

# COSMETICS IN INDIA :

*A Brief Guide for the Student and the Intending Manufacturer*

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THE MANUFACTURE and use of cosmetics and perfumes in India are by no means of recent origin ; their beginnings may, in fact, be traced far back into the mists of remote antiquity. Turning the pages of history, we find references to the liberal use of various cosmetics and perfumes by kings, courtiers and commoners as a normal part of their daily routine. Naturally occurring materials were prepared and compounded to give various types of cosmetic preparations, which corresponded in many essential ways to those in use to-day. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between perfumes and cosmetics in ancient India, and the manufacture of these allied aids to beauty may usually be regarded as one overall process rather than a series of deliberately separated practices.

Cosmetic and perfume receptacles of many kinds have been discovered in some of the oldest excavations of Mohenjadaró and other Indian archæological sites. Very lucid descriptions of these and the art of beauty culture of ancient India have been recorded in the early works of our celebrated poets, scholars, dramatists and historians. Even to-day, we find many people in India, using, as a matter of routine, judicious blends of some of the naturally occurring materials which bear closer resemblance to ancient Indian cosmetics than to those of the present day.

A very interesting account of the art and science of cosmetics in the Gupta Age and in the time of the poets Kālidāsa and Bāna have been made available to us by Sadgopal.<sup>1</sup> A detailed study of these old writings reveals that some cosmetic preparation or other was used at every stage of human activity from the cradle to the grave.

## FOR THE BATH

Prior to bathing, men, women and children used to massage their bodies with several pastes (creams) and tissue oils to render the skin (particularly the limbs and face) soft and supple. Sandalwood was used for the preparation of several of these pastes, which were called *Anulepana*, *Angaraga*, etc., and several beneficial oils (tissue oils) were prepared from such fruits as ingudi, manatsila and harilata. During the bath, in addition to using scented waters like rose, geranium, etc., a soap-like preparation called *Phenaka* was also employed. Several medicinal herbs were commonly soaked in advance in the water intended for the bath.

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The after-bath toilet evidently used to take up quite a lot of time. The hair, after drying, was perfumed and warmed with the frankincense of Lodhra dust, Dhupa (gum benzoin), etc. The body was then smeared with a paste, prepared by mixing sandalwood dust, camphor, musk, saffron, etc., grinding them together and kneading the mixture to a fine paste with rose-water. This preparation was applied to the skin because of the medicinal properties of some of the ingredients and in order that they might keep the body always pleasantly scented. More or less as an ornament, the *Tilaka* or vermilion spot was impressed on the forehead by men, women and children alike. Women used to smear their breasts with several pastes for the cooling effect thus imparted.

Eye-brow pencils and eye shadows were used. Lips were painted with a lac dye and finished with Lodhra dust, although the chewing of betel leaves with the other necessary ingredients was equally popular for reddening the lips. Men used to chew scented tobacco along with betel leaves as a means of sweetening their breath.

The above is only the barest outline of the beauty culture of ancient India. Unfortunately, elaborate information on the subject was not hitherto available so easily to the modern student of cosmetics who was, therefore, naturally led to believe that such beauty aids had been largely introduced into India from foreign countries. More and more information on the subject is being brought to light by several Indian authors, and there is no doubt that exceedingly instructive and interesting information will be unfolded if the talented research workers in India divert their attention towards the revival of ancient Indian cosmetics and modify them to suit the present-day needs of the country.

#### COPING WITH TRADITION AND CLIMATE

Manufacturers of cosmetics in India are nowadays faced with a number of peculiar difficulties. To start with, a vast majority of people in India still prefer the traditional Indian methods of beauty culture, notwithstanding the changing conditions and the eye-catching advertisements in favour of modern cosmetics. This ancient art is something in which they have a firm belief (even to the extent of being very uncompromising and absolutely conservative) because, in this case, they need not rely upon the veracity or otherwise of newspaper advertisements. Traditional methods have been passed on to them from their forefathers and they practise them almost as rites and rituals, although not to the same extent as did their ancestors. If you tell such a conservative Indian that by using modern cold creams, skin foods and vanishing creams, etc., he or she can keep his skin always in a velvety condition and that he would do well to use them, out comes the instantaneous reply that he needs no special preparation for that purpose ;

