

ದೃಶ್ಯ ಬೆಲಕು



ಕನ್ನಡ ಮತ್ತು ಇಂಗ್ಲೀಷ್ ತ್ರೈಮಾಸಿಕ
DRUSHYA BELAKU Kannada & English Quarterly

ಸಂಪುಟ: 01 ಸಂಚಿಕೆ: 04 ಜುಲೈ-ಅಗಸ್ಟ್ 2016 ಮುಖ್ಯ: 78 ಪುಟ: 157/-



Ornamentation of Bidriware

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Introduction: The art of Metal-craft in India is as old as its history in which inlaying of one metal upon another holds a distinguished position. Like painting and textiles, inlaid metal-craft presents a fascinating variety recalling mind the history and custom of different regions of this vast country. It tells the story of conquest and bloodshed, devotion and refinement blended with sublime emotion wrought in the language of hammer and chisel. A number of traditions of crafts based on metals alloys, gems and stones flourished in ancient India. Many of these traditions started in ancient India and continue vigorously even in Modern India. Once such craft is Bidriware.

Bidriware: Bidar district is the home of the Bidriware industry and the very name Bidri is derived from Bidar. The Bidri articles are well known from their artistic elegance and beauty in India and abroad. This craft was introduced in Bidar during the rule of Bahmanis¹ and patronized by their successors. It gained such popularity that working centres for it were opened at Murshidabad in West Bengal, Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh and Purniah in Bihar. However towards the end of the 19th century, it showed signs of decay. The Nizam's government during the first of the 20th century did what it could to revive the industry and to save it from extinction.²

Unique feature: A unique aspect of the Bidriware craft is the soil used to ornament the art objects. This soil, which has not received rain or sunlight for centuries, is collected by artisans from the inner areas of the Bidar fort. The soil contains ingredients that give a lustrous black colour to Bidriware. The Bidriware is solid. It does not dent or break unless struck or hurled with great force. It does not rust either. The entire process of manufacture of Bidriware is carried on with great expertise and celerity by different sections of the people.³



Bidriware, Bidar



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Techniques of Ornamentation: There are many types of inlay for ornamenting Bidriware objects. According to the process used for the inlay, the work is known as Tarkashi (if only wire is inlaid), Tehnishan (if the inlay looks flush with the surface of the object); Mahtabi or Aftabi (if the design look black against the overlaid metal sheet); Zarnishan (if the inlaid pieces are in low relief), Zarbuland (if the inlaid pieces are in high relief).¹ and Koftagari (it is done by first drawing out the pattern on the steel surface with a hard steel needle or silai).²

1. **Tarkashi:** Tarkashi or inlay of wire is rarely used alone. Generally, it is combined with aftabi, tehnishan or zarnishan. In this technique a fine wire of silver is drawn and the design is made from that single wire. It is a very time-consuming and intricate process, demanding precision and great patience.
2. **Tehnishan:** This has been variously spelt as tehnishan, tahnishan, the-nishan, tahnishan or even tah-tila or true incrustation. In it the pattern is cut in fairly deep grooves, round bottomed for wire, and flat with straight sides for any other shaped pieces. The depth of the grooves should be about two-third of the diameter of the wires. The pure gold or silver metal is pressed into the grooves and is hammered down flat. The inlay should be of the softest metal procurable, usually pure metal, if gold or silver, and carefully annealed in any case. The manufactures often take great pride and pains to inscribe, by a skilful inlay of wire, verses from the Holy Quran, spells, and poetical passages, names of the owners and makers and prayers for good fortune. This technique is not confined to Bidriware but is used for any kind of inlaying.
3. **Zarnishan¹:** The outline of the pattern is engraved on the object, and a thin sheet of silver, gold or copper is held over the outlines of the engraved area and rubbed with a finger until a thin sheet of silver, gold or copper is held over the outlines of the engraved area and rubbed with a finger until a tracing of the design is imparted on the metal sheet. This traced design on the sheet is cut into pieces of the desired shapes, each a little larger than the space it is intended to cover. The margin or rim of each piece is gently bent over, and the cavity thus formed in the metal sheet is filled with soft lead or some other composition.

Next, each such piece is inverted over the space to be decorated, the margin of the structure is then pressed into the engraved outline on the object, and is carefully hammered or punched all round so that the surface metal embraces and fixes the applied piece. The object is then finished by punching or chasing the desired design on the applied silver, gold or copper sheet.²

4. **Zarbuland:** The exact form and ornamentation of the pieces to be applied are practically finished, either by moulding, repousse (embossing), or chasing. The job requires great care, and the shapes need to be measured constantly with a caliper and gauges for accuracy before they are attached into the excavated area. When the piece is finally shaped satisfactory, it is skillfully polished. If the applied piece is in low, it is Zarnishan work, and in case it is in high relief, it is Zarbuland-work. In both types, the applied decoration shows in relief against the surface of the object. There was no hard and fast rule of adhering to one variety of workmanship in decorating may be found together in a Bidri object.
5. **Aftabi:** In the aftabi technique, the silver sheet is cut into the exact sizes of the designs which are traced on it with pencil from a prepared design on paper. Instead of fixing the silver sheet into engraved pattern, the designs are cut out in the silver sheet.

