

Design Resource

Masoli: Eternal Beauty of Adornment

Beautifully Handcrafted Traditional Toe ring
by

Sunny Kolekar
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/masoli-eternal-beauty-adornment>

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IDC, IIT Bombay**Source:**<http://www.dsource.in/resource/masoli-eternal-beauty-adornment/introduction>

Introduction

In India the art of adornment goes back to primitive society who used, for decoration, flowers and beads, carved wood, shell, bone and stone. As the civilization changed, the material also used to change in time to natural objects, stones, clay beads, bones, ivory, semiprecious stones, copper, and then to silver & gold; now platinum too. The archeological studies and evidences shows Indians were using gold as adornments since Indus-valley civilization.

Indian jewelries are as old as Indian civilization. The ruins of the Indus Valley civilization, dating back to 5000 - 8000 years, have yielded examples of beaded jewellery. The temples of South India, Bengal, Orissa and Central India present an absolute plethora of the jeweller's art. In the sculptures at Khajuraho, Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati, Belur, Kancheepuram and the paintings at Ajanta, Thanjavur, Mysore and Kerala are the mere example of Indian obsession towards self-adornment. The ancient texts like Kamasutra and Natyasastra depicts the detailing and methodology adorning self, according to the body structure. The epics, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Arthasastra, texts centuries old, mention the intricate arts of the jewellers of yore. The Silappadikaram, an ancient Tamil classic, talks of a society dealing in gold, pearls and precious stones. Greek visitors to ancient India marveled and precious stones. Jewellery in India is not only an adornment, but each stone is endowed with a spiritual quality and used as a protection against evil forces or negative energies. The navaratna or nine gems represents nine planets, are worn in a particular order for the same reason which continues even today. The maniratna, called the serpent stone, was used as a talisman to protect the wearer. Rudraksha and Tulsi seeds and sandalwood beads are worn even today during Hindu worship.

Maharashtra is one such place where people follow their traditions with complete devotion, even though time had brought changes like a usual activity. But the vitality and versatility of the customs, traditions, rituals, life-style and cuisines make Maharashtra absolutely unique and inimitable. The rich as well as raw tradition and rituals creates a complete visual extravaganza to the visitors. As well as it makes people curious to know more about it. Jewellery is an interlaced intricate obsession of Indians where ever the horizon it is. In Maharashtra also jewellery plays an inevitable role. From their weddings to day to day life it has an important role. In Maharashtra, the bridal chooda (green bangle) is significantly different. The brides wear green glass bangles in odd numbers. This signifies creativity, new life and fertility. Along with these green bangles they wear solid gold bangles called patlya and carved kadas called tode. Each and every accessory significantly plays an unavoidable role. Same like gold and silver also has important significance. There are interestingly five set of toe rings crafted in very fascinating and amusing designs. Genda, Jodvi, Birud, Masoli, Karangali are the names of the set of toe rings. There are particularities in selection jewelries from the birth of child and then the rest of life. Kardoda, Kuirya, Tode, Ghagrya are some names of silver jewelries made for babies. One very interesting and fascinating fact is without any gender difference babies are adorned with jewelries and the impeccable logic behind it is the male children won't be able to adore them with these beautiful artifacts after a particular age.

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Masoli

Masoli is a beautifully handcrafted traditional toe rig which is in the shape of fish worn by married women of dhargar community all across western Maharashtra. According to the legends the bride or married woman is compared to crops which are surrounded by water and fish symbolizes water which signifies fertility and liveliness. The semiotic analysis of fish design can be connected to the beauty, grace and magnetism of women as well as in ancient times design inspiration was always directly taken from flora and fauna. Ancient jewellery artisans might have got inspired from shape, colors, patterns, texture and movements of fish as well as the cultural and traditional significance. The tradition of wearing toe rings by married women can be seen across India in different shapes and designs but the unanimity is its significance. Toe rings are not evenhanded to beautify the legs but also have some health benefits. Scientifically there are nerves from toes which connect uterus and hearts. By wearing toe rings good circulation is ensured there by strengthening the uterus. The menstrual cycle is also regulated ensuring speedy conception. Also silver is known to be a good conductor. Silver absorbs the energy from the earth and passes it on to the body thereby rejuvenating the entire system.



