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# Assessment of the Presence of *Magico-Ritualism* in Ancient Vadnagar

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**Abstract:** *This research paper is focused primarily on exploring the aspects of belief, ritualism, associated with amulets and 'eye-goddess' pendants recovered from excavation of Vadnagar. The presence of these artefacts implies that the residents of thriving city of Vadnagar were actively engaged in ritualistic activities for their well-being or for warding off the evil. It involves an in-depth analysis of the artefacts recovered from the excavation at the site. They have been classified on the basis of their typological and distinct characteristic features. Moreover, it deals with the changes observed among the artefacts throughout the cultural periods of Vadnagar.*

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**Keywords:** Amulets, Eye-goddess, Evil-eye, Terracotta, Shell, Bone, Metal

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## Introduction

Archaeological evidence of ritualistic objects in Indian history may be traced back to the proto-historic period, specifically to the Harappan culture. Although what prompted them to create objects related to various beliefs cannot be answered without delving deep into the psyche of humankind. Now, it is quite likely that beliefs can be discerned through their appearance. However, that is not always the case – as a particular object may have a dual purpose of being just a decorative ornament and a protective charm as well as warding off evil, depending upon the belief of the wearer. In such a scenario, objects such as amulets, pendants, rings often come to mind – which may be considered as ornamental beautifying the wearer but may also have magico-ritual purposes attached to them.

The concept of amulets is quite ancient and is widespread throughout cultures worldwide. Often highly esteemed for their efficacy in transmitting good fortune and warding off misfortune, amulets are still used by many in modern world. All human beings struggle for safety and sometimes diseases and disasters disrupt their lives as these elements are not under their control. In such cases, they seek symbols, charms or amulets to ensure their safety and well-being. From the *Atharvavedic* references it can be said that these amulets are solely meant for white magic, not black magic (Patki, 2014).

In order to understand the symbols or artefacts related to such beliefs, through this paper, an in-depth examination has been conducted primarily on the two types of artefacts found in the ancient city of Vadnagar to validate the perspective. The two categories of artefacts are amulets and 'eye-goddesses' pendants. The following study has been undertaken on these artefacts recovered across the cultural periods of the ancient Vadnagar to the contemporary era.

Table1: Material-wise Distribution of Amulets in Vadnagar

Material	Period									Total
	I	II	III A	III B	IV A	IV B	V	VI	VII	
Shell	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Terracotta	0	0	6	9	4	3	3	1	0	26
Metal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Bone/Ivory	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>

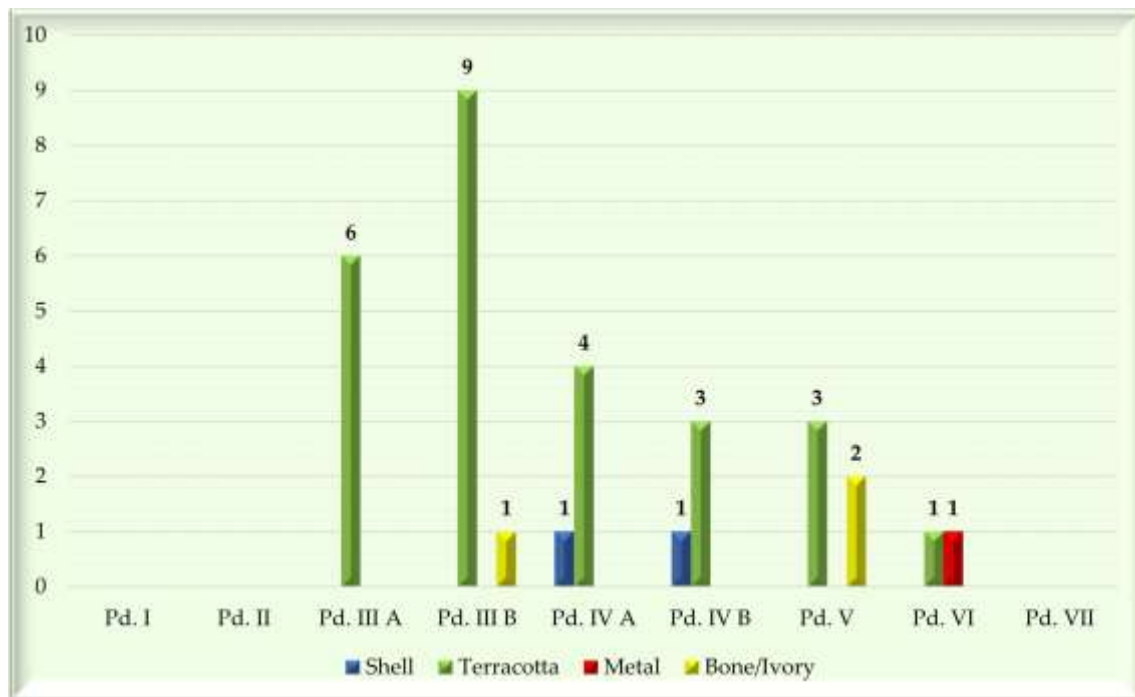


Figure 1: Material-wise Distribution of Amulets in Vadnagar

## Amulets

In addition to beads, pendants, bangles, and rings, amulets are often clubbed to the category of 'jewellery', although they were and are specifically associated with rituals and beliefs. The term "amulet" is derived from the Arabic word *Hamulet*, which means a freight, burden, or things that are carried, similarly, in Latin, the term *Amuletum* refers to something that is used to ward off or avert evil (Deo, 2000). Considered to have both mystical and curative values, as they protect the user from evil or misfortune, amulets

are provided with either horizontal or vertical perforations, and sometimes both. They are usually worn on the waist, arm, wrist or around the neck by individuals of all genders, regardless of their socio-economic status. The earliest known evidence of amulets can be traced back to the Bronze Age. Consequently, their popularity has grown since the Common Era (Ghosh, 1989). This may be due to the rising causes of distress among humankind over the years which possibly led to more reliance over ‘sympathetic magic’.

