

N  QQASHI  
forging metal into treasure

A TIMELESS CRAFT FROM LUCKNOW



BADA IMAMBARA GATE,  
LUCKNOW (UP)

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A goblet adorned with modern naqqashi work

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## SYNOPSIS

Since ages craft has been an integral part of the culture and economy of our nation. Being a premiere institute, National Institute of Design takes pride in this rich culture and vows to preserve it by constantly engaging into the betterment of the craftspeople or recognizing the crafts which are now being left behind in the pages of history. One such initiative is the craft documentation course taken up by the students which requires them to study, research and document the craft by visiting the cluster. Thus, establishing an appreciation for the rich heritage of our country.

Hidden away in the busy lanes of Lucknow is the Shukla market of Yahiyaganj where a handful of craftsmen are busy beating utensils into treasures. The age-old craft of naqqashi has prevailed in the city since the last 200 years and holds a great significance in the culture and heritage of this city. The shrill noises of the metal can be heard even before stepping into the narrow lanes and once inside the market all one can experience is a gush of enthusiastic sellers, buyers and craftsmen bringing the craft to life.

The way it has traveled from various parts of the world and influenced the communities practicing it, places, and the people around it says a lot about the craft of Naqqashi.

As the document unfolds you shall find how the craft acts as a communal binding for a locality, influences their way of living, and reflects upon the lives of the Nawabs with whom the craft rose to its zenith.

We as a team, felt really welcomed in the city and despite having faced certain challenges on feild, were blessed with the experience of a lifetime. From learning different ways to approach people, understanding and experiencing a city to its whole, working together as a team while motivating each other and providing relevant information. Each and every stage of the process has given us lessons way beyond the existence of a craft.



HUSAINABAD PICTURE GALLERY  
LUCKNOW (UP)

## INTRODUCTION

India is a land where every corner is evident with the greatness of art and craft due to its rich diversity and cultural inheritance. The intriguing history and the enthralling past counts for the origin of Indian crafts. Indian crafts flourish to be the amalgamation of socio-political and religious influences that outlined India over time. The tradition of Indian crafts has encircled religious values, the special needs of royalty, and the confined needs of a commoner.

A craft takes its course through time, and is therefore ever evolving. It is a manifestation of the culture, people, community and their religious beliefs. We live in an evolving, challenging and open society, and contemporary craftspeople and their work have a strong presence within it. They draw inspiration and motivation from a society that is ever changing, and yet their art stands through the test of time. In the modern times, when industries are thriving, these crafts still hold their due relevance. The human touch on each piece adds to the intricacy and value of the piece, which makes it precious.



Hammer and Anvils  
The tools used by the artisans for  
Naqqashi.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Craft of Naqqashi

Naqqashi or Repousse (French) refers to the art of engraving sheet metal with intricate designs. The craft itself dates from about 8000 BCE and holds a very strong cultural importance with a history that can be traced back to Persia. Being practiced extensively across the various cities of India, it first came to the country in the northern city of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh.

The intriguing play of the punches or “Kalams”, hammers, and anvils results in intricate patterns over the surface which were celebrated by the Nawabs. The craft came to India with a generous number of craftsmen which has now declined to only 5 craftsmen working in the street of Yahiyaganj, Lucknow. Lucknow is the capital of the state of Uttar Pradesh, the largest northern state of India. A variety of products are being made by the Lucknow craftsmen ranging from articles of religious importance (Pandaan, Ughaldaan, Khaasdan, Wazu ka lota, and Alam) to objects of daily use (Lota, glasses and, Ghadas) bringing out the beauty of this craft hidden away in the streets of Lucknow.

## HISTORY

The world historians affirm that Persia gave the world its first metal objects in 3500 BCE. By the 6th Century BCE, the Persian craftspeople were skilled in various techniques like Metal Casting, Smelting, Repousse, and Chasing required for the material.

In the Parthian period (3rd century BCE - 3rd century CE), strong Greek influences could be seen in the decorative elements. During the Sasanian period (3rd Century CE - 7th Century CE), Repousse was the most popular technique for creating relief designs on gold and silver from the reverse side of the metal sheet showing lively hunting scenes, dancing women, and palmettes (palm leaves). The earliest Persian bowls and other vessels kept celebrating the royal themes even after the 8th Century.

During the 12th century, Khorasan, the large North-Eastern province of Iran developed vessels of bronze and copper raised from metal and inlaid with silver designs (Bidriware). This technique dominated luxury metalworking not only in Persia but all over the world. This method remained popular until the 14th century CE. The Khorasan people are popularly known for being the best metal works of Persia.

In the Safavid period (1501 - 1736), copper bowls and ewers (water pitchers) were incised with intricate floral and figural designs. In this period the most lavished patterns were fashioned on steel body armor and helmets. Calligraphy 'flags' made of steel fretwork were usually inlaid with gold wire and edged in brass were important emblems in processions celebrating the Shiite religious festival of Muharram.

## THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The Mughal Empire flourished during the 18th Century and had conquered almost all of India, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. Evidence of trade between Iran and North India has been found. The open-door policy of the Mughal king resulted in many soldiers, administrators, aristocrats, and artists shifting and settling down in India. Under the Mughal Dynasty, Saadat Khan was appointed as the subedar of Awadh on 9th September 1722 by Mohammad Shah. Asaf-ud-daula (1775-1798) was appointed as the 4th nawab of Lucknow. He shifted the capital of Awadh from Faizabad to Lucknow. Due to his immense interest in Art and Culture, Lucknow city evolved in its architecture and culture. He brought makers and thinkers from Persia who along with them brought the culture and intricate craft of Repousse, which was later known as Naqqashi or Naqshi in India. The motifs used in the craft were highly influenced by the Mughal form of art which later further developed and became Lucknow's style of Naqqashi.

