

PM Narendra Modi's gifts to US vice-president Kamala Harris, Australia PM Scott Morrison boost Kashi's Gulabi Meenakari art



PM gifted a Gulabi Meenakari chess set to V-P Kamala Harris

VARANASI: US vice-president Kamala Harris would have no idea who [Kunj Bihari Singh](#) is, but must have been delighted to receive a beautifully handcrafted gift, a chess set made of Gulabi meenakari, from Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) during their meeting in the US on Friday. This exquisite gift was handcrafted by Kunj Bihari, a master artisan and national award winner of Varanasi, the parliamentary constituency of Modi.

Considering a deluge of orders for such chess sets after the [PM's](#) gesture, local experts believe that it would go a long way in reviving this exquisite art form of the region.

During his US visit, the PM reportedly presented the chess set as gift to Harris. Besides, he also gifted a Gulabi meenakari ship to Australian Prime Minister [Scott Morrison](#) and a sandalwood Buddha statue to Japanese Premier [Yoshihide Suga](#).

"The Kashi's craft of Gulabi meenakari got international recognition after the PM presented the artifacts to the world leaders," an elated Kunj Bihari told TOI on Saturday. "Since then, orders are pouring in from different parts of the country and abroad, and I have received the order of 25 chess sets," he said, adding that the PM's positive gesture towards the Kashi craft would definitely help revive this art after the Covid-19 setback.

On demand, he himself had left for New Delhi on September 19 to hand over the crafts to the authorities, he said.

While Kunj Bihari has crafted the chess set, his brother [Tarun Kumar](#), who is also a national merit awardee, has created the ship. The Gulabi meenakari or pink enameling of Banaras joined the coveted Geographical Indication (GI) club in 2015.

"The presentation of this craft at the international level by the PM would boost this art globally," said the GI expert and president of Human Welfare Association (HWA) Dr. [Rajani Kant](#), who facilitated many crafts to get GI certification. This is the global branding of GI-tagged Indian crafts by the PM and would boost the prospects of Indian art and craft, he said.

Gulabi meenakari of Banaras is a unique art form. It is considered as the most alluring and technical of all metal decorations. The National Museum of India, New Delhi and Bharat Kala Bhawan, Banaras Hindu University have collections of this art.

According to the specification given in the GI notification, Banaras Gulabi meenakari is basically an ancient form of art in India that has been praised since its introduction for the superb designs and combination of colours. It is characterized by pink strokes on white enamel. Unlike the vibrant enamelling in red, green and blue of Jaipur and Delhi, where the white enamel is left stark, the Varanasi craftsmen delicately add pink to the predominant white enamel. The motifs have been lotus blooms and buds. It is said to have been introduced in Varanasi by Persian enamellists who had come to India in the early 17th century at the peak of Mughal court.

It is a unique craft in which meenakars (artisans of enamelling) make items like religious figures of gods and goddesses on silver and gold sheet, various types of traditional ornaments and decorative items, motifs, including flowers and birds and animals on gold and silver metal.

Late [Rai Krishnadas](#), founder director of Barat Kala Bhawan, had also written that Banaras stands next to Jaipur in the art of enamelling and the nature of Banaras pink is similar to Jaipur red. In the 19th century and early 20th century, pink enamel was famous throughout the country and was much sought after by princes and the aristocracy. Unlike the red enamel of Jaipur, which has still maintained the high quality and fine workmanship of the 19th century, the pink enamel of Banaras was short-lived.

It ended here in the first quarter of 20th century when its last hereditary master Babbu Singh passed away in 1923. After a gap of about half a century, there has been a revival of pink enamelling in Banaras, chiefly as a trade to meet the demands of tourists and of women, who have taken to old jewellery more as a fashion than out of love for its charm and grace.