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## **ENAMEL CHOUMPS: CASE REPORT AND SHORT REVIEW**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Adorning teeth with gold or jewels has been a tradition since ancient times in different parts of the world. Enamel choumps are a rare type of tooth tattoo in which gold is embedded on the facial surfaces of teeth, most commonly maxillary anterior teeth. In India these are mostly seen in tribes of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These choumps are made in villages by local tattoo makers called Feruas. In addition to having cultural specificity, these choumps can be used for forensic identification also. Therefore they should be recorded in a proper database.

**Key words:** Choumps, Dental Tattoos, Myths, Traditions

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

For the purpose of status or style, teeth adorned with gold have been an age old tradition. The concept of decorating or enhancing teeth is actually very ancient and continues to be performed in some contemporary societies.<sup>[1]</sup> Ritual practices involving decorating teeth have known to be practiced all over the world.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### **History**

The earliest evidence known of drilling human teeth dates back to 500-900 AD, done by the people of Mayan civilization.<sup>[1]</sup> 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 often on their teeth to accommodate the jewellery. In certain

parts of China and Japan, women used to stain their teeth black and in many other cultures teeth embellished with gold have been seen especially in Latin Americans and Caucasians.<sup>[3]</sup> A form of tooth drilling known as 'Mapandes' used to be done for spiritual purpose in some tribes of Bali as a ritual to mark the entrance into adulthood. In Algeria, human remains have shown that they used to practice inserting a small piece of gold in between the maxillary anterior teeth. In some areas of Philippines and Bhutan, the practice of placing gold discs on maxillary anterior teeth has been known.<sup>[1]</sup> This practice of decorating teeth has been known to be specific to different tribes and can give an insight about their culture and customs.

In India, tooth tattooing is done for religious and social purposes. This form of

tooth adornment is called as 'Choump' and is particularly seen in certain tribes of western Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and specially the Gujjar Tribes, Jaduvanshi Thakurs and Jaat Tribes.<sup>[1]</sup> Enamel choumps are a rare form of dental tattoo, in which gold is placed on teeth, especially on the labial surfaces of maxillary anterior teeth.<sup>[4]</sup>

### Myths And Beliefs

The origin of this practice is actually quite ancient and its mention has been reported even in the great Indian epic 'The Mahabharata'. According to The Mahabharata when Karan was on his death bed, Lord Krishna visited him in the disguise of a beggar. Even though he was penniless, he realized that he had a tooth with a golden choump on it and so he plucked out his tooth and gave it to the beggar. Seeing this act of his generosity, Lord Krishna blessed him. Since then the devotees of Lord Krishna, follow this tradition of tooth Choumps, in the hope that they will be blessed by Lord Krishna. Some believe gold to be a symbol of purity and that the one who has gold in his mouth will always follow the path of truthfulness. Also, gold is assumed to be one of the five important elements which a person should carry at the time of death.<sup>[5]</sup> Enamel choumps have also been known to be the symbols of particular tribes. Choumps are also engraved on teeth as a mark of entering into adulthood.

The modern age dental tattoos are customized designs which are added to dental crowns before they are seated on

teeth. These are made by skilled professionals. Whereas, enamel choumps are made by unskilled individuals commonly known as 'Feruas'.<sup>[4]</sup> The Feruas usually visit villages during festivals or local fairs and that is when the villagers usually get it done. In this article we report a case of gold enamel choumps seen on permanent maxillary central incisors.

### CASE DETAIL:

A 35 years old male patient reported to the Department of Periodontics and complained of staining and black deposits on his teeth and wanted to get them cleaned. On clinical examination it was found that there were generalized stains and calculus on his teeth. Also, the patient had a tricoloured pattern on the labial surface of the maxillary central incisor (figure 1). The pattern was unlike anything that we had seen in the area. There were two golden spots, one red and one green spot on each central incisor. On asking the patient it was known that the golden spots were actually gold impregnated into the tooth. The red and the green spots however, appeared to be some kind of dyes, that were used to make the spots. The gold spots have been documented and are known as enamel choumps. The patient belonged to Rajasthan where this practice is commonly seen. The patient had got these done ten years back in a local village fair. He took great pride in the fact that he had gold on his teeth and insisted that they must not be touched with any instrument. From the clinical findings and history, they were diagnosed

as enamel choumps, which is a common practice in Rajasthan, from where the patient belonged. The intraoral periapical radiograph revealed no radio opacity, which probably was due to insufficient thickness of the gold on the teeth. The teeth appeared normal in all aspects i.e, without any periapical pathology and normal pulp testing. No caries surrounding the choumps was observed and the patient did not report any sensitivity to hot or cold in these teeth. The surrounding soft tissues did not show any signs of reaction to the dye. There was no discolouration of the teeth or the adjacent mucosa because of the tattoo. The gold embedded into the tooth or the dye did not seem to have any adverse effect on the teeth or the surrounding soft tissues.

## DISCUSSION:

Enamel choumps are a type of traditional tooth tattoos in which superficial cavities are made on tooth and then filled with gold. The patterns of this tattooing vary amongst different tribes. The various patterns that so far have been documented are single, double or triple gold spot tattoos or gold spots in groups of six on maxillary central incisors. Three gold spot tattoos may be seen on central and lateral incisors. Multiple coloured tattoos may also be seen.<sup>[5]</sup> Enamel choumps have not been documented to have any gender predilection.<sup>[3]</sup>

Enamel choumps and the new age dental tattoos are procedures to enhance the appearance of teeth for various reasons. However, these practices pose a risk of

infection and may even be painful.<sup>[6]</sup> They can be aspirated by the patient and the dyes used can cause an allergic reaction. There are chances of plaque build-up around the tattoo, which may increase the chance of tooth decay.<sup>[1]</sup> The unnecessary removal of tooth structure may weaken the tooth and reduce its longevity. Enamel choumps are made by drilling holes in the teeth and then hammering gold into them. This can cause tooth fracture or even injury to the adjacent teeth and the mucosa. The method is unhealthy and may cause damage to the teeth. Choumps are unique as they have a geographical pattern of distribution and also are specific to particular tribes.<sup>[5]</sup> The knowledge of these and other practices of tooth mutilations and adornments can give an insight about the various customary practices among different tribes and civilizations in different parts of the world.<sup>[1]</sup> Not only this, if these findings are documented and recorded in a database, it can be very helpful for forensic identification of unidentifiable corpses, for teeth are considered to be the hardest parts of human body and are resistant to decomposition and destruction even by fire.<sup>[7]</sup> Therefore, such findings should be documented and recorded with photographic records in order to be of use in forensic identification.<sup>[5,8,9,10]</sup>

## CONCLUSION:

The practice of tooth tattooing has been present in almost all parts of the world since prehistoric times and these practices

are still being followed in today's world, in different communities, in different ways. In the end, we can say that although some of these cultural practices have harmful effects on the teeth yet, the knowledge

can be used for enhancing cultural sensitivity and social customs practiced amongst various civilizations in different parts of India.

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## FIGURES:



Figure 1- Multicoloured enamel choumps on maxillary central incisors