## NAQQASHI IN PRESENT DAY

Being an age-old craft, it is splendid how Naqqashi still prevails in many parts of the country. Each part holds its own set of products and motifs distinguishing them from each other such as the god idols and doors of Varanasi, utensils, and artifacts of Moradabad with lotus, Swastik and mango shaped motifs, decorative items of Jaipur with engravings, the ceremonial symbols of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa practiced by the Gharuan and Dhokras (tribal communities), locks and cutleries of Mathura, Aligarh and Meerut, copperware Naqqashi of Jammu and Kashmir where Surahi, rosewater sprinklers, and henna holders are made, sheet metal embossing and metal casting of Dharmshala where idols, bells, and utensils are made, brass nakshi in Warangal where idols, trophies, and claddings are being made, the brass Repousse art metal plates of Thanjavur, sheet metal embossing of Mysore. Each one of the crafts holds a specialty of their own with the Naqqashi from Lucknow being very different in the motifs and the rawness in the intricate work displayed by the craftsmen of Yahiyaganj. Thus this craft has developed in itself with respect to the place it reached and has been developed with sheer splendor under the rulers.

Aasifi Masjid , Lucknow

The mosque is located inside of the Bara Imambara and it was built nearly 10 years before the complex itself. It is believed that the three-domed mosque was designed and built by Iranian architect Kifait-ullah, who later drafted the project of Bara Imambara.





Rumi Darwaza, Lucknow (UP)

## CHAPTER 2

# Lucknow - the City of Nawabs

“Yeh Sach Hai Zinda-Dili Ki Koi Kitaab Hai Tu,  
Adab K Husn-o Hunar Ka Haseen Shabab Hai Tu,  
Sar-e Chaman Tera Jalwa Hai Woh Gulaab Hai Tu,  
Lucknow Ab Bhi Duniya Mein Lajawab Hai Tu”

– Yogesh Praveen

[Dr. Yogesh Praveen, an Indian author and expert on the history and culture of Avadh, specifically Lucknow.]

Lucknow (Urdu: لکھنؤ, Lakhnaū) is the capital city of Uttar Pradesh, a northern state of India. It has always been a multicultural city with a rich history, cuisine, and hub of craft sectors.

It is the administrative headquarters of Lucknow District and Lucknow Division. Uttar Pradesh is the largest state in Northern India. It is the most populated state in India and the most populated subdivision in the world with 200 million inhabitants. The state is known for its rich culture and tourism. It is located in the foothills of Himalaya and Gangetic plains with beautiful pilgrimage sites like Varanasi, Prayagraj (Allahabad), etc.

The city 'Lucknow' acquired its name from the legendary mythology, when Shri Ram came back from exile he gifted the province to his younger brother Shri Lakshman for his immense loyalty during the exile period of 14 years thus, named Lakshmanpur but was more popularly called 'Lachhmanpur' or 'Lakhanpur' which was later anglicized as 'Lucknow' in the medieval times after the fort 'Lakhna Qila' during the Shaikhs settlement.

The region in the modern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, known as the United provinces of Agra and Oudh before independence, was made part of the Mughal Empire around 1555, by Emperor Humayun. The province was under the control of the Sheikhzadeh, who were the descendants of Sheik Abdul Rahim, to whom the estate was granted in Awadh by Emperor Jahangir. The Nawabi period for which Lucknow in Awadh is known started on September 9, 1722, when the Mughal Emperor Mohammad Shah made Saadat Khan, the subedar of Awadh. After Saadat Khan's death, his son-in-law Safdar Jung took his place and established Faizabad. On Safdar Jung's death in 1754, his son Shuja-ud-daula took over the throne in 1775. He is known for initiating the cultural practices for which Lucknow eventually became renowned for the practice of inviting and patronizing artists, poets, courtesans, and writers from all over the country. After Shuja-ud-Daula's death, his son Nawab Asaf-ud-daula came to rule. He shifted the capital from Faizabad to Lucknow. He began the evolution of the city giving it the present form, improving the culture and architectural value of the city.

Lucknow is a multicultural city located on the Indus-Gangetic plains. Surrounded by Barabanki on the east, Unnao on the west, Raebareli on the south, and Sitapur and Hardoi on the north, Lucknow is situated on the northwest shore of the Gomti River. The river flows through the heart of the city dividing it into two regions. The city

experiences four beautiful seasons giving the city a humid subtropical climate and has a population count of 28.2 lakhs, according to the census of 2011. The place has a varied flora and fauna with farms cultivating vegetables and fruits to sunflowers, roses, and marigolds cultivated in abundance on the outskirts. The city also has a very intricate network of inter-city transportation including the metro, bus, autos, etc. It is also the economic and political hotspot of the state. Thus, this perfect blend of history, culture, art, and modern developments makes the city of Lucknow a majestic experience on its own.

Popularly known as the city of Nawabs, Lucknow is famous for its traditional cuisine, fine arts, and the most courteous people you will find. The cultural heritage of Lucknow was influenced by the Mughal Era and the touch could be found in almost everything that relates to the culture of Lucknow, be it the lip-smacking cuisine, delightful music, and dance forms, or the language. Everything has a touch of the royal splendor that Lucknow once flourished in. The city is well known for its architectural heritage - Rumi Darwaza, Bara Imambara, Jama Masjid, Kesar bagh palace, etc. Tourists from all over the world get attracted to the historic and Nawabi ambiance of the place.

Lucknow is a base for many arts and crafts that have been in practice since historic times like Chikan embroidery (delicate, shadow work hand embroidery traditionally done with white thread), bone carving, Zardozi (embroidery is done with threads of gold), block-printing, clay toys, Kamdaani or Mukaish (Brocade) and Fardi or Takayi (types of embroidery with metallic wires), Chinhat pottery (on the outskirts of Lucknow), Sheet-metal work, etc. There is a striking resemblance in motifs for decoration and patterns among most of the crafts. Most of the crafts flourished during the reign of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula.

All these crafts can be found in various localities in the city, some crafts are even specific to certain localities. Yahiyaganj, one such locality is a small area situated in the old city which is famous for its Naqqashi work done on copper and brass utensils. It has been practiced there by the Thather community for generations.

The locality reflects the real essence of an inter-communal harmony with two different crafts, ie, Naqqashi and Rangai, being practiced by two different communities thriving in the same narrow street with its age-old houses, Havelis, and Mosques adorned with intricate

patterns, the old city still boasts of the Mughal architecture and its influence. The street was sparkling with shiny utensils. The loud noise of beating utensils with hammers was echoing across. Yahiyaganj was bustling with buyers and sellers in the early afternoon.

