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A Detailed Case Study On Bindi And Tilak

Sonika Nayak
Assistant Professor
Department of History
Hooghly Women's College, Kolkata,India

Abstract: The word bindi in ancient times was known as bindu meaning a drop, a small particle, a dot.Bindu is a Sanskrit term which made its first appearance in the Nasadiya Sukta of the Rig Veda. Although bindi is popularly associated with women only, men too used to put a bindi on their forehead, more popularly known as tilak. Tilak is also a Sanskrit term. The concept of tilak can be traced back to very ancient societies such as the Aryans where a groom applied his blood on his bride's forehead as a symbol of marriage, which signified the life-long commitment to his blood. Although both the terms and meaning of bindi and tilak may somewhat seem to overlap each other, but still both these terms are not at all synonymous. The present paper attempts to focus in detail not only about the various unknown aspects of bindi and tilak but also tries to highlight the distinction between a bindi and tilak.

Keywords: *bindi, tilak, mark, line, horizontal, vertical*

Putting a bindi or a tilak has been an age-old practice prevalent in the Hindu society. While both bindi and tilak is put in the area just between the eyebrows, but tilak occasionally extends either vertically or horizontally on a large part of the forehead and may cover the nose also. Bindi is used by women as a popular fashion accessory in today's world but tilak is used till today for ceremonial, ritualistic purpose or for welcoming or honoring someone or for honoring a victory. On careful observation we find a huge difference between bindi and tilak on various ground-from its symbolic representation to its colour, from its myth to its utility purpose and the reason for its existence in today's modern society among all hindus.There must be something special for its age-long survival.

Chakras are the centres of psychic energy in the human body. There are seven chakras among which *Ajna* or the sixth chakra is said to be present in the area just between the eyebrows i.e. in the forehead. This area is known as the area of concealed wisdom or the "Command" centre. The cosmic energy resides here. It is the centre point wherein all experiences are gathered in total concentration. According to the tantric cult while meditating the latent energy known as *kundalini* arises from the base of the spine, goes towards the head and then the *ajna* becomes an outlet for this potent energy and thus becomes the major point of the base of creation. Creation represents everything auspicious and also symbolizes good fortune. *Ajna* is symbolized by a sacred lotus with two petals which corresponds to the colors deep blue, indigo or violet although it is traditionally described as white. It is at this point that the two sides nadi Ida(yoga) and Pingala are said to terminate and merge with the central channel Sushnumna,signifying the end of duality i.e. the feature of being dual(e.g.-light and dark, male and female).The seed syllable is OM while its presiding deity is Ardhanarishvara who is half male, half female-Shiva/Shakti.This end of duality is thus unity which leads to creation(creation of the Universe for example).*Ajna* is also the area which deals with our intelligence,conscience,spiritual devotion,austerity,intellect and is the centre of decision making. *Ajna* governs the brain, the nervous system, ears, nose, left eye and eye of personality. It is very important because it is through this that we understand our spiritual nature. *Ajna* along with *bindu* or *tilak* is known as the mystical "third eye" or "single eye" or the "all seeing eye of God". In metaphysics *bindu*/*tilak* is considered the point at which creation starts. During meditation, people focus their eyesight at the centre of their eyebrows. While performing this act of concentration a sort of energy is released between the eyebrows which results in a pressure. *Bindi/Tilak* actually helps to increase one's concentration reducing this pressure further preventing radiation of energy from outside.
Symbolically speaking the geometrical shapes of *bindi* and *tilak* have an unique interpretation.

Bindi-It is a mark in the shape of a dot. A dot is the most elemental of all forms. Its circular shape means it is the potent seed of all things (i.e. for creation).Hence *bindi* is associated with Shakti which is indicative of her potent energy. So women wear *bindi*.
Tilak-It is a mark represented by a line which means action. Based upon the Hindu caste system in ancient times and Vedic texts there were four kinds of *tilak*.
1. Brahman [sic] *tilak-Urdha pundra* (marking of two vertical lines on forehead. Now-a-days it is more of a U shaped *tilak*)
2. Kshatriya *tilak-Ardha Chandra* (half moon *tilak*, with a bindi or circular mark in the middle of the half arc.)
3. Vaishya *tilak-Tripundra* (three arc-like vertical lines on the forehead with a circular mark on top of it.)
4. Shudra *tilak*-Partal (large circular mark on forehead.)
But in today's world although all forms of *tilak* are still in use its casteist reason is gone.Besides, two main types of *tilak* have emerged-1.Vaishnavite *tilak* and 2.Shaivite *tilak.*

