# Cosmetic Surgery: finding home in the Indian Market

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No doubt that the majority of us approve of the fallacy of emphasizing appearance and looks but the yearning to have a beautiful face/body/physique is so deeply-rooted in us that we find it difficult to disassociate ourselves from it. Is it not a natural feeling to have a desire for physical beauty similar to the desire for other basic essential things which make our lives happy?

In an effort to let the media establish the definition of beauty, we all somewhere lost our personal definitions of it. A recent paper titled "What is Beauty Anyway," found that men characterized the beauty of a woman by her state of being, the two major components of which were stated as health and happiness.

## Advent of cosmetic surgery

Developments in the field of dermatology and dermatologic surgery, ophthalmology and ophthalmic plastic surgery and plastic and facial surgery over the years have given rise to the discussion of the scope of cosmetic surgery in the modern times. Historic records suggest that the general field of cosmetic surgery has highly benefited by the significant contributions made by the aforementioned surgical specialties.

With the increasing participation of non-traditional cosmetic surgeons, which include primary care physicians, obstetricians and ophthalmologists, in the area of cosmetic surgery, has directed the future of the aesthetic market on a positive track. More and more non-traditional surgeons are incorporating aesthetic procedures into their practices.

Keeping in line, dentists are also trying to make a place for themselves in the field of cosmetic facial surgery. Recently, the California legislature passed a law which authorizes oral surgeons (DDS dentists) to perform all sorts of facial cosmetic surgeries. It allows dental surgeons to perform facial cosmetic procedures, which are usually termed as complex, like rhinoplasty, otoplasty, and face-lift.

The scope of cosmetic plastic surgery continues to evolve. The active person demands the maximum benefit with the least amount of down time. Today there are a host of procedures, which can be performed efficiently and safely and still allow a person a quick return to work. Hollywood actress Kate Winslet opines that plastic surgery and breast implants are fine for people if it makes them feel better about who they are.

Aesthetic treatments are offered through two different categories of invasive (surgical) or non-invasive (non-surgical) procedures. Invasive procedures involve radical measures taken to alter the appearance of a patient. Some of the most sought after cosmetic surgical procedures are breast enlargement, rhinoplasty (nose surgery), surgical face-lifts, tummy tucks, and liposuction. Non-invasive procedures, on the other hand, do not involve breaking of the skin and holds attractiveness largely due to their lower cost, shorter time of procedures, and less recovery time. Some of the main non-surgical cosmetic procedures are botox, skin resurfacing, and dermal fillers.

## Indian cosmetic surgery industry

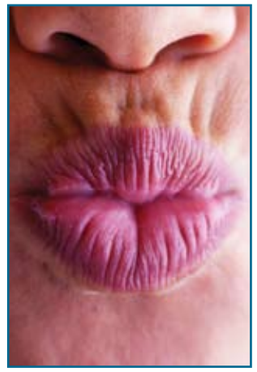
In India, cosmetic surgery has been practiced for a long time but there has been a notable surge in the Indian cosmetic or aesthetic surgery during the past five years mainly because of the increasing demand for aesthetic procedures from people in the urban cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Pune and Chandigarh.

Cosmetic surgeries in India were associated with celebrities and people of the affluent class at a point of time, but today these surgeries are increasingly being taken by the burgeoning middle class whose demand for them is based on their needs. At present, more and more men and women from the upper middle class group are opting for cosmetic procedures to get attractive looks in order to grab lucrative jobs, best possible marriage partner and mainly get rid of any deformity that they feel impacts their self-confidence and self-esteem. Two of the major growth drivers of the Indian cosmetic industry among others are its affordability, which comes from the growing disposable income, and the consumer awareness resulting from the active efforts of the media - especially the print media.

This growing demand has had a positive impact on the Indian aesthetic or cosmetic surgery industry (that includes both invasive and non-invasive procedures), which registered a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 34% in terms of revenue generation in the period 2005-2007, according to a report titled Indian Aesthetic (Cosmetic Surgery) Industry: A Primer, published by Koncept Analytics, a Delhi-based research and consulting firm. The estimated size of the overall cosmetic surgery industry is worth US$110 million (approximately Rs. 460 crore) with the maximum revenue contributed by invasive or surgical procedures as their costs are comparatively higher than the non-invasive procedures. However, the rate of growth and the overall number of non-invasive procedures done in a year remain higher when compared to invasive procedures.

