



Ivory Chuda: The Fading Craft of Kachchh's Royal Court

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ABSTRACT

Indian jewellery comprises a vast and complex assortment of marvels. Traditional ornaments- having a distinctive cultural identity played a significant and fascinating role in characterising Indian Royalty. The study aimed to encapsulate crafting one such tradition of wearing the ivory chuda- a custom adhered to the royal house of Kachchh, the princely state of Gujarat. The personal interviews of members of royal family and the case study of the ivory chuda artisan were conducted with the help of open and close ended interview schedule. The results revealed that the ivory chuda was the essential ornament of the dignified royal women and it symbolized their marital status. The practice of wearing ivory bangles was followed among the married women of royal family of Kachchh since the generations. With the emergence of some of the Indian government policies and the newer technologies, the craft of ivory chuda making started fading away. Though the custom of wearing a chuda still prevails in the royal family, the noble women have accepted the replica of ivory chuda. The present study is an attempt to ascertain the craft of making the ivory chuda with its relevance to the past and present scenario.

KEYWORDS : Chuda, Craft, Ivory, Kachchh, Royal, Traditional Jewellery.

Introduction

Marriage and religion are inseparable in Indian culture and together provide another major motivation for the use of traditional ornaments. Infinitely varied in material and decoration, the bangle remains among the primary ornaments worn by Indian women and is often an important indication that the wearer is a married women. (Untracht O) Several kinds of hand crafted bangles were popular among the royal families of various regions of India. Regional courts had their distinctive craftsmen to create the ornaments for imperial women.

Kachchh- the princely state of Gujarat, was self-sufficient enough for crafts of jewellery making in ivory, silver, gold and *minakari*. Royal women of Kachchh court adorned themselves with different jewellery and each jewellery had special significance attached to it. Jewellery with the symbol of the regal status indicated the marital status also. Such iconic ornaments include - *bor* which was worn on head, *nath* a nose ring, *khanch* and *chuda*, the ivory bangles were given by husband to the bride.

Apart from the connotations of the jewellery found their relevance with the wedding customs too. Distinctive traditional rituals were followed by the Royal court of Kachchh during the wedding of the Princess. One such ceremony called *vadhavo*, was performed for the bride's ivory bangles, the *chuda* as it had auspicious symbolism of married women associated with it. It was the ceremony of taking bride's wedding bangles from the manufacturer's shop i.e *maniar's* shop to back to *zanana khana* (the place for the royal women) for blessings of Lord Ganesh. The ceremony was performed by the parents of the bridegroom as these bangles were gifted by them to the bride. The maids with the parents of bridegroom went from the *zenana khana* to the shop of the *maniar* singing the appropriate songs and proceeded by the *langhas* playing the *dhol* and the *shehnai*. They performed *vadhavo* to the ivory bangles and one amongst them carried these sets of bangles back to the *zenana khana* and these were deposited on the *patla* near the *Ganpati's* idol for his blessings.

Chuda, the ivory bangles (Plate 1) were made from an elephant's tusks and were covered with strips of gold. For a lady of the family, ivory bangles were an auspicious part of her adornment and indicated her marital status. After the death of the husband, the widow had to remove her ivory bangles which she was accustomed

to put on during the lifetime of her husband and adapt plain gold bangles. Through the passage of time, though there is an advancement and restrictions in the raw material of *chuda* the women of royalty have not changed their tradition. The changing scenario has made them to adapt the replicas. The researcher has made an effort to know the glorious craft of the making of ivory *chuda* which is still associated with the royal customs with the acceptable transformation.



**Plate 1: 40 years old ivory Chuda with total 18 bangles
Credit : Haroon Maniyar**

Methodology

The framed objective was achieved by peeping into the past and the present references of the lavishing non textile craft of ivory *chuda* making. The available literary sources helped to understand the past scenario of the craft. The present status of the craft and its earlier association with the royal court of Bhuj was found out by conducting the personal interviews with the members of the royal family of Kachchh. The case study of the only living legendary artisan of ivory *chuda* producer who served in royal court, Shri Haroon Ibrahim Maniyar unfolded many facts regarding this craft. The personnel were interviewed through the means of open and close ended interview schedule and the data pertaining to the craft was recorded in digital forms as well as written notes.

