

Body and Ornaments: A Reflection on Ghurye's Perspective

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Abstract: *G. S. Ghurye, one of the founders of Indian Sociology, wrote on an unconventional subject like “Indian Costume”, which bears relevance to the study of aesthetics and fashion in modern India. Taking cues from Ghurye’s ideas the present paper will highlight the underneath meaning of wearing ornaments on women’s body. Since the time of Indus Valley Civilization Indians have developed a rich culture of making, trading and wearing ornaments for different parts of the body to beautify and celebrate the human body. A costume, as Ghurye defines, is to cover and protect the body and the design of costumes attracts the attention of the viewer. Parallel to this, ornaments not only serve to please the eyes of the beholder but also fulfil a sense of aesthetic pleasure of the wearer. Thus, this article will highlight the relation between body and ornaments.*

Keywords: Ornaments, body image, aesthetics, costume, fashion.

I

Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893-1984) is widely regarded as the “father of Indian sociology” for his unique contribution in the field of Indian sociology. He attempted to understand, through his writings, the essence of Indian Society by excavating the past from the written literature and from historical records. For him, excavating the past not only gives a better understanding of the present society but also gives an interpretation of the development of society and human progress (Upadhyaya 2007). One of his prime objectives was to formulate sociology of knowledge in an institutional structure through the interpretation of Indological texts. This underneath meaning of the ancient texts constituted the basis of his sociology of knowledge and that of modern sociology.

As an Indologist Ghurye studied Vedic India, Family, Kinship, Caste, Tribe, Sadhus, Religion, Social Tensions and many other subjects which encouraged later generation of Indian scholars to undertake research in

these fields. Many sociologists, his students and followers, have followed his path in exploring the thoughts he has left behind. However, a very few have followed his interest in Indian Costume or *Bharata Natya and its Costume* for further research. I find Ghurye's work on Indian Costume, based on archaeological evidence, rather than literary sources, an exceptional one to understand the aesthetic taste and pleasure of Indian people in wearing a costume. Ghurye has explored the history of costumes over the ancient (Vedic) period to present (20th century) day, covering the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan. In Momin's view, Ghurye's work created a base for studying the 'sartorial histories, task and erotic-aesthetic' and for investigation the underneath significance of Culture and Practice (Momin 1996). In this paper I have argued that ornaments reproduce the aesthetic erotic magic in a similar way as that done by costumes. Costumes and ornaments in reality supplement each other and work for beautification of the body of the women.

II

A costume, as Ghurye defines, is something to cover and protect the body; and the design of costumes draws the attention of the viewer. Parallel to this, an ornament not only serves to please the eyes of the beholder but also fulfils a sense of aesthetic pleasure of the wearer. Ornament plays a very crucial part in adorning the body. It is an object of beautification, which can be made up of selected material such like flower, bones, roots and metals. Since Indus Valley Civilization 'gold' metal is used for adorning human body (Nanda 1992)¹. This wearable object that catches the eyes of the viewer towards one's body also satisfies the ones who wear it. The main purpose of the ornament is to decorate the body. This decoration of the body gives the women a sense of power, security and self-confidence. Since the society at large and the women in particular value beautification of body through costumes and ornaments there has been a continuous research and innovation in designing different kinds of ornaments for different parts of the body. This creative invention of the people had opened a new occupation of jewellery making using different kinds of metals right in the Vedic society and a new occupational group called Sonar or Swarnakar had evolved. Women and Ornament are inseparable when it comes to Indian Society and Culture. The women feel incomplete without the ornaments and this is associated with social expectations, behaviours and the symbolic order of a society in a given point in time. The society has

symbolically legitimized adoration of body with ornaments since there are specific religious, spiritual, and scientific meanings behind wearing ornaments. That meaning varies from the wearer to the viewer and to the maker of the ornaments. The beauty of the ornaments conveys deeper meanings that “heighten the charm of a person” (Ghurye 1947: 105). Those who beautify themselves with ornaments do it in order to (1) comply with the cultural standard, (2) have a feeling that they are looking good (and hence for self-satisfaction), (3) to look good and attractive to the viewers. They do it either consciously or unconsciously, although the expectations and the outcomes may not always match. The viewers may or may not find value the aesthetic sense thus created by the wearer of the ornaments. The women would still wear the ornaments compulsively and thus endorsing the mystic value of the jewelry reproduced by the culture and the market. For an ornament maker (or *karigarhor* the craftsman), designing the ornament stems from his imagination of the body of the women, his mastery over the craft, and an assessment of the changing tastes and market. The body of the women remains the central concern of the designer. The culture, the traditions, religiosity also play a part in sustaining interest in ornaments. The Hindu Gods and Goddess are imagined as the ones adorned with heavy gold ornaments and so are the kings and queens in the epics. They thus set a standard for the women, across classes and cultures, who use different types of ornaments in different observable parts of their body. Apart from the decoration of body, ornaments, the gold-made ones in particular, demonstrate the status of the women and the family they belong to. Sexuality, aesthetics, status, identity, fantasy, religiosity, tradition and culture and so many other dimensions constitute the essence of gold ornaments in India society. Here, I would try to explain, in general terms, the underneath meaning of use of ornaments for the Indian Women.

