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SUBJECT- Fine Arts

**BRIGHT WITH PROMISE, TANGLED IN
THE PAST - THE INCREDIBLE ART OF
TARKASHI AT THE CROSS ROADS**

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Abstract:

Inlay art is a remarkable feature of monuments representing Mughal architecture and it evolved and flourished during the Mughal rule. Marble inlay commonly known as '*Pachchikari*' or '*Parchinkari*' is an indigenously developed form of Mughal art in India and has close connection with '*Pietra dura*', the Italian version of marble inlay. Tarkashi or Brass inlay is an improvised form of inlay which involves the fixing of brass wires in the substrate that is usually wood. Tarkashi has its roots in Mainpuri from where it reached Jaipur and flourished there. Today it is practiced as a family tradition by the generations of the master Tarkashi artists and is moreover limited in those regions itself. It once had a glorious past but is now facing the challenges to stay alive and is awaiting an all-round support to revive and witness a brighter future.

Key words – *Inlay, Tarkashi, Grandeur, Brass, Revival*

Introduction:

Inlay is an art form in which materials like shell, bone, precious and semi-precious stones and metals etc. are fixed in grooves or incisions made on the base surface or substrates like wood, metal and stones etc. A remarkable feature of Mughal architecture is the marble inlay popularly known as '*Pachchikari*' or '*Parchinkari*'.

It developed and evolved indigenously during the Mughal rule in India and is believed to have originated from '*Pietra dura*', the Italian version of marble inlay.¹ An innovative and improvised form of inlay is Tarkashi² that involves brass wire inlaid into the intricately worked out patterns usually on wood.

Today Tarkashi is practiced as a traditional art form mainly in Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh and Jaipur, Rajasthan.³ It is an incredible art form that would spontaneously attract the on-lookers and leave them speechless in awe not just by its beauty but with its intricately worked patterns on objects as small as a coaster to as large as a dressing table.

I got fascinated by this art form when I had a glimpse of the Sanchi Stupa that Shri Gajendra Singh Kushwaha had worked out on a wooden block of approximately 6x 8 inches. I could not take my eyes off from that piece and set out to trace the story of this one of the many traditional craft forms of India. Tarkashi's grandeur was well supported by the elite royals who got the artists to make use of valuable metals like Gold and Silver in their furniture along with ivory and other inlay materials.

It is believed to have its roots in the Middle East from where it reached India through the invaders who brought along with them their own culture and traditions which very soon became one with those of the Indians and became an inseparable part of the Indian craft heritage. On the contrary, there are others who speak of Tarkashi as purely Indian. According to them what came to India was a form of Inlay or an art form that used metal wire as in Filigree Art.⁴ Usage of metal wire on wood or stone as in Tarkashi was an innovative approach to the Inlay craft.

It grew by leaps and bounds and also saw its decline with the diminishing status of the royals. The artisans lost patronage of the kings and then their attention moved towards the common man. To make their products economical and accessible the artists replaced Gold and Silver with metal alloys like Brass which was comparatively much cheap, had a luster and was strong enough to withstand the impact of the striking hammer. A writer has beautifully expressed his views about the art work of brass metal wire over wood as '*Peetal ke Taar, Lakdi ka Aangan*' for the skilled artwork of Shri Ramswaroop Jangid ji, an eminent Tarkashi artist from Jaipur, Rajasthan. The design on the wooden box comprises of a *Jaal* or lattice design and appears like 'twinkling stars in the night sky'.⁵





Tarkashi witnessed a glorious past, paved its way through the difficult times in the medieval age and is now at the cross-road waiting either to be revived or to be lost in the ruins forever. People appreciate the intricate designs and splendid handwork of the Tarkashi products but move on to buy factory made items for their own valid reasons – product range, price, availability, utility etc. So, if Tarkashi is to be revived these key factors will have to be considered and solutions sought.

It is not always the faster or the stronger that emerge as winners but the ones who stand strong, fight and never quit. The Tarkashi artists too with their persistence and dedication are trying and will emerge winners. The training camps and workshops are being organized both for amateurs and professionals so that the amateurs can learn and refine their skills and professionals/master craftsmen can be upgraded and updated to understand the new market trends and adopt the technological advancements (mainly for production, purchase and marketing) for better and brighter prospects.

Tarkashi provides ample opportunities for self-growth and women empowerment by providing employment for self as well as others.⁶ The new generation of Tarkashi artists is all geared up and has beautifully mingled up the traditional and modern concepts to conquer the local as well as the global market.

Conclusion:

Research and study on Tarkashi concludes that this incredible and precious art is fast losing its identity due to lack of recognition and necessary support both by people and Government, attraction of the younger generation towards more lucrative jobs, too much investment in terms of time, money and labour and lack of a regular market. Presently, what is needed is to bring more and more people, both artists and art lovers closer to this art to revive its past glory.

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(Footnotes)

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