Intricately sewn embroidery.

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Eternal beauty of adornment.



The workspace of craftsmen.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools that are used are:

- **Kansis (Files):** It is a tool usually of hardened steel with cutting ridges for forming or smoothing surfaces especially of metal.
- **Katris (Snips):** Snips, also known as shears, are hand tools used to cut metal sheets and other tough webs.
- **Mojpatti (metal ruler):** A metal rule is a simple measuring instrument that is used for measuring distances and ruling straight lines.
- **Sandsi (tongs tweezers):** Tongs are a tool used to grip and lift objects, of which there are many forms adapted to their specific use.
- **Hathodi:** A tool with a heavy metal head mounted at right angles at the end of a handle, used for jobs such as breaking things and driving in nails.
- **Mush:** A traditional tool which is in a shape of cup used for melting silver and gold.
- **Molding Sand:** A particular fine sand which is used for making molds for casting.
- **Casting Frame:** Set of frame which is made of iron used for making molds.
- **Stencil:** Readymade stencil which is used for creating impression of required design in molds.
- **Die:** A die is a specialized tool used in making artifacts or products to cut or shape material mostly using a press. Like molds, dies are generally customized to the item they are used to create.
- **Aairan:** This tool is composition of wooden base and iron block fixed on top it, this tool is used for keeping the die mold during the hammering process.
- **Brass Wire Brushes:** These tools are used during washing and polishing.
- **Soldering Board:** This tool is used for keeping the objects during soldering.
- **Metal Clips:** This tool used for clipping objects together for preventing falling.

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- **Tweezers:** This tool is used for holding the objects during soldering.
- **Soldering Gun:** This tool is used for melting metal during soldering.
- **Hand Bellows:** This tool is used for blowing fire during melting silver.



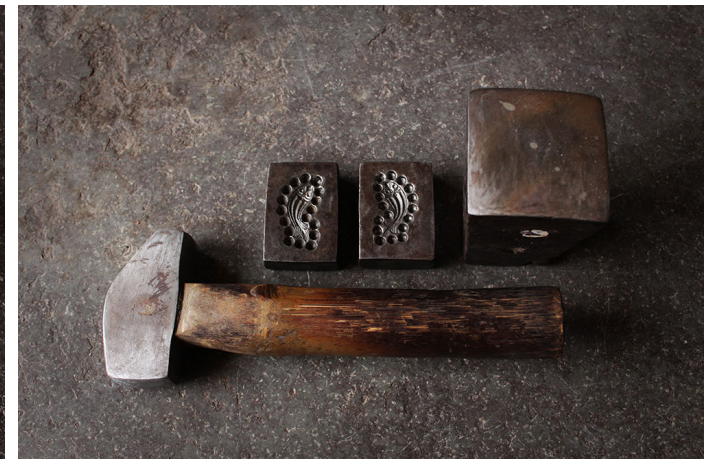
Set of files.



Left to right: 1. Mush (cup), 2. Snips, 3. Metal ruler, 4. Tong tweezers. 5. Harmer.



Left to right: Molding Sand, Casting Frame and Stencil Design.



Left to right: Hammer, Pressing Die, Airan.

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Soldering tools.



Hand bellows.



Polishing Brushes.

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Making Process

The making of masoli starts with selecting the desired design from the collection of jewelers. Once the required design is finalized, casting frame is placed on an even surface (preferably floor) and design stencil is placed inside it accurately. Afterwards some amount of ammonium chloride is sprinkled evenly then molding sand is filled inside the casting frame and pressed meticulously to create the impression of the design well and good. Once it is made the sand filled casting frame is placed upside down and the other part of the frame is placed on top of at the right place and repeats the same process of sand filling. Later on the frames are separated from each other and the metal stencil of masoli is removed carefully from it. Then some amount of sand is removed from the edges of each frame to create path for molten silver liquid during casting and once again two frames are set together and tied tightly. Afterwards molten silver liquid is made by melting raw silver or old broken silver jewellery in a particular container called 'mush'. Once it is ready the silver liquid is carefully poured into the casting frame and set aside for some time. After sometime the frames are separated and the casted artifact is removed from it. The casted artifact is once again heated slightly for cutting and separating them into two individual pieces. Later on the edges are trimmed and brought into the shape. Then it is placed on the pressing die at right place and beaten it carefully with an iron hammer to bring more sharpened features and once it is done again the sides are trimmed and filled. Later on the adjustable silver rings are soldered at the plain backside of casted silver artifact to give the fullest form of the toe ring 'masoli'. As a part of finishing the toe ring is washed and polished with soap berry and fine sand. The whole organic and traditional method of crafting masoli makes it an exceptional and unique art.



