

Design Resource

## Temple Jewellery - Kanyakumari, Tamilnadu

Authentic Ornaments

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Sowmya B. N.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/temple-jewellery-kanyakumari-tamilnadu>



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## Introduction

Nagercoil is a city and a municipality in Kanyakumari district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. It derives its name from a famous old temple called the Nagaraja Temple, which still exists in the central part of the city. It has been an important temple for Hindus for centuries and is also a tourist attraction. The deities of the temple are adorned with traditional temple jewellery, which is made only in Vadasery.

Vadasery, a tiny village on the borders of Nagercoil, is dedicated to creating temple jewellery. A jewellery crafted to decorate the statues of gods and goddesses is temple jewellery. The practice of ornamenting statues originated in South India. The local rulers, Chola, Pandya, and Krishnadeva Raya dynasties, gave their jewelleries to temples to adorn deities and protect their jewelleries. They set up workshops in a temple with professional artisans to create jewellery, especially for the gods. Nowadays, there are 58 units, with 224 traditional artisans, engaged in the manufacture of temple jewellery.

These traditional jewels are made with silver covered with gold leaf. The top visible layer has natural un-cut stones, while the gold leaf is used to form the lining for the stones. This ensures that the jewels retain their shine for years. The Rajas of Chettinad and Ramnad were using this traditional jewellery.

Temple jewellery is studded with red stones that come either in dark reddish maroon or dark green colour. The jewellery used to adorn was later worn by temple dancers, and slowly, the designs became a part of the Indian woman's bridal jewelry. Temple Jewellery, an essential part of the decoration of the Tamil bride, is also an integral part of the Acharya or costume of a Bharatanatyam or Kuchipudi dancer. Indian women and jewelry have always created a great combination. The Tradition is still alive and is more active than earlier. South Indian women consider wearing temple ornaments at important festivals. Artisan families in Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, have been mastering this art for more than 100 years. Many of these age-old designs are still fashioned. The jewellery of Tamil Nadu exposes the top of the goldsmith's art.



Original Jewellery is made with silver and plated with gold.

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Skilled senior artisans involved in making of temple Jewellery.



The handcrafted Jewellery is a symphony of designs derived from the Viswakarma community of south India.

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Semi-finished pendant.



A pair of beautiful Jhumkas with multi-colour stones and pearls.

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## Tools and Raw Materials

The tools and raw materials that are used for making temple jewellery are:

- **Silver Stripes:** It is the main raw material used for making jewellery.
- **Lacquer:** The lacquer is filled to the holes formed by the floral design for stone fixing.
- **Forceps:** These are used for holding objects.
- **Half Flattened Chisel:** Chisel is used for edge smoothening of the jewellery.
- **Battery:** It is used for the electroplating process.
- **Gold Solution:** This solution is used in the electroplating process in order to achieve an impressive gold look.
- **Soap Solution:** This solution is used for cleaning and polishing the jewellery.
- **Coloured Shining Paper:** This paper is fixed under the stone to reflect the colour.
- **Stone:** Colourful stones are used for making jewellery.
- **Gold Leaf:** The gold leaf is fixed in between the silver lines and stones.
- **Kathir:** A small chisel-like tool curved at the tip used to fix the gold leaf.
- **Wire:** Golden wire is used to attach the beads to jewellery.

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Silver is the main raw material, which is used to make the design.



Black stone ground into powder.



Lac used as adhesive.



A mixture of lac and black stone powder is used to stick the pearls.

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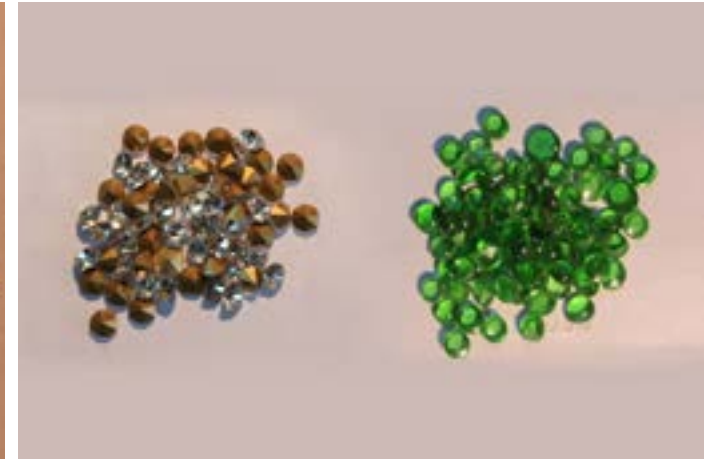
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Strings to decorate the ornaments.



