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Meenakari: Jaipur’s Enamel-Work Legacy

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Meenakari: Jaipur’s Enamel-Work Legacy

What is Meenakari? It is the art of fusing coloured glass onto engraved metal. The glass melts in a kiln and sets hard. Jaipur is the main centre of the craft in India.

1 What is Meenakari?

Meenakari is a metal craft. An artisan engraves a design into gold or silver. Coloured glass powder is then filled into the grooves. Heat fuses the glass to the metal.



A gold Meenakari enamel bracelet, Royal Ontario Museum. Wikimedia Commons, CC0.

What does the name mean?

The first part comes from Persian *mina*. Sources translate it as heaven or paradise. The ending *kari* means work. So the name means “heavenly work”.

What is it used for?

It decorates jewellery, boxes, mirrors and paandans (betel boxes). The enamel also protects the metal from wear.

What is the memory hook?

Engrave, fill, fire.

> **Quick check 1.** Meenakari fuses coloured glass onto engraved metal. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: harpersbazaar.in; esamskriti.com

2 How did it reach Jaipur?

The art began in Persia. The Mughals brought it to India. Later, Raja Man Singh of Amber took it to Rajasthan.

What did Man Singh do?

Man Singh brought skilled enamellers from the Mughal palace at Lahore. He settled them in Jaipur. Jaipur then became the centre of the craft.

Which date do exams use?

Sources place this around the turn of the 16th century. Do not give an exact year. No source here fixes one.

What is the memory hook?

Persia, Mughals, Man Singh, Lahore, Jaipur.

Quick check 2. Meenakari reached India from Persia through the Mughals. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: esamskriti.com; utsavpedia.com

3 How is enamel applied?

The work passes through a team. A goldsmith makes the piece. An engraver cuts the design. Then the enameller fills the grooves.

What happens to the colours?

Each colour is a powdered glass. It is made from mineral oxides. The enameller fires each colour separately in a kiln. The heat fuses the glass to the metal.

Why does groove depth matter?

The engraving holds the colour in place. It also changes how light plays on the finished piece.

What is the memory hook?

One colour, one firing.

Quick check 3. Man Singh brought his enamellers from Delhi. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: esamskriti.com; harpersbazaar.in

4 Why is gold preferred?

Gold takes almost every enamel colour. Silver does not. Only a few colours stick to silver well. These include gold, blue, green and yellow.

Why does this matter?

Enamellers want a wide palette. So gold became the favourite base. Chemistry, not fashion, shaped this choice.

What is Jaipur known for?

Jaipur is known for champlevé enamel on gold. Its strongest colour is a deep ruby red. Mughal colours such as red, green and white also stand out.

What is the memory hook?

Gold takes all colours; silver takes few.

> **Quick check 4.** Each enamel colour is fired separately. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: esamskriti.com; skyjems.ca

5 What is the Kundan link?

Kundan is a way of setting gems in gold foil. Meenakari often goes on the back of Kundan jewellery. So one piece shows gems in front and enamel behind.

Why put enamel at the back?

The back would otherwise be bare metal. Enamel turns it into a second decorated face. Some old pieces were made reversible for this reason.

Are they rival crafts?

No. They work together on one piece. An exam may test this.

What is the memory hook?

Kundan front, Meenakari back.

> **Quick check 5.** Silver takes every enamel colour as well as gold does. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: esamskriti.com; harpersbazaar.in

6 Where else is it made?

Gold Meenakari is done mainly in Jaipur, Benaras and Delhi. Silver work is done mainly in Udaipur, Bikaner and Nathdwara. Glass enamelling is done in Pratapgarh.

What is Gulabi Meenakari?

Varanasi has its own style, called Gulabi Meenakari. *Gulabi* means pink. Pink is its main colour. Jaipur is known for red instead.

Which one has a GI tag?

Banaras Gulabi Meenakari is GI-tagged. A GI tag protects a product's place name. Work made in Jaipur cannot be sold under that name.

What is the memory hook?

Jaipur red; Varanasi pink with a GI tag.

> **Quick check 6.** Pink is the main colour of Jaipur Meenakari. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: utsavpedia.com; outlooktraveller.com

7 What do exams ask?

Exams ask who brought the craft to Jaipur and where it came from. They also ask which colour marks each region.

What are the common questions?

Who settled enamellers in Jaipur? Raja Man Singh of Amber. Where did they come from? The Mughal palace at Lahore. Which metal takes most colours? Gold. Which craft pairs with Meenakari? Kundan.

What traps do exams set?

Some options name Akbar as the one who settled artisans in Jaipur. Man Singh did that. Some options give Jaipur the pink colour. Pink belongs to Varanasi. Some options give the GI tag to Jaipur Meenakari. The GI-tagged name is Banaras Gulabi Meenakari.

What is the memory hook?

Man Singh, Lahore, gold, Kundan back, Varanasi pink.

> **Quick check 7.** Banaras Gulabi Meenakari has a GI tag. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: gjepc.org; esamskriti.com

Practice MCQs

1. What is Meenakari?

A. Wood carving

B. Enamel work on engraved metal

C. Painting on cloth

D. Silk weaving

See answer ↓

2. Who settled enamellers from the Mughal palace at Lahore in Jaipur?

A. Raja Man Singh of Amber

B. Aurangzeb

C. Shah Jahan

D. Maharaja Ranjit Singh

See answer ↓

3. Which colour is Jaipur Meenakari best known for?

A. Pink

B. Pale blue

C. Deep ruby red

D. Black

See answer ↓

4. Which Meenakari tradition is GI-tagged?

A. Banaras Gulabi Meenakari

B. Bikaner Meenakari

C. Udaipur silver Meenakari

D. Jaipur Meenakari

See answer ↓

5. Why do enamellers prefer gold as the base metal?

A. It never needs firing

B. It is lighter than copper

C. It is cheaper than silver

D. It accepts nearly all enamel colours

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **B.** The answer is enamel work on engraved metal. Coloured glass is fused into grooves by heat. Memory hook: engrave, fill, fire. ↑ Q1
2. **A.** The answer is Raja Man Singh of Amber. He brought skilled enamellers from Lahore to Jaipur. Memory hook: Man Singh, Lahore, Jaipur. ↑ Q2
3. **C.** The answer is deep ruby red. Jaipur work is champlevé enamel on gold. Pink belongs to Varanasi. Memory hook: Jaipur red. ↑ Q3
4. **A.** The answer is Banaras Gulabi Meenakari. Gulabi means pink. A GI tag protects the place name. Memory hook: Varanasi pink, GI tag. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** The answer is that gold accepts nearly every colour. Silver takes only a few, such as gold, blue, green and yellow. Memory hook: gold takes all colours. ↑ Q5

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** Heat sets the glass in the grooves. ↑ 1
2. **True.** Persia is the source. ↑ 2
3. **False.** it is false. They came from the Mughal palace at Lahore. ↑ 3
4. **True.** The kiln is used again for each colour. ↑ 4
5. **False.** it is false. Only a few colours stick to silver. ↑ 5
6. **False.** it is false. Jaipur is known for red. Pink is Varanasi. ↑ 6
7. **True.** The tag protects the Banaras name. ↑ 7

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