

Design Resource

Lacquer Work

The Craft of Making Lac Bangles

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Ms. Anisha Crasto and Ms.

Anushree Kumar

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/lacquer-work>



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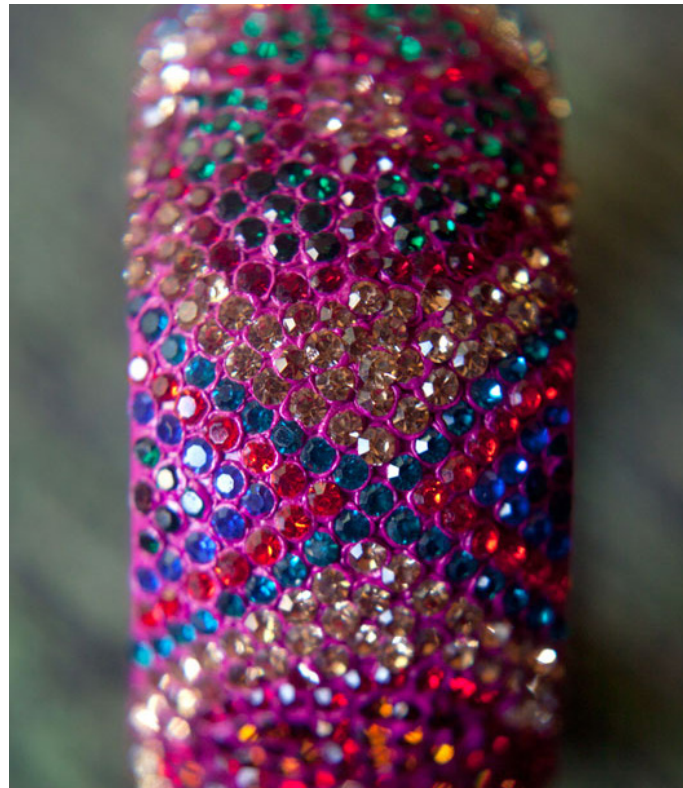
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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/lacquer-work/introduction>

Introduction

Rajasthan has a long history of rich culture and tradition which is still embedded in the lifestyle of the people. It can also be prominently seen in the socio-cultural activities of the state. The city of Jaipur houses a lot of crafts which have a strong relation to the customs and tradition of the people of Rajasthan. Lac as a craft practice has a traditional importance among the women of the state. Women wear lac bangles in marriages and festivals. The lac bangles are in huge demands during festivals, marriages and are also offered to Gods and Goddesses as religious offerings. Therefore a lot of families all across Rajasthan are engaged in the craft of making lac bangles. Lac bangles are made in Jaipur as it has huge demands among the local and foreign buyers. Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh, while planning the city housed the craft in a lane which came to be known as Maniharon Ka Rasta after the name of the community practicing the craft. The place is situated in the walled city near Ajmeri Gate. Apart from this in many places around the walled city artisan, especially the women are engaged in making bangles at small scale.

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Lac bangle made for brides considered to be an ideal ware for women.



The artisan selling Lac bangles.

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Craftsman involved in making bangle out of lac.



Lac is easily softened by heating.

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Colored lac is ready to be applied on bangles.



Fashioned bangles to meet the latest trend.

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Traditional red and green bangles are must for bride during wedding.

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People and Place

The craft of making lac bangles is traditionally practiced by the Manihar or Lakhera communities in Rajasthan. Manihars belong to Muslim communities while Lakhera community consists of Hindus. Historically both the communities are engaged in the craft of making lac bangles and the same is transferred to the younger generations too. There are around 500 families practicing the lac business making Jaipur a hub of the same. These families are either from Jaipur or have migrated from other districts of Rajasthan. The artisans of lac business come from the lower income group therefore are less educated and socially unaware. Due to the lack of education and proper awareness they face a lot of problem in terms of work and health. In India Lac bangles hold a significant place in the life of married women. The culture is prominent both in Hindu and Muslim communities and prevails mainly in North India. Craft is practiced mainly in Rajasthan, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa and Maharashtra. In Rajasthan lac bangles are made in Jaipur, Jhunjhunu, Sikar, Alwar, Ajmer and Jodhpur. Jaipur is considered to be the hub of lac bangles and related products. Apart from Maniharon ka Rasta in Jaipur, there are number of artisans practicing the craft in neighboring places like Gangauri Bazar, Ramganj Bazar, Shashtri Nagar, Jhotwara, Ghatgate, Haldion Ka Rasta etc.

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Artisans working together in a small workplace.



Lac bangle are generally made by women in their houses.