Different types of stones are used to decorate the ornament.



Flux paste is used for soldering the silver.



Forceps are used in making ornaments.

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File and sandpaper are used to trim or smooth the surface.



Things used for electrolysis.



A rolling machine is used to flatten the silver strips to the required size and thickness.

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## Making Process

Temple jewellery making is a time-consuming process. Silver stripes are used to make temple jewellery. The first process is the extraction of silver stripes from silver. The silver sheet is cut to the shape of a pendant. Then the silver stripes are curled welded on the surface of precut silver sheet so as to make a floral design forming holes for fixing stones. The silver stripes placed upon the silver sheet are soldered to the sheet by heat. Flux paste is used for soldering.

Once the pendant is ready, the holes formed by the floral design are completely filled by the lacquer. After filling the lacquer, the pendant is placed in the middle of the rice husk fire for the melting process. The reason for filling the lacquer is to fix the stones. Then the edge of the pendant is smoothed by using a chisel. Later the pendant is polished and cleaned in a soap solution. The polishing process is carried out in a machine. Once the polishing of the pendant is done, then the pendant is electroplated in gold by the electrolysis process. The side and back portion of the ornament is electroplated in gold in order to achieve an impressive uniform gold look. Electroplating is the process of coating metal objects with a very thin layer of another metal, typically by applying a direct electric current. This partially dissolves the metals and creates a chemical bond between them. The coating applied by electroplating is usually around 0.0002 inches thick.

Plating is a permanent addition to the surface of the base metal. This means that plating will not be naturally separate. However, the plating can be worn off over months and years of use and wear. The ornamental part is polished and cleaned as thoroughly before the electroplating process starts in a gold plating. Gold plating will look uneven and smudged if the surface is dirty, oily, or damaged.

Once the electroplating process is completed, the ornament is taken for stone fixing. The wooden stick is taken, free at one end, and a flattened surface fixes the other. At the flattened surface end, the lacquer is kept and melted using fire. After thawing, the ornament is set to the wooden stick, and the stone fixing process starts.

Before starting the stone fixing process, the coloured shining paper is fixed on the ornament. After that, the stone is fixed above the coloured paper. Now the stone-studded jewel is ready for applying gold leaf. The delicate leaf is set on the exposed wax between the silver lines and the stones so that the entire exposed wax is sealed with gold leaf. The gold leaf is fixed on the wax with the use of a small preheated "Kathir". The gold leaf is firmly fixed on the surface, and now the stones are seen in a particular design on the surface. Then the beads are attached to a hook prepared at the edge of the ornament.

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The silver is soldered to the base piece.



Initially, flux paste is applied to silver and placed as per design.



The lac mixture is filled into the design.

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Lac is melted by heating and fills the space.



The edges are trimmed to the surface level.



Silver is washed in soap water.



The silver is soaked into nitric acid.

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Electrolysis is done to attain gold plating on silver.



Required beads are placed and heated with red-hot charcoal to fill its space.

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The product is fixed to the lac for further process.



Pearls are attached to the product.



Finished pendant of temple Jewellery.

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## Products

At present, ornaments like necklaces, earrings, ear hangings, Vanki (armlet), Kanganam (Bracelets), bangles, Pendant, Nose rings, etc. set with red, blue, green, and white synthetic stones are popular. Jewels made for Bharatanatyam and dramatics are a specialty in this craft. A complete set of jewels like a headset, Jada Villai, Rakkodi, Nose ring, Bangles, Ottyanam, etc., is known as the Bharatanatyam set. The popular designs in the pendants are Makari, Naga, Yali, Swan, Parrot, etc.



A maang tikka used to ornament fore head.



Beautifully made waistband for gods.



Necklace with bright stones.

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Stunning blue coloured stones are used in the necklace.



Ornaments are used for hair decoration.



Beautiful Jhumka with pearls at the end.



Heavily stud earring.

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Ornamented hairpin.



The choker is made with bright colour stones and pearls.



Earrings studded with green colour stones.

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## Video



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## Contact Details

This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Sowmya B. N. at [NID, Bengaluru](#).

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You can write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

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