Table 2: Shape-wise Distribution of Amulets in Vadnagar

Shape	Period									Total
	I	II	III A	III B	IV A	IV B	V	VI	VII	
Square	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	0	6
Circular	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	4
Cuboid	0	0	0	2	3	0	1	0	0	6
Cylindrical	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	4
Rectangular	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Oval	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	1	0	6
Tubular	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Bi-cone	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Human face	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Tortoise	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>

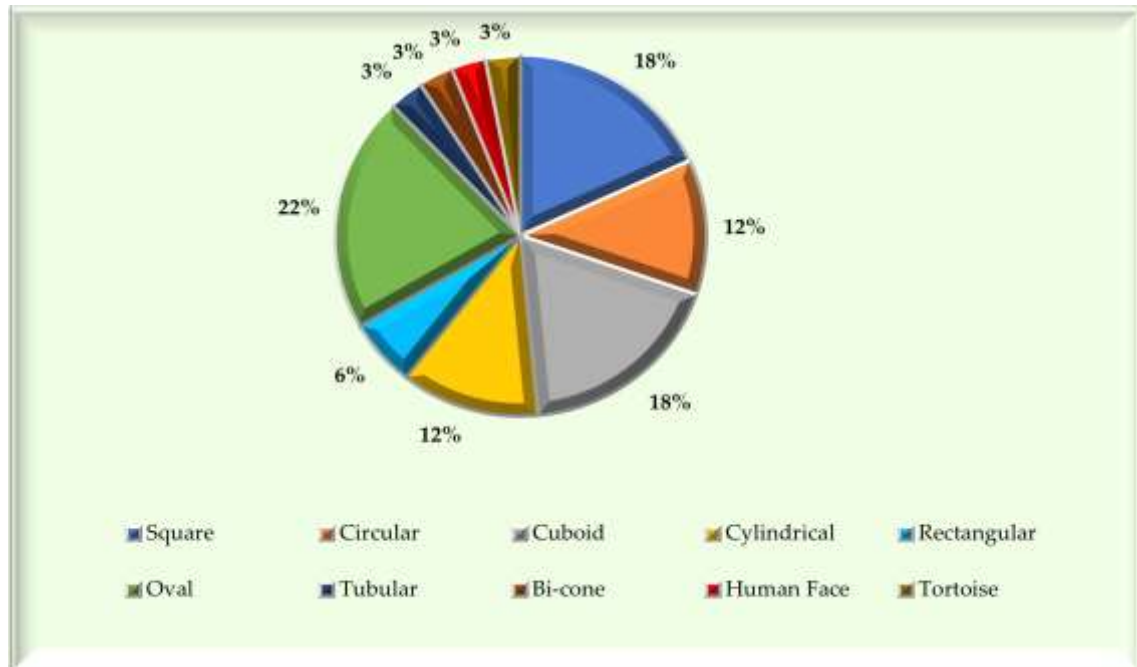


Figure 2: Shape-wise Distribution of Amulets in Vadnagar

As mentioned before, in the Indian context, the presence of amulets can be dated back to the Indus Valley civilization, the PGW period, and the Early Historic periods

(Marshal, 1931). In addition to archaeological finds, there are also texts such as the Vedas and Brahmanas which mention the use of amulets, referred to as *Mani* or Jewels, as a means of protection against all kinds of evil (Deo, 2000). It has been observed that this phenomenon has become increasingly prevalent among people from the early historical period. Taxila (Marshal, 1951), Kausambi, and Kondapur (Ghosh, 1989) have found a variety of amulets made from various materials and exhibiting distinct shapes. Other sites, including Prakash, Adam, Ahichchhatra, Kanmer, Nevasa, Sambhar, Nasik, Vaisali, Rajghat, and others, have also reported the amulet.

