



A Research Project on

**Amar Colony:
Glimmer In The Dust**



Acknowledgment

I would like to express my special gratitude to **Anand Foundation** for giving me the opportunity to work as their intern and research on such an interesting topic.

I would like to acknowledge my institute, **Indian Institute of Craft and Design**, for providing us with NGO training.

I would also like to thank my teachers, family and friends for encouraging, motivating and guiding me through the whole process.



In this day and age of reducing waste and our impact on the earth, refurbishing furniture is an excellent way to fix and reuse quality items.

Moreover nowadays, people are into vintage furniture to make their homes more elegant and classy.

Dainty doorknobs, sombre sofas, cheap and utilitarian chest of drawers, adorable antiques are extremely à la mode. These alluring articles can be found in the dusty lanes of Amar colony in Lajpat Nagar, Delhi.

When I first heard of Amar colony, I presumed it to be 'marché du luxe', full of flashy and shiny showrooms with furniture being displayed in organized and coordinated

manner but it was all in inverse.

Sounds of the nails hammering, acrid smell of thinners and polish, air full of sawdust tingling your nose is what Amar colony truly is.

Located in the narrow dusty single lane, coloured in the hues of blue thanks to the tarpaulin sheets, these shops have no doors or fancy showrooms.

There is no welcoming door and these 40 shops work in harmony.

Amar colony, earlier known as khokha market or kabadh



(scrap) is totally contrary to its name. It is a paradise for antique lovers and those who want to give their homes a vintage look with some curios will be more than happy to visit this market.

The heart of the Amar colony is its salesmen and

artisans, as the owners hardly show up. They work their souls out to deliver the best products and services to their clients.

If you get hungry strolling the shops, Amar colony got it covered also. There is a chai wala (tea stall) in the back of one shop. They will give you the best tea and lunch is also served. It will be a hangout place with your family or friends though just for few minutes. They sell the best 'kadhi chawal'. (Just try if you ever go there)





Quaint Mirrors and Dressers

“Mirror mirror on the wall, which is the prettiest of 'em all?” - The phrase will come to your mind the instant you spot these frames and dressers which can add a dash of spunk or class to your ambience depending on the kind you pick.

Intricately carved in beautiful cyan, sweet lavender, bright yellow or caramel browns, these will dominate your rooms.



Cheap Cabinets and Chest of Drawers

Looking for some vintage cabinets or chests, Amar colony comes to your rescue!

From colonial style to local artwork, every era can be seen in the small stretch of shops. To give your homes, cafes, hotels etc. a touch of royalty, without spending extravagantly, this place is the right choice. Check out the large variety of cabinets and chests made of Burma teak with elaborate



wooden and metal work inspired from British, Mughal and Rajasthan artworks. You can find them in every shop placed haphazardly, just look through and you might find something amazing.



Funky Furnishings

At Amar colony you can find copious furniture waiting to scintillate your homes, restaurants and cafes (at the cheapest prices!!).

Sofas, couches, chairs, coffee tables, center tables, bar stools beds, bedheads, side tables, dining tables, chaise longue, coat hangers are stored nonchalantly in the 'shops' and the narrow walkway for you to stop and have a glance. Typical colonial style, bright pop colours, intricately cut tiles gives an extra edge to the century old tables and beds.

So whenever you plan on decorating or redecorating your house do visit Amar colony, I'm sure you'll not be disappointed.





Whimsical Whim-whams

Are you an antiques lover? Want knick-knacks that are centuries old?

Close your eyes think what you desire and voila, the Room of Requirement (Harry Potter series) delivers even the wildest things. This is the perfect place for people who love all things vintage.

Pocket-watches, pocket binoculars, 100 year old charkha, marine telescopes, microscopes, gramophones, camera, mechanical clock, typewriters, vintage phones (want to be lucky- grab the Babu Rao's 'Red phone' from Hera Pheri), swords, posters, 35 kilos brass sculptures from South or





engraved Surahis can be found stacked in little dusty corners.

You have to be your own Jack Sparrow to find these little but big treasures. Who knows you end up finding Aladdin's lamp or the golden pot at the end of the rainbow. So I suggest you walk around and chat with the shopkeepers who will happily show you their collections.

In Conversation

The reason for Amar colony's existence is because of its owners and skilled artisans. They stand as strong pillars to sustain this 40 years old market. Despite all the hardships, they do it all with a smile on their face.





Leading the Amar colony's furniture market from 60 years, Mr Tari Singh's (65 years old) shop is solely dealing in antiques and old furniture. Dressed in white kurta pyjama, white turban (impressively white in those dusty shops), he exuberantly welcomed me. He briefed about the 'chronicles' of his shop while we all were sipping on chai (tea).

Mr Singh recalled how his father came to India after partition with his three brothers. In order to find work everyone separated and his father came into this furniture business.

Since you have been in this for so many years now, what change have you noticed so far?

