretized through aesthetic practices. Moreover the findings for specialised production and trade to faraway regions highlight the economic importance of such objects, which correlate the wide range of craft organisation and barter.
In short cosmetics and ornaments provided significant insights in Indus civilization, providing perceptions about domestic practices up to broader perceptive of social formation.

Future endeavours must continue through utilising interdisciplinary strategies through applying scientific material analysis & experimental archaeology.

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