SEEP KA KAAM - MOTHER-OF-PEARL WORK

Production Clusters
Jodhpur city

Products
Boxes of various sizes
Lamp stands
Candle Stands
Ashtrays
Chessboard
Photo Frames

Tools
Grinder
Metal Cutter
Shell cutter
Wood saw

THE DARK OUTER side of the shell is removed through ghisai, grinding - a process which also smoothes the shell and reduces its thickness so that it may be cut to the required size with a metal cutter. The pieces of shell are then neatly glued onto previously carved wooden objects. The areas bereft of shell ornamentation are covered with thin brass strips and a round plate is affixed to the base. Shell may also be inlaid into brass objects which are designed so that they are patterned with gentle depressions in which the shell may be inset. The entire object is subjected to ghisai to ensure that the shell and the brass are level throughout; the object is then polished with emery and waxed to give it a glossy finish. Alternatively, it may also be given an antique finish by applying a paste of mehendi, henna; over its surface, the paste is washed off after a couple of hours to reveal shells that are varying tinted, having absorbed the dye in different proportions. The ornamentation may also imitate the Usta kaam of Bikaner by using embossed patterns created with a mixture of fuller’s earth and glue; the floral motifs thus made are enamel painted, outlined in black and highlighted with gold paint; finally, a protective layer of varnish is applied.

Inset A brass lid with an indented floral motif; the cut pieces of shell held in the craftsman’s palm are to be inlaid in the recessed forms as shown.

BONE WORK

Production Clusters
Jodhpur city

Products
Boxes of varying sizes and shapes
Small Chests
Table lamps
Flowerpots
Ashtrays
Toys
Animal Figurines
Chess set

Tools
Sanding Machine
Cutting Machine
Files
Emery Paper

WITH THE BAN on ivory in 1989, the craftsmen were forced to adapt their skills to a new material – bone. The camel bones are processed in workshops at Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh. The bones are heated in furnaces so that the extra fibres and extension get burnt out; they are then chemically bleached and cut into smooth narrow strips which may be further cut to the desired size by the craftsmen. Although the rest of the process is similar to that of seep ka kaam, bone is more profitable as there is little wastage of material and time during the cleaning stage; bone is also together and less liable to chip than mother-of-pearl, thus saving the labour spent in repairing chipped areas on shell surfaces. The henna based antique finish and the imitation Usta ornamentation that are used in shell work are also used for bone objects. The growing popularity of this work is evident in the large increase of artisans in Jodhpur city.

Inset Detail of a painted box

1 A carved and painted container.
2 A carved, embossed and painted container.
3 An Embossed and painted lamp base.