

Did Sushrutha first describe ear lobe repairs? A peep into the Samhita

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Sir,

Ear lobe repairs are among the commonest and simplest procedures performed by plastic surgeons in India. The heavy jewelry that's part of the Indian tradition surely is the culprit. Given the prevalence of the elongated (or torn) ear lobes in India; it's only logical that surgeons of yore ventured into remedying this simple issue. Now a days there are many methods of repairing a partial or completely torn ear lobe [1,2]. The techniques have ranged from simple adjustment of local skin to more imaginative sandwiching of conchal cartilage [3]. Who first described the ear lobe repair however is unclear.

Sushrutha, now widely regarded as the 'father of plastic surgery' in his treatise 'Sushrutha Samhita' seems to describe in fairly elaborate detail the method of repairing a torn ear lobe. He even described over fifteen different procedures based on the nature and size of ear lobe tear. Some include

1. The Nemi- Bandhinaka: To be used in cases where the bifurcated lobes and equal in size.
2. The Utpala-Bhedyaka: To be used in cases where the severed lobes are round, extended, and equal.
3. The Valluraka: To be used in cases where the severed lobes of the ears would be short, circular and equal in size.
4. The Aangima: To be adopted in cases where the anterior surface of the torn lobe is more elongated than the other.
5. The Ganda-Karna: To be adopted in cases where the

posterior surface of the torn lobe is more elongated than the other.

Though the exact details of the surgical nuances are difficult to decipher, he does mention some valid and important aspects of lobe repair. He mentions slicing off a patch of healthy skin from the cheeks and adhering it to one of the severed lobes (Akin to a skin graft). He describes a process called the Kapata-Sandhika (closing of the two leaves of a door {Kapatam}) wherein he brings about an adhesion, on the posterior side, between the bifurcated lobes and another, which by shortening the elongated anterior side of the ear (Akin to a wedge excision or a Z-plasty). He also describes the Ardha-Kapata-Sandhika (Ardha{Half} Kapata {Door} Sandhika {Joining}) [4]. This description has a peculiar resemblance to the half Z-plasty. The nature of Sushrutha's contribution to reconstructive surgery is a matter of controversy which is unlikely to die down in the near future. Part reason for such confusion is the presence of numerous translations and even more numerous interpretations. However, the very fact that he might have described procedures like adhesion, Z-plasty and half Z-plasty is a matter of awe in itself.

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