



ठोक्याची घागर



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Visual Ethnography of Beaten Brass Ghaagar

DESIGN RESEARCH SEMINAR

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## ABSTRACT

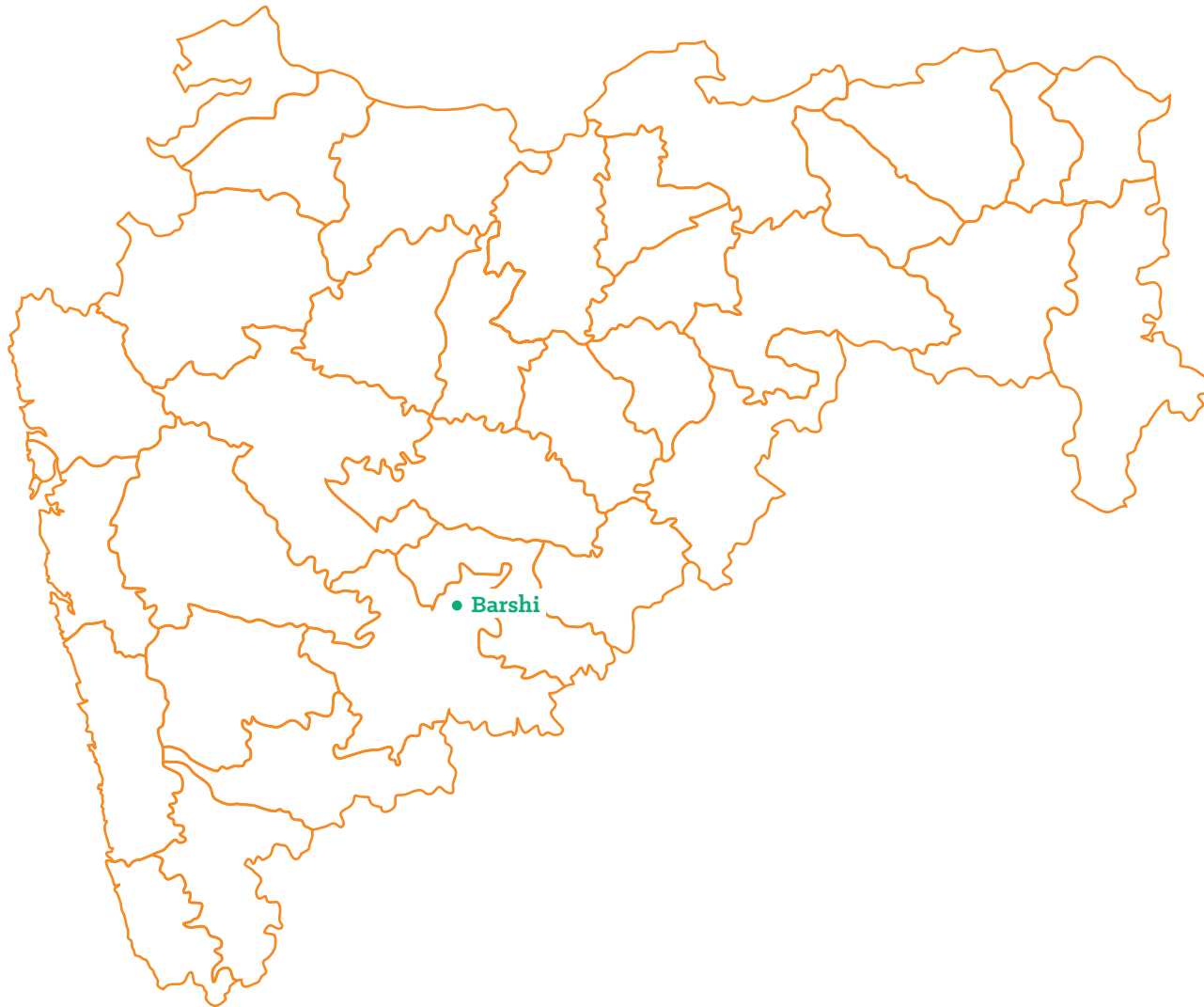
Beaten brass vessels especially Ghaagars and Handas are a very famous part of Barshi, a town in Maharashtra which also is my hometown. These vessels have been a part of childhood and growing up years. We use these to store water till date.

This project gave me an opportunity to look into the making of these Ghaagars. I was lucky enough to be hosted by a wonderful family by the name of Gore who have been providing these vessels to my family shop for more than five decades now. I learnt about the entire process of making the Ghaagar. And also about a life very different than mine.

Visual ethnography was a completely new field for me. With the excitement of a new subject and an age old tradition to explore I embarked on this journey of understanding the 'Thokyachi Ghaagar'.







