

Design Resource

Koftgiri Art - Rajasthan

Decorating Weaponry

by

Shyamlata Gahlot and Sanmati Hosure

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/koftgiri-art-rajasthan>



1. Introduction
2. Smt. Shyamlata Gahlot
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Introduction

The art of decorating arms and weaponry is known as Koftgiri. This art originated in India around 500-700 years ago with the Mughals. An age-old craft is practised in Mewar district. Nowadays it can be seen in Jaipur and Udaipur. Koftgiri refers to the action of 'beating' the pattern into iron. It can be both an inlay and overlay art. It is the art of ornamenting surfaces by inlaying light metal on a dark one using gold or silver wires. In Koftgiri, traditional motifs are made by inlaying a lot of lines and curves with gold or silver wires. Primarily these two metals are preferred due to their quality of flexibility. The entire design is created mainly by wire.

Traditionally, the Sikligar community has been practising this craft in Udaipur, Rajasthan. The Koftgiri work is done on objects made of iron metal like daggers, swords, shields, dagger heads, sticks, etc. Initially, this art was used in decorating handles of swords and daggers and hunting knives. Many years ago the traditional armourers of Rajasthan, Gadi-Lohars were widely use Koftgiri to create weaponry and armour for the use of their Rajputs, rulers and noblemen of the time. Earlier craftsmen were asked to use their creativity to decorate weaponry to impress rulers. The hunting excursion and the scenes of royal processions were the inspiration for them to embellish weapons. Gradually Kofigiri craft become more of a commercial rather than a usage-based craft.

During the Mughal times, Koftgiri artists were killed after finishing their creative work by rulers for not copying their handwork. They don't want to lose their uniqueness. This created insecurity among artists. To protect the Koftgiri art and the artists' Rajput rulers started hiding Koftgiri artists under their patronage. Since then these artists practising Koftgiri by hiding themselves. Only a few families in Udaipur practice this unique art. One of them was Late. Shri. Rajesh Ghalot. He was practising Koftgiri since his childhood. After his sudden dismissal his wife Smt. Shyamlata Ghalot started practising this art. Both of them have been rewarded with many national and international awards.

To date sixteen Rajasthani handicrafts have been approved a GI (Geographical Indications) tag. Recently GI approved five more handicrafts to this list. They are Koftgiri Metal Craft of Udaipur, Nathdwara Pichhwai Craft of Rajsamand, Bandhej work of Jodhpur and Usta Art of Bikaner. For the first time, Udaipur art is labelled GI tag for Koftgiri Art totalling twenty-one types of arts and handicrafts of Rajasthan. This historical art is still preserved by the Maru Lohar community in Mewar district of Rajasthan. This will not only safeguard the traditional knowledge and cultural expressions of the State but also support the disappearing artwork.

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Bracelet.



Sword Handle.

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Sindur Box.



Shyamlata with her stall.

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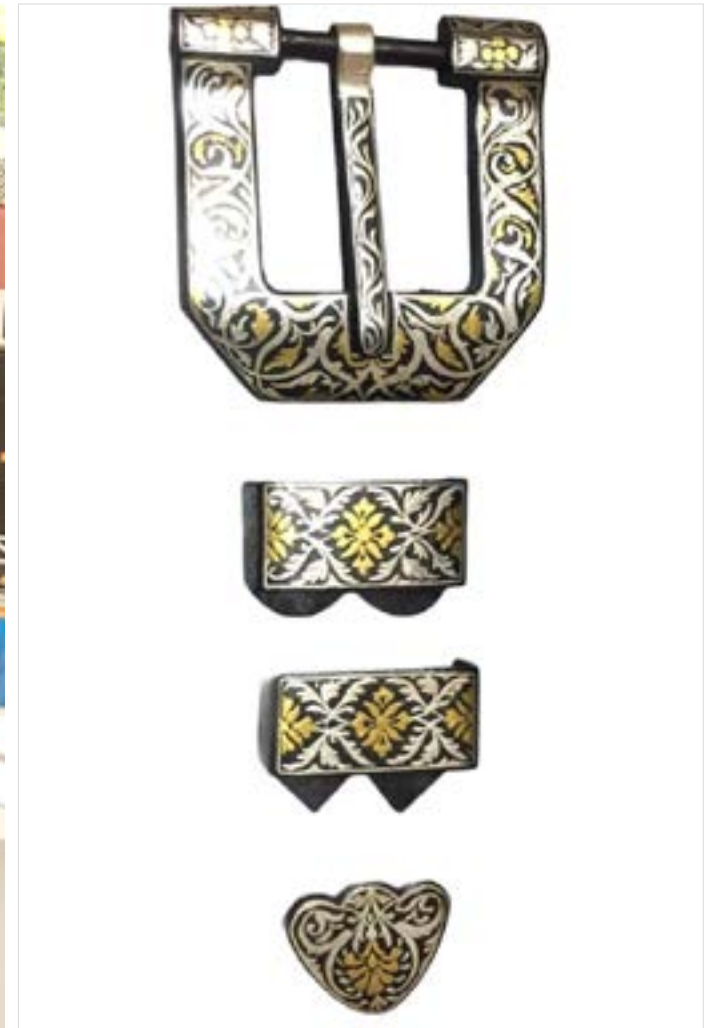
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Shyamlati giving live demonstration.



