

Floral Depictions in the Coiffure of Ancient Indian terracotta

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Abstract:

India, world famous for its culture has a diverse, rich and elongated motifs tradition. In fact, the traditions of motifs in our country can trace their origin back, almost to about 5000 years ago, to the ancient Indus Valley and Mohenjodaro civilizations, and they have been created and developed through the ages against a background that is richly woven with the myths and imaginary of sign and symbol. The development of a particular motif is undoubtedly being the result of religion, customs, natural surroundings and social beliefs of the particular area to which its creator belongs. Though always speculative, the meaning of the motifs used in decoration of coiffure, Head-dress and hair dress may change with cultural context but the symbolic meaning of various motifs remains some whatever they are applied.

Key words: Ancient, Antiquities. Motifs, Religion, Symbols, Tradition.

History is generally deals with the exploits of the kings and their achievements in the field of administration, the rise and the fall of states and the social and economic conditions of the people. But such a history cannot be regarded as complete. It should present the story of the people and their life, thought and culture. It should record the characteristics as well as reactions of the people to physical and economic conditions. It should contain an account of their social institutions, beliefs and forms. It is, therefore, necessary to deal with history of costume, coiffure and ornaments. Head dress was a common item of male and female attire in ancient India which is still used by the people on ceremonial occasions or even when one goes out. The antiquities found from Harappa and Mohenjodaro¹ reveal that both men and women generally wore a fan like head dress, but in case of a nude male figure, it looks like cap curling into a point.

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In other parts of the country, however, the practice of hair-dressing was in vogue from very early times as is evident from the antiquities unearthed at Harappa and Mohenjodaro. These antiquities reveal that men had varied styles of hair-dressing². Their hair was taken back from the forehead and was either cut short behind or coiled in a knot or chignon at the back with a fillet to support it. A terracotta figure is of special interest because it shows curly hair. The discovery of combs at Mahenjodaro also testifies to the fashion of hair arrangement in the Indus Valley period. The terracotta of Mauryan period gives better picture of hair-dressing.

It appears from the antiquities of the Indus Valley that the females were very fond of arranging their hair in different ways. The head of a woman from Mohenjodaro shows curly hair hanging down at the back of the head. In the Vedic period women dressed their hair in various ways as is evident from the literature. It has been described by the terms *Stulka*, *Kurira* or *Kumba*, *Opasa* and *Kaparda*.³ These terms probably denote different styles of hair dressing.

In the Buddhist literature,⁴ there are references to the head-dress called *usnisa*. During the Mauryan period in the North Eastern India, it appears that the head dress was an essential item as evident from the terracotta and was used with much care and taste. Megasthenese says that, 'Indians wore an upper garment which they partly throw over their shoulders and partly twist in folds round their head.'⁵ Circular pendants or leaf-like designs are also noticed on the torque around the head and on the lateral chignons of the turban, as we found in the Basarh and Sarnath figures. The history of hair dressing in North Eastern India can actually be traced from the Mauryan period. The terracotta which has been ascribed to the Mauryan period is different from those of Sunga sculptures.

Regarding the arrangement of hair by women in the Mauryan period it is mentioned in the Arthasastra of Kautilya that they were not allowed to keep hair on their head, but at another place it is mentioned that they shall keep away the queen from the society of ascetics with shaven heads. It may appear from the above description that women were not very fond of hair dressing but the terracotta ascribed to this period reveal that women did arranged their hair in different ways. Of course, the use of head dress was more popular than the practice of arranging the hair among the female folk.

Sometimes the hair was combed at the fore-head with lateral discs or cones converted into flowers. The terracotta of the Sunga period found from various parts of North-eastern India also reveal some more types of head dresses. The turban with diagonal leaf pattern impressed on the band and top knot is also very interesting because it enhances the beauty of the figure. The literary sources like *Natyasastra*⁶ and *Divyavadana*⁷ refer to the use of turbans by the people, but it appears to be confined to a particular class such as kings, minister, soldiers and priests.

