

A Study on the Jewellery as Emotional Material for Culture, Intimacy, Memory, and Identity

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Abstract Ornamentation has long been central to many cultures, serving as a means of preserving and reinforcing a community's cultural heritage. It acts as a powerful medium for expressing identity, spirituality, and tradition (Miller, 2005; Küchler & Miller, 2005; Turner, 1967)¹. This paper not only explores the cultural significance of Jewellery across the most prominent communities of the world, but also how it's played a rather most important role in acting as an instrument for intimate stimulation. While many scholars focus on the "status symbol" aspect of gold and gems, looking at how objects create or reinforce private bonds between people or even between a person and their spiritual beliefs adds a beautiful layer of depth to the study of human bonds (Miller, 2005; Gell, 1998)².

Keywords: Jewellery, Intimacy, Cultural heritage, Mythology, Ovid, Kamasutra.

Introduction

Jewellery has been long associated with spirituality, social status symbols, healing properties and just as an object for abstract expression. Jewellery is among the oldest decorative arts (Jewelry history and evolution through time, September 11, 2021)³. Jewellery transitioned from foraged materials such as gems, bone, shell, and obsidian to masterfully crafted metals and gemstones as technology advanced. This change turned primitive decorations into cultural masterpieces that continue to influence the style of jewellery worldwide today. Gemstones are also associated with divinity of gods and their parables. In many traditions, jewellery isn't just an accessory; it's a living entity or a conduit for gods. The myth of the Brisingamen (Simek, 2007)⁴ in Norse Mythology provides one example of how jewellery represents irresistible power of desire and the need to possess beauty among God and men alike. The Sorla pattr, (Edwards, 1985)⁵ the goddess Freyja discovered an exceptionally crafted necklace being forged by four dwarves inside of a cavern. Captivated by the artifact's unparalleled beauty, she sought to possess it. However, the craftsmen rejected all offers of conventional wealth, such as gold and silver. Instead, they proposed a transactional form of intimacy, requiring the goddess to spend one night with each of the four dwarves. Other few examples of myth and folklore would be the Necklace of Harmonia, The *Syamantaka* etc, all highlight all the vast history of human and godly desire and show how jewellery can carry the "energy" of its origin (Gell, 1998)⁶.

Likewise, in physical intimacy jewellery may quite literally behave like a catalyst to amplify the intimate connection between practitioners, which will be further detailed in this paper.

¹ Küchler, S., & Miller, D. (2005). *Clothing as material culture*. Berg Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350045804> ; Turner, V. (1967). Symbols in African ritual. *Science*, 156(3775), 157–166. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.156.3775.157>

² Miller, D. (2005). Materiality: An introduction. In *Materiality* (pp. 1–50). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822386872> ; Gell, A. (1998). *Art and agency: An anthropological theory*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198280132.001.0001>

³ Jewelry history and evolution through time. (2021, September 11). *ItsHot*. <https://www.itshot.com/jewelry/jewelry-history-and-evolution-through-time>

⁴ Simek, R. (2007). *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. D. S. Brewer. <https://doi.org/10.7722/j.ctt81s6n>

⁵ Edwards, P. (1985). *Sörla pátr*. In *Seven Viking Romances* (pp. 175–200). Penguin Classics. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203703069> ; Simek, R. (2007). *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*. D. S. Brewer. <https://doi.org/10.7722/j.ctt81s6n>

⁶ Gell, A. (1998). *Art and agency: An anthropological theory*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198280132.001.0001>

Classification of Jewellery function

While jewellery is commonly studied through aesthetics, symbolism, and material value, its role as a facilitator of physical intimacy remains comparatively underexplored.

For a better understanding of this study jewellery pieces could be categorized as only ornamental and intimately functional, then further into types of jewellery and finally by their mode of intimacy (Kuchler & Miller, 2005)⁷.

For example, in Table 1:

Tactile jewellery, restrictive jewellery or interactive jewellery and even jewellery that's memory embedded and evokes nostalgia (Gell, 1998; Dormer, 1994; Küchler & Miller, 2005).⁸

Table 1.

Category	Description
Tactile Jewellery	Encourages touch, stroking, holding and sensation across the body.
Restrictive Jewellery	Implies restraint, enclosure, tension and more functionality based.
Interactive Jewellery	Requires participation from another person and positioning of the body.