“When my father started the business, here used to be vegetable vendors, pedlars and scrap collectors and gradually it became the khokha market or known as furniture market. Earlier it was clean, but now others have littered the front area and people thinks this market to be raddi market, which makes me sad.”

How is your shop different from other 30 shops?

Singh proudly stated "We are the only shop here that deals with solely old furniture and antiques. We do not buy or sell new furniture. We have 40 year old Burma teak cupboard, seasoned wood cabinets, 60 year old bed frame from Calcutta etc. are our specialty."

Have you ever thought of going online?

"Honestly, I have no interest in this", Singh replied laughingly. "But my son likes these kinds of things. He is saying to make an online website, to expand our business."

What is your source of getting this furniture and



antiques?

"Usually people come and sell it to us. Some come from embassies, some from Bombay, Calcutta or South. If we think it can be sold we buy it and repair it."

What is your customer base?

"Our customers are only those who love antiques or old furniture. Our old customers visit us frequently. Sometimes



people tell us about the value of the items we have. A famous advocate is our regular customer."

If not furniture, what else would you be doing?

"Umm... I don't think of anything. My father started this business, so eventually I had to take over. I never thought of doing anything else besides this."

How many artisans work for you?

"Currently there are 5. Their work is divided. Some do salesmanship,

some polishing and some carving. Many have trained here and then went to Dubai or other countries to work. So I'm proud of them. We train our artisans here."

What are the ups and downs you face here?

"Usually, we don't face any problems but sometimes people sell us fake things or cancel the orders. Otherwise the business is good. We are satisfied with it."

Whole life working and still, Mr Singh doesn't regret his decisions and love what he is doing. He is very contented with his life and work. He will continue working and wish for the growth of Amar colony's furniture market.



Leaving his hometown in UP, Ramnath has been doing different type of chores his whole to feed his family. After marrying off his four daughters, he now lives with his wife in Nagloi, Delhi.

From how long are you doing this job?

"It has been 22 years that I'm working here."

What kind of work do you do here?

"My main work is polishing. The furniture comes from the Badarpur factory to be polished here."

From where have you learnt this craft?

"I learnt it here itself. When I came I didn't had the

idea, my owner and other workers taught me and now it has been so many year that I have been doing this."

Was this your first career option? What all other works have you done?

"No, this is not my first job. Earlier, I used work in a steel company. But as it was dissolved, so I had to shift to south extension and then I came here."

Are you satisfied with your job and income? Do you work somewhere else other than this?

"No, I don't work anywhere. This is the only source of my income. I am satisfied with my income as I get to eat three times meal."



Are you not bored/ tired of doing this for 22 years?

Ramnath smiled and said "Majboori mein koi insaan thakta nahi. Thus, I did all the work that was offered to me."
(In state of helplessness, no man is tired) this line just put me in deep thought and gave me chills.

Do you feel any kind of competition between the workers?

"No, not at all. We all work in harmony. There is so much of brotherhood. We never felt any kind of competition amongst ourselves."

With a big smile on his face he bid goodbye to us and got engaged with his work.

In a small talk with **Irshad**, he tells us about his feelings about his work and life. On asking what he was doing, he answered, " **I am a carpenter here. I repair the old furniture and stuff. If a table needs a leg or. A cabinet needs a door or some other repairing he is the one to look for.**"
Toiling for 20 years,





Irshad switched from being a mechanic to carpenter.

Why don't you resume being a mechanic?

He smirked a little and replied, "because of my self-respect. Once my owner threw money at me over a little thing, and from then I decided not to work as a mechanic."

How did you get to know about Amar colony?

"My father used to work here as a carpenter too. So after

quitting my first job, I came here and my father taught me how to mend the furniture."

Tell me about your family?

"I live with my wife and kids in Sangam vihar, Delhi. My kids are studying. I don't want them to be a labourer like me. I want them to study hard and start their own work. I want them to be happily settled."

Just like Irshad, every parent wants their children to be independent and settled. Irshad is working hard only for his wife and kids bright future.

In conversation with **Devkaran**, who was sitting alone in a corner and quietly working I wished and asked for his introduction.

For how long have you been working?

“I have been working my whole life. Since I was young I started working with my father. I used to do small chores and gradually worked as a wage labourer, so you can say that it’s been 58



years."

What is your position here?

"I am working here for 28 years now. I generally smoothens the wood (randa marna) with the help of a card scrapper (teg). Firstly, I sharpen the card scrapper and then use it to smooth the wood which is then polished."

Where is your home and how many family members?

"My ancestral home is in Meerut, UP. I moved to Delhi years ago and now I live in harsh vihar with my wife and two sons."

Do you plan on getting your sons in this field?

"No, never. I don't want them to work under someone. There is nothing great in working as a labourer. My elder son has done B.com and second has done 12th. I want them to work on their own but they are good for nothing. They don't listen to me and stay idle at home."

What do you like the most here?

"There is nothing specific as such. I like all the activities here and all the furniture that is made here. We all made it with full dedication and our blood, sweat and tears."