Results and Discussion

Chuda was the significance of the married women. It comprised of total 18 bangles of gradual sizes out of which nine were worn on the arms and nine on wrist. (Plate 1) According to the craftsman, ivory symbolizes lord Ganesh and thus the *chuda* made of ivory believed to be auspicious for married women. The results pertaining to the specific objective has been discussed under the following heads: (a) The past and present scenario of the craft (c) Case study of the

artisan (c) The craft of ivory *chuda* making.

(a) The past and present scenario of the craft

As mentioned by Untracht O., Rajasthan, Gujarat and some places of Northern India had been the major centres for ivory bangles manufacturing. Rural women as well as the women of the royal families had worn ivory bangles profusely after their marriage not only as a symbol of they being married but also to keep them healthy and assure ease in childbirth. Throughout India, an old but dying custom calls for a bride's maternal uncle to present her with an ivory bangle, worn as an amulet and never removed during the first year of her marriage. References said that in Rajasthan and Gujarat, an ideal set of ivory bangles includes seventeen (called *chura*) worn on upper arm and nine (called *muthia*) worn on lower arm, a total of fifty-two on both arms. Some women wear only the *muthiya* on the lower arm. They were never removed unless they became widow. They were worn during women's entire married life. (Untracht O)

Her survey said that since more than two thousand years, ivory played a major role in Indian culture and heritage. The major centres of ivory bangle production were Pali in Rajasthan, Delhi, Patiala and Hoshiarpur in Punjab, Murshidabad in West Bengal, Cuttack and Puri in Orissa, Vishakhapatnam and Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, Mysore in Karnataka and Trivendrum in Kerala. Each place had their distinctive manner of work. At the peak of its trade in the nineteenth century, ivory was delivered to an estimated ten thousand ivory craftsmen of north western India. (Untracht O)

The Indian ivory derived from Indian elephants of northeast and the south was considered best due to its superior quality of large tusks and immense size. Indian cultural beliefs restricted the cutting tusks from dead animals only. Ancient trade between India and Africa showed the use of ivory from African elephants' tusks. Adding to this, she has explained that Indian products shipped to Mombasa, Mozambique and Zanzibar were routinely exchanged for an annual average of more than two hundred tons of African ivory that entered India at Bombay and from there it was distributed to all Indian ivory craft centres. (Untracht O)

In 1990 the government of India prohibited the import of African ivory in India and use of Indian ivory was also banned. This resulted in opting out tubes of white plastic or acrylic instead of ivory to produce traditional bangles in contemporary material. Keeping the customs alive with the changing scenario, the women of the royal family of Kachchh have also adopted this imitate version of ivory *chuda*.

(b) Case study

Haroon Ibrahim Maniyar, 86 year old craftman, including his father, grandfather, great grandfather, and now his sons and grandson, around seven generations have been involved in the ivory *chuda*-bangle making craft. Since 76 years he is practicing this craft (Plate 2). An expert in the bangle-making art, he had worked on both traditional-ivory and contemporary-acrylic bangle material. His son, Imtiyaz, and his grandson Rameez have expanded and managed his business very well. They spend much of their time in the family's retail shop named "*Shringar Chudi*" in Danda Bazaar, Bhuj.



Plate 2: Haroon Ibrahim Maniyar

Raj Maniyar- Ivory Chudamaker

Haroon, facilitated by the title of "*Rajjo maniyar*", meaning the *maniyar* who worked for the last Raj of the Royal Family; was associated with royal patronage of Kachchh since the ages. He made *chuda*, ivory bangles during the weddings of Maharao Shri Pragmulji III and his younger brother. The royal family accustomed to place the orders for *chuda* to the *maniyars* for the wedding ceremony. The *maniyar* was invited to the Prag Mahal and had given place for besides the office of the treasurer. The process of making of *chuda* began eight days prior to wedding. During the wedding celebration of the prince and princess, the *maniyar* stayed in the palace premises for eight days and engaged himself in the process of making ivory bangles for the wedding trousseau. Demand of the ivory *chuda* from royal house of Kachchh helped them to earn between 800-1000 rupees for eight days of work. Thus, Haroon Ibrahim Maniyar and family holds the privilege of having the title of the Royal *Maniyaras*, who exclusively manufactured ivory bangles for the Rao's family.