Be it necklaces, waist chains, rings, anklets etc. they all could be categorized by what kind of physical interaction it enables to get a better understanding of its functionality and whether it's meant solely for ornamental and sentimental purposes or could potentially act as a subject for our study in this paper (Entwistle, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Woodward, 2007).⁹

Variation in Jewellery Pieces and Functionality

From the Kamasutra by Vātsyāyana (Book II and Book IV), Jewellery appears repeatedly in descriptions of beautification, courtship, and lovemaking. Necklaces accentuate bodily movement, breasts, collarbones, and the neck. As quoted by famous sexologist Seema Anand from a mention in Kamasutra again, "the human body can be bifurcated into two equal halves with 15 distinct erogenous zones on either side of the body" (Vatsyayana, 1883)¹⁰. And further the neck and clavicle function as anatomically sensitive zones as they accommodate neural, muscular, and circulatory connections between the upper body and the head. (Jung, Black, & Bhutta., 2023)¹¹. Thus, the neck being one of the most sensitive and prominent zones, often plays a central role in intimate initiation. Necklaces across culture come in different shapes, sizes, lengths, material such as metal, gemstones, pearls and fabric etc. The skin on these areas of the body is also evidently thinner thus greater stimulation by common jewellery materials like metal and gemstones. The tactile feel of jewellery is also affected by the thermal conductivity and surface properties of materials, each producing different sensory reactions. Aside from tactile and constraining stimulation, neckpieces also serve as visual objects of evocation, highlighting sensitive and intimate areas of the body (Entwistle, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton,

⁷ Küchler, S., & Miller, D. (2005). *Clothing as material culture*. Berg Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350045804>

⁸ Dormer, P. (1994). *The art of the maker: Skill and its meaning in art, craft and design*. Thames & Hudson. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315077109>

⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981). *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139167611> ; Entwistle, J. (2000). *The fashioned body: Fashion, dress and modern social theory*. Polity Press. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136754940100400313>

¹⁰ Vatsyayana. (1883). *The Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana* (R. F. Burton & F. F. Arbuthnot, Trans.). Cosmopoli Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429500152>

¹¹ ung, A., Black, S., & Bhutta, M. F. (2023). Anatomy and sensory significance of the cervical region: Clinical and functional perspectives. *Clinical Anatomy*, 36(4), 512–521. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ca.23984>

1981; Woodward, 2007).¹² Neckpieces can contribute to experiences of physical awareness and interpersonal intimacy. Variations in form, such as elongated pendants extending toward the bosom or constrictive chokers encircling the neck, influence both bodily perception and symbolic interpretation through mechanisms of movement. Neck stimulation is very relational and interpersonally driven (Howes, 2003; Fisher, 1990; Steele, 1996).¹³

Roman erotic culture explicitly connected ornamentation with seduction and flirtation. In the famous Roman poet Ovid, emphasizes that feminine beauty is enhanced through deliberate adornment and cultivated presentation (*Ars Amatoria* 3.101–120). Any form of decorative beautification could act as an enhancing active apparatus for love making. Ovid also suggested that attraction works through partial concealment, which implies that a necklace, placed right above the bosom of a woman or the chest of a man would aesthetically stroke implication and movement to guide in seduction. (Fredrick, 2002; Richlin, 1992; Wyke, 1994).¹⁴

Another very impressive study by Ramachandran (McGeoch, 2014)¹⁵ on somatosensory cortex, which is the part of the brain responsible for processing sensations from the body, shows that the hand representation in the primary somatosensory cortex (S1) is dynamically influenced by motor activity, meaning sensory perception can be potentially enhanced during active hand movements. This neural interaction between touch and movement suggests that jewellery worn on the hands could trigger physical intimacy by affecting both sensory and motor brainwork during touch. From the fingertips to the wrists, hands are subjected to not just tactile sensations but also interactive foreplay. Foreplay is a highlighted mention in this paper, as most of the argument above is encircled around it. Thus, hands being the most obvious mediators in foreplay, are nuanced control and sensation during intimate contact. Evidently so, the rhythmic clinking of glass or metal bangles was intended to announce a woman's presence, that could be used to draw attention without a word. Jewellery on the wrists and fingers is physically stimulating, working through tactile feedback loops and sensory mapping. (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998).¹⁶ The wrist is a critical "tactile gateway" because the skin is thin and the ulnar and radial nerves are close to the surface (Ya-Xian, 1999).¹⁷

Going further, the "Nath" a prominent Indian ancient jewellery is considered most seductive of all in many documentations. The Kamasutra and related Tantric texts often link the breath or Prana to sexual energy. The Nath, by its placement, draws attention to the nostrils and the rhythm of the breath, which quickens during arousal. The Kamasutra deals with the visual and social power of the Nath, but later interpretations and traditional Ayurvedic practice have it that certain points on the nose (specifically the left nostril) are connected to the female reproductive system. Piercing this area was thought to help with menstrual pain and to increase arousal. (Lawson, 2011; Wujastyk, 2003; Alter, 2000).¹⁸

In a 2014 case study report to check the erogenous intensity of body parts, sample of some 800 participants, completed a survey of 41 body parts (Turnbull, 2014)¹⁹, in which feet surprising ranked lower than estimated. However, it is proven that the ankle is a high-traffic area for nerves that connect the entire lower body to the brain. Not only that, but it is also

