

Design Resource

Varakh-Jaipur

The Art of Silver or Gold Foils

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Mr. Antony William

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/varakh-jaipur>

1. Introduction
2. People and Place
3. Tools and Raw Materials
4. Making Process
5. Products
6. Contact Details



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Introduction

Varakh is an ancient craft technique in which very fine silver or gold foils are made, which are used to decorate sweets, fruits, paan and sometimes even used for cladding. The craft is practiced since ages and is in great demand among the people across the country. Since silver has high medicinal values therefore it is also used in few of the Ayurvedic medicines. Both men and women are involved in the making of this craft. Pannigaaron Ka Mohallah, near Subhash Chowk in Jaipur houses the community of Pannigars, the people involved in making Varakh. The narrow lanes are filled with the constant sound of hammering. Since ages, people are involved in making of the gold and silver foils; inspite of the several social and cultural issues raised against Varakh making.



In current times craftsmen also make artificial Varakh to be cladded on walls of hotels and houses.

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The packed booklet inside which the pieces of gold and silver are kept and beaten.



Shri. Mehboob Bhai showing an aluminium cladded tile.

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A picture of artisans applying Varakh on the temple kalash.



Varakh applied on the jewellerys of the idols.

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People and Place

The craft of making fine gold and silver Varakh is mainly practiced by Muslim communities. These artisans are called as Pannigaars. There are around 200 Pannigar families in Jaipur making Varakh in small workshops housed in their houses. The craft of Varakh making is done in some parts of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Hyderabad etc. In Jaipur, the craft is being practiced in Pannigaron Ka Mohalla near Subhash Chowk.



Narrow lanes filled with the sound of hammering in Pannigaaron ka Mohalla.



Shri Mehboob Khan, an artisan along with his son Mr. Imraan Khan.



Women are also equally involved in the craft.



Artisans involved in hammering the Varakh.

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Tools and Raw Materials

• Tools:

Tools used are as follows:

Auzaar (Booklet):

This is a book of, mainly 160 pages in which small pieces of silver and gold are kept and hammered to make Varakh. The pages are made up of the fine outer skin of sheep and goat. Skin is treated with a liquid extracted by boiling several herbs like, kesar, javitri, daal chini, clove, milk etc. Skin is dipped in this liquid for few days and then taken out and dried. It is applied with edible colors to enhance the look. It is believed that after this treatment the skin is no longer considered as non-vegetarian and the Varakh made in this is completely pure.

Pushti (Leather Book Cover):

160 or 1170 auzaars are kept in a cover called Pushti. This cover is made with high precision as a slight mistake in size may affect the Varakh.

Hatodi (Hammer):

Heavy metal-head hammers are used to beat the book to make Varakh.

Phalua (Steel Cutter):

This is used to cut the Varakh while shaping it.

Cheep (Plucker):

This is made up of bamboo strip and is used to hold the Auzaar while cutting the Varakh

Paibandi (Finger Cover):

It is a small leather piece, which is tied on the index finger while cutting Varakh. This prevents the sticking of foil on the fingers.

Chadaa (Beads):

A string of small beads are used to rub on Varakh coated metal products to give it a shine.

• Raw Material:

The materials used for making Varakh are as follows.

Dali (Gold and Silver):

Pure gold and silver biscuits are used to make fine foils.

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Makol (Powder):

A fine powder used to apply on hands while cutting the Varakh. The powder is procured from a stone found in Himachal Pradesh. It is edible and grinded to make fine powder.



Machine to make silver or gold strips.



Big-head hammer, leather booklet, small bamboo stick and brush to clean the hammers are initial tools.

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Pushti, the leather cover and the pages called as auzaars.



Takhti, white color flat piece of wood covered with mica to keep Varakh. Bamboo strip, cheep is used to hold the auzaars, iron cutter called as Phalua, helps in cutting the silver or gold strips, Makol, fine powder and small leather piece called as paibandi.

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Stone to rub the surface or metal cladded with Varakh to give shine.



Silver in form of thin strips.

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Small 1 inch piece cut out of silver strip.

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Making Process

The process of varakh making involves the steps:

- Making of rods
- Making of strips
- Making of Varakh
- Cutting of Varakh
- Packaging

Making of Rods:

Silver and gold is bought from the market in the form of biscuits (Dali). These biscuits are melted to convert it into liquid which is then poured into the moulds to make thin rods.

Making of Strips:

These rods are further pressed in pressing-machine to make fine strips of 1 inch width. The process is repeated till the desired thickness is obtained. The strips are folded and kept properly so that they don't get crushed.