(c) The craft of Ivory *chuda* making: Through the eye of an Artisan

i) Raw Material procurement

India appeared as one of the chief markets for ivory along with America, England, Germany, the Netherlands and France with the flourished sea trade routes. The best and most expensive ivory was procured by Kachchh from central and east Africa as the place was popular for the best variety of elephants. Much of the ivory was imported from the African ports of Mombasa and Dar-es-Salam according to Haroon.⁶ The size of six feet ivory was procured by the rulers and then provided to the *maniyars* according to the requirement. To provide an idea about the kind of ivory tusks used for the making of ivory bangles, two such examples of the six feet African ivory tusks have been preserved at the Sharad Baug palace, Bhuj, Kachchh (Plate 3).



Plate 3: Examples of African Ivory tusks

Credit: Trustee, Sharad Baug palace, Bhuj, Kachchh

Haroon recalled that 50 or 60 years ago the two main brands of ivory were in existence namely Hans mark and *Janak* mark ivories. The brand Hans, owned by Bhatia Hansrajbhai of Mundra was the leading ivory and was marked with rubber stamp in the shape of a swan (*hans*). A tusk with the Hans stamp indicated that it was a quality product. The owner of the Janak brand Nandubhai was used to divide the bulk of the ivory into five parts or piles known as *dhagi*, which were sold to the ivory workers at the rate they wished. He never bothered much about the profit. Ivory was brought ashore

from the steamers and circulated through the country via the railways⁶.

ii)Tools

Sanghado was the main device to make beautiful ivory *chuda*. Several other tools used to make bangles with hand were *karvat*, *patti*, *chhinu* and *panu*.

Sanghado had attachments of *kho*, *faachad*, *aar*, *karaaio* and *dhanodi*. *Kho* was made of iron which supported hand during the process of *chuda* making. *Faachad* was the another wooden support



Plate 4: Sanghado
Credit: Haroon Maniyar

used to rest the leg during process. *Karaaio* was used to fix the hollow ivory piece on it and then convert it into bangle. It helped to follow the stages of carving and finishing. *Aar* was the guiding and holding feature that fixed the *karaaio* in between. *Dhanodi* had shape resembling the bow. It was attached to *Karaaio* with a string. One end of string was wounded to *karaio* and one to the *dhanodi* that helped used to rotate *karaio* through it's to and fro movement.(Plate4)

Karvat or ivory cutter was used to cut the ivory piece keeping in mind the perfect measurement required for *chuda*. *Paanu* was used to cut the diameter of bangle from inside. It had various width according to which the diameter of bangle was cut and finished. *Chhinu* that had sharp edge was used to mark the bangle diameter on

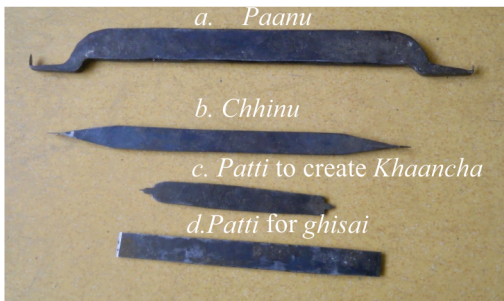


Plate 5:Tools used for making Chuda
Credit: Haroon Maniyar

ivory piece and separate it from it. *Patti* with pointed edge was used to create a hollow space known as *khancho* in the middle of the bangle. This hollow space was then filled with gold. *Patti* with straight edge was use for *ghisai*, a finishing process. *Sabar jo singh*, deer horn, which was easily procurable was used as the material for the handle of the tools. (Plate5)

iii)Process:

From 6 ft of tusk, the official provided a three inch piece of ivory to *maniyar* for making of *chuda*. The actual making process started with the worship of ivory in the auspicious *muhurta*. The size of bangle ranged from the smallest, a size 2-2/16",2-4/16", 2-6/16" to

the 2-8/16". The width of each bangle of *chuda* were kept half inch.