¹² Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981). *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139167611>; Woodward, I. (2007). *Understanding material culture*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446217573>

¹³ Fisher, S. (1990). *The evolution of psychological concepts about the body*. In *The female body in Western culture* (pp. 45–67). Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674867628>; Howes, D. (2003). *Sensual relations: Engaging the senses in culture and social theory*. University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11908>; Steele, V. (1996). *Fetish: Fashion, sex and power*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195115796.001.0001>

¹⁴ Fredrick, D. (2002). *The Roman gaze: Vision, power, and the body*. Johns Hopkins University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.60395>; Ovid. (1990). *The art of love (Ars Amatoria)* (J. H. Mozley, Trans.). Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.4159/DLCL.ovid-art_love.1929; Wyke, M. (1994). *Woman in the mirror: The rhetorical invention of femininity in Augustan Rome*. *Roman Studies*, 84, 134–151. <https://doi.org/10.2307/300873>

¹⁵ McGeoch, P. D. (2014). *The neuroscience of body ownership and sensory perception*. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00001>

¹⁶ Ramachandran, V. S., & Blakeslee, S. (1998). *Phantoms in the brain: Probing the mysteries of the human mind*. William Morrow. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e619712007-001>

¹⁷ Ya-Xian, Z., Suetake, T., & Tagami, H. (1999). Number of cell layers of the stratum corneum in normal skin—Relationship to the anatomical location on the body, age, sex and physical parameters. *Archives of Dermatological Research*, 291(10), 555–559. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s004030050453>

¹⁸ Alter, J. S. (2000). *Knowing dīl ka rasta: The body and embodiment in Indian medical thought*. University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812204926>; Lawson, E. T. (2011). Body modification and cultural identity in South Asian adornment traditions. *Fashion Theory*, 15(3), 321–340. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174111X12954359478896>; Wujastyk, D. (2003). *The roots of Ayurveda: Selections from Sanskrit medical writings* (3rd ed.). Penguin Classics. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1nh3k8h>

¹⁹ Turnbull, O. H., Lovett, V. E., Chaldecott, J., & Lucas, M. D. (2014). Reports of intimate touch: Erogenous zones and somatosensory mapping. *Cortex*, 53, 146–154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2013.07.006>

know that lower limbs are of especially notable for erotic interest. Even if we consider these interactions non-somatic sources of pleasure or rather simply fetishes (Aoyama et al., 2012; Gallace & Spence, 2014),²⁰ they act as primarily visual form of desire and may develop via objects outside the body. Such associations are likely mediated through visual rather than somatosensory systems, thereby challenging the Ramachandran proposal mentioned earlier but still act as a notable mention in this study. Thus, any beautification of the feet topped by its preexisting sensitivity to stimulus, is bound to enhance sensual foreplay (Turnbull et al., 2014; Classen, 2005)²¹.

Similarly to the "Nath" another significant jewellery piece would be the waist chain, called "Ileke" and "Jigida" in South Africa and famously known as the "Kamarband" in Indian culture. It encircles the body's physical centre of gravity and acts as a constant tactile bridge between the upper and lower nervous systems. The skin around the waist is governed by the T10 to T12 spinal nerves. This region is highly sensitive to "circumferential pressure" the feeling of being encircled. A waist chain provides a constant 360-degree tactile input that the brain interprets as a "boundary" or "embrace". (McGeoch, 2014) (Field, 2010)²². Also, in the Greco – Roman cultures the "Gordian Knot" was often tied at the waist chain. The "untying of the girdle" became a historical euphemism for the consummation of marriage (Edwards, 1985; Faraone, 1999; Olson, 2008)²³. The waist already being a sensually attractive zone for more individuals, undoubtedly holds some weight in the hierarchy of erogenous zones. Sociologically, the waist is the site of the "Madhya" or the centre (Doniger & Kakar, 2002; Sivaramamurti, 1978).²⁴, representing a biological boundary where vulnerability meets strength. Because the skin here is thin and the underlying musculature is responsive to the rhythm of breath, it functions as a highly reactive canvas for touch, a single point of contact on the waist can trigger a global neurological response, grounding the individual while simultaneously heightening their state of sensory readiness. It is, in essence, the gatekeeper of the body's most intimate silhouette. (Dehejia, 1997; Alter, 2000).²⁵