The head dress has had always been forming an important adornment of the women's outfit. In the beginning the head dresses were fairly simple, but gradually they became more and more elaborate and decorative. In the Sunga period it appears the necessity of the use of head dress was felt by the people. According to Motichandra⁸, ladies generally wore a long piece of cloth to cover their head, but turban was also used on special occasions. A terracotta male figure from Patna showed hair has been combed into forehead with lateral dices or cones converted into flowers. The fragmentary head from Sarnath⁹ is remarkable for it is framed by a number of conventional spiral curls. A floral wreath of a pattern common in Sunga art appears above the curls and there is also a crenellated crown of the Persian design. Men generally kept long hair tied in a top knot around which the folds of the turban were arranged¹⁰ further, musicians, soldiers and charioteers wear curled locks of hair falling on either side of the face.

In the Sunga period, most of the female figures shown on their railings of Bodhagaya wear some sort of head-dress but as such it is difficult to trace the arrangement of their hair. A very good example of the complex arrangement of their hair is noticed in a terracotta head from Bulandibagh. The head appears to be that of a female. In this case some of the locks of hair have been shown of the left side of the head, while one or two locks have been shown hanging on the right side.

In the study of male hair-dressing in India during Kusana period, there is the beginning of a new Helmet, i.e. the Hellenistic element in the domain of Indian art. One may say that in the Kusana period one finds on one hand continuance of the same fashions of hair arrangement which are noticed in the Sunga period, while on the other hand some new methods also appear to have been adopted which bar the Hellenistic

influence. In the Kusana period, we come across with different types of hair arrangements. The stone sculptures of the Kusana period found from Mathura, Bihar and Bengal also testify to the practice of arranging the hair in different styles. Some arranged their hair in pig-tails too.¹¹

The literary, foreign and archaeological accounts of the Gupta period afford ample material for the study of hair-dressing. In Amarakosa there are further references that men had long hairs in which they wore flowers. It may also note that men in the Gupta period delighted in wearing their hair in wig-like fashion. The practice of arranging the hair prevalent in the Gupta period must have continued to survive in the succeeding periods. This fact may be corroborated by the literary, foreign and archaeological accounts of the post-Gupta periods.

The people of Gupta period appear to have particular attention to their costume, coiffure and ornament. The hair of women during the period was arranged in various ways. Not only was the hair adorned in different styles but was also decorated with flowers and ornaments in order to make it more attractive and beautiful. Literary sources, foreign accounts and archaeological finds are very helpful for the study of coiffure. Regarding the female hair dressing, Kalidasa says that women grew long hair; combed, parted and then knitted them in long tresses. They wore flowers, pearls and gems in their long hanging tresses and on the parting line. In the *Abhijnanamsakuntalam*, it is mentioned that Sakuntala appeared before the king with a band in the shape of a bun which was to the length of the hair and was finally decorated with flowers. In the *Kadambari* Bana has mentioned that hair net¹² was also used by the females to make it more attractive. In the *Raghuvamsa* he said that, the hair was tied up in some kind of knot, so as to stand perpendicularly with a pearl string intermixed with flower-garland; there upon was fixed a resplendent jewel.¹³ Further, the term *mauli* corresponds to *dhammila*¹⁴ according to *mallinatha*. The Kirta-mukuta represented on the head of Buddha in the Patna museum is made up two slanting rectangles joined above with a coping having floral designs.

Bana, the author of *Harsacharita* and the *Kadambari*, has furnished many interesting information as regards the hair dressing of the males and the females.¹⁵ As

regards the arrangement of the hair by males, he says that, Bhandi, the son of queen Yasovati's brother, had side locks of curly hair at the age of eight, the chief who had come to visit Harsa, had peacock's feather stuck in the top knots. The practice of keeping long hair appears to have been popular in this period as well. Bana's friend Sudrasti wore a thick bunch of flowers in his short top knot. According to G.H. Ojha¹⁶ and C.V. Vaidya¹⁷ people during the period, c.600 to 1200 A.D., used to give special attention to hair dressing. They wore long hair which might have been arranged in coils, either at the back or at the top of the head.

So, it is clear from the description that the floral motifs or flower motifs played an important role in the head-dressing, hair-dressing and garments of ancient Indian terracotta, which reflects through various instances of different periods of ancient Indian art which is an important expression of the Cultural Revolution.

Notes and References

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5. Arrian, XVI, 224.
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10. *Ibid*, p-92.
11. Sahay Sachidanand, *op cit*, p-104.
12. *Ibid*, p-107.
13. Kalidasa, *Raghuvamsa*, XVII 23
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