

# Solah Sringār

## The Sixteen Traditional Indian Modes of Adornment of the Body

Since the dawn of civilisation, it has been the prerogative of woman to make herself alluring and attractive; beautiful or plain, each woman may spend upto hours each day indulging in beauty rituals and treatments guaranteed to enhance her inherent charms.

Today the world over, designers, cosmetic manufacturers, perfumers, and jewellers vie with each other to innovate an ever-increasing range of creations dedicated to the adornment and beautification of womankind. Entire industries exist to cater to this basic feminine urge for beautification, to the extent that there is a complete commercialisation in this field.

In India, 'Sringār'—the painting and decoration of the body for beautification of the feminine form—has always been an elaborate art. It was not a mere cosmetic process, but had a deeper significance, with roots in ancient Indian traditions, when every aspect of life was governed by complex disciplines and rituals. These rituals, both religious and social, were evolved for the requirements of health, hygiene, and a sense of aesthetics.

Ancient writers have classified the decoration of the body into 16 modes of adornment, the earliest references to which are found in the classical Indian epic, the Ramayana of Tulsidas.

Though the exact definition of these Sringār varied from region to region depending on local customs and requirements, some of the more common rituals were — bathing; anointing the skin with herbal oils; drying the hair with smoke of incense; application of *kumkum* on the forehead, *mehndi* or *henna* on the hands, *alta* on the feet, collyrium in the eyes; combing, plaiting and arranging the hair; consumption of betel or *paan* for refreshing the breath; beeswax for the lips; flowers to bedeck the

hair, and innumerable kinds of ornaments to adorn the body. It is believed that the different kinds of jewels were identified for such adornment. This ritual of Sringār, apart from its aesthetic connotation, had a physical relevance, and each element had its own particular significance.

The basic essential was bathing — it has a special place in the Indian ethos, having led to the cleansing and purification of the body — a prerequisite for any ritual or religious ceremony. Oiling of the body and perfuming it with floral essences rendered it shiny as bronze, a mirror of purity, worthy of adornment and respect; collyrium heightened the glow of the eyes, and also had medicinal properties; the auspicious *kumkum* on the forehead ward off the evil eye; *henna* had a cooling effect so valuable in the scorching heat of the plains; and *betel*, while aesthetically treating the natural colour of the lips, also provided a layer of protection.

There is also a sensuousness and lyrical quality about the Sringār ritual, which has inspired poets, painters and sculptors for several centuries to create works of art. Exquisite miniature paintings of Mughal and Rajput origin depict beautiful ladies lovingly labouring over each step of the Sringār routine: the intricately sculpted temple walls of Khajuraho, Konarak, Halebidu, etc., show graceful women languorously combing their lustrous hair and sprinkling the powder with the *sindoor*, applying *henna* to their hands, or gazing their reflection in the mirror: innumerable Sanskrit and Hindi texts have devoted pages in describing this elaborate routine.

In this calendar, Air-India presents a contemporary interpretation of the process of Sringār as described in an 11th century Sanskrit text. The sixteen processes, only twelve, primarily pertaining to the beautification of the face and hair, are depicted in the form of charismatic portraits of young Indian ladies of today.



मङ्गलस्नान  
Mangalasnāna  
The ritual bath



केशपाशसुगन्धीकरण  
Kesāpāśasugandhīkaraṇa  
Drying the hair with the smoke of fragrant incense



अंशुरागविलेपन  
Anśuragavilepana  
Skin refreshed with perfumed herbal paste



कज्जलरेखादीपन  
Kajjalarekhaḍipana  
Collyrium to accentuate the eyes



तिलकप्राशन  
Tilakaprasādhana  
Kumkum - the auspicious red powder mark on the forehead



मुखप्राशन  
Mukhaprasādhana  
Beautification of the face with decorative symbols



केशपाशरचना  
Kesāpāśaracana  
Styling the luxuriant tresses



अलकानिवेशन  
Alakākanivāsaṇa  
Highlighting the lips



अलङ्कारपरिधान  
Alaṅkāraparidhāna  
Adorning the face with elaborate ornaments



दर्पणविलोकन  
Darpanavilokaṇa  
A glimpse in the mirror for the final touches



मुखविशोधन  
Mukhaviśodhana  
Paan - the breath freshener



लज्जावनतमुखी  
Lajjavānatamukhī  
Diaphanous veil for the bashful beauty

Photographs by Suresh Sheth.

Research and Costumes:

Bhanu Rajopadhye Athaiya

We appreciate the assistance of Tribhovandas Bhimji Zaveri, Zaveri Bazaar, Bombay, for the loan of jewellery, and D. Popli and Sons, Bombay, for the loan of props.

Text: Uttara Patil, Air-India

Concept and design: Air-India Art Studio.