Techniques and Designs:

1. **Munabatkari:** In this method of ornamentation the patterns of flowers, etc., are wrought on slightly raised levels over the surface of the article (i.e., one can feel with hand the designs overlaid on the article. For this purpose, lead is first laid on articles in the shape of lead and silver is fixed in tarkashi or tehnishan technique. These required a lot of labour and very intricate workmanship hence they become very costly, and are, therefore rarely produced. The gold is also inlaid occasionally but owing to its scarcity and high cost such articles are not much in demand and are, therefore, manufactured only to order.⁸
2. **Koftgari⁹:** The type of metal work known as Koftgari is produced in India, Persia, Europe and Japan. In Europe, it is known as Damascening, which means decorating a metal object by inlaying on t another metal. In Japan, it is generally known Non Zogan. Whereas an alloy chiefly of Zinc and Copper is used in Bidri-work, iron or steel is used for Koftgari-work. The operation for Koftgari-work is as follows: the iron or steel object to be decorated is first heated to a blue colour; then using a sharp knife is surface is covered by cuts and hatches in various directions, and the burrs are attached. Now the design is drawn upon the hatching with a sharp-

pointed steel stylus. This done, pure gold or silver wire is conducted into the grooves, according to the pattern, and carefully sunk by pressing it into the metal with a copper tool. In inferior-type Koftgari, known as 'false damascening,' the inlay work is so light that it soon wears off.

The Koftgari craftsmen use the same five terms for the type of their decoration, as are used by the Bidri artisans. The old centre's for Koftgari-work were Sialkot and Gujarat (Pakistan); Jaipur, Alwar, Jodhpur and Sirohi (Rajasthan); Datia (Madhya Pradesh); and Hyderabad and Kalyani in the Deccan (i.e. Bidar) until the end of the 19th century, these places were known for manufacturing and decorating with Koftgari, sword handles, scabbards, body armour, shields, boxes, trays and buttons. With the decline in the use of the traditional arms during the last century, craftsmen started producing trays, boxes, picture-frames and a variety of decorative objects embellished with Koftgari. Now it is almost an extinct craft.¹⁰

3. **Ganga-Jamuna:** Kashmir is famous for its parcel gilt silver ware. The pattern consists of small springs of leaves hammered out in relief all over the vessel. Sometimes the ground is silver and springs are parcel gilt: it is then known as the Ganga-Jamuna pattern. This Ganga-Jamuna is a favourite pattern with Indian artists, which they love to introduce into all sorts of manufactures. It got its name from the two rivers Ganga and Jamuna, which between them enclose a tract of land in upper India known by the name of Doab or 'Two Waters'. The colour of the waters that the Ganges carries down to the sea is described in the books white, while those of its tributary the Jamuna deep blue. Hence when on the same article patterns of two colours meet or run side by side, the vessel is described to be of Ganga-Jamuna pattern.¹¹ This is like the above gold and silver wires are used in the same design the gold often alloyed with a little copper to give it a pinkish tinge.¹²
4. **Diwali Work:** The degree of hammering applied to Koftgari causes the gold or silver to spread over the rest of the work. In Rajputana, Dewali work is subsequently scratched to remove portions of the gold and produce a closer similarly to wire inlaying.¹³
5. **Asrafi-ki-booti or teenpati-ki-booti**¹⁴: Highly conventionalized patterns asrafi-ki-booti or teenpati-ki-booti, stars, vine creepers, and stylized poppy plants with flower; single bloom or whole plant in various shapes, mostly in medallion form or mango shape; are amongst those which can be traced back to Persian influence. They are most fond in the earlier pieces. Border of parallel lines with cross lines, like railway track crossed by sleepers, are also other popular designs.

6. **Mahi-pusht:** Mahi-Pusht or fish scale pattern is another very interesting design in Bidriware. Fish-shaped boxes are also very common to Lucknow and Bidar, but articles ornamented with fish designs are special to Lucknow. A large collection of spice boxes of fish designs is in the Ratan Tata Collection of Bidriware in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay. The Salar Jung Museum has also in its custody, a number of them. T.N. Mukerji attributes such patterns to the Bidri manufacturers of Lucknow. He traces the fish emblem to “the late kings of Oudh, occupying the foremost rank among the nobility of the Delhi Empire”¹⁵. They ‘delighted in parading their dignity of fish (Mahi Maratib) which consisted of the privilege of carrying before them in all state processions the representation of fish, made of metal and borne upon a pole, with two circular gilt bells attached to it.
7. **Phooljadi:** Phooljadi design also popular from ancient to modern times. In recent time phooljadi design adopting more by Bidri artisan. ‘+’ sign adopt while designing the Bidriware. Silver is require for designing this design on Bidriware.

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