Beautifully made stencil from the library of craftsmen.

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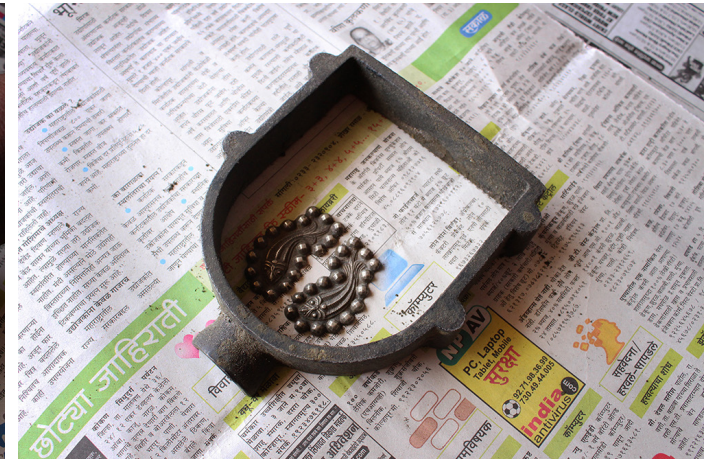
Set of casting frames.



Individual part of casting frame.



The accuracy of artisan placing the stencil inside the casting frame.



The layout of casting frame and stencil.

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Artisan evenly sprinkling ammonium chloride.



Evenly spread ammonium chloride on casting frame.



Molding sand.



Artisan making the molding sand even more fine and lenient.

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Filling the frame with molding sand.



Filling the frame with molding sand.



Making process of casting mold.



Pressing the sand thoroughly to achieve a perfect casting mold.

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Meticulous and continuous pressing makes the mold perfect.



The filling and pressing.



Frame immersed in the mud.



Artisan removing the excess amount of sand from the frame.

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Getting ready for the next procedure.



Interior view of casting frame after filling the sand.



Placing the remaining part of frame for completing the mold.



Fullest form of casting frame.

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Artisan evenly sprinkling ammonium chloride.



The rest of the part also filled with molding sand.



Meticulous and continuous pressing.



Artisan removing the excess amount of sand from the frame.

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Cleaning the sides and removing the sand.



Separating the frames into two parts.



View of casting mold.



The edges of stencils are gently pressed to remove it from the mold.

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Design cavities.



Detailed view of design and pattern.



Removing the sand for creating path for molten silver.



Casting frame.

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Creating path for molten silver.



Casting mold.



Creating path for molten silver.



Creating path for molten silver.

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Mouth of casting frame.



Knotting the frames tightly together to avoid air circulation.



Old toe ring in 'mush' for melting.



Air blower.

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Craft man blowing the fire for melting silver.



Molten silver is poured carefully into the casting mold.



The final fire coming out of the mold before finding its shape.



The process of casting.

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Separating the frames from each other.



Separating the frames from each other.



Masoli after casting.



The burned frame.

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Heating the casted artifact once again to make it tender.



Fragmentary form of the casted artifact.



Chiseling the artifacts into individual pieces.



Cutting the joints of artifact for separating them.

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The artifact after cutting and trimming.



Pressing die.



Casted artifact places on the cavities of pressing die.



Artisan confirming the accuracy of placement.

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Artisan gently and firmly beating the silver form.



Rearranging the silver form for beating.



After the beating process.



Filing the edges for giving the final look.

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Filed artifacts before getting into jewellery form.



Soldering preparations.



Soldering preparations.



Clipping the object together for preventing from falling.

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Rings are clipped for avoiding falling.



Soldering preparations.



Soldering preparations.



Soldering process.

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Soldering process.



Soldered toe rings are kept in water for cooling down.



Soap berry; Organic method of making masoli.



The birth of feminine adornment.

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Brushing it carefully for giving more lusters.

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