## INTRODUCTION

Barshi is my native place as well as my place of birth and thus holds a very special place in my heart. It is a taluka in the Solapur district of Maharashtra. A good mix of traditional village charm and the development of a city is what makes Barshi an interesting place to visit. Barshi is famous for multiple things across different sectors like trade, commerce, agriculture, medicine, education. One such thing is handmade beaten brass vessels especially a Ghaagar and Handa which are both mainly used to store water.

My family has been a trader's family in the utensils business for more than five decades now. And that's how I got introduced to these beaten vessels. I have seen them being used in every household since I was a child. But up until now, I had never met the people behind these beautiful pieces of work nor had I witnessed the process behind making these. This project gave me the opportunity to look at it from a different approach and understand something that has been in front my eyes for all my life.





Bhagvant Mandir



## BARSHI

Barshi is a town in Solapur district of Maharashtra, India. It is a municipal town and a headquarters of a taluka bearing the same name. The town is traditionally considered as a gateway to the neighbouring region of Marathwada.

One of the most famous attractions of Barshi is the Bhagvant Mandir which is one of the two temples in the country dedicated to Vishnu as Lord Bhagvant; the other is situated at Varanasi, UP. The temple was built in 1245 A.D. and according to Hindu mythology, Lord Rama traveled through here while going to Sri Lanka.

Nargis Dutt Memorial Cancer Hospital, initiated by film actor Sunil Dutt, is also situated in Barshi. It is linked to Tata Memorial Hospital for Cancer Research, Mumbai. And is known for its state-of-the-art facilities and is funded privately by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as well as by the government.

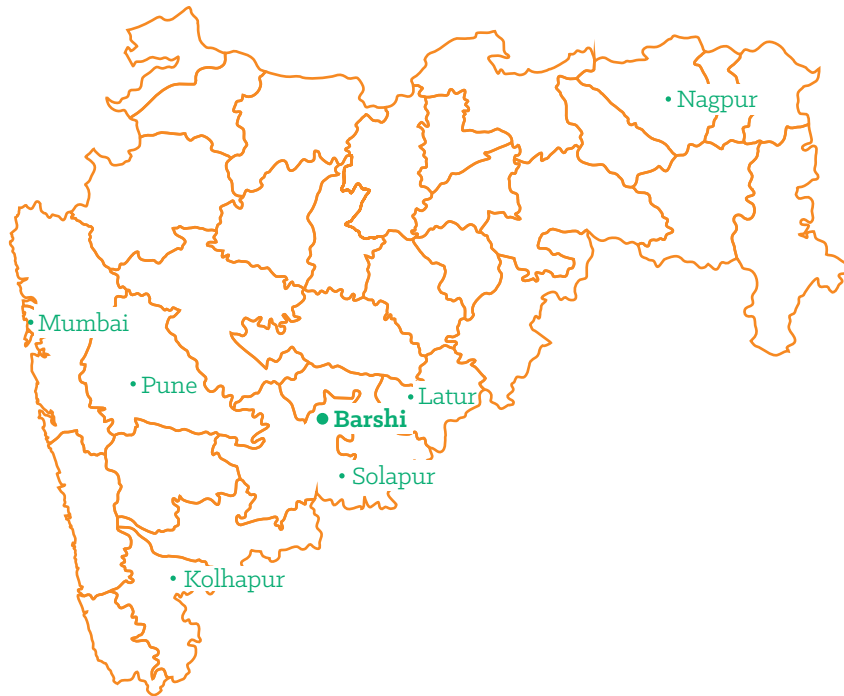
## PEOPLE OF BARSHI

Barshi has a population of 118,722 people. Marathi is the most commonly spoken language here. Hinduism is the major religion followed in Barshi, with 80.49% of the population following it. Islam is the second most popular religion here with approximately 16.20% following it. Jainism is followed by 2.02% people and there are smaller groups of people following Christianity, Buddhism and Sikhism as well. Most of the festivals of each religion are celebrated here like Makar Sankranti, Shivratri, Holi, Diwali, Id, Paryushan, et. al.

## TRADE, COMMERCE AND EDUCATION IN BARSHI

Barshi is famous in the region for its toor dal (lentil) production and other agriculture products. It is also known for its wholesale trading market, called 'Krishi Utapanna Bazar Samiti' where farmers and cattle owners come from





all over to sell raw commodities, crops, vegetables, fruits, animals, and animal products to wholesale buyers. In the past, Barshi had three cotton textile mills out of which only one survives today. It is also an emerging regional education centre with reputed educational institutes situated here.