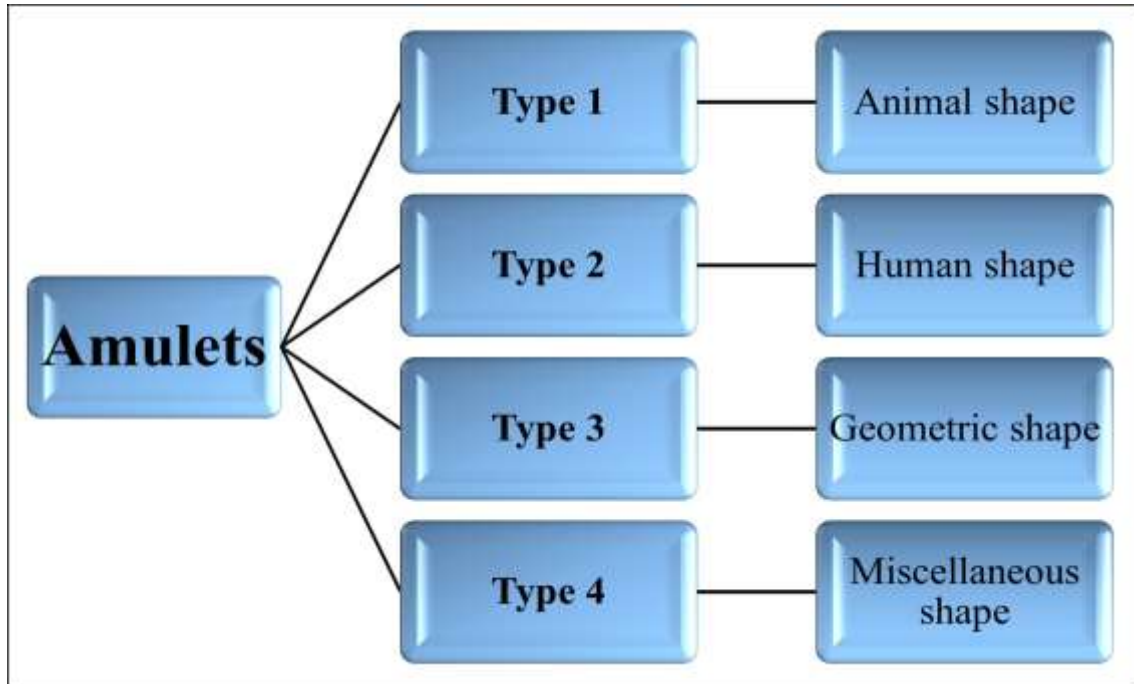


Figure 3: Types of Amulets

A total of 32 amulets recovered from the Vadnagar excavation have been documented during the 2019-22 field season, throughout different cultural periods. Through the documentation, various patterns and forms of the amulets have been ascertained (Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 1-2). They have been classified based on their material composition and morphometric features. These are primarily made from four distinct materials, such as terracotta, shell, metal, and bone/ivory. Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the distribution of various materials used for amulets over diverse cultural periods in Vadnagar (Figures 4-6).

## Methodology

A detailed study has been carried out on 32 specimens of amulets by meticulously documenting them to comprehend their affiliation towards specific materials and forms. The classification of amulets has resulted in the formulation of a typology, which categorizes them into four distinct types based on their distinctive features (Figure 3). These four distinct categories of amulets have been sorted based on findings from several different sites.



Figure 4: Terracotta Amulets of Type 1, Type 2 and Type 3 variety

**Type 1 - Animal Shapes:** This type of amulet encompasses a diverse range of shapes associated with animals – including tiger's claw, lion, elephant, bull, horse, ram, dog, squirrel, bird, fish, and *makara* (gargoyle) shapes (Deo, 2000). Among these varieties, amulets of various shapes such as a gargoyle (*makara*) pendant have been reported from

Kondapur (Ghosh, 1989), a lion-shaped pendant from Nasik, and pendants fashioned like elephants, bulls, horses, rams, dogs, fish, and birds from Taxila and Kausambi. (Deo, 2000).



Figure 5: Terracotta Amulets of Type 3 Variety

**Type 2 - Human Shapes:** Similar amulets in the shape of a human body or with a human-like appearance have also been documented in Mohenjo-Daro, Ahichchhatra, Taxila, Ujjain, and Nevasa (Deo, 2000). Notable among these are a serpentine amulet depicting a pregnant lady in a squatting position with bent legs from Ahichchhatra (Ghosh, 1989), a human figure with a ram's head from Mohenjo-Daro (Mackay, 1938), and a human-shaped amulet from Nevasa.

**Type 3 - Geometric Shapes:** These amulets come in various shapes such as square, round, oval, cylindrical, rectangular, etc. They have been found and recorded in Taxila



(Marshal, 1951) and Vadnagar. The amulets unearthed in Vadnagar during an earlier excavation in the 1950s are typically of geometric shapes.



Figure 6: Shell, Metal and Bone/Ivory Amulets of Type 3 variety

**Type 4 - Miscellaneous shapes:** These amulets consist of several shapes such as an inverted *Triratna*, mango, cowrie, and bell. The site of Adam (Nath, 2016) has reported presence of inverted *Triratna* and mango shaped amulets. Additionally, cowrie and bell-shaped amulets have also been found in Taxila. (Deo, 2000).

It may be noteworthy that there is an absence of miscellaneous shaped amulets during the field seasons 2019-22 of Vadnagar excavation. Although, seasons 2016-19 have produced two types of terracotta amulets: geometric (round) and miscellaneous

(inverted *Triratna*). These amulets belong to Periods III and IV (Ambekar, 2019). After the classification of amulets into various types, we would now look into the different media that were used in creating them.