Buckle.

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Sword Tip.



Shield.



RJ Koftgiri.



Koftgiri.

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Mewar Ratan Jodhpur Award given to Lt. Shri. Rajesh Ghalot.

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Smt. Shyamlata Gahlot

Late Rajesh Gahlot inherited the knowledge of art from his ancestors; he had a lot of interest in Koftgiri art since his childhood. At the age of 16, he got initiation into this art. He got the district-level award at the age of 19 and the state award at the age of 22. Apart from this, he won the 2009 Rashtrapati Award, Rajiv Gandhi Award, and many other innumerable awards. He was the youngest artist in this field to achieve Rashtrapati Award.

His wife Smt. Shyamlata Gahlot learnt Koftgiri from him and her grandfather. Earlier she was not into this art but after Rajesh's sudden departure, she decided to learn this art. She faced many challenges while undertaking training as many people believe that this art is not meant for women. Her father is her only support. Her grandfather and forefathers were renowned Koftgiri artists. In 1960 her great-great-grandfather was living in Deogarh Place under the Rajput ruler's patronage. He created Koftgiri weaponry for Rajputs. His photo is displayed on the walls of Deogarh Palace. Smt. Shyamlata dedicated to dedicate her whole life to this art so that this art will never end. It's her husband's dream to keep this ancient art alive. She is the only female artist who knows Koftgiri art. She also conducts workshops and training sessions for art lovers. Her efforts are to give this art a distinct identity in India and abroad. Nowadays her son is practising Koftgiri to continue his family tradition. Smt. Shyamlata has successfully completed her doctorate in Craft & social work and was awarded by Honorary Doctorate Award Council on 4 th June, 2023.

Smt. Shyamlata Gahlot secured many awards:

- National Award in 2019.
- 2nd Winner of the 'The Best Craftsman', Uzbekistan in 2019.
- Outstanding Entrepreneur Award by South Indian Women Achievers Award (SIWAA), Hyderabad, India in 2019.
- World Craft Council 2nd prize.
- World Women Community 1st prize.
- World Human Rights Protection Commission (WHRPC) 'Honorary Doctorate' Award and its lifetime membership.
- A Consortium of Women Entrepreneurs of India's 'Exemplary Award' for a contribution towards the traditional industries of India on the occasion of International Women's Day and State Conference on IPR by Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur, Rajasthan in 2020.

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Shyamlata's forefather Ganesh Ji Waghela - (1960).



Shyamlata's great grandfather.



Deogarh Palace where Shyamlata's forefathers were practising Koftgiri.



Rajesh Ji given live demo to CM Vasundhara Ji.

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Training session conducted in China by Rajesh Ji.



Shyamlatra Ji giving demonstration.



Maharaja Gaj Singh Ji watching live demonstration.



National award winner 2009.

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National Award Certificate of Rajesh Ji.



Rajesh Ji with Jodhpur Maharaja Gaj Singh Ji.



Rajiv Gandhi award.



National Youth Award.