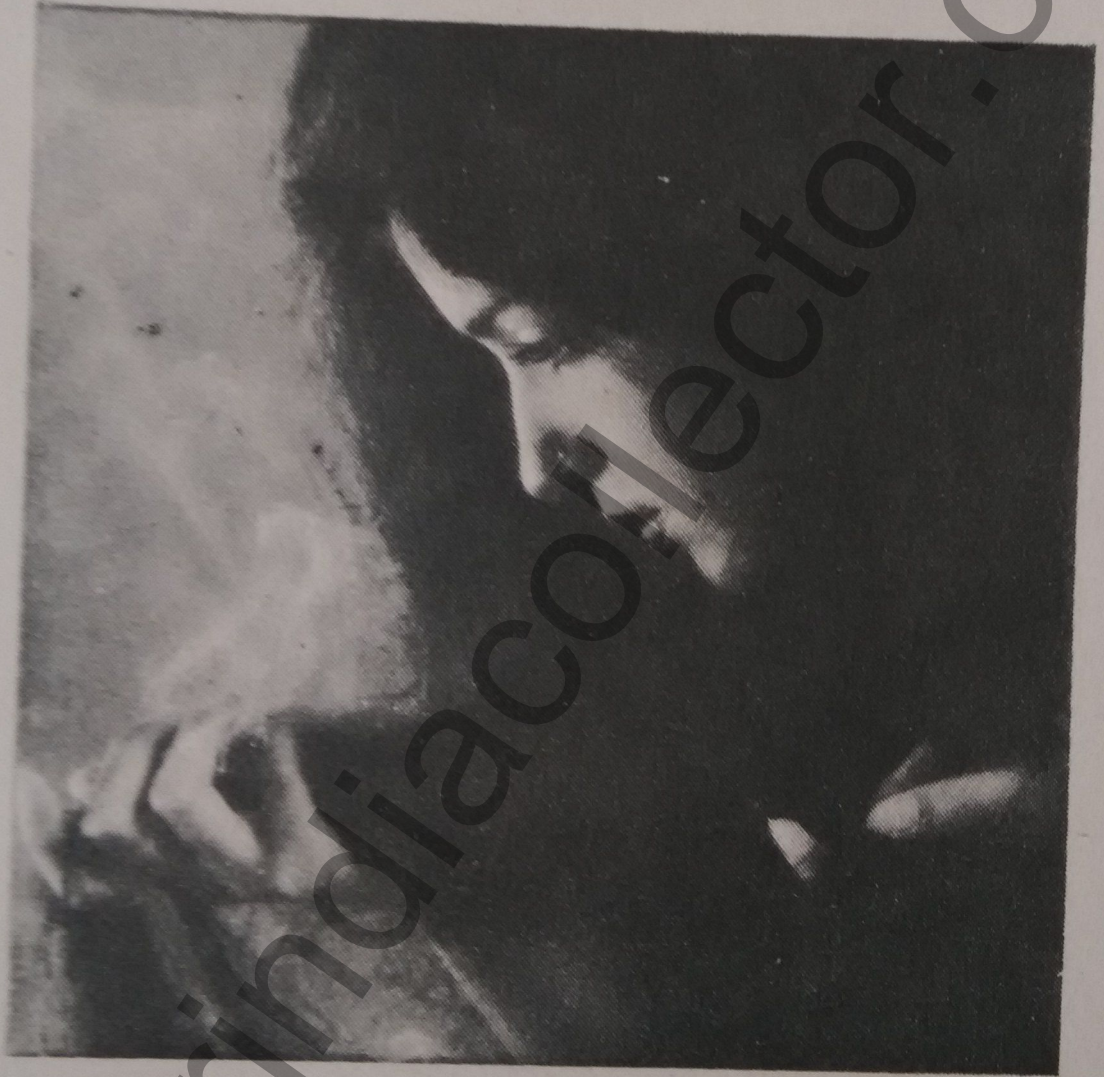


मङ्गलस्नान

Mangalasnāna

The ritual bath





केशपाशसुगन्धीकरण

Kesapāśāsugandhīkaraṇa

Drying the hair with the  
smoke of fragrant incense





अङ्गरागविलेपन

Angarāgavilepana

Skin refreshed with  
perfumed herbal paste





कज्जलरेखादीपन  
Kajjalarekhādīpana

Collyrium to accentuate the eyes



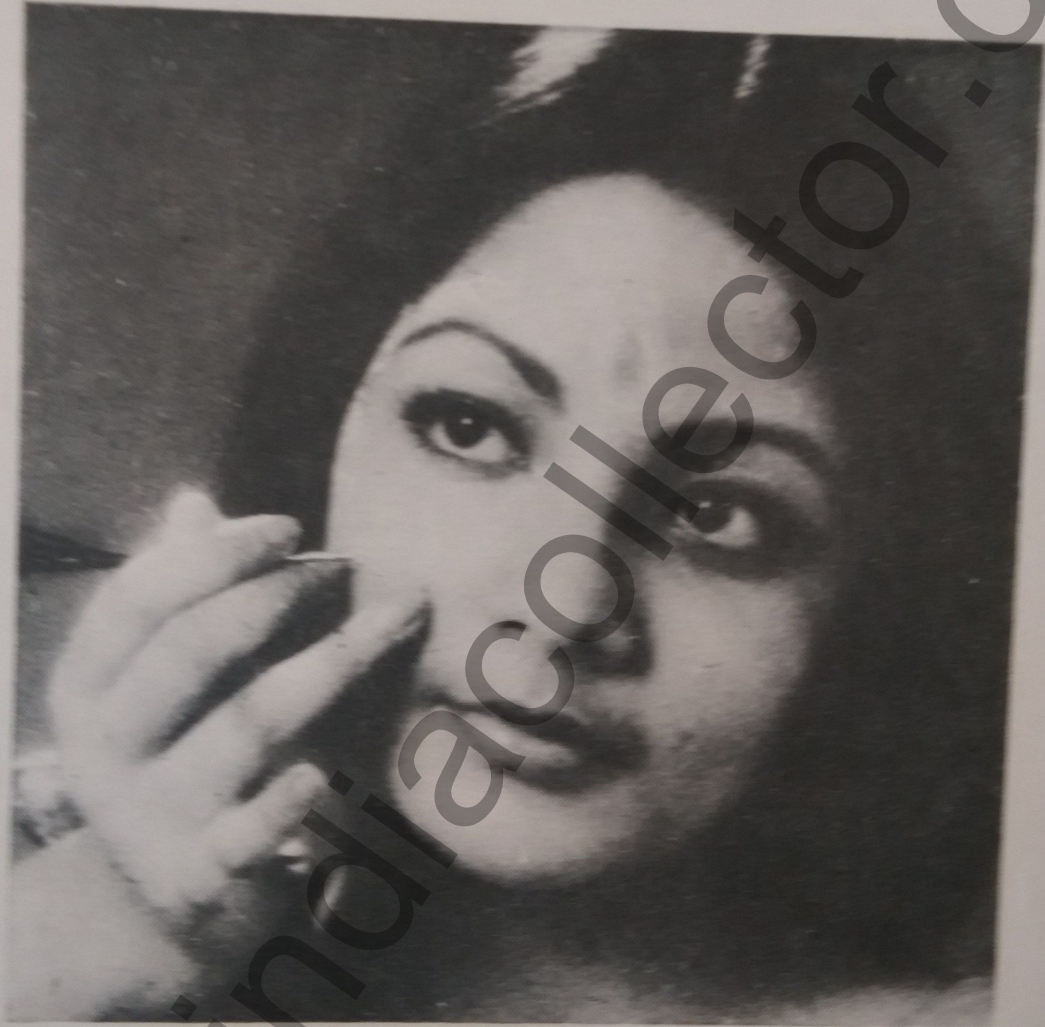


तिलकप्रसाधन

Tilakaprasadhana

Kumkum - the auspicious red  
powder mark on the forehead





मुखप्रसाधन

Mukhaprasādhana

Beautification of the face  
with decorative symbols





केशपाशरचनां

Kesāpaśaracanā

Styling the luxuriant tresses





अलक्तकनिवेशन  
Alaktakaniveśana

Highlighting the lips





अलङ्कारपरिधान  
Alaṅkāraparidhāna

Adorning the face with  
elaborate ornaments





दर्पणविलोकन  
Darpanavilokana

A glimpse in the mirror  
for the final touches



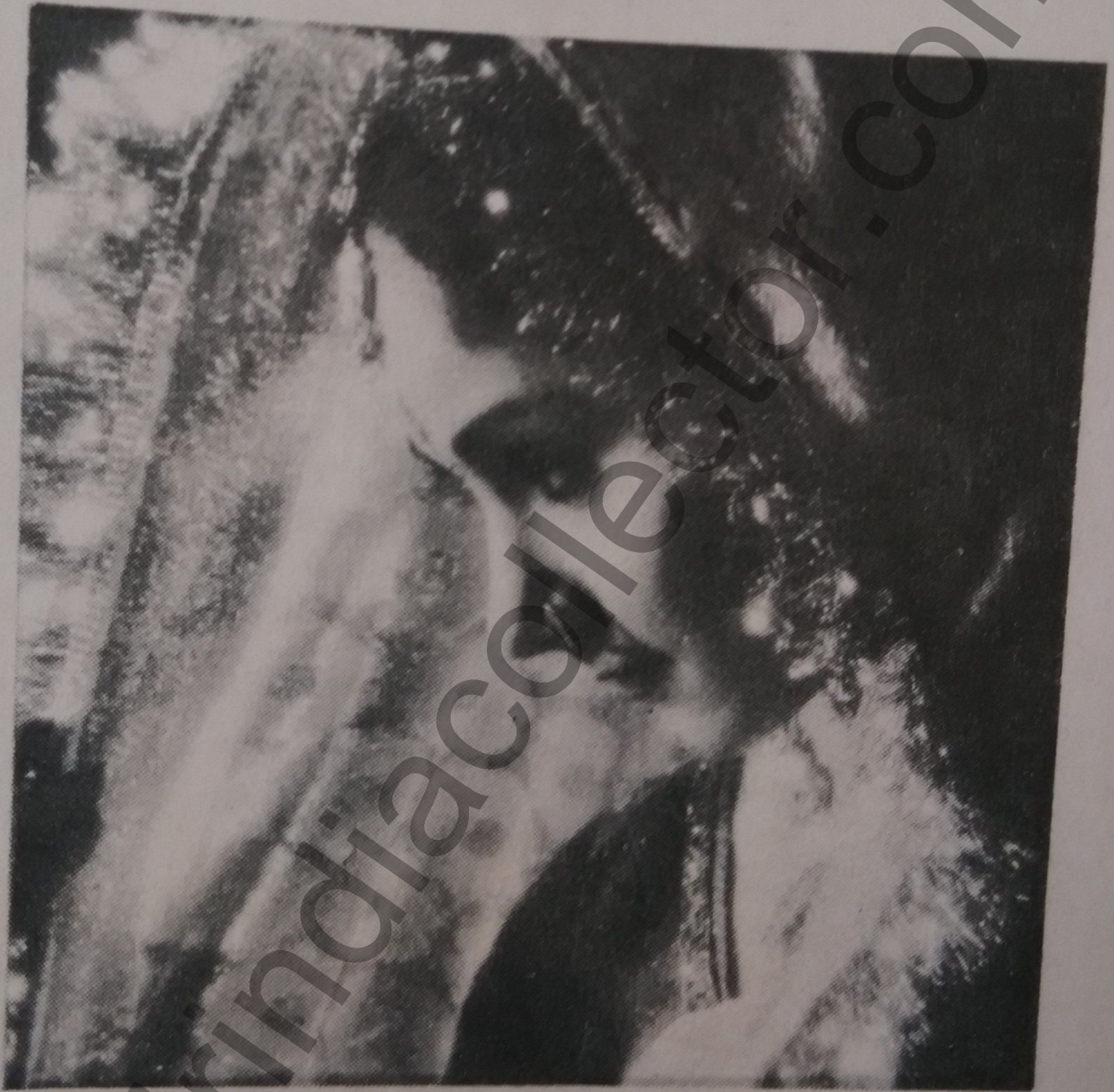


मुखविशोधन

Mukhavisodhana

Paan - the breath freshener





लज्जावनतमुखी  