Lucknow is well connected to all major cities in the country, by air, rail, and road. There are regular flights from all major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, etc. to Lucknow's Amausi Airport or Chaudhary Charan Singh Airport. From the airport, one can take the metro to Charbagh metro station. From Charbagh, there is a lot of local transport available till Yahiyaganj.

The nearest railway station is the Aishbagh railway station and Lucknow Central station. One can easily get local transport from there till Yahiyaganj. The nearest bus stand is in Kaisarbagh that has buses to and from all the major cities like Kanpur, Ayodhya (Faizabad), Delhi, etc. The drive from the airport to the old city is filled with splendid views of the Mughal architecture.

Thus, Lucknow is a city with a well-deserved tag of the "city of Tehzeeb"(manners or warm hospitality) or "the city of Nawabs". Interwoven with culture and heritage is a beautiful place that resonates with the true essence of an Indian city and is an epitome of calmness and peace.



The main street of Yahiyaganj, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

## CHAPTER 3

# The Craftsperson

A craftsperson is the backbone of any craft and all the socio-cultural norms surrounding the craftsman highly influence the craft itself. A craftsperson is one who is skilled in making particular products by hand.

The number of craftspeople working in the Shukla market of Yahiyaganj has decreased drastically over the last few years. Yet there are certain families who are still rooted in this practice followed through generations, learned from their fathers and forefathers. Among these handful of families were people of various age groups and skill sets working continuously throughout the day. Yet these craftsmen do not hold an artisan card, nor do they have any government recognition. Most of the craftsmen have only completed their primary education or even less and they want their kids to study properly and leave the decision of their professional choice up to them. Women do not engage in this craft and are expected to look after the home and the family, though in the sellers' community i.e the Aggarwal's, women sometimes come to the shops to attend to the buyers if the males are busy or outside.

One such craftsperson was Neeraj bhaiya who was 23 years old and had learned the craft from his father. He lived in his home with his father, younger brother, wife, and son where both he and his brother practiced the craft in a small room at the front of their home facing the street from 8 in the morning till 9 at night. His father, about 70 years in age and a master craftsman had stopped working due to his deteriorating health including joint pain and hearing loss.

. He seemed to really enjoy what he was doing and was a master in the craft as he had been working only on paandaans (a container used to store and craft paans) which he sells in the same market. He had a slight knowledge about the craft itself and appreciated it but did not want his son to continue the practice and take up some other profession.

Omnath Ji was another 60-year-old master craftsman who had been working to make alams ( a physical representation of the symbols used by the muslim community) for the Muharram festival. He lived in Yahiyaganj with his family and worked in his shop which had products ranging from Alams and Paandans to Lotas (a container to store water) and Tamdis (a large container to store water). Being a master craftsman in making alams, he was very proud about the craft and its practice and had taught his son the values of respecting it. None of the craftsmen in Yahiyaganj had any information about the history of the place and just knew that it had been going on through generations.

Reaching old age, he had started experiencing joint pain regularly but was used to the loud noise around him as he started working at 8 in the morning and worked till 7 in the evening.

The two main ways to do the Naqqashi work were the embossing work done on utensils and the relief work done from the back on sheets. One major example of the work done on sheets was the Alams made by Omnath Ji and the Shivilings made by Deepchand Ji out of sheets of metal by beating it from the back. The other technique is the embossing done by most of the craftsmen. Each craftsman has his own set of tools and the forms of the flowers, leaves and other motives change from craftsman to craftsman, thus establishing an equity in the skills of the craftsmen as each one of them specializes in a particular product and style since they are so few in number.

Most of the craftsmen are attached to the craft and respect this age-old tradition but don't want their kids to be a part of the legacy due to various reasons, the major one being the lack of value for the craft in people which results in them being paid the bare amount of money for their hard work.



Deepchand Ji making shiviling from a sheet of metal. They create certain products which are different from the traditional Naqqashi form.



A Thathera creating Paraat

## CHAPTER 4

# Thatheras: The Craft Community

The Thatheras (the craftspeople who make handmade utensils by beating metal) are the crafts community that plays a major role in the economy and culture of the country. From their history to their background and spread, everything is a huge connection to various incidents embedded in history. The Thathera community of Yahiyaganj has a brief past which also explains their current state of being.

The Thathera word has originated from the sound 'thak-thak' produced from beating the metal sheets to create utensils. The Thathera's are known for creating brass and copper vessels. The community could be traced back to the time when human civilizations started using vessels, i.e since the Iron Age. According to their tradition, their origin can be traced back to Sahastrabahu. The community can be further divided into three i.e the Maharana's, the Mahapatra's, and the Kalaikar's.

The community is well spread in the country. There are over 40 groups of Thatheras in different cities of India, for example, Warangal, Andhra Pradesh, Jaipur, Moradabad, Varanasi to name a few. Every community has its own style of working around the material and is known for it. The Thathera clusters of Moradabad, Jaipur, and Varanasi are most known for their work.

In 1883, during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the craft village - Jandiala Guru was formed for the upliftment of the community. The village was named after the ruler's son Jand. The king opened doors for all the thatheras from across the country to settle down and practice the craft. The majority of the craftsmen were Muslims, Hindu, and Sikhs. During the partition in 1947, most of the Muslim craftsmen traveled to Pakistan, and others either remained settled there or traveled to various places across the country.

Naqqashi was introduced in Lucknow in 1775 under the reign of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula. The community was full of Muslim craftsmen brought from Persia and was settled in Yahiyaganj named after Nawab Muhammad Yahiya Meerza Amani Asaf-ud-Daula. The Jaunpur craftsmen when they came to Lucknow adapted the craft for their livelihood, resulting in Hindu craftsmen practicing the craft today.