he has taken good care of his skin as a normal practice, he will tell you, by using several oils (which he knows by practice are good enough for him) for massaging the skin (face and limbs) at night and washing off the excess in the morning with a fine paste of soap-nut powder. He further argues that this practice does keep the skin in a velvety condition, and even if, by chance, he were to skip this treatment for a day or two, his skin still does not look ugly by any means. This very deep-rooted and pre-formed prejudice has been the greatest obstacle in the way of popularising modern cosmetics in India. In fact, any preparation presented in a modern type of container is regarded with some suspicion, since all modern cosmetics go in such packings. He further holds that a product good in itself does not require a "camouflaging" container to sell it!

Secondly, the geographical position of India itself presents a number of intricate problems to large-scale manufacturers of cosmetics and importers of foreign cosmetics in India. This is a country where one can experience all types of climates, right from the scorching and blazing sun of Thar down to the biting frost of the Himalayas. There are places where the rainfall is inconspicuously small and also places where the heaviest rainfall in the world is recorded. The relative humidity varies from 20 to 90 per cent. Perhaps there is no other place in the world where such extremities would be found!

#### VANISHING CREAM

Considering vanishing creams, the most commonly used modern cosmetic preparation, we find that it is quite difficult to prepare a good product which will be acceptable in all parts of India during all seasons of the year, with the result that the manufacturer will have to go on changing the formulation, depending upon the area where the product is to be used and also the prevailing climatic conditions. One would start profusely perspiring after using a normal vanishing cream during the rainy months and summer months in places where the relative humidity is on the high side. Several authorities have opined that this could be minimised by reducing the percentage of humectants used therein. A product with a subnormal content of humectants will, however, be lacking in easy spreadability, and will have a strong tendency to "vanish" in the container itself. This is probably the reason for the premature drying up of vanishing creams in India—whether of Indian make or imported ones. Even the usual percentage of hygroscopic agents will not be sufficient to retain the requisite amount of moisture during the summer months. The addition of certain special humectants and other auxiliary materials will doubtless solve some of these difficulties, but all of them have their limitations. For instance, glycerin, the conventional humectant in India, can partly or wholly be replaced with diethylene glycol, which is less hygroscopic than glycerin and at the same time capable of

retaining an optimum moisture in the cream. The careful choice of certain emulsifying agents also helps in attaining a high degree of emulsification (hence contributing to the retention of moisture and stability of the product). But all these mean a lot of manipulation, requiring specialised knowledge at every stage. It has been customary with many Indian manufacturers and retailers to keep the cream jars inverted so that, should the product sink in the unopened jars during storage and/or shelf-life, the jars may appear full when opened! Hold the jars erect and lightly tap them on the palm; you will be surprised to find that quite a portion of the jars will be empty.

No perfect remedy has yet been found for this defect, which seems to be peculiar to India, and people have taken for granted that this defect is an intrinsic property of the vanishing cream itself.

### HAIR OILS

Other cosmetic preparations, like cold creams, lipsticks, rouges, nail polishes and enamels, liquid shampoos, deodorants, etc., are slowly finding their place in the make-up kit.

Another class of cosmetic preparations, which compares very favourably with vanishing creams in popularity, is represented by hairdressing preparations, perfumed and medicated oils representing the most important items. Medicated oils have been very well accepted in the Indian market, the oils most commonly used for the purpose being castor oil, sesame oil and coconut oil. There are many more specialised hair oils which enjoy far greater popularity than any other hairdressing preparations in India, because of their real or supposed medicinal properties. The manufacture and use of such oils have been known in India since time immemorial. Most of them are prepared by maceration processes (some, with jasmine, rose and henna perfumes, being prepared by a modified enfleurage process). There are many medicinal herbs like Trifla, Shekakai, Brahmi, Jaborandi, Amla, etc., which are used in the preparation of hair tonics and, in effect, these have stood the test of time very well. Sesame oil has been the most commonly used base for such oils, though one firm specialises in using coconut oil in their preparation.