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Tools and Raw Materials

• Tools:

Tools used in making bangles are simple and mainly wooden based. Earlier shagwaan wood was used but now the tools are made in any low coat wood. Artisans buy these tools from the local market directly.

Angethi (Coal burner with flat steel plates/silla on top):

This is used for heating and melting of the lac.

Kadhai (Shallow vessel):

This is generally an aluminum vessel used to melt lac in huge quantity either to make colors or normal lac rod.

Stone piece:

To grind the colors and in order to make it into powder grinding-stone is used.

Chimta (Spatula):

This is a huge spatula used to stir the lac while heating.

Hatta (flat wooden tool):

This is used for pressing and shaping lac bangles for sizing.

Khali (round wooden rod):

This is used for sizing the bangles.

• Raw Materials:

Main raw material used in the process is Lac accompanied by several other materials. Following are the main raw materials used in the process:

Lac:

It is a natural material procured from the forest and then goes through several steps of refinement to be finally used in making the products

Coal:

It is used to burn the Bhatti and also to heat the lac.

Precious and semi-precious stone:

They are used to embellish the bangles

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Coal is used to produce the heat.



Hatta, used for flattening the bangles, mustard oil is used as a lubricant and chapdi is a raw material in which colors are mixed.

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Round shaped wooden khali, used to size the bangles.



Farma, used to shape the bangle.

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Color powder used to make the colors.



Colored lac stuck to the end of wooden sticks.

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Colored lac is applied on the basic brown lac.



Water is used to cool the heated bangles before finishing.

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Iron stove is used to heat the bangles slightly during embellishing process.



Semi-precious stones are brought from the market in small packets.



The view of working area.



Coal is used to produce the heat.

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Process

There are about 500 families involved in the lac bangle-making business in Jaipur. These families have their own Bhatti. Two to three persons can work on a furnace. The flat metal surface on either side of the Bhatti is heated by the fire in the furnace. On this the artisan makes bangles of different sizes. This process is generally done by the male workers while the female partner plays helping role. The bangle making involves three major steps:

- Making of colors
- Making of bangles
- Finishing

Making of colors:

The process of making colors starts with melting the Lac pieces in kadhai (shallow vessel). The heating is done till the solid lac pieces turns into semi-molten state. At this stage beroza and giya pathar powder is added along with powdered colors brought from the market. The mixture is stirred well. Once the mixture is properly made heating is stopped and the liquid is allowed to cool down to a semi solid state. After this it is stuck at the end of a wooden or cane stick. Different colors are stuck on different sticks and shaped into a cube form. The color used depends on the market demand. Traditionally red, green and yellow colors are used.

Making of the bangles:

Normal lac is stuck on a wooden rod and rolled over a flat surface to make it into a cylindrical shape. This lac is then heated slowly over the coal Angethi (burner). The heated lac is continuously pressed and rolled over the flat iron plate with the help of Hatta. The colored lac is heated simultaneously and then applied evenly by rubbing it on the lac. The artisans make sure that the lac has reached a sufficiently warm and soft stage before applying the color on it. This process is called Rang Chapna. Once the color has been applied to the lac base it is again shaped with the help of Hatta into a thin coil and cut off from the plain lac rod. The thickness and the length of the coil approximately depend on the final shape and size of the bangles. This whole process is done by a single artisan and then passed on to different aritans. The coil is then placed in a farma, and pressed with the help of hatta so that the coil takes the shape of the farma. Coil is then taken out and heated again over the burner so that the ends can be joined together to form a bangle. The process is called Moojodaai. Thus it is passed over to another artisan for further work. The semi formed bangle is slipped into a round wooden beam with a tapering end for different sizes and adjusted for size. The artisan rubs the lac bangles over this wooden beam with the help of a piece of cotton cloth dipped in oil. This gives shine to the bangles. The process is called Ghotai. Once the size and shape is obtained wooden beam along with the bangles is dipped in cold water to freeze the shape. Bangles are taken out and kept at a clean cool place.

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Finishing:

The bangles are ready to be embellished with sequins, semi-precious stones, mirrors, beads etc. For applying the sequins, they are heated over a tin plate kept on a small burner. The metal base of the sequins gets heated and easily melts the lac surface on which they are placed and stick there after cooling. They are picked up one at a time and stuck on the bangle. The process requires great precision. It takes much longer when working with smaller sized sequins. This process is called as Chipai. The embellishment is done by the women of the family.

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The base brown color lac is initially coated with white color.



The required color is rubbed over the lac surface for detailed carving.



The colored lac is heated to make it soft.



It is simultaneously pressed and rolled to make coils.

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Thin coils made up of lac.



Thin coils are cut into pieces using a metal strip.



Thin coils ready to be shaped into bangles.