Now conclusively, the back is frequently described in neuroanatomy and art history as the "vast frontier" of the body (Gallace & Spence, 2010; Classen, 2005).²⁶ Because it is largely out of the wearer's line of sight, it represents a unique psychological space, thus being a site of vulnerability where touch is felt with heightened intensity because it cannot be visually anticipated. The back is a sensitive zone with a series of neurological bands spanning on a wider area of surface. For something like a waist chain to function as a sensual stimulator, a variety of factors could be highlighted. The spine acts as a thermal conductor. A metal chain resting on the vertebrae provides a sharp contrast between the "cold" of the ornament and the "heat" of the spinal column, keeping the nervous system in a state of constant, low-level arousal. In classical Indian aesthetics and the Kamasutra, the back is viewed as a landscape of grace, specifically focused on the "Anka" or the curve of the spine. A back chain, often an extension of a necklace or could be a specific Kamarband attachment, serves to draw the eye down the length of the spine, emphasizing the "S-curve" (Tribhanga) of the body. (Doniger & Kakar, 2002; Boner & Sharma, 1966).²⁷ In the Kamasutra, the back is identified as a site for "Nakhapada"

²⁰ Aoyama, A., Krummenacher, P., Palla, A., & Kawato, M. (2012). Neural mechanisms of body perception and erotic visual attention. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 3, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00395>; Gallace, A., & Spence, C. (2014). In touch with the future: The sense of touch from cognitive neuroscience to virtual reality. *Oxford University Press*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199644469.001.0001>

²¹ Turnbull, O. H., Lovett, V. E., Chaldecott, J., & Lucas, M. D. (2014). Reports of intimate touch: Erogenous zones and somatosensory mapping. *Cortex*, 53, 146–154. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cortex.2013.07.006>; Classen, C. (2005). *The book of touch*. Berg Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474214988>

²² Field, T. (2010). Touch for socioemotional and physical well-being: A review. *Developmental Review*, 30(4), 367–383. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2011.01.001>; McGlone, F., Wessberg, J., & Olsson, H. (2014). Discriminative and affective touch: Sensing and feeling. *Neuron*, 82(4), 737–755. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2014.05.001>

²³ Edwards, C. (1985). *The politics of immorality in ancient Rome*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511552717>; Faraone, C. A. (1999). *Ancient Greek love magic*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674039216>; Olson, K. (2008). *Dress and the Roman woman: Self-presentation and society*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203934302>

²⁴ Doniger, W., & Kakar, S. (2002). *Kamasutra*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192839824.001.0001>; Sivaramamurti, C. (1978). *Chitrasutra of the Vishnudharmottara*. Kanak Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003278542>

²⁵ Dehejia, V. (1997). *Indian art*. Phaidon Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/777991>; Alter, J. S. (2000). *Knowing dil ka rasta: The body and embodiment in Indian medical thought*. University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812204926>

²⁶ Gallace, A., & Spence, C. (2010). The science of interpersonal touch: An overview. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 34(2), 246–259. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2008.10.004>; Classen, C. (2005). *The book of touch*. Berg Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474214988>

²⁷ Doniger, W., & Kakar, S. (2002). *Kamasutra*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192839824.001.0001>; Boner, A., & Sharma, S. R. (1966). *Silpa Prakasa: Medieval Orissan Sanskrit text on temple architecture*. E. J. Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004492370>

or fingernail marks (White, 2003; Alter, 2000)²⁸. Because the back is the most unprotected side of the human form, allowing someone to place a chain there is a profound gesture of psychological surrender.

Conclusion

Jewellery's significance extends well beyond its ornamental and status symbol functions to encompass a deeply intimate role in human relationships and cultural expression. Throughout history and across diverse cultures, jewellery has acted as a bridge connecting the physical, emotional, and spiritual realms. As demonstrated, specific jewellery pieces such as necklaces, bangles, waist chains, and nose rings interact with sensitive anatomical zones, enhancing tactile stimulation and serving as catalysts for intimacy. These adornments not only accentuate physical beauty but also evoke sensory responses and relational dynamics that foster closeness and desire.

Mythological narratives like the Brisingamen and cultural texts like the Kamasutra reveal jewellery as a medium of exchange, desire, and spiritual energy, reinforcing its role in intimate human experiences. The interplay between material properties, bodily sensitivity, and cultural symbolism creates a nuanced language of touch, sight, and memory embedded in jewellery. This layered functionality challenges the traditional view of jewellery solely as a decorative or economic object, highlighting its capacity to actively shape intimate interactions and communication.

By exploring jewellery as an instrument for intimacy, this study opens new avenues for understanding how physical objects mediate human connection, desire, and identity. It invites further interdisciplinary research into the sensory, psychological, and cultural dimensions of adornment, enriching our appreciation of jewellery as a dynamic participant in the intimate lives of individuals and communities.

²⁸ White, D. G. (2003). *Kiss of the Yogini: "Tantric sex" in its South Asian contexts*. University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226895154.001.0001> ; Alter, J. S. (2000). *Knowing dil ka rasta: The body and embodiment in Indian medical thought*. University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812204926>