In the hustling lanes of Shukla Market of Yahiyaganj in Lucknow, the wholesale market for Naqqashi utensils and other metal products including God idols and kitchenwares still remains a major hub for metalwork. The community claims to have traveled from the provinces of Jaunpur and Sultanpur to Lucknow around 200 years ago. The craft has passed on from generation to generation. Presently, there are only 4 to 5 families practicing in the Shukla Market, indicating a rapid decline in the craft as the younger generation doesn't want to be involved in the craft anymore. Women do not indulge in the craft but look after the homes or families and are sometimes seen in the shops of the sellers i.e Aggarwal's. The Aggarwal community mostly found in North India is widely known for its business skills and is believed to be the descendants of King Agrasen. In Yahiyaganj, the Aggarwals own most of the utensil shops and have resided there for a long time.

Earlier when the craft reached Lucknow, the main products made were of religious and cultural importance for the Nawabs and the Muslim community.

The products included Paandaan, Ughaldaan (a spittoon used to spit the saliva while eating Paan), Khaasdaan (a container to store freshly crafted Paans), and Alams. All these products hold great importance in Islam and were majorly made out of copper, brass, and silver. With time the consumer market has shifted from just Muslims to all the communities as products of kitchenware became a part of the craft practice and the materials used are copper and brass with aluminum and steel paving their way into the market.

The main street or the Shukla market is a long narrow street full of banners and utensil sellers calling out for customers. The place is located on the inside of a "main road" which is best accessed through an E-rickshaw as it's always crowded. With an architecture ranging from the times of the nawabs to newly constructed homes, the population of this place was 14,342 with a literacy rate of 80% and a sex ratio of 925, according to the census of 2011. The workspace of these craftsmen is as small as 2.5 meters x 4 meters, located in the front of their homes facing the street which is still adequate for their setup. Most of the work is completed in the day itself, with a sufficient amount of natural light in their spaces and during the night they work under light bulbs with the electricity supply coming from Uttar Pradesh electricity regulatory commission. There are regular power cuts throughout and most of the homes have inverters as a means of power backup, but it isn't sufficient to run their heavy turning machines used in Chillai (Scraping of the metal).

Most of the craftsmen have only completed their primary education and then stepped into the craft but the younger generation does not do so. Before even entering the premises of the market one can hear the repeated sound of the beating of metal, which poses a great problem to the craftsmen. A sound of a frequency more than 85 dB(A) is considered dangerous, where the Thatheras experience a sound of about 93 dB(A) everyday which can eventually result in various hearing problems, depression, poor attention span, hypertension, stress, insomnia, hangnails, and work performance drop. As they have to work continuously with hammers and punches it usually results in joint pains in the older ages. No official health scheme has been implemented for the craftsmen there but there are many nursing homes and hospitals nearby which can be visited in the time of need or causality.

The community plays a major role in the daily life of people and needs to be respected and valued more lest the craft vanishes completely. The first step to which shall be recognition of them and improving their working and living conditions which will motivate the coming generations too to keep the craft alive.



A worker finishing the edges of the utensils inside the Paandaan at the Aggarwal Factory.



A Fruit plate adorned with heavy Naqqashi work

## CHAPTER 5

# The Craft: Products/Objects

Thinking of the Nawabi times, one can imagine grand palaces with extravagant lifestyles and Nawab's sitting in the darbar (court) in their intricately designed attires enjoying the classical art forms with elaborate arrangements of paan (betel leaves) and jaam (goblet full of alcohol). The imagery of the Mughal Era is incomplete without Paan, betel leaves dressed up with a combination of areca nuts with aromatic spices and special mouth freshening condiments, especially to clean the mouth palate.

Lucknow holds its pride in the tehzeeb as an intrinsic part of the lineage which is not only restricted to the mannerisms, language, or warm hospitality but also to the dining etiquette as a part of which paan is offered to the guests upon their arrival and after the meal as well. Paan chewing has certain styles and mannerisms attached to it and in Lucknow, it relates to the ever so famous "Nazaakat" (Finesse) and "Nafasat" (Neatness) of the city with Paan being prepared and offered in the famed Lucknowi (Lucknow's) style.

## TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS

Paan is a famous delicacy and a very well-known part of Lucknow's cuisine ever since the Mughal times. The paan culture was popularised in North India after the famous Noor Jahan took interest in it as the delicacy acts as a natural ingredient to add a tinge of red color on the lips. The Paan's were specially prepared in the zenana or haram (the women's section) and were served to the guests. The preparation of a Paan entails skill and practice as adding all the ingredients in the right amount is the trick to preparing the right Paan. It involves the following associates in the process.

### Paandaan (A container to store and serve Paan)

Paandaan is a container used to store the ingredients to craft a paan. The container usually has one bigger and several smaller sections inside the box. The bigger section to store betel leaf and lime, the smaller sections to store tobacco and the nut from the areca palm, and the smallest containers to store the cardamom, cloves, spices, etc. The container is customized in several materials including precious metals, other metals, and wood. It is generally found in round or rectangular forms.

The last ruler of the Kingdom Awadh, Wajid-Ali-Shah when exiled to Calcutta by the British also carried a Paan dan to store his everyday Paan's ingredients essentials. The specific Paan dan that was used by Wajid was later given to the Queen Mary during the Delhi Coronation Court and Indian tour of 1911-1912 then presented to the museum in 1912. Even the dancing girls of the court of Nawabs in Lucknow used to carry Paan dan's which were made of materials like pure silver, coated with fine Mughlai ( a local oil used to preserve metal and silver from resulting) work of Lucknow. A woman was judged by the art of maintaining her Paandaan.

The Paandaans made in Lucknow are known for being exquisite and classy due to the intricate Naqqashi done on the surface of the metal. Some Paandaans are small enough to be carried in hand whereas others are so big that they are attached with wheels for ease of movement within the house. The Paandaan is an exclusive piece of artistry that adorns the living rooms of the people even today.



**The Paandaan**

### Nagardaan (A container to store fresh Betel leaves)

The container usually finds its place as a counterpart to the Paandaans. The container is usually seen in rectangular form but specifically customized betel leaves shaped Nagardaans are also popular. The box is intricately designed with Naqqashi patterns on all sides.

### Khaasdan (A container to store prepared Paans)

The fine etiquette of Paan chewing comes to an epitome when the freshly prepared paans are stored in the Khaasdan in a beautifully laced manner topped with ingredients like mashed coconut and then served to the guests. The act of serving paan in the Khaasdan is the best representation of a lady's 'Saliqa' (etiquette) in the court.