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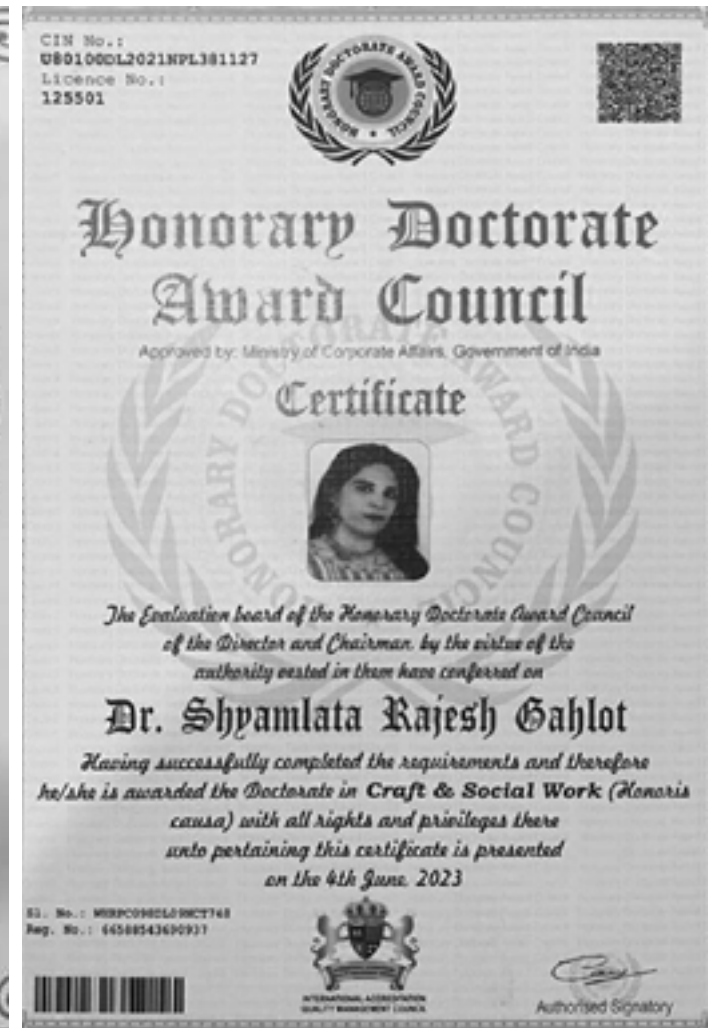
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National Award Certificate of Rajesh Ji.



Doctorate Award Certificate of Shyamalata Ji.

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SIWAA Award.

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Shyamlata Rajesh Gahlot

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Tools and Raw Materials

Tools and raw materials that are used for making Koftgiri art are:

- **Gold and Silver Wires:** These wires are used for decorating weapons due to their flexibility.
- **Grinder:** It is used to polish ironwork pieces.
- **Chhaini:** It is used for hatching and cross-hatching.
- **Pakkad:** It is used to grip the workpiece.
- **Tankla:** It is used for the inlay of gold and silver wires.
- **Hakik Stone:** The tool for polishing the workpiece.
- **Hammer and Cheerapatti:** These are used as a tool to cut wire or Patti.



Knives and Daggers before Koftgiri Work.

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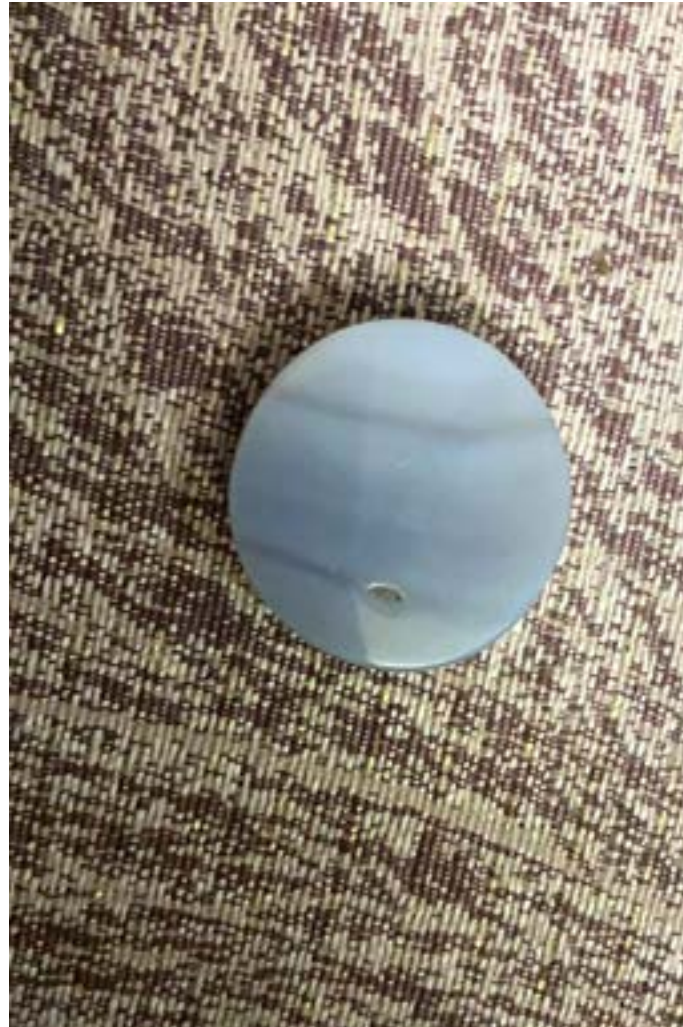
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Hakik Stone.