## REACHING BARSHI

### By Air

There are no direct flights to reach Barshi. The nearest airport is Osmanabad airport which is 38.1 km away. Another major airport close to Barshi is Solapur airport which is 72.2 km away.

### By Train

Barshi only recently got its own broad gauge railway station called Barshi Town. There is a train everyday that runs between Mumbai (370 km) and Latur (100 km) that stops at Barshi. So this is the best way to reach Barshi from Mumbai. Pune (196 km) is also well connected to Barshi by train. There is a train twice a week that connects Nagpur and Kolhapur which stops at Barshi. Another option to reach Barshi is to get down at Kurduvadi Junction (which is an important junction on the Central Railways system) and take a taxi or bus to Barshi which is 33 km away.

### By Bus

Bus is a very convenient option to reach Barshi. There are regular state transport buses that connect Mumbai and Pune to Barshi. Solapur, Latur and Osmanabad are the closest big cities which are all well connected by bus to Barshi









## REASON FOR CHOOSING BARSHI

As mentioned earlier, Barshi holds a very special place in my heart. I visit Barshi at least once a year and used to spend my summer vacations there when I was in school. My cousins and I would often spend time in our shop observing our uncles and grandfather handle customers and sell the utensils. We would often pretend to do the same when the shop was empty. And thus, I have always seen the different utensils up close but never once did I know the process behind making them.

This project gave me the opportunity to see something in its most basic form and understand the artists behind it. The younger generation in our house have never been exposed to this process for some reason. This made it even more exciting for me to do this project. Also as a design student it is always fascinating to still be able to experience things being made with hand in this day and age of computers and internet.

Another reason I chose this project was because of the chance of interacting with new people, people who live a very different life than mine. To find and understand the differences and similarities in our lives. And since the family I was going to be with has been working with my family for more than five decades, it just made things even more special. By trying to understand them, I would probably learn more about the aspect of my family's life which I have never looked into - the commerce aspect - how my grandfather started the business and how were the conditions of the market back then and the differences between the markets then and now.

**Image:** A typical day at the Deshmukh Plot in Barshi where the Gore family resides and has the factory





## VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is the systematic study of people and cultures. It is designed to explore cultural phenomena where the researcher observes society from the point of view of the subject of the study. An ethnography is a means to represent graphically and in writing the culture of a group.<sup>1</sup>

Visual Ethnography is a research method which uses different visual techniques such as photography, video, painting, sketching, etc. to depict the research based on observation of people and their environment and the correlation between them. This makes it different from a formal research setting where the researcher and subject stick to a format and answer questions which are pre formed. Ethnography lets the researcher see beyond their preconceived notions and lets them immerse themselves in the world of others. Most importantly, it allows the researcher to see behavioural patterns in real life context. Ethnography is not merely a method of data collection but is a way of creating and representing knowledge about the society, culture and individuals that is based on the ethnographer's individual experience.

**Image:** Chandu Gore at work in the factory

1: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnography>



श्री वेङ्कटदा प्रसन्न



गोरे







## METHODOLOGY

As this was the first time I was doing an ethnographic study I had very little idea on how to proceed. I was unsure of how to approach the people without making them uncomfortable and gathering as much information as possible. So I decided to try and understand not just the craft of making the beaten vessels but also how the family functions and how are the two interlinked.

Once I was in Barshi, I was introduced to a few members of the Gore family by my uncle. As the days went by I got introduced to the other members of the family as well as their relatives who stay around. The Gores have provided beaten vessels to our shop since it was started in 1961 by my Grandfather and they continue to provide them to date. I explained to them the purpose of my visit and they were very happy to be my hosts and were ready to give me all the information I wanted. One of the biggest challenges I faced was for them to treat me as one of their own and not give me too much importance. Since they have worked with my family for so long, they would treat me like a precious doll initially, not letting me sit on the ground, not letting me walk around without slippers, making sure I was very well fed. It was really sweet of them to do all this but it always created a distance between us. But with each passing day, everyone became familiar with me and got used to my presence around them. We had started conversing like friends and that made life much easier. The awkwardness went off really quickly. They didn't mind sharing all the details of the trade with me and were very enthusiastic all the time.

**Image:** Gore Family's house + factory





## THE GORE FAMILY

The Gore family stays at Deshmukh plot in Barshi. They share the space for their house and the factory.

For my project I interacted with Chandrakant (Chandu) Gore and his family. Their family comprises of Chandu Gore, his wife, two sons and two daughters who are all married. When I was visiting them, the younger daughter had just given birth and Chandu Gore's wife was with her.