### Ughaldan (A container to spit saliva while chewing Paan)

A Ughaldan is a spittoon used to spit the saliva that accumulates in the mouth while chewing Paan, better known as "Peek". The Ughaldan is vital equipment of the Paan chewing activity as it involves the sophisticated disposal of the 'Peek', without spoiling the clothes of the eater or the surroundings. The paan-chewing etiquette is followed with utmost finesse in the Lucknowi households to date.

The Paan culture was a very important part of the Nawabi lifestyle. The Nawab's had various skilled craftsmen hired under the court that used to create the best Paandaan and the associated utensils for the court as well as the Begum's (Nawab's wives). During Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula's reign from 1775 to 1798, the Paan culture flourished when he introduced the craft of Naqqashi which can be seen in the culture of Lucknow to date. The motifs and designs became even more intricate and stylized.

The give and take of the above-mentioned articles is an important part of the marriage traditions in Muslim families. It is said that a marriage can't happen in Muslim families without gifting a Paandaan in dowry and it is still practiced in Lucknow.

There are some other popular traditional products, for example, Silapchi (basin for washing hands), Lagan (Paraat or Thali), Sini (metal plate for covering), Kabir-chammach (cooking utensils) that are custom-made for dowry in Muslim weddings.



**The Khaasdan**



**The Ughaldan**

## CEREMONIAL PRODUCTS

Naqqashi as an ornamentation technique became a significant aspect of the culture in Lucknow. It represented the symbol of rich culture and prosperity in the Kingdom. The ornamentation also played an important role in the religious part of the culture as the designs also influenced the elements of religious elements in the communities. The Alams and Wazoo-ka-Lota play a major role in the religious activities of the Muslim community. These traditional items could be seen in Lucknow from time to time.

**Wazoo-ka-Lota** (A vessel used to store water)

Wazoo-ka-Lota or Wazu Lota, the name comes from the Urdu word 'Wazu' which means personal hygiene or self-cleansing before Namaz (Prayer) and 'lota', a water vessel. The Wazoo-ka-lota is used by the people of the Muslim community for washing hands and feet before they go to pray. The vessel had been in use since time immemorial. The vessel has the form of a small pot with a pout in front to pour water. The reason for creating a spout is said to be the message to Save Water - usage of less water during the cleansing process.

**Bibi-ka-Alam** (An object used in processions during Muharram)

Alam is a physical representation of the symbols used by the Muslim community during the processions of Muharram (A Muslim festival). Alam, which can weigh up to 300kg, is carried by the man leading the procession of mourners during Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram when mourning for Imam Hussein culminates on the anniversary of Karbala. In the middle of Alam is a tiqe, a long sword-like structure engraved with poetry about Hussein, the names of the prophet Mohammad and his children, and verses from the Quran. The artist's imagination makes one tiqe look very different from another, despite common themes.

The Alams made in Lucknow show a prominent change in motifs over the time since Naqqashi was introduced in Lucknow. Omnath Ji, an artist in the Shukla market of Yahiyaganj in Lucknow, specifically works on creating Alams. "The designs are more floral nowadays, the sizes and weight have also decreased from earlier.", he says. He creates smaller Alams over the year for the festival. The Alams of bigger size are only made on order.



The Wazoo-ka-Lota



The Bibi-ka-Alam

## CONTEMPORARY NAQQASHI PRODUCTS

The Shukla Market of Yahiyaganj in Lucknow is a famous spot for all the metal-crafted items such as household vessels like utensils, knives, cutlery, etc., the casted-metal idols of Gods, show-pieces, trophies also find a place in the shops. The new products are being made in small sizes to be bought for souvenirs and gifting purposes. The vessels found in Yahiyaganj of Lucknow are handcrafted with intricately designed Naqqashi work on the surface and are usually found in Copper or Brass material.

Copper plays a significant role in the Hindu religion as well. The vessels used during the prayer are usually made from Copper as it is considered to be the purest metal. The Copper vessels for prayer could also find their customers in the Shukla market of Yahiyaganj in Lucknow. The vessels are available in both plain as well as elegantly crafted forms with Naqqashi on the surface which increases the aesthetic value of the vessels.

A small street in the middle of the Old City of Lucknow caters to the needs of everyone. The Craftsmen, the Kalaikars (the ones who clean and polish the utensils), the sellers, and shops all reside there. The process of making utensils to their Naqqashi to the cleansing and then polishing and selling, all goes on in the same street.

### EXPORT MARKET

The export of hand-crafted items has been a game-changer for artisans over the past decade. The craft communities and their production of products are highly dependent on the demand for export in the market. Since the demand for traditional products like Paandaan, Ughaldaan, etc. has declined drastically, there has been a boom in the production of contemporary naqqashi products. For example, tea sets, jars, glasses, and other daily use items. The products are exported to various cities within India, for example, Moradabad, Agra, Jaipur, and Delhi, etc.



The casted Idols of Gods and Goddesses.



A Glass heavily ornamented with floral motifs in Naqqashi work

## CHAPTER 6

# The Motifs

A motif is a decorative image or design, especially a repeated one forming a pattern. In the narrative, a motif is a distinctive repeating feature or idea, often it helps develop other narrative aspects such as theme or mood.

Motifs are the core of the craft of Naqqashi. The motifs used to engrave the utensils are highly inspired by Mughal Culture and Architecture. A keen resemblance could be found between the elements used to create the motifs, for example, the full moon, the half-moon, stars, and intricate floral patterns. The artisans of Yahiyaganj used to engrave the motifs with the help of hammers and nails to adorn the vessels with intricate patterns.