The coil is placed in the farma in order to give it a semi-circular shape.

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The coil is heated slightly to soften.



Both the ends are joined.



The joined ends are shaped properly.

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Sizing is done as per the requirement.



The shaped and sized bangles are dipped in water.



A cotton cloth dipped in oil is rubbed over the bangles to give it a shiny look.

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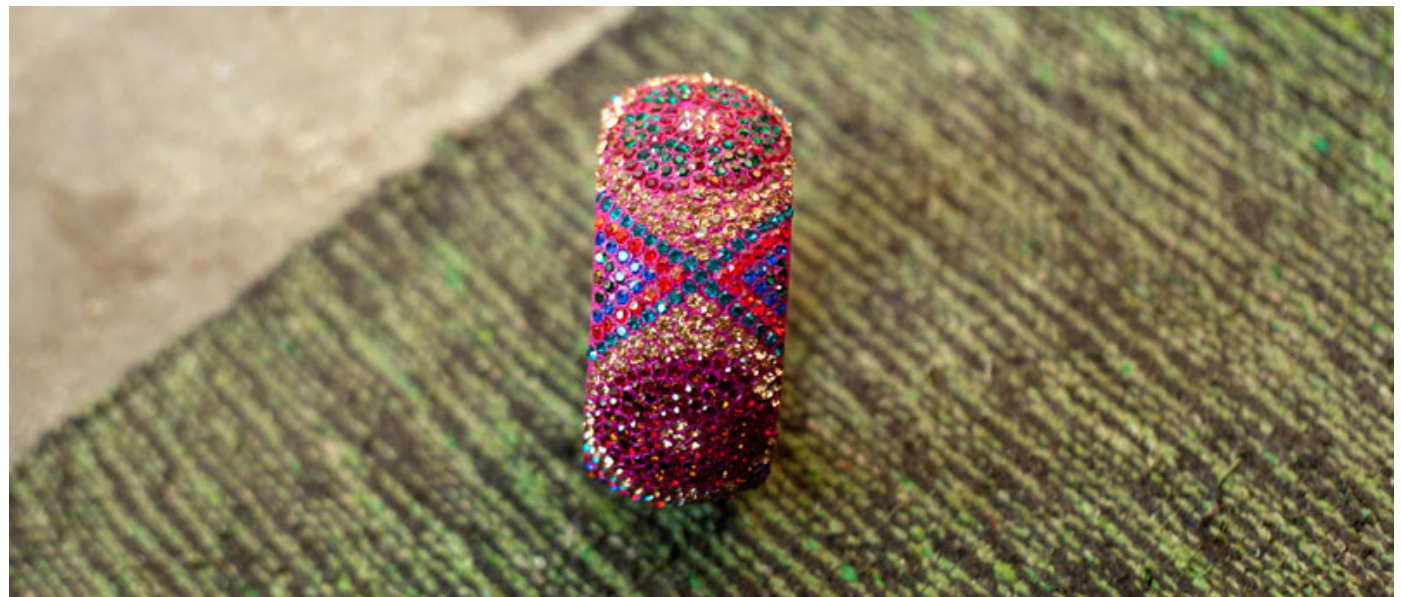
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Removing the bangles for the wooden frame.



The prepared bangles are allowed to cool.



The lac bangle is finally embellished using semiprecious stones.

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Products

The wide range of lac bangles are worn in special, auspicious and festival occasions by women. Lac bangles does not cause any harm to the wearer when compared to metal and plastic bangles. The striking products are available in various colors with gleaming semi-precious stones. Traditionally only bangles were made in lac but with the increase in demands and also to capture new market the artisans started making several utility products like, boxes, mirrors, photo frames, key chains, pens, penholders, tea, coasters, notebooks, phone books, toys, furniture's etc. apart from jewelry like necklaces and earrings.



Lac earrings embellished with beads.

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The packed bangles displayed for sale.



Variety of earrings in different colors.



Stacked bangles in different vibrant colors.

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Bangle in multi colors.



The colorful precious stones enhance the beauty.

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Bangles in sequence studded stones.



The bangle is given an extra decoration with beaded hangings.

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Design

Traditionally the artisans used to make plain lac bangles in single colors. Rajasthan bangles have laheriya pattern on them which is considered to be a native style of the state and worn during Teej and Gangaur. Apart from this bangles made for marriages are decorated with precious and semi-precious stones, mirrors and pearls. Traditional colors used are bright, red, green, yellow and orange. Now artisans have started using pastels and other colors as preferred by the customers.



Traditional Lac bangles in red and green color worn by the married women.

Various designs made on Lac bangles with the help of stone.



Different designs are made by adding various colors.

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