The growth story of the Indian cosmetic surgery industry is broadly based on the growth of the economy that has seen an annual GDP growth rate of +7-9% in the last five years. As Dr. Ashok Gupta, a renowned aesthetic surgeon based in Mumbai says,

**"Aesthetic surgery is not independent of the economic situation of the country. The inflation has to remain low and the economic rate has to grow…then only aesthetic surgery can survive"**



## The age old practice of plastic surgery

According to an article published in The Indian Journal of Post Graduate Medicine, the earliest mention of plastic surgery finds place in the Hindu mythology where Lord Shiva performed the first surgical procedure by attaching an elephant's head on the body of his son Ashwini Kumar who successfully replanted the severed head of Yagna. Thus, the history of plastic surgery in India dates back before the Vedic times nearly 4000 years ago.

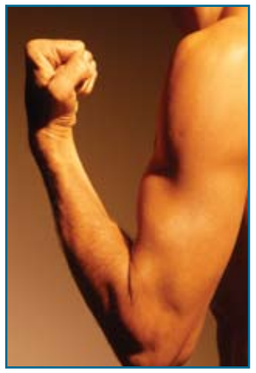
Plastic and reconstructive surgery find their origin as far back as Ancient Egypt with wound care depicted in hieroglyphs on papyrus and descriptions of flap reconstructions of nose and ear in the Sushruta-Sanhita 2000 years ago in India. The passing on of these techniques through generations resulted in the evolution of the Indian Plastic Surgery.

## The concept of beauty

The concept of physical beauty holds significant importance to it as it has been programmed into our brains as an eminent part of our existence. After all, had there not been a mutual attraction between the males and females, none of us would have been here and the human race would have been a fatally imperfect experiment.

One of the many things which attract humans towards each other is, indeed, physical beauty. But this fact does not justify our obsession with looks single-handedly, for appearance is only the first layer of attractiveness.

Generally, everyone wants to look beautiful and wishes to gain attention accordingly. It is a part of the human nature to attract and be attracted by others. It has been noticed that people who emphasize physical beauty relate their appearance with their power to gain attention. It suggests that a person changes his appearance in order to meet the standards of attractivity.



As Dr. Rakesh Kalra who operates an aesthetic clinic from Dehradun says,

**"If we work well and satisfy our clientele from abroad then we would be able to hand over a legacy of good cosmetic surgery practice to our juniors".**

Another economic factor that is driving the growth is the improving purchasing power and standard of living of the Indian populace. Indian population represents 16.9% or 1.1 billion of the global population, the increasing per capita income of which is expected to make India the eighth largest wealth centre by 2017, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). According to the annual CapGemini/Merrill Lynch wealth report, the number of millionaires in India was 50,000 in 2002, and has reached 100,000 at present, which amounts to a CAGR of +20%. India represents 1.1% of the worldwide number of millionaires, which is 9.5 million.

The growing sector of Medical tourism is also adding to the growth of the Indian cosmetic surgery industry. An increasing number of foreigners, mainly from the European countries, US, Middle East, Asian and African countries are visiting India for getting their cosmetic surgery done because of lower costs and satisfactory services provided here. In India, the cost cosmetic procedures is on an average one-third to countries like the US and UK.

In the meantime, several practicing plastic surgeons have started doing cosmetic surgeries. The growing interest of plastic surgeons to enter into the field of aesthetics market is evident through the increasing membership of the Indian Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, which has reached 200 from +10 around a decade back, according to Dr. Vasundhara Oberoi, an aesthetic surgeon associated with Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Delhi.

About the demographics – people, who are opting for cosmetic surgeries, Dr. Lakshyajeet Dhami, an aesthetic surgeon from Mumbai believes that the market growth is largely driven by the young people ageing between 20 to 27 years, who mainly opt for procedures like hair transplant, liposuction and rhinoplasty, and the people falling in the age group of 30 to 45, who wish to look good after marriage or post pregnancy.

The growing interest of teenagers to take up cosmetic surgery is further adding to the market growth. Teenagers are approaching cosmetic/aesthetic surgeons for facial hair removal and scar revision to rhinoplasty and gynaecomastia (male breast reduction) to breast reduction and augmentation (in girls). Dr. Ashok Gupta says that the age group of people undergoing aesthetic procedures has widely expanded in the recent past ranging from 15 to 90 years.

The Indian aesthetics market is set to attain high growth rate in the wake of new developments including laparoscopic surgery and robotic surgery, according to Dr. Manoj Khanna, a cosmetic surgeon based in Kolkata. He projects that the market will be growing at a rate of 10-15%.

In the next 4-5 years, the market will see huge growth as

- The specialty is still in its infancy as far as growth is concerned and hence there is a huge potential.
- It is expected that the number of international patients will soar in the next few years.

Though it is expected that the desire to look good and increase self-esteem will override economic rationale, it is certainly a risk that a weakening economy would dampen discretionary consumer spending. Since any medical insurance policy does not cover aesthetic procedures, the state of the economy will have some effect on these discretionary spending.