Some of the popular motifs and their meanings in Islam are :

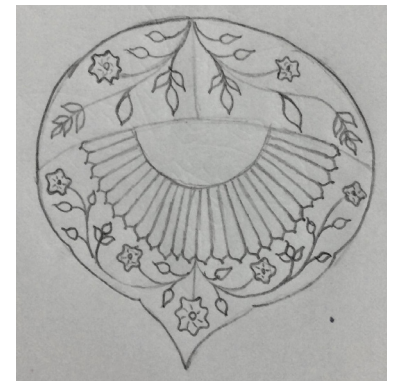
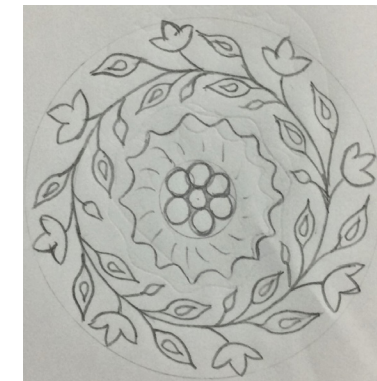
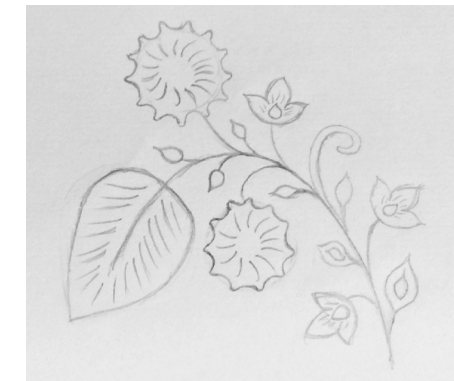
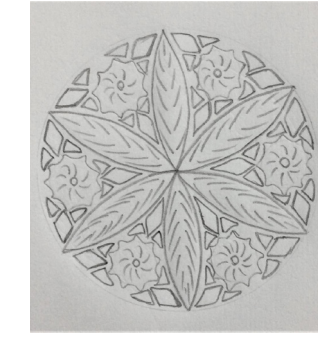
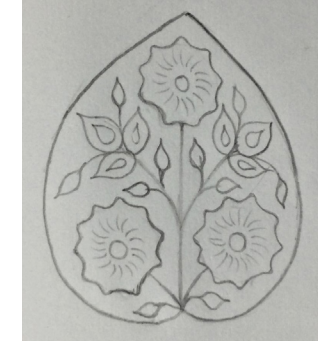
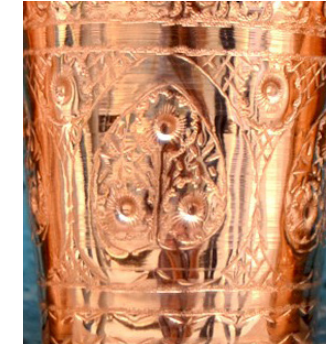
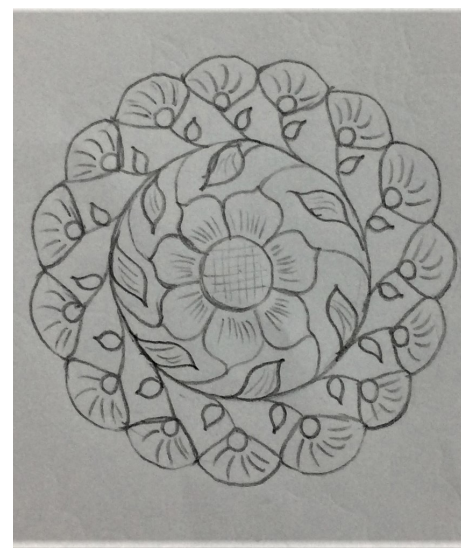
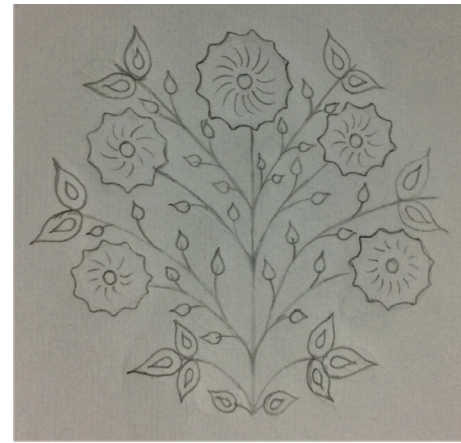
**Half Moon** - It signifies the beginning and end of fasting during Ramadan. It also signifies the Muslim calendar.

**Full Moon** - It represents the guidance of God on the path through life.

**Stars** - The star has intimate spiritual significance. It is referred to as an expression of divine light - the light that enters the heart during creation and exits the heart during annihilation.

**Floral patterns** - Islamic artists tend to abide by the concept of aniconism; that is, the belief that the creation of living beings, like humans, is a job for God and should therefore be left out of artwork. Islamic aniconism is partly influenced by the prohibition of idolatry or the worshiping of an idol or image in place of God. Hence, the floral designs are used by artists in the place of human or animal forms as Islamic art patterns.

Some of the popular motifs are sketched here:



Hand-drawn Motif Illustrations and their reference



A rangaikar applying kalai on a finished vessel. Kalai makes a vessel foodsafe.

## CHAPTER 7

# Making of the Craft

Naqqashi is a small but major part of the whole procedure of making these utensils and although there is a huge shift in the raw materials and the consumer group yet the process remains the same. During the rule of the Nawabs this craft was done on metals like silver, copper and brass but with time artisans had to shift to other materials.

The process starts with making utensils out of sheets of brass and copper, imported from various places like Mathura, Moradabad and Agra in UP and Jagadhari and Rewari in Haryana. Earlier this craft was practised on various metals like copper, brass and silver but with the rising prices of silver and the introduction of new metal utensils this craft is now mostly practised on copper, brass, steel and aluminium. These reddish brown and yellow colored lustrous sheets are bought in bulk and brought to the small scale factories or "karkhanas" located on the other side of yahiyaganj, hardly a 15 minute walk from the shukla market. These karkhanas are mostly two storey buildings with a separate room for each process. The sheets are cut into smaller sheets and press moulded to make the utensils. They are then heated to make the metal soft for trimming. The trimmings are melted and recycled in the same karkhana in the other room.

Next, these utensils are covered in an acid made out of dilute HCl and water are shaved using very sharp metal tools, producing an almost deafening noise. The process is done by putting the utensil on a horizontal rotating “wheel” and gently pressing the tool to the surface of the acid soaked utensil. This process is called “haraad” or “chillai” (scraping) and is done to expose the underskin of the metal.