Iron Chirani.

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Iron Pen.



Raw Weapons before Koftgiri Work.

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Silver Wire and Sheet.



Tools used for Koftgiri.

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Upni.



Wooden Stick to Roll Metal Wire.

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Koftgiri - Tools and Raw Materials

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Making Process

Koftgiri artwork is done by thin wire of gold and silver on objects made of iron metal like daggers, swords, shields, dagger heads, sticks, etc. First, all the items are heated and excavated with a finely sharpened edge. They turn blue when heated. The style in which it is to be designed is outlined. It is now filled with a hair-like thin gold wire and it is heated and suffocated with a Hukki stone. The wire melts and the design looks beautiful from the outside. This is how Tula Koftgiri's art is done.

There are three main techniques used for Koftgiri art:

1. Deep inlay

In this technique, a required pattern is carved into the blade of a sword or knife. Then the silver wire is hammered into the undercut grooves using a hammer. This process is called inlay in which one cannot feel the pattern.

2. Traditional Koftgiri

A hard steel needle is used to draw a cross-stitch pattern on the blade. The drawing process is followed by heating and pressing with a polished Hakik stone. In the traditional Koftgiri technique, one can feel the pattern.

3. The Tula

In this technique, a pattern looks embossed. A gold or silver foil is hammered onto the punched or cross-hatch surface. It is more likely overlay art.



A flame torch is used to heat the object.



A handle is heated till its colour get changed.

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It is fixed into a customised holder.



Iron Chirani is sharpened before carving.



Carving is done using Iron Chirani.



It is heated again after carving.

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The colour of the handle is changed after heating.



Hair like thin metal wire is used for inlay work.



Iron pen and metal wire is used for inlay work.



A metal wire inlay work.

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Upni is used to give the proper shape to the design using metal wire inlay work.



Dagger with Sheath.

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Artist Making Weapon.

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Shyamlata with her father.



Workplace.

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Koftgiri - Inlay Work

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Products

Koftgiri is a glorious art that is truly majestic and royal. One can witness the majesty of a Rajput family during their wedding or royal occasions. None of the royal family events is complete without the display of elaborate weaponry, lavishly embellished with gold and silver Koftgiri. Such adornment has been of much importance to the Rajputs and Mughals.

Different types of weaponry are used for Koftgiri art.

Daggers: It has a straight double-edged blade broadening from the hilt to the point, which is usually quite blunt.

Katar: It has an H-shaped horizontal hand grip due to which the blade sits above the user's knuckles. It was used for hunting by upper-class Rajputs.

Handles and Pommel: These weapon parts are designed from cattle or camel bones, resembling an animal. The usage of god, animal or human heads was during the time range between 1200 to 800 B.C. These motifs are used as a mark of royalty or a token of appreciation for one's valour upon defeating the opponent in a war.

Kada: It is a bangle-like iron bracelet. The reason behind using Kada is to protect the sword arm during battle. Eventually, it becomes an important part of the Rajput costume to be worn in ceremonies.

Apart from traditional weaponry, contemporary products are also created to meet market demands. Cufflinks, Buttons, key chains, pen holders and pendants are now in trend.



Utility Box.



Sword.

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Walking Stick.



Sword.

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Sword.



Sword Handle.

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Sword Handle.



Sword Handle.

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Sword Handle.



Shield.



Sword Blades.

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Sindur Box.



Shield and Dagger.



RJ Koftgiri.



Pen Holder.

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Mini Sword.



Knives.

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Mini Sword.



Knife Holder.



Antique Lock and Key.

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Knife (Katar).



Dagger.



Elephant Face Dagger Parts.

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Dagger.

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Dagger with Sheath.



Dagger with Sheath.

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2. Smt. Shyamlata Gahlot
3. Tools and Raw Materials
4. Making Process
5. Products
6. Video
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Dagger with Sheath.



Dagger with Sheath.



Cufflinks and Buttons set.

Design Resource

Koftgiri Art - Rajasthan

Decorating Weaponry

by

Shyamlata Gahlot and Sanmati Hosure

IDC, IIT Bombay

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Candle Stand.



Buckle.

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Video



Shyamlata Rajesh Gahlot



Koftgiri - Tools and Raw Materials



Koftgiri - Inlay Work



Koftgiri - Making Process

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Contact Details

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