**Chandu Gore** is the 71 year old head of the family who started this business. He has been in this business for more than 50 years now. One of his first clients was my grandfather. He is extremely fond of travelling and has travelled across the country mainly on pilgrimage. He tries and takes at least one trip every year with his wife and friends or relatives around.

**Ganesh Gore** is Chandu uncle's elder son. He is a graduate and works in the textile mill in Barshi. He was very keen on understanding from me post graduation options, especially MBA from different universities, as that

would help him with the promotion in the mill.

**Sarika Gore** is Ganesh's wife. She runs a xerox shop and also has a small tailoring setup which she works on in the afternoons and evenings when she comes home.

Ganesh and Sarika have two sons who are both studying in pre primary and primary school in Barshi.

**Sudhir Gore** is Chandu uncle's younger son, who has now taken up the art of making the Ghaagar. He does this full time and is joined in by Chandu uncle from time to time. He got into the business after his 12th standard.

**Shyamal Gore** is Sudhir's wife who was my companion and friend throughout the journey and made sure I was extremely comfortable at their home. She finished her D.Ed after marriage and is now pursuing BA from an open university.

Sudhir and Shyamal have a two year old daughter named **Sai**, who was our

constant source of entertainment. And when I was there, Shyamal was in the eighth month of her pregnancy and I got the news later that she gave birth to a son in January.

Everyone in the family knows how to make the Ghaagar even if they don't pursue it full time. The women in the house help with less physical work like blowing the bellows, crushing the Daag(explained later in the report), washing the Ghaagar once it is ready.

Chandu uncle's brother and his kids are also in this business and along with the Ghaagar make other vessels as well. The whole family gives a lot of importance to education, mainly as a passage for getting good jobs. MBA is a favourite among them with a few people from the younger generation having pursued it and others applying for it.

### Images:

1. Chandrakant Gore
2. Chandrakant's wife
3. Ganesh Gore
4. Shyamal and Sai Gore
5. Ganesh's sons
6. Sudhir Gore
7. Entrance to Gore family's house and factory







## THE PROCESS

There are Ghaagars made of different sizes - small, medium and large. The most commonly made is the medium Ghaagar. All measurements in this report are of the medium sized Ghaagar unless mentioned otherwise.



## TYPES OF GHAAGAR

Four types of Ghaagars are made based on different combinations of copper and brass in the making:

1. **Copper:** The complete Ghaagar is made of copper.
2. **Ganga Jamuna:** The upper and lower portion of the Ghaagar are made of copper and the middle portion is made of brass.
3. **Naru Shankar:** The upper and lower portion of the Ghaagar are made of brass and the middle portion is made of copper.
4. **Brass:** The complete Ghaagar is made of brass.

Ganga Jamuna Ghaagar is now rarely made these days as it is not very cost effective. People prefer buying the other three options.

The ring and the neck in all types of Ghaagars remains the same. The neck is made of copper as it can take more heat than brass. When the Ghaagar is being heated, the neck is exposed to most amount of heat compared to any other part of the Ghaagar.



## PARTS OF A GHAAGAR

1. **Ring**
2. **Kaatla/Gala** - Neck
3. **Upra** - Upper portion of the Ghaagar
4. **Pata** - Middle portion of the Ghaagar
5. **Bood** - Lower portion of the Ghaagar