The craft of *chuda* making was divided into five stages- cutting, drilling, carving, polishing & colouring.(Plate6)

i) Cutting: Two men used to sit in front of *sanghado* facing opposite to each other and chopped the elephant tusk with the help of a *karvat*. The solid parts were then divided into concentric cylinders from which separate bangles were cut.

ii)Drilling: The second step followed was grooving out of the diameter with the help of *paanu*. The grooving process was followed for each bangle in progression by giving inside cuts. It created two to three cylinders, each of which was then divided by nine sectional cuts with help of *chhinu* into ten bangles, with required width and a complete graduated range of bangle sizes was obtained.

The bangle piece was fixed in the *karaaio* for finishing process as the surface of the bangle must be finished and edges of the bangle must be smooth and even after cutting. These processes were followed with the help of *patti*.

iii) Carving: The designs on the bangles were carved with incised lines or contoured depressions. The bangle was mounted on *karaio* and the areas to be removed are excavated with pointed *patti*, a cutting tool.

After the *khaancho*, a central depression was marked into which a strip of gold was fixed and designs were carved according to the requirement. These types of bangles were generally dyed in red colour as it was considered as an auspicious colour and given as gift a bride.

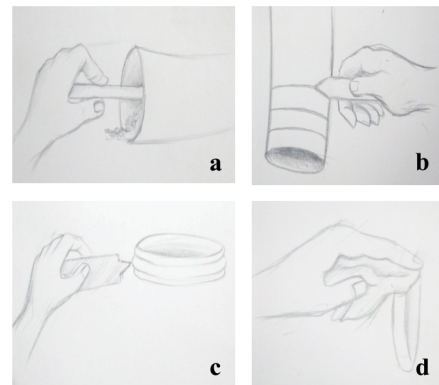


Plate 6: Making ivory bangles
a. Drilling & grooving b. Insertion of sectional cuts c. Creation of *khaancho* d. Polishing
Credit: Haroon Maniyar

iv)Polishing & colouring: The process ends with the polishing and colouring of the bangles. The damp cloth pressed against the rotating bangle to provide finishing surface to it followed by washing it in soap and water.

As mentioned by Untracht O. and narrated by Haroon, in earlier times the natural red dye was obtained from Indian madder plant. Alum, as the mordant was added into the dye bath to gain the permanent red colour. The bangle was first treated with mordant and then immersed into dye bath. It was immediately treated with the cold water to prevent cracking. The dyeing process was repeated many times according to requirement of the deep shades and eliminate color irregularities.

Synthetic dyes of red and green hues which were used to dye silk were introduced to colour *chuda*. The synthetic red dye was brought in India from Europe in about 1871. In combination with the same alum mordant, it could produce even more uniform result than natural dye and with far less effort. (Untracht O)

iv) Designs

Simple yet elegant was the preference of the royal family of Kachchh. It was interesting to note that owing to strict purdah system the officials took the samples of *chuda* designs to the zenana and took the preference of the royal women. The *chuda* with plain surface was popular in olden times among members of royalty. Through the changing time, the

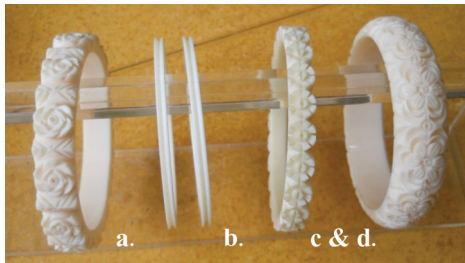


Plate 7: Different designs of ivory bangles

a. Gulab b. Khanch c and d. Mogra

Credit: Haroon Maniyar

carved floral *mogra* designs came into existence. *Chuda* with *khanch* design were preferred to embellish it with gold filling, these bangles were known as "*sona ni madheli*" meaning gold plated bangles. *Jari wado*, *gulab patlo*, *chandni*, and *super patlo* are the some of the names of the designs now a days. (Plate 7)

Conclusion

The ivory *chuda* was handmade using elementary tools and the ingenuity and skill of the traditional craftsmen. The factors such as restriction on the chief raw material and technological advancement after 1990 has affected the acceptance of the use of imitation material and has lost the traditional practice followed for the manufacturing of the jewellery. With the revolutionary approaches by the Indian government, the royal customs still survives and the customary ivory *chuda* in simulated version is promptly accepted by the royal women of Kachchh.

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