Table 3: Type-wise Distribution of Terracotta Amulets in Vadnagar

Periods	Types			Total
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	
Period III A	0	0	6	6
Period III B	1	0	8	9
Period IV A	0	0	4	4
Period IV B	0	0	3	3
Period V	0	1	2	3
Period VI	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>

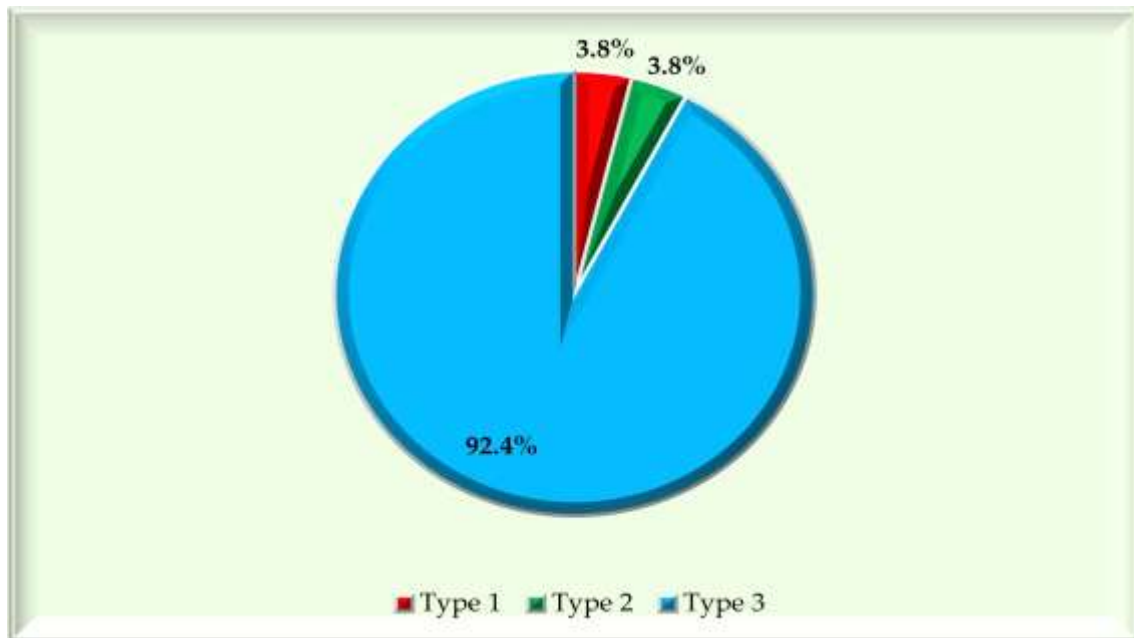


Figure 7: Type-wise Distribution of Terracotta Amulets in Vadnagar

### Terracotta Amulets

The terracotta amulets were mainly found within the deposit spanning from Period III A (the early phase of Kshatrapa) to Period VI (the Sultanate-Mughal period). There have been a total of 26 amulets documented, classified into three different categories. Table 3 and Figure 7 illustrate the distribution of terracotta amulets based on their types across various cultural periods.

**Type 1-** There is only a single specimen of this type, which is in the form of a tortoise. It was found in the deposit of Period IIIB. This specific form is exclusively recorded in terracotta. It is flat with a less prominent snout and horizontal perforation throughout the body (Figure 4).



In Indian iconography, the tortoise is considered as the vehicle of river goddess Yamuna, and in Jainism, it serves as Tirthankara's *Lanchana*. The tortoise is associated with wisdom and longevity in the Mahabharata, whereas the *Brhatsamhita* of Varahamihira describes it as an auspicious sign (Deo 2000). Thus, the tortoise-shaped amulets are possibly representative of longevity. There are other evidence of tortoise shaped artefacts reported from Vadnagar excavation, but due to the placement of perforation those have been categorized as pendants.

**Type 2** - Similar to Type 1, there is also a single specimen of this type recovered, which is in the shape of a human face. It has vertical perforations through the face of the amulet. It was found in the deposit of Period V. This specific variant is exclusively documented in terracotta. Usually, the human figure is rarely used as a decorative motif in beads and pendants (Figure 4).

**Type 3** - The amulets of this type are primarily characterized by its diverse range of geometric shapes comprising square, round, cuboid, cylindrical, rectangular, oval, tubular, and bi-cone. All of these amulets contain horizontal perforations, either single or double. This particular form has been documented right from Period IIIA up to Period VI. One of the reasons for predominance among this type is possibly the ease of making them. It has also been noted that as time progressed, the quantity of terracotta amulets decreased and eventually they disappeared (Figures 4 and 5). However, a wider range of variations in this type with little refinement (crudeness) would be possible due to the arrival of the Shaka-Parthian tribe during period III who brought with them their primitive artistic styles, possibly explaining the presence of such crude appearance.

### **Shell Amulets**

The presence of shell (*Turbinella pyrum*) in Vadnagar has been recorded since the earliest deposits and is widespread until the late phase of Period V which are mostly evidenced through bangles and beads. However, amulets crafted from shell are reported only from Period IV. Two specimens are recorded in shell amulets fashioned in Type 3 form, with one in a square shape and the other in a circular shape (Figure 6).

### **Bone/Ivory Amulets**

A significant number of bone and ivory objects, such as dice, pendants, bangles, ritualistic and beautification objects have been unearthed at the site. There are a total of three bone/ivory amulets classified into Type 3 that have been recorded from the Period IIIB deposit. In addition to these, two specimens have been recorded from the Period V deposit as well (Figure 6).

### **Metal Amulets**

The copper amulet found at the site is in Type 3 form and has a geometric shape of a rectangle. This single specimen has been recorded from the Period VI deposit. However, the shape of this amulet bears a resemblance to the contemporary *Tabiz* (Figure 6). Furthermore, there have been two exceptional gold amulets recovered and documented

from the Vadnagar excavation. These two amulets quite resemble a modern-day *Tabiz* and fall into the category of Type 3 amulets. One of the specimens documented belongs to Period IVA. It has a barrel shape that closely resembles the *damru* motif. Another specimen has been observed belonging to the deposit of Period V (Solanki period) in barrel shape having an inverted dagger symbol with an ornate hilt in middle of the amulet (Figure 6).