Hair oils are prepared in India by a number of processes, viz. : (1) hot maceration process; (2) cold maceration process; (3) water extraction process; (4) modified enfleurage process.

In the hot maceration process, the dried medicaments are crushed to a coarse powder and soaked in the oil base. The oil-medicament mixture is then slowly heated, with constant stirring, taking care to see that no charring of the oil takes place. When the oil has extracted all the medicinal principles (which stage can be judged by the colour and odour of the oil) the residue is allowed to settle after removing from the fire. The clear oil is drawn off

from the top and filtered. Needless to say, the oil used must be fresh and low in free fatty acids, etc. The danger of the oil becoming charred always accompanies the process.

In the cold maceration process, the crushed herbs are freed from unwanted portions and allowed to remain in the purified oil for several days with constant stirring. When the oil has absorbed the active principles of the medicinal herbs, as will be evident from the colour and odour of the treated oil, it is filtered, dried and bottled. The product obtained is of very high quality, and is correspondingly expensive.

In the water extraction process, the active principles of the herbs are first extracted by boiling them with water and the extract further boiled with the oil base. This process does not seem to be very effective, as many of the constituents which would have been easily taken up by the oil may not be fully compatible with water. Further, the oil will be in direct contact with water, traces of which, if left in the oil, invite problems of rancidity. The only advantage of this process is that it is a hot maceration process without the risk of charring.

The modified enfleurage process, as practised in India, is based on the fact that fresh sesame seed kernel has a very good affinity for the volatile constituents of flowers and leaves. Bags of sesame seeds are soaked in water for about two to three hours, by which time the husk becomes loosened. The bags are then removed from water and gently rubbed by hand, when all the husk separates. The bags are then emptied into large tubs of water. The light husks which float are removed by skimming and the heavier seed kernels are thoroughly dried in the sun. The seeds thus treated form the base for absorbing the odorous constituents of flowers. Only fresh flowers are selected for the process. A thin layer of seeds is spread over a clean surface and over it is spread a layer of fresh flowers. A man sits at one corner of the room and skilfully throws the seeds and flowers in alternate layers on the ground in such a way that the layers are very uniform in thickness. After all the flowers are covered up like this, the whole set-up is left undisturbed for a good twenty-four hours, when most of the essential oil from the flowers will have been transferred to the seed kernels. The residual flowers are then separated by sifting and the seeds treated over again with a fresh batch of flowers. (The used flowers, which have not lost their entire content of essential oil, are used to pre-treat fresh seeds before the latter are charged with fresh flowers.) When enough of the essential oil has been absorbed by the seeds—a stage which the operator knows by experience—the seeds are dried in the sun to remove traces of moisture and stored in bags. They are crushed as and when required and the freshly crushed oil has the fine, delicate odour of the natural flower, with a background of the warm sesame oil note. The chances of rancidity developing in the dry seeds

is very remote. This oil is used as such or after blending with other suitable perfumes. Excellent hair oils may be so obtained.

As regards perfumed hair oils, there has for a long while been some prejudice against their use. It has been the general belief that the constant use of perfumed hair oils leads to premature greying of the hair and also baldness! Many people will not use them, even very occasionally. The very term "hair oil" is taken to mean perfumed oils, as distinct from "pure oils," and quite frequently one can hear people saying, "Don't use hair oils, but use pure oils." All these baseless fears are fast disappearing now, however, and perfumed hair oils and other hairdressing preparations, such as brilliantines and hair creams, are becoming increasingly popular.

#### COSMETIC POWDERS

Next in importance and popularity to vanishing creams and hairdressing preparations in India are cosmetic powders. They are being used in India without any discretion, and it is rather unfortunate that, in most cases, it is not the quality of the product but its selling price that is the guiding factor. It may be said here that this is not a universal statement, but it definitely applies to a major part of the existing market.