Lajjāvanatamukhi

Diaphanous veil for the  
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Ancient writers have classified the decoration of the body into 16 modes of adornment, the earliest references to which are found in the classical Indian epic, the Ramayana of Tulsidas.

Though the exact definition of these Sringār varied from region to region depending on local customs and requirements, some of the more common rituals were—bathing; anointing the skin with herbal oils; drying the hair with smoke of incense; application of *kumkum* on the forehead, *mehndi* or *henna* on the hands, *alta* on the feet, collyrium in the eyes; combing, plaiting and arranging the hair; consumption of betel or *paan* for refreshing the breath; beeswax for the lips; flowers to bedeck the

hair, and innumerable kinds of ornaments to adorn the body. It is believed that 32 different kinds of jewels were identified for such adornment. This ritual of Sringār, apart from its aesthetic connotation, had a physical relevance, and each element had its own particular significance.

The basic essential was bathing—it has a special place in the Indian ethos; bathing led to the cleansing and purification of the body—a prerequisite for any ritual or religious ceremony. Oiling of the body and perfuming it with herbal essences rendered it shiny as bronze, a mirror of purity, worthy of adornment and respect; collyrium heightened the glow of the eyes, and also had medicinal properties; the auspicious *kumkum* on the forehead warded off the evil eye; *henna* had a cooling effect so valuable in the scorching heat of the plains; and beeswax, while accentuating the natural colour of the lips, also provided a layer of protection.

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aṅkāraparidhāna

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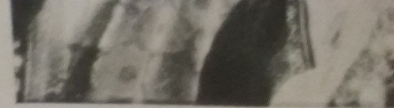
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