The field seasons spanning from 2019 to 2022 resulted in the finding of more specimens of amulets compared to previous seasons. As observed, these amulets are made from various materials such as terracotta, shell, bone/ivory, and metal (copper/gold) and have been classified into several types. While a significant quantity of amulets has been observed from Period III (16), they primarily exhibit an oval shape (Type 3), with some variations in it. Only one example of a Type 1 amulet, specifically in the form of an animal (tortoise) has been documented. In Period IV, there was an overall decrease in the variety of Type 3 shapes, which were now limited to cuboid, rectangular, and circular forms. There is a consistent decline in the quantity starting from Period V, and the Type 3 shapes are square, cuboid, and cylindrical. During this period, just a single specimen of a Type 2 amulet, which is shaped like a human face, has been identified. Two specimens from Period VI have been documented, exhibiting a noticeable alteration in the shape of the amulet.

After describing the materials used for the amulet, it is necessary to examine a textual reference. According to Patki (2014), the term *mani* is used to describe an amulet. However, the *Atharva Veda* does not provide any physical description for *mani*. The information regarding materials for *mani* is obtained from the *Saunaka Samhita* and *Kausika sutra*. *Mani* was made utilizing a diverse range of wooden materials. The remaining elements included grass, grain, shells or pearl, and metal (gold, silver, lead etc.).

From the above discussion, it may be inferred that each and every of these objects have had some meaning and significance in the life of the inhabitants of ancient Vadnagar. The preference towards specific shapes and medium provides an interesting peek into the minds of the people living in the town. As observed, only certain metals such as copper and gold were used in making amulets, which is quite noteworthy as even today these two metals are mainly utilised in creating such objects. This may be attributed to the fact that they are considered to possess healing properties which would be beneficial to the wearer and at the same time the rarity of gold adds onto its preciousness.

One of the reasons why objects with 'ritualistic' connotations are often relegated to the fancies of an archaeologist is mainly due to its over utilisation in many cases where the implication was possibly misplaced. As a researcher, it is thus pertinent to keep an open mind while documenting such artefacts which do not exhibit any 'apparent' function useful to the humankind. However, it is equally important to exhaust all the possible avenues of interpretation of an artefact before one hastily categorizes it into an object of magico-ritualism.

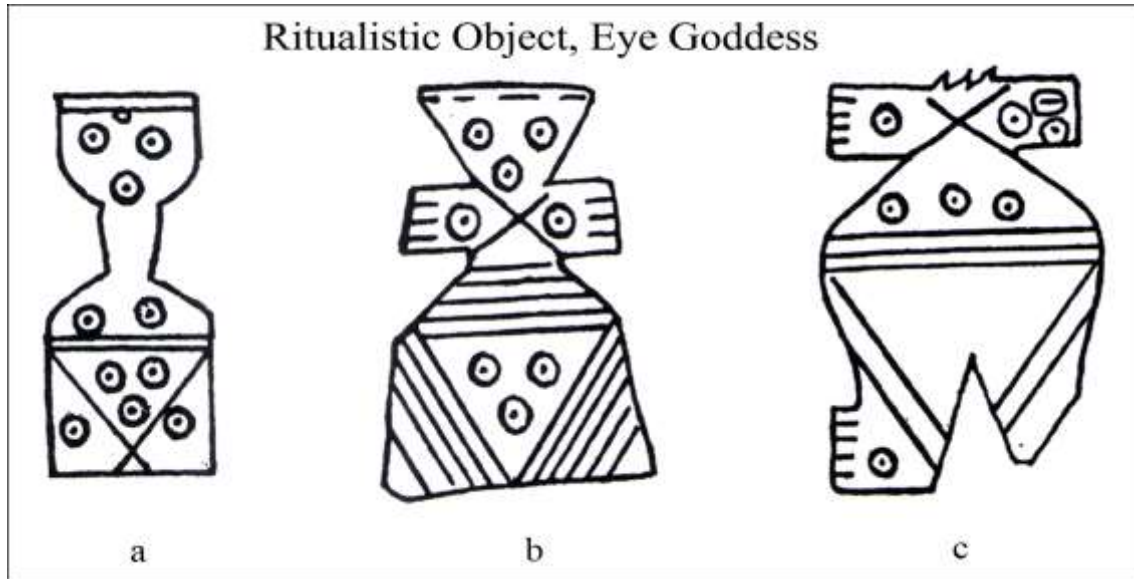


Figure 8: Ritualistic Object, eye goddess of three varieties (Courtesy: Dhavalikar 1965)

### ‘Eye-goddess’ Pendants

There are some objects which have a long antiquity dating back not only to the Harappan period in the Indian subcontinent but also to contemporary sites from West Asia and Egypt. Although whether the concept or idea behind such artefact had travelled from India to Western Asia or vice-versa remains debatable, it is undeniable that exchange of ideas, beliefs among two or more contemporary cultures were and are likely, which possibly resulted in the form of such ritualistic objects found all over these ancient cultures. They are usually found in the northern and north-western region of India have yielded a considerable number of curious ivory objects, which have mostly been dated from early historic levels of 5<sup>th</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Some of them are common with those found in West Asia form 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, known as ‘eye – goddesses’ (Dhavalikar 1965).