Increasing the percentage of indigenous talc reduces the selling price of the product materially, but the disadvantages of any such increase beyond certain limits are obvious. An average Indian goes in for a cheap product and uses it for all purposes during all seasons of the year. Many people do not bother even to use an ordinary base like a vanishing cream, and, during the "winter" season, it is not uncommon to find rather dark-complexioned people smearing a layer of talcum powder of measurable thickness on the bare facial skin and moving about with glistening faces. This, in many cases, is overdone, even to the extent of developing a sharp contrast between the face and the immediately adjoining portions of the neck and the ears! It is only very recently that people are coming to know the proper use of the different cosmetic powders. Properly advertised face powders are now beginning to educate the public in the more skilful application of this important cosmetic.

#### ANJANA : HOME-MADE EYE-SHADOW

Eye cosmetics have also been widely used in India for a very long time, but more because of the "medicinal" properties claimed for them than for their decorative effects. Different types have, of course, been used in different countries. In Ancient Egypt, for example, a preparation called "kohl," corresponding to the present-day mascara, was once used extensively. Such preparations appear to have been based on lampblack, blacklead, and several metallic oxides and ochres as pigments, with vegetable oils as

binders and vehicles. These preparations were used because of their decorative effect. But the practice in India has been quite different. All these preparations reached a stage of high development very early, and there are among the older formulæ many which are still successfully being used. Every Indian home knows the manufacturing details and the use of these cosmetics, and nobody goes to the market in search of the same.

The method of manufacture adopted in Indian homes is, in brief, this :

A clean and dry copper plate is smeared with the fresh juice of the flowers (full-blossomed) of *Taberna Montana Coronarium* (locally called Nandibattalu). The plate is then allowed to dry in the sun before a second layer of the juice is applied to it. As much of the juice as possible is spread on to the plate, which is then finally dried thoroughly. This plate is then inverted over a lighted castor-oil lamp (the juice-smeared side facing the flame), the height being adjusted in such a way that as much of the soot as possible is collected on the plate, at the same time keeping the flame alive. More than one lamp may be used at a time to hasten the process. After sufficient soot has been collected (a fact that one is able to judge by experience) the plate is removed and cooled. All the deposit (including the initial juice layer) is scraped off and well mixed with the requisite quantity of pure and fresh cow's butter, in the cold, and kneaded thoroughly, taking care to see that the soot does not form lumps or ball up during the process. Quite often, a small quantity of borneol and saffron paste is added to it during kneading, to enhance its cooling effect and impart a pleasing odour. In spite of the fact that butter is easily susceptible to rancidity, it has been found that the Indian eye shadows prepared in the above manner remain unspoiled indefinitely. This preparation is commonly known as "anjana," "kadige," "kappu," etc., in different parts of the country. It is said to possess remarkable medicinal properties and to banish all sorts of irritation in the eyes, at the same time producing very pleasing and attractive soft black colour effects.

#### SUMMARY

From the foregoing, it will be clear that the use of cosmetics is not new in India, but that people are taking time to switch over from ancient Indian cosmetics to the more modern ones. There is, as I have said, one important factor which every manufacturer of cosmetics has to remember when formulating a cosmetic preparation for the Indian market. India, being a tropical country, experiences all types of climates at the same time in different parts of the country, and a product which is well accepted under one type of climatic conditions may not be satisfactory when and where there is a change in the climate. If we go a little deeper into the subject, it should not be very difficult to manufacture products which will be ideally suited for

Indian conditions instead of blindly following the standard formulations of the West, which have been devised after intensive research to meet mainly Western requirements. Manufacturers would do well to modify the same (even the technique of manufacture, if necessary) to suit Indian needs, so that, as far as possible, the consumer may be given the type of product he needs. Thereby a positive step would be taken towards the revival of ancient Indian cosmetics with such modifications as may be necessary to suit the needs of the present day. Another point worth noting is the desirability of using as high a proportion as may prove practicable of raw materials indigenous to India and sometimes of a highly specialised character. If this can be done while still following the tremendously successful methods of the West with Western methods of experimentation and control, a market of very great potentialities may be opened up in the not too distant future.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> *Indian Soap Journal*, Vol. XIV, No. 5, November, 1948.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XIV (serial commencing from No. 4, October, 1948).
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. XV, No. 11, May, 1950.