Rangasaipt in Warangal district has long been known for the superb workmanship of its metal workers, the Viswakarmas dating back to the great Kakatiya rulers (11th-13th centuries). These craftsmen were known for their proficiency in stone and metal sculpture. They made vigrahas and vahanas and other accessories like crowns of the gods and goddesses of temple and temple ornamentation.

During the Nizam’s rule, metal craftsmen acquired strikingly secular overtones and incorporated Mughal floral motifs and designs. With a decrease in the demand for traditional and temple articles of adornment, they switched to the manufacture of articles for use in homes. They make flower pots, vases, lanterns, shields, small stools, Mayur lamps, hanging lampshades, dasavatara shields, panels illustrating the Mahabharata and Ramayana and Hindu gods and goddesses.

The sheet metal products available currently mostly have religious themes. Mementoes are the highest selling products.

The Process of Metal Craft

Metal sheet work involves various processes. Flat ornamentation is the earliest form of sheeting, where the sheet of brass (an alloy of copper and zinc) is placed on a warm bed of lac over a wooden plank. Lac is a mixture of bee’s wax, resins castor, mustard oil and brick dust. The edges of the brass sheet are also covered with lac. The sheet is cleaned with tamarind and dried. The design draft drawn with pencil on a tracing sheet is transferred on the sheet by engraving. The negative side of the design is cut away in order to give the see-through effect and the designs are filed to make it smooth. The sheet is taken out from the lac by breaking it. After embossing, the final definition is given. The sheet is treated with nitric acid for shine and then heated and washed. The plates made by this method are often mounted on wooden frames.

Flower pots, lampshades and drum containers are made by hollow sheeting. The sheet has to be given the shape of a hollow container without any converging or diverging molding. The pattern of the form needs to be cut into pieces and welded together to bring out the form.