Interestingly, the West Asian artefacts made in alabaster have been denoted as benevolent protective eyes, intended to bring good fortune or a god who cured eye-diseases. Such is not the case in India, where these objects are considered as ‘goddesses’ due to their presumed breasts in design and in later periods have been associated with the *Sitala* worship as the ‘eye’ (dot-in-circle) resembles small pox pustules and thus these designs are presumed to protect the wearer from such a deadly disease, quite common in tropical countries like India. M.K. Dhavalikar (1965) has classified these ‘curious’ objects into three categories (Figure 8).

1. Triangular top and oblong bottom with elongated parallel sided stem that joins the top and bottom.
2. Evolved form of the first type where the top and bottom and similar with only the parallel sided stem joining the two is replaced by one with sides tapering upwards. It also has a pair of outstretched arms.

3. Elaborate form of the preceding, this is almost an anthropomorphic form having a triangular head, pair of outstretched arms, broad swelling hips possibly indicative of fertility and short, stumpy out-turned feet.

However, the objects reported from Vadnagar excavation, made of bone/ivory have incised dot-in-circle and linear decoration with a definite arrangement and have been identified as 'eye-goddesses' due to their similarity with those reported previously from various archaeological excavation in India. Sites including Navdatoli, Nagda, Ujjain, Prabhas Patan, Ropa, Sonkh, Mathura have reported such objects (Ghosh,1989). A total of 6 such eye-goddess figurines (almost intact / fragmented) have been reported from Vadnagar excavation and their detailed description are given in following paragraphs (Figure 9).