These utensils are then brought to the market where every shopkeeper has an appointed craftsman and the utensils are given to them to do naqqashi on. The craftsman usually decorates the product according to him but can also be asked to make a customised product. These craftsmen have their workspace or their own shops facing the street which is mostly a part of their homes. The naqqashi is of two types, “ubhaar naqqashi” and “jalidaar naqqashi”. ‘Ubhar’ translates to bulge and ‘jalidaar’ to mesh. The ubhaar naqqashi is done in two ways, one by embossing from the front and the other by beating it from the back making a low relief pattern at the front. For the former, the utensil is kept on a cast iron stand which resembles the one used by cobblers, the wider ones known as “nihai” and the ones with a narrow top known as “sabri”. The craftsman keeps the utensils on top of the stand and beats its surface with punches or “kalams” using a hammer or “hathodi” making beautiful, intricate and organic forms, the motifs mostly being moons, stars, floral patterns and messages and writings in urdu. Products like paandaan, khaasdaan, ughaldaan, lotas and other kitchenware are mostly made this way. For the latter, i.e naqqashi from the back is mostly done on sheets, which are then heated to straighten it and then cut along the made pattern. Products like alams, shivlings and various other images are made using this process. All these products can also be made by jalidaar naqqashi, the only difference being the cut work done on the metal sheet making a “jaali” of the surface. Every craftsman has his own set of kalams which are majorly bought from delhi and are made of cast iron thus lasting very long. Most of the craftsmen like Neeraj bhaiya and Omnath ji, to name a few, start working in the morning by 8am and work the whole day till 9 at night.

Every craftsman has his own specialization in a particular product which is being carried out for generations. The crafted utensils are then given to the kalaikars or the kalaiwaalas to put a thin layer of tin or “ranga” on the surface as copper is a reactive metal and thus unfit for cooking and also for decorative purposes. The kalaikars or “re-tinners” get their names from the metal alloy also known as ‘kalai’ or ‘ranga’ which they put on the utensils. The utensils used for just drinking or storing water need not be coated with this layer. In this process, the utensils are first washed thoroughly using caustic soda to get rid of impurities. The utensils are then put on a flame to heat it. When hot the tin strip is melted in the utensil and then rubbed with ammonium chloride locally known as “nausadar” using cotton pads. The nausadar helps the tin to stick to the surface and spread evenly. Immediately after this, the utensil is dipped in cold water bringing down the temperature of the utensil and thus making it ready for use. This process needs to be repeated after every two to three months as the coating tends to wear off slowly while cooking. A major difference, on the grounds of religion, was noticed here as most of the craftsmen doing naqqashi were hindus whereas the kalaikaars were all muslims. One of the kalaikaars, Mehmud Ali ji’s family has been practising this since the last three generations. He sits with the other male members of his family in a room facing the street where all of them practise the craft together.

All the utensils, with or without ranga, are then sent back to the karkhana for cleaning and assembly. The utensils without the tin coating are dipped in a very dilute acid solution to get rid of any dust or impurity. The utensils are mostly made in parts (handles, locks, lids etc) and are then put together. The complete utensils are then sent for packaging.

The whole process is spread within the area of Yahiyaganj which goes about in a very systematic and planned manner and is a great example of communal harmony with people from various castes and religions working together to keep the craft alive.



The metal sheets are cut into smaller sizes and desired forms.



The sheets are then trimmed to remove the rough edges.



The sheets are press-molded to make the vessels of desired form.



The press-molded vessels are heated to increase malleability.



The molded forms beaten further into desired forms for utensils.



The bigger vessels, made in parts, are welded together.



The vessels are covered with HCl acid to remove the outer layer.



The vessels are then scraped to expose an even and shiny surface.



The vessels are washed very dilute HCl acid to remove the impurities.



The parts are then assembled together.



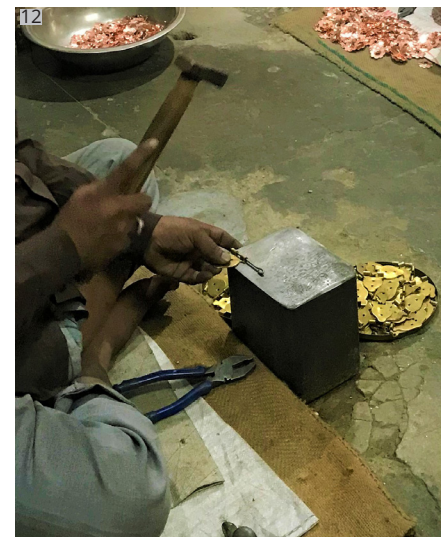
A craftsman applying kalai on vessels inner surface to make it food safe.



The vessels are then polished and send to the craftsmen.



Naqqashi is done on the vessels by the craftsmen of Shukla Market.



The parts and joineries of the products are made By molding.



Kalai is also applied on the outer surface of vessels for ornamentation.



The final products are available in Yahiyaganj.

## PACKAGING

Packaging is a major part of any production process and thus needs to be done effectively in accordance with the product. The utensils made in Yahiyaganj are packed and exported to nearby towns. There isn't any trace of an online platform for this craft but the craftsmen do visit Lucknow haat and other crafts melas.

The products are manufactured, assembled and packed in the same factory. The individual units are produced and finished separately and then are assembled and packed in a separate room. Most of the products have a slip with the name of the shop or the seller's name stuck at the top. They are then wrapped in plastic covers to prevent the metal from coming in contact with the moisture. They are then kept inside jute bags to be sent to the particular shops or retailers across the state.

One quintessential shop noticed by everyone passing by Yahiyaganj is the Kanhaiya Lal Prag Das shop owned by Parmesh Aggarwal and his father. The shop has been owned by the family since generations. Parmesh Aggarwal has founded a brand/label known as "Thathera" which sells the most intricately worked pieces through exhibitions, while the other utensils with less intricate work are sold extensively in the shop.

Besides Lucknow, the products are exported to nearby cities like Agra and Moradabad yet the biggest market remains in Yahiyaganj as the customers in other cities do not pay such high prices. The transport of the products is not a massive issue due to the nature of the material.