The Brahman *tilak* of yesterday's world is known s the Vaishnavite *tilak* of today's world.
The Vaishnavite *tilak* known as Urdha Pundram or Naamam consists of a long line starting from just below the hairline to almost the end of one's nose tip. It is intercepted in the middle by an elongated U.This *tilak*, traditionally made with sandalwood paste acts as a coolant. This *tilak* is praised in Hindu texts for its purity. Vishnu's *tilak* is always drawn vertically upwards because its indicates proactivity which is a very essential quality needed to be present in any person associated with household. To survive in the world one has to be like a strong warrior who marches into battle with no fear. Vishnu is the preserver of the Universe, hence he is associated with activity. Sandalwood paste or fragrant clay associated with Vishnu represents material, worldly practices. Sometimes the *tilak* is drawn as two lines representing the feet of Vishnu and in the middle a red line is put to represent Devi Laxmi.This *tilak* is applied to 12 parts of the body, reciting the 12 names of the Lord.

The Vaishya *tilak* of yesterday's world is known as the Shaivite *tilak* of today's world.
The Shaivite *tilak* is also known as Tripundra.Drawn as 3 horizontal stripes with white ash or *vibhuti*, it also has a circle or single vertical band in the middle on the forehead. The ash associated with Shiva represents asceticism and world renouncing practices. The horizontal mark of Shiva indicates passivity and inertia, the withdrawal of a hermit. This is because Lord Shiva is Tripurantak-The destroyer of the three assumed world of me, mine and not mine. He unlike Vishnu is a recluse and does not want to interact with the outside world. Thus the 3 horizontal lines of white ash acts as a remainder and reminder of what ultimately remains and the holy ash signifies the burning away of anava,karma and maya i.e. the destruction of the 3 worlds that humans inhabit-the natural,cultural,personal.Holy ash hence shows purity. The line or circle in the middle represents the third eye of Shiva which quickens spiritual insight.

The color of the *tilak* used to determine the caste of men wearing it in ancient India although by caste it actually meant profession in those days. But women of all castes used to wear a red *bindi* when they got married. An unmarried girl used to wear a black *bindi* but usually unmarried women did not wear a *bindi*. And a widow, a priestess or a woman who did not wish to get married used to wear a sandalwood white *bindi*. But what do the colors signify? This is what it means:-
1. **WHITE**-Tilak/Bindi of white color represents purity and love for divinity. Brahmins, teachers, priests, priestess; widow celibates wore/used this color.
2. **RED**-Signifies passion, love, courage, heroism, sacrifice.Kings, warriors, ministers, administrators, married women used it.
3. **YELLOW**-Signifies prosperity, practicality.Businessmen, traders used it.
4. **BLACK**-This color has a lot of meanings and significances. The service class of the society, unmarried women etc used it. This color was widely used because of its cheapness and availability. The color black denotes no worldly love and that's why unmarried women used to put it. This colored *bindi/tilak* was used as a protection against evil eye.Shudras wore it to signify their service to other castes (Das 2015).People associated with medicine also used it. A black horizontal line is drawn on a red *bindi* and sometimes ashes smeared on forehead with a red *bindi* in the middle are worn to depict the unity of Shiva and Shakti by holy people. Black is the color taken from ashes which represent Shiva who is portrayed as covered in ashes all the time while red signifies Shakti who is the ultimate energy. This kind of *bindi* represents the super fusion of Shiva and Shakti into Ardhanarishvara.

Apart from the similarities a few differences existed also between *bindi* and *tilak*. They are :-
1. *Tilak* has a religious connotation but *bindi* has no such connotation. *Bindi* is used for marriage purpose and is also a popular fashion accessory in today's world. But *tilak* still bears its age-old religious significance.
2. When the mark on the forehead is worn by women it is known as *bindi* and when worn by men it is known as *tilak.*
3. *Bindi* is available with paste, sticker or even jewellery but *tilak* is always applied either with powder or paste.

4. *Bindi* is worn in the area of the forehead just between the eyebrows but *tilak* is applied on other body parts as well.
5.While men in ancient times used to wear *tilak* according to caste, women of all castes used to wear a red *bindi* if married, no *bindi* or a black *bindi* if unmarried and white *bindi* if a widow.

Conclusion

Thus we see both *bindi* and *tilak* have immense significance in the cultural sphere of our Hindu society. Although the meaning and significance often seems to overlap each other yet both are very much different from each other. Many figurines and sculptures from Indus times have been found with the mark on the forehead.

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