According to you, which wood is the best?

"I would say, teak wood is the best to work with."

Apart from Amar colony, where else have you worked?

"I used to work in Shahdara in furniture business only. Then I shifted to Amar colony 28 years ago."





Busy polishing a table which was being ordered by a client, I had a small chit-chat with **Ramsagar**, and asked him what he was doing?

"I am applying this filling into the holes and scratches in the table to make it even."

What is this filling made of?

"It is made of chalk powder, colour pigment, glue and other ingredients."

How did you get to know about Amar colony? For how long have you been working here?

"I used to work in Jor Bagh in furniture shop only. I came with my friends to Amar colony and I liked this place and

decided to work here. I have been working here for 25 years now."

How many customers come a day, if you have to say a number?

"Sometimes 50-100 people come and sometimes not a single in a whole day. People do know of the Amar colony. During Diwali season or other festival, the number increases."

Your advice on how to keep the wood long lasting?

"Everyone should use teak wood. Teak wood



lasts longer and if polished again can last for 30-40 years more, whereas board ply has less lifetime and can be reused again."

What are your working hours?

"I work from 9 in the morning till 8:30 in the evening. The market is opened for all the days of the week."

For how long are you planning to work?

"For people like us, it's not in our hands. We have to work till our last breath. 'Waise bhi yahan nahi karenge toh biwi ghar pe kaam karwayegi' (otherwise, wife will make me do the household work)"

Do you use some of your ideas while working?

"No, I don't, as in I cannot. Usually people tell us beforehand what they want or take it as it is. So we customise for them as per their needs. So it doesn't become a problem in future we don't use our ideas, moreover it takes 2-3 days in refurbishing one table."

Lastly, I came across the painting duo- Rajkumar and Suresh, deeply engrossed in their work.

Are you two brothers?

"Biologically no, but we always work together, that's why people tell us that we look like brothers."

For how many years are you working?

"After studying, I came along with my friends to Delhi in search of work. I guess it has been 12-13



years that I'm working here. Suresh came just 3 years ago."

What are the difficulties that you face?

"Every work has its own problems and challenges. It is difficult to work in less space. The air is all soaked with the smell of thinner and polish. It is difficult for us to work as thinner makes us dizzy, so is the case with saw dust."

What type of wood do you work with?

"We use teak wood, commercial wood, ply board, mango wood and sometimes Burma teak for our furniture. We



mostly make new furniture."

Have you tried your ideas on any of the furniture?

"Yes I have. We usually do order work only. When it is for order we go it as per the needs of the customers. But



when there is no order, I try some of my ideas. Once I painted a chest of drawers with different colours. I painted it what colour comes to my mind. It got sold for a good price and the client told that it was some kind of abstract art. I was really happy that they liked my work. If given a chance again I will try my best to make something like that again."

How long does it take to make

one order?

"It depends on the type of order. Currently we are working on a cupboard. It takes 3 days to make one cupboard with full-fledged painted."

Are you happy doing this?

"There is nothing like happiness for us. We have to do any kind of work to fill our bellies. We don't have the choice of being happy or not. 'Majboori mein sab karna padhta hai' (Helplessness makes you do anything)."



Conclusion

Amar colony furniture market located near the clothes market in Lajpat nagar is no doubt the best market for buying cheap furniture and antiques.

If you want to infuse your homes with old- school style furniture please take a stroll in the furniture market of Amar colony. As it is not crowded much you can have a peaceful shopping experience and the salesmen are also friendly.

But Amar colony has its own 'shades of grey'. There are some difficulties and challenges that they people of Amar colony has to go through every day.

Dusty lanes, air filled with sawdust and thinners lead to many health problems for the craftsmen and the salesmen. Owners hardly come to the shops, thus they don't face any such problems like the workers do.

Workers eat tobacco (shikhar - popular among the

workers here) on a daily basis so as to avoid the smell of thinners and polish that go to their heads. Thinners make them dizzy and hinder their work. Therefore, they eat tobacco which is very hazardous for their health.

The kitschy furniture lying in front of the shops takes away the old-school vibe of the market. There is no cleanliness which is the biggest negative point.

If these problems are taken care of then in no time Amar colony furniture market will become the second 'Kirti nagar furniture market'.

To curb these problems, I suggest that air purifiers should be installed. Workers should be given masks and eye protectors to wear. Furniture and other stuff should





be piled up neatly. Name board should be installed and proper gate should be set up. Flyers and advertisements should be published in order to create more awareness among the masses. Government should provide a little fund so that they can renovate their shops as they help the government in a way to sell those long lost antiques.

A person believing in hard work and aspiring to do best in the field of art and craft. Motivated, Diligent and Adaptable are the words that describe her.

She is a go-getter girl and speaks her mind in English, Hindi and little bit of French and Korean. Though having a career driven mindset, she is family-oriented too.

VRIDDHI JAIN