Making of Varakh:

Artisans cut small piece of 1 inch length out of the silver/gold strips. These pieces are placed in every page of the Auzaar. The position of each piece of silver/gold is maintained manually so that they are placed one over the other. The Auzaar is finally kept in the Pushti (Leather Cover). The flap is closed by applying little amount of water on the surface and then beating it with hammer.

After packing, the artisan starts hammering the booklet exactly at the place where the silver/ gold pieces are placed. After a considerable time the booklet is open again and the placement of the increased/expanded piece of silver/ gold is changed. This is done with each piece and again the booklet is closed and hammered. The placement of silver/gold and hammering is repeated till the desired size is obtained. After which the booklet is sent for cutting of Varakh and packaging. In one day an artisan can make up to 2-3 booklets. This process is done only by the men.

Cutting of Varakh:

In a booklet of 160 pages only 140-130 Varakh are fine to be used further. Rest is considered as wastage and again goes through the process of foil making. The booklet is opened carefully and cheep is fixed at the corner to hold the pages. The wasted/ damaged Varakhs are removed. The removal process is done only by women in their house. The artisan wears paibandi in their finger and applies powder before touching the Varakh.

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The Varakh is cut into four parts and each part is turned inside out. This helps in giving clean straight edge to the Varakh. Cutting is done with Phalua. The inner joints are pressed with Phalua so that the edge sticks to each other. The waste Varakhs are used to fill the gaps that occur while pasting the Varakh. Once all the Varakhs are cut and made into rectangular shape they are again gently hammered to make it flat and to remove any kind of over lapping.

Packaging:

After cutting and shaping the Varakh, finally it is placed on a butter paper and covered with another. The paper is folded from between and tied with cotton thread. A bundle of Varakh contains 10 Varakhs.



Machine used to make silver or gold strips



Strip is cut into smaller pieces (one inch) using Phalua.



Small 1-inch piece of silver.



One piece is placed in every page at the corner.

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The Auzaar is then slipped inside the Pushti.



Artisan beating the Pushti with hammer.



After a considerable time of beating process the booklet is open and the placement of the silver piece is changed.



Pushti is again closed and beaten to achieve the desired size.

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Silver piece hammered and stretched to obtained the size.



Varakh is cut into half.



The cut piece is further cut into half.

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Varakh is turned inside out.



All the four pieces are turned inside out to make a rectangle with fine edges.



Small gaps are filled with Varakh taken from the waste Varakhs.

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A butter paper is kept.



Varakh is gently transferred on the butter paper and covered with another butter paper.



It is tied with cotton thread.

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Products

The product made is fine piece of Varakh. Varakh mainly comes in three sizes namely:

- Jumbo (6x4 in.),
- Medium (3.5x5.5 in.) and
- Small (3x5).

Varakh is high in demand and has a diversified market. Varakh is used in food industry on large scale for decoration. Apart from this silver and gold are offered to God/ Temple by the devotees and this gold and silver is then melted and made into Varakh. This Varakh is used to apply on the temple Kalash or on the idols of gods and goddesses. Also it is used to clad ceilings, decorative lightings, utensils etc.



Ornaments and jewellerys of idols coated with Varakh.

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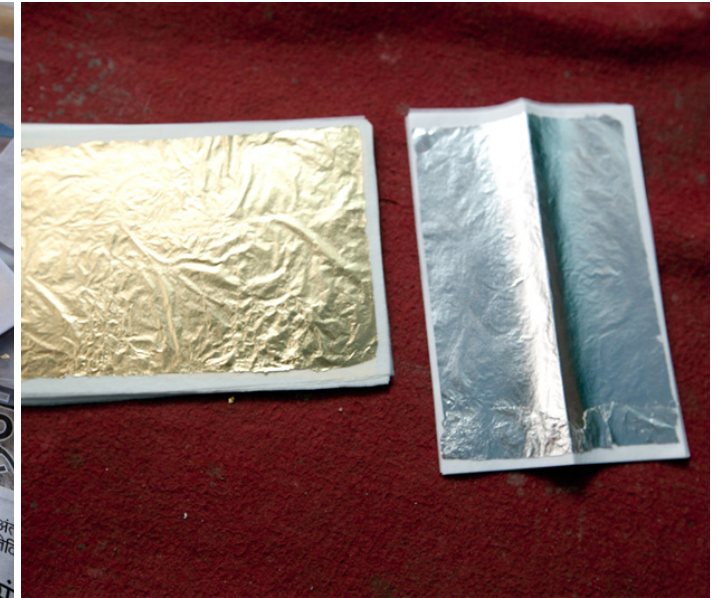
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Artificial Varakh, used for cladding.



Real gold and silver Varakh, used for decorating food items or cladding temple kalash or idols.



Tiles cladded with silver and aluminium Varakh.



Different types of swatches of various surface design possibilities in Varakh.

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