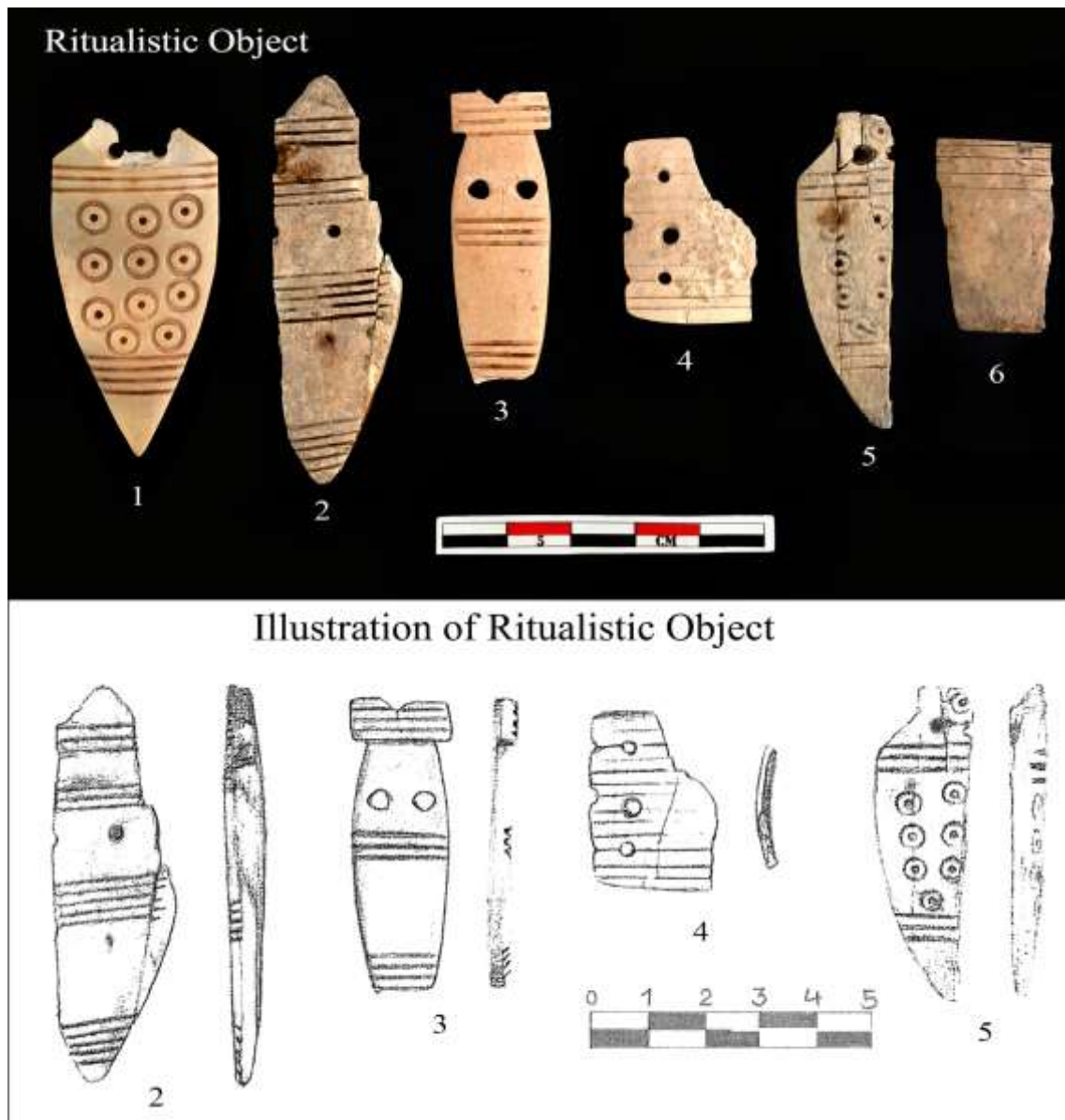


Figure 9: Ritualistic object- eye-goddess, Bone/Ivory

1. Eye-goddess is almost intact, with only the top portion broken, while the rest is intact. It comprises of an oblong body with a tapering pointed lower end. The upper top portion consists of two tiny circular perforations placed horizontally, which are broken and a set of three deep horizontal incised lines are visible just below them. The middle portion of the object has eleven incised concentric circles with dots placed in a manner forming a horizontal set of 3:3:3:2. From a slightly different perspective, these incised circles seem form a U shape (made up of 8 of the circles) and an I shape within it (made up of 3 of the circles placed perpendicular). A set of four deep horizontal incised lines can be observed immediately after the circles, forming the lower portion of the object. Although, the probable function of such an object was to protect the wearer from evil-eye or small pox, the arrangement of the circles on this particular object seems quite interesting. It was possibly worn as a pendant. While all the decorative aspects are visible only on one face of the object, the opposite face remains plain. Material – bone, length – 54.95 mm (broken), width – 26.08 mm, thickness – 4.64 mm, weight – 6.49 gm. Reg. no. – 6773, Period V deposit.
2. Eye-goddess, fragmented, with the top portion broken. It comprises of an oblong body, having two sets of three deep horizontal incised lines in the upper part and two sets of five deep horizontal incised lines in the middle and lower end respectively. The opposite face of the objects however in plain and devoid of any decoration. In between the upper and middle set of horizontal lines two circular perforations can be noticed. The tip of the lower tapering end is broken. The probable function of such an object was to protect the wearer from evil-eye or small pox. It was possibly worn as an amulet. Material – bone, length – 74.08 mm (broken), width – 26.77 mm (broken), thickness – 6.96 mm, weight – 10.26 gm. Reg. no. – 11050, Period V deposit.
3. Eye-goddess, almost intact, segmented, having a slightly broken rectangular top portion and an oblong body, ending in a narrow tapering point which is broken. A set of three deep horizontal incised lines each can be observed across the top segment and middle portion while the lower end comprises of a set of five (four grooved lines visible) deep horizontal incised lines. In between the upper segment and the incised lines of the middle portion are two small circular perforations, horizontally placed. The probable function of such an object was to protect the wearer from evil-eye or small pox. It was possibly worn as an amulet. While all the decorative aspects are visible only on one face of the object, the opposite face remains plain. Material – bone, Length – 53.83 mm, width – 17.83 mm, thickness – 4.28 mm, weight – 4.59 gm. Reg. no. – 1056, Period V deposit.
4. Eye-goddess, fragmented, with a rectangular top and possibly oblong body. A total of eleven shallow incised horizontal lines at regular intervals are visible on one face of the object, while the opposite face is devoid of any design. Altogether, six circular perforations can be observed, placed vertically in a set of set of three each. While three of the perforations are found broken, their sizes vary. The probable function of such an object was to protect the wearer from evil-eye or small pox. It was possibly

worn as an amulet. Material – ivory, Length – 33.99 mm (broken), width – 22.90 mm (broken), thickness – 2.83 mm, weight – 1.56 gm. Reg. no. – 3662, Period VI deposit.

5. Eye-goddess, fragmented in half vertically. It comprises of a squarish top and an oblong body with a tapering pointed lower end. The upper top portion consists of one single concentric circle with dot followed by two tiny circular perforations (one broken) placed horizontally underneath it. A set of three deep horizontal incised lines are visible just below them. The middle portion of the object has seven incised single concentric circles with dots placed in a manner forming a horizontal set of 2:2:2:1 ratio. A set of three shallow horizontal incised lines can be observed immediately after the circles, forming the lower portion of the object. Although, the probable function of such an object was to protect the wearer from evil-eye or small pox, the arrangement of the concentric circles on this particular object seems quite interesting. It was possibly worn as a pendant. While all the decorative aspects are visible only on one face of the object, the opposite face remains plain. Material – bone, Length – 58.33 mm (broken), width – 16.15 mm (broken), thickness – 5.54 mm, weight – 5.4 gm. Reg. no. – 3104, Period VI deposit.
6. Probable eye-goddess amulet/pendant, fragmented, with an oblong shape having four deep horizontal incised lines on it, while the rest is devoid of any decoration. The lines are only on one face of the object while the opposite face remains plain. Material – ivory, Length – 35.33 mm (broken), width – 20.33 mm (broken), thickness – 2 mm, weight – 1.73 gm. Reg. no. – 1396, Period VI deposit.

Table 4: Total number of ritualistic objects found throughout cultural periods

<b>Eye-goddess Pendants</b>	
<b>Period</b>	<b>Number of Objects</b>
V	3
VI	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 5: Overall State of Preservation of Ritualistic Objects

<b>Eye-goddess Pendants</b>	
<b>Condition</b>	<b>Number of Objects</b>
Almost intact	2
Fragmented	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 6: Decorations found amongst the Ritualistic Objects

<b>Eye-goddess Pendants</b>	
<b>Types of Decoration</b>	<b>Number of Objects</b>
Dot-in-circle, linear and perforated	2
Linear and perforated	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>



## Discussion

The purpose of these religious objects interestingly, seems similar to the West Asian artefacts made in alabaster. They were also probably used as protective eyes, intended to bring good fortune or a god who cured eye-diseases. Such is not the case in India, where these objects are considered as ‘goddesses’ due to their presumed breasts in design and in later periods have been associated with the *Sitala* worship as the ‘eye’ (dot-in-circle) resembles small pox pustules and thus these designs are presumed to protect the wearer from such a deadly disease, quite common in tropical countries like India. Even during a case of smallpox, protecting the eyes is extremely important, which could explain the presence of dots in the object. This goddess is most often linked to smallpox, but she is also sometimes given other roles and powers, such as protecting children and bringing good fortune (Wadley, 1980). In present-day Gujarat, *Sitala mata* is revered as the provider of good fortune, spouse, and sons rather than being connected to disease.



