



*International Journal Of*  
**Recent Scientific  
Research**

ISSN: 0976-3031  
Volume: 7(4) April -2016

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THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF  
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RECENT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH (IJRSR)  
<http://www.recentscientific.com/> [recentscientific@gmail.com](mailto:recentscientific@gmail.com)



ISSN: 0976-3031

Available Online at <http://www.recentscientific.com>

International Journal of Recent Scientific Research  
Vol. 7, Issue, 4, pp. 10515-10516, April, 2016

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## Case Report

### GOLD TATTOO ON TEETH – A RARE CASE REPORT

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#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 19th January, 2016  
Received in revised form  
12<sup>th</sup> February, 2016  
Accepted 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2016  
Published online 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2016

#### ABSTRACT

The art of tattooing have been practiced all over the world since ages. This case report provides an insight into a unique type of gold tattooing on the teeth. The circular cavities are prepared on the maxillary anterior teeth and filled with the gold by local tattoo makers. This practice of gold tattooing is prevalent in some parts of Rajasthan. Knowledge of such practices is important as they provide the data on cultural beliefs, trend and traditions of people around the world.

##### Keywords:

Gold tattoo, Choumps, Enamel  
tattoo, Central incisors

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## INTRODUCTION

‘Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder’, goes the saying. The need or want for beauty has existed since time immemorial. Everybody wants to create their own visual style which is unique for themselves and yet identifiable for others. Exotic decorative and ritual practices involving tooth tattooing have been practiced all over the world. The concept of decorating or enhancing teeth is actually very ancient. In early times, Native Americans used to alter the look of their teeth by carving grooves and notches and putting semiprecious stones in them to add brilliance to their smile. They used to practice this quite oftenly on their teeth to accommodate the jewellery.<sup>[1]</sup> In some parts of China and Japan, women used to stain their teeth with some black material as part of their beauty regimens and in many cultures teeth may be bordered in gold and gold teeth are especially common in Latin America and the Caucasus. Mayans were accomplished smelters and forgers of gold, silver and bronze. They had expertise in the fabrication and placement of well carved stone inlays in the cavities prepared precisely in the front teeth.<sup>[2]</sup>

Tooth drilling locally known as ‘Mapandes’ was done for a spiritual purpose among youths from Bali tribes as a religious

ritual to indicate the entrance into adulthood through the symbolic act of destroying the six soul enemies such as anger, pride and greed.<sup>[3]</sup> In Algeria, human remains have made it evident that for adornment purposes, they had a practice of inserting a small piece of gold between the proximal surfaces of maxillary anterior teeth.<sup>[4]</sup> Evidence of gold enamel tattoos have been found in some areas of Philippine reported by the collections of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of Michigan that a group of 43 human anterior teeth had gold discs or plugs inserted on the small holes on the labial surfaces for decorative purposes.<sup>[5]</sup>

#### Case report

A 38 years old female reported to the dental checkup camp organized by Department of Public Health Dentistry in rural area of Jaipur. On clinical examination two gold colored enamel tattoos on the central incisors (11& 21) were found [Figure 1]. Detailed history revealed that patient had got the gold tattooing done by a tooth tattoo maker in a local fair in her nearby village. She got the enamel tattooing done when she was 17 years old and recalled that the tattoo maker had drilled holes with a manual drilling tool in her front teeth and then placed the gold tattoo with the gold wire by hammering it on to the tooth surface. She stated that her mother and father also had

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such kind of tattoos and it is the tradition in their family to get the gold tattooing done. These tattoos are called enamel choumps.



Figure 1 Gold tattoo on central incisors

## DISCUSSION

Choumps are a type of tooth tattoo made with gold and are placed on the tooth enamel, mainly on the labial surfaces of the maxillary anterior teeth. Certain tribes of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have shown such types of tattoos. This practice of gold tattooing by engraving tooth surface is prevalent among the Gujjar Tribes, and also some Jaduvanshi and Thakurs Tribes. This case belonged to Gujjar tribe of Rajasthan. The practice of inserting Choumps can be traced back to mythological period during the Mahabharat that even the daanveer karan had gold choump in his teeth. Individuals who have Choumps are thought to be blessed by the god. It is also used by many tribes for branding a particular tribe based on the pattern of the Choump.<sup>[6]</sup> Around 7th century AD, Chinese used to possess gold teeth. It has been observed that the specimens of teeth were decorated by the insertion of several golden inlays into small perforated cavities cut into the enamel of the upper incisors.<sup>[7]</sup>

This practice of gold tattoo is prevalent amongst both the sexes and most commonly practiced on maxillary permanent incisors. In this practice, enamel of the labial surface of upper incisors are engraved with circular cavities using a hand drill and are later filled with gold.

These tattoos are made by local tattoo makers, who are called as a Ferua. Feruas are not professional tattoo makers. They usually come to the villages during festivities or villagers go to the local fares known as Melas to get the gold tattoo done. The technique for placing choumps on anterior teeth is simple but unhealthy.<sup>[8]</sup> They never sterilize their instruments and equipments rather clean them with cloth.

## CONCLUSION

Practices of mutilating teeth have been present in almost all parts of world since pre-historic times and these practices are still being followed in today's world. The traditional practice of gold enamel tattoo is unique in itself in a way that it is being practiced by some of the nomadic clan. Knowledge of these practices is important for the valuable insights they provide into the cultural beliefs and traditions of the people who practice them. It is better to reproduce proper radiographic and photographic records of these modifications, which will enable us to secure our cultural heritage. Further studies are required to know the prevalence of other mutilating practices involving the teeth among Indian population.

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### How to cite this article:

Roma Yadav et al. 2016, Gold Tattoo on Teeth – A Rare Case Report. *Int J Recent Sci Res.* 7(4), pp. 10515-10516.

T.SSN 0976-3031



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