- a) Wearing of ornaments reflects the **aesthetic sense** of the user and that of the close collectivity. The larger world the media can hugely contribute to the building of the ever-evolving aesthetic sense at the local level. In terms of self-perception and presentation of self, wearing of ornament has a greater value than that of wearing clothes, since the former is generally perceived as scanty and precious. Ornaments are like the final touches for making oneself delightful. The aesthetic value of ornaments has been widely displayed in the ancient temples, especially in Southern and Western India (Ghurye 1947:99, 101).

- b) Since ancient times, there has been a whole **body of beliefs** associated with the use of ornaments. In ancient times, Indians used to wear handcrafted gold and silver ornaments. Each ornament was taken to carry a symbolic meaning and function for the persons wearing it and for the community. Some of these beliefs were scientifically reasoned out. For example, it was believed that silver reacts well with the earth's energy, while gold reacts well with the body's energy and aura. That is why, silver was worn in the form of anklet, and toe rings (Kumar 2002: 20); while gold ornaments were used for the other upper parts of the body. It was believed that women having pierced nose experience less pain during childbirth. It was also believed that the nose ring enhances the emotional, romantic, and sexual appeal of a woman by vitalizing the health of the female reproductive organs. Further, it was believed that a pierced nose, though its control over the brain waves, would prevent women from being hypnotized (Thakur 2004).

A silver made waist chain or hip belt is believed to help a pregnant woman to have a healthy foetus and safe delivery. Another associated belief is that it helps to woman remain slim and fit, since it prevents accumulation of extra fat in those parts of the body. The bangles used by women in the wrist create continuous friction with the body, thus enhancing the blood circulation and overall health. The electric waves passing through the outer skin due to the chafing of ornaments get reverted to one's own body because bangles propel the energy into the body (Thakur 2004). The Hindus in ancient times gave shape to this item called bangles and, later on, they have proliferated into many shapes and designs to add to the beautification of the wearer.

- c) Ornaments, since ancient times, have been believed to have **erotic value**. Ornaments are the objects that attract the eyes of the others towards the location (erogenous zone) of the body. According to Freud, an erogenous zone in the body part arouses the sexual curiosity and draws men's attention towards women's body. Erogenous is an area of the human body which stimulates a sexual response (Freud 1920: 33, Slade 2017: 16). Commenting on dance and costume, Ghurye has said: 'the purpose of the artfulness might be concealing the erogenous zone' (Ghurye 1995: 18). Ghurye missed the point that there could be unconscious expression of

sensuousness in hiding as well. In contrast, the artfulness of ornament highlights the erogenous zone. Ornaments show off subtle attribute that enhances the attractiveness of women's body. For example, wearing sari may accentuate the shape of one's body but ornaments can bring to attention the relatively less noticed parts of the body. Examples could be a lovely neckline with necklace or chain; or fingers with finger rings. The neck is one of the erogenous zones of women's body. It has been an important site of decoration and aesthetic, sensuous communication. In cultural terms, necklaces communicate grace, wealth, power, affiliation, prestige, levels of resources and elements of identity and position. For women, the following necklaces are often considered alluring:

Chokers

Collar-length necklaces

Mid-chest pendants on chains

Long pendant necklaces nearing a woman's cleavage

Thus, necklaces worn near the heart and are believed to be an artistic means to enhance and express sensuous emotions, which, in turn, may have a bearing on the management of relations.

- d) Ornaments cannot be limited to material values; they always have **metaphysical and symbolic value**. Such symbolic values, attached to the ornaments are transported in metaphorical language from the wearer to the viewer. In India, it is generally perceived that any part of the body covered with ornament is beautiful. Adorning of women's body with ornament makes her more valuable and beautiful. Some ornaments, which are particularly associated with married women in India are Mangalsutra, Shaka Pola, toe ring and so on. Other than this, the design/symbol of the gold jewellery is also believed to play a crucial part in protecting women from the evil forces. It is largely believed that the ring finger nerves are connected to the heart through the brain. A marriage ring thus helps cement the physical and emotive bond between two bodies and souls (Kaur 2012).

III

I have tried to show, in this short note, that wearing of ornaments by women has immense aesthetic and sensuous sides, apart from its material, cultural and status value. The erotic value of ornaments is much higher than that of the costumes. The eroticism and therefore fetishism are thus closely connected, as they work on the presentation of the body in the social field. Aesthetic value, on the other hand, is tied to emotions. For example, a married woman adorns her body with specific kinds of ornaments in love and marriage. This wearing of ornament creates a bond between the woman's body and the viewers – the lover, the husband and the members of the society at large. So, ornaments are aesthetically emotional and sensuous. The attraction of women towards the ornaments, which is socially reproduced, is universal. The crafting of designs by the ornament makers, the selection and use of ornaments reflect the aesthetic sense of the time and space. Ghurye, opined, “ornaments beautify the body is the popular belief... the value of ornament is the makeup of beauty” (Ghurye 1947: 99).

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