Figure 10: Sculpture of *Sitala*, Sun Temple, Modhera

According to Dhavalikar, eye idols might have been used as amulets during pox endemic as a tantric belief for medicinal purpose. Further these might have been used as offering in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra. Where a person dedicates silver image of eyes to *Sitala* as a belief of their child’s sight might be spared. He also suggests that similar to this, ivory strips have also been used as offerings. The iconographic features of *Sitala* typically include the presence of a broom and a water vessel in the deity’s hands, usually depicted riding on her vehicle - a donkey and a winnowing fan over her head. These characteristics have also been observed in a stone sculpture from the Modhera Sun

Temple (Figure 10). The donkey as vehicle is considered to be a symbol of negative animosity (Ghatak 2013) and carrier of disease. Thus, it has been suggested that when she is depicted riding a donkey, she is portrayed as having power to control over epidemic diseases like cholera, small-pox (Trivedi). The broom as a cleaning aid eliminating dust and dirt, the water vessel (pitcher) as vegetation and life and the winnowing fan symbolises the cleaning and curative power, with the big eyes representing the basic essence of the belief. The symbol of a vessel, such as a pitcher or an ewer, possesses attributes that serve to both protect and contain (Ghatak 2013).

The finding of ritualistic objects, i.e., eye-goddesses at the site are quite unique in itself because as of yet they have not been reported from early-medieval/medieval period deposits in India. Mostly found from early historic and historic periods from sites of northern and north-western India, in Vadnagar these artefacts have been reported exclusively from Period V (10<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century CE) and Period VI (14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century CE). This shows that the worship of eye-goddesses continued until very late and possibly merged into the *Sitala* cult (goddess of diseases) eventually. It remains debatable, however, whether the incised sets of three and five linear designs found on all these artefacts were marked arbitrarily or denoted any meaning through their numbers and placement on the object. In this context the intriguing finds of enigmatic terracotta tablets and bricks of different sizes and shapes from Vadnagar, which are marked with a set of three parallel groove lines are noteworthy. The specific utilization of these which have also been reported from other historical sites, has remained a topic of debate. The terracotta tablets unearthed at these different sites displayed a remarkable similarity in their making, dimensions, form, and even the style of engraved designs.

## Conclusion

As mentioned, from Vadnagar excavation, eye-goddess figurines have been reported both from the deposits of Period V and Period VI respectively, showing unique arrangements of dot-in-circle pattern and incised sets of three to five linear designs. Coincidentally the *Sitala Mata* temple at Vadnagar also dates back to the early phase of Period V (early phase of Solanki period) suggesting a possible connection between eye-goddess and *Sitala* worship, for medicinal practices. On the premises of the temple, it has been observed that some game boards have also been carved on the floor, reinforcing the fact that as along with beliefs and worship the temple as a community gathering place was significant.

Regarding the amulet (specifically metal), it appears to resemble a *tabiz* or *kavaach* (as amulets are termed) are worn by many communities with the belief of harnessing its protective power. These modern *tabiz* are often embellished with beautiful motifs and are crafted from metals or organic materials, with a hollow interior chamber, although many are plain and devoid of any motif. The appearance of these occurrences can be correlated with the gold amulet that displays similar distinguishing features recorded from the Period V. Through a reasonable conjecture it may thus be implied that the practice of utilizing sacred amulets may have been initiated during the early-medieval

phase of Period V. Moreover, the unearthing of a corroded copper amulet from the Period VI deposits, which exhibits signs of being hollow on the inside, offers further corroboration of these assertions. An examination has been conducted with the present-day residents of Vadnagar to improve their comprehension of this particular facet. For a deeper understanding, personal communication with the residents of Kaziwada, an area near *Patthar Ki Haveli* in Vadnagar, it is worth noting that the use of *tabiz* (amulets) by tantric practitioners is still widespread. These amulets serve the aim of protecting against evil and are also used for medicinal reasons, such as healing ailments. When making the *tabiz*, it is intentionally left hollow so as to insert little pieces of paper with tantric hymns or sacred writings within it. This whole process is carried out to provide protection to the wearer.

Thus, while dealing with artefacts related to magico-ritualism from archaeological context, it is imperative to take up an ethnographic documentation of modern-day communities involved in such practices. The belief system among humans solely focusses on the protection and preservation of self and it is interesting to note that such was the case in antiquity as well. It is only the echoes of invocation of higher powers through prayers and offerings that are preserved in the archaeological context of an ancient habitation and are emulated in the findings of such artefacts.

However, a hypothesis can be put forth as this practice being prevalent in ancient Vadnagar and can be traced back to the Period III evincing with the presence of the amulets from that deposit. This practice has evolved over time, transitioning from terracotta to metal, as well as incorporating material as bone/ivory. The presence of the eye-goddess in the deposit from Period V provides further evidence of the continuing belief of protection against evil and medicinal purposes practiced in India for centuries and still remains till date.

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