The packaging of the products for export is done in Jute bags and the products sold in the local market are wrapped in newspaper and polythene bags. There is no specific format of packaging being followed in the Yahiyaganj market. Some famous shop owners may give a bag when buying a large amount of products. The bags usually have the name of the shop and address printed on them for the promotion of their shops.



A glimpse inside the utensils factory owned by The Aggarwal's near Yahiyaganj

## CHAPTER 8

# Supporting Organizations/Individuals

The craft sector is the second largest economy building sector of our country and also one of the most exploited ones. Exploited as the craftsmen who are the real makers of the product get the lowest share, their work and skills aren't valued and they don't receive the respect which they deserve. This attitude discourages a lot of these craftsmen thus pushing them to decide to not continue the craft themselves or their kids to continue this legacy. Most of the craftsmen live in a very underdeveloped state with minimal facilities reaching them, thus making it a need for their community to get aid or support from government, non government and various sources.

Some such known organizations are as follows:

The All India Handicraft Board is the nodal agency in the government of India for crafts. It assists in the development, marketing and export of handicrafts, and enhancing their craft forms and skills. Some of the schemes offered by them are the ambedkar hastshilp Vikas Yojna, under which they have certain other schemes catering to different kinds of crafts, market support and services, research and development etc.

The **Handicraft and Handloom Export Corporation** of India was founded in 1962 and is a website supporting and providing a digital platform to the crafts across the country. They also sell all these products in other places such as exhibitions, craft bazaars and general sales agents abroad.

The **Parampara Project**, under the Ministry of Culture, is an attempt to showcase the country's efforts towards conservation of India's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). It is also a step towards exploring the ICH in the context of its linkage with environmental sustainability. It was conceptualized with the objective of creating a national networking centre/clearing house which will help to synergize efforts and initiatives made by different agencies with analogous activities elsewhere, through exchange of knowledge, experience and best practices and for making available a database based on new/past/conserved living traditions.

The **Crafts Council of India** is a non-government organization established in 1964 by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay under which thousands of craftspeople are trained to render their skills and introduced to design innovation and product development. Certain institutes such as National Institute of Design (NID), Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Indian Institute of Management (IIM), etc are also working towards the upliftment of some craft clusters and sensitizing students towards the craft sector.

The Naqqashi work of Yahiyaganj is a well known craft but is still headed towards extinction as the craft is not valued and recognized enough to help the craftsmen sustain this practise. Neither there are any particular NGOs working for these craftsmen nor the government aids to help them much.

One of the sellers in the market, the owner of the renowned shop Kanhaiya Lal Prag Das, Mr. Pramesh Aggarwal has set up a brand called the "Thathera" under which the most intricately and lavishly made utensils are sold out through exhibitions out of which the craftsmen get 25% of the profit but still many craftsmen out there don't get fairly paid for the amount of work they do. Although there are many government and non government organizations which are coming forth to help the craftsmen, many still fail to benefit from their schemes thus pushing them to develop and retain their market on their own.



A worker washing utensils with acid in the Aggarwal factory near yahiyaganj

## CHAPTER 9

# The Artisan's Perspective

A craftsman is a person with an abundance of skills and understanding of their surroundings and the materials in it. The way their hands work to make the most beautiful things out of the most basic materials is incredible. Sadly they are the same people who often lead their lives in debt, poverty or with minimal basic facilities. The biggest concern at this time faced by these craftsmen is the pace at which their craft is dying slowly. Although there are certain aids and self help groups for the craftsmen, many fail to reach out to such facilities thus pushing them to pursue other professions.

### Issues and Concerns

The craft of Naqqashi is one of the oldest crafts being practised in the city of Lucknow. Despite being an age-old craft the craftsmen still live with minimal facilities reaching them. The government water and electricity supply in the area is subjected to power cuts and odd timings. The families have now adapted to these situations and have their day scheduled according to it. The craftsmen generally start their work at around 8 in the morning and work till 7 or 8 in the evening which exposes them to a lot of noise throughout the day. The noise produced by beating the metal is about 98 dB(A) whereas the maximum noise a person can bear in a day is about 85 dB(A). This leads to various health and hearing issues faced by the craftsmen. Many end up with hearing loss by the time they reach a certain age. Also, many end up with joint pain due to lifting heavy hammers and working with tools all day long.

Yahiyaganj is a locality in the centre of the old city of Lucknow, thus accessibility to various government or private hospitals is easy. Yet these health issues are a matter of concern for the people. All the craftsmen live with their families and work from home, with their wives are homemakers and kids studying. Most of the youth has moved out of the place to live in different cities for higher education or jobs. The youth and the craftspeople themselves don't want their coming generations to indulge in the craft due to various reasons ranging from quality of living, respect of the profession and the average wages they get. Most of the craftsmen want their kids to complete higher education and get a respectable job and many leave this choice up to kids. This may result in the extinction of the practise of this craft in the near future which itself is a matter of huge concern.

The shukla street of Yahiyaganj is filled with sellers, buyers and makers of naqqashi and one can hear the noise of metal beating even before they enter the street. There are about five families still practising this craft. All these craftsmen specialize in different products and styles making their work different from the others. These craftsmen also make customized products and since all their patterns vary from each other they can take up projects under them catering to a particular product and a style. This is one of the major strengths of these craftsmen and if used wisely can work in their favor.

### Strengths and Opportunities

The international market nowadays invites the crafts from other countries with open arms and India is one of the countries known for its rich culture and heritage. Therefore catering to the international market with multiple approaches can be a major opportunity for the craftsmen. Manipulating exotic products and decorating them with naqqashi and bringing the authentic Indian look to them can be one one them. Therefore, expanding the market through various platforms and catering to the international market can help these craftsmen grow and retain this beautiful craft.

The craftsmen of Yahiyaganj are very motivated and fully devoted to this craft and with proper aid and path can reach new heights thus creating a solution for most of their issues.



A worker polishing the finished utensils in the Aggarwal factory near yahiyaganj

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The Labyrinth at the Bara Imambara in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh



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