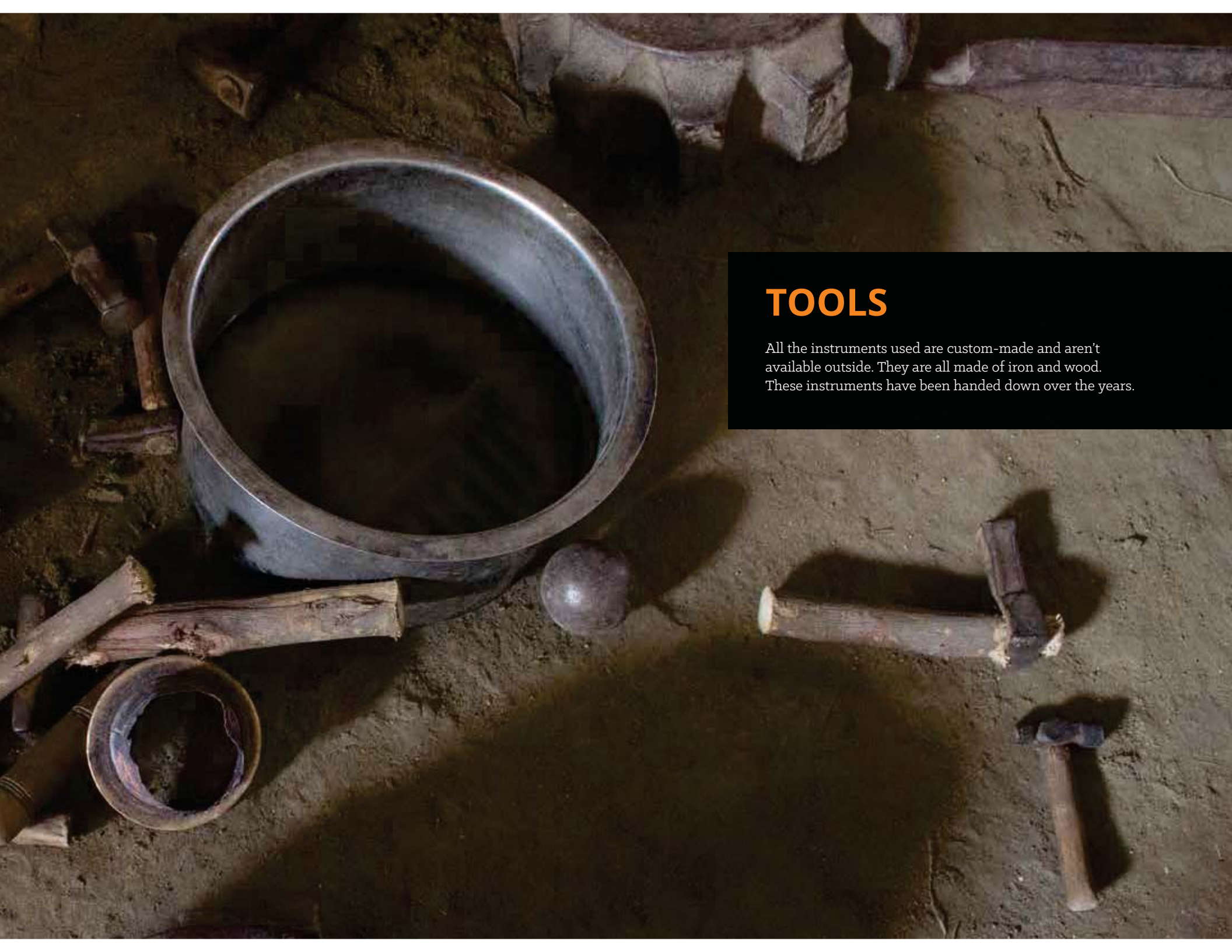


## MEASUREMENTS (of a medium sized Brass Ghaagar)

- The sheet used to make this Ghaagar is either 22 or 24 gauge.
- The size of the sheet used to make the neck is 11.5"X2.25"
- The circle used to make the upper and lower portions of the Ghaagar is 13" in diameter.
- The sheet (Pata) used to make the middle portion of the Ghaagar is 39"x4.5". The sheet that comes from the factory is usually 39"x14" which is used to make 3 Ghaagars.







## TOOLS

All the instruments used are custom-made and aren't available outside. They are all made of iron and wood. These instruments have been handed down over the years.







**1. Kharoli:** These are placed on a wooden base on which the Ghaagar is beaten using different hammers. Each Kharoli has a different use and is used in combination with different hammers to get the desired result.

**2. Kharoli on wooden base:** This is how the Kharoli is placed on the wooden base. A small stool is kept besides it where the person sits and puts his leg around the Kharoli and works on the Ghaagar.

**3. Bangadi:** These are used under the Ghaagar usually while beating them to give them the roundness. Mainly used when the lower and upper portions are being made from the circles and also when the middle portion is being given shape. The iron balls shown in the image are used to fix the lower portion to the rest of the Ghaagar (explained later in the report).



**4. Measuring and cutting tools:** These are the different tools used to take measurements. Different scissors are also used for different purposes like cutting the metal for the Ghaagar to making cuts for joints. Tools used during heating and making the Daag are placed on extreme right.

**5. Hammers:** These are all the hammers they use while making the Ghaagar. Each of them has a different purpose, from beating sheets into circle to creating grooves to creating pattern on the Ghaagar at the end for aesthetic purposes.







**MAKING DAAG**







**Daag** is the binding liquid used on the joints of the Ghaagar.

It is made of brass, tin and sawagi. The proportions are 63%, 29% and 8% respectively. All of this put together is heated till it blends together into a piping hot liquid. It is then kept aside to cool on its own.

Once the Daag is prepared, as per requirement it is smashed into a fine powder which is added to water and sawagi. This mixture is then used on the joints of the Ghaagar. Heating the Ghaagar makes the Daag melt and blend with the metal making the joints stronger and more permanent.



The Gores make about 1.5 kg Daag at a time, which lasts them for almost a week. About 25-30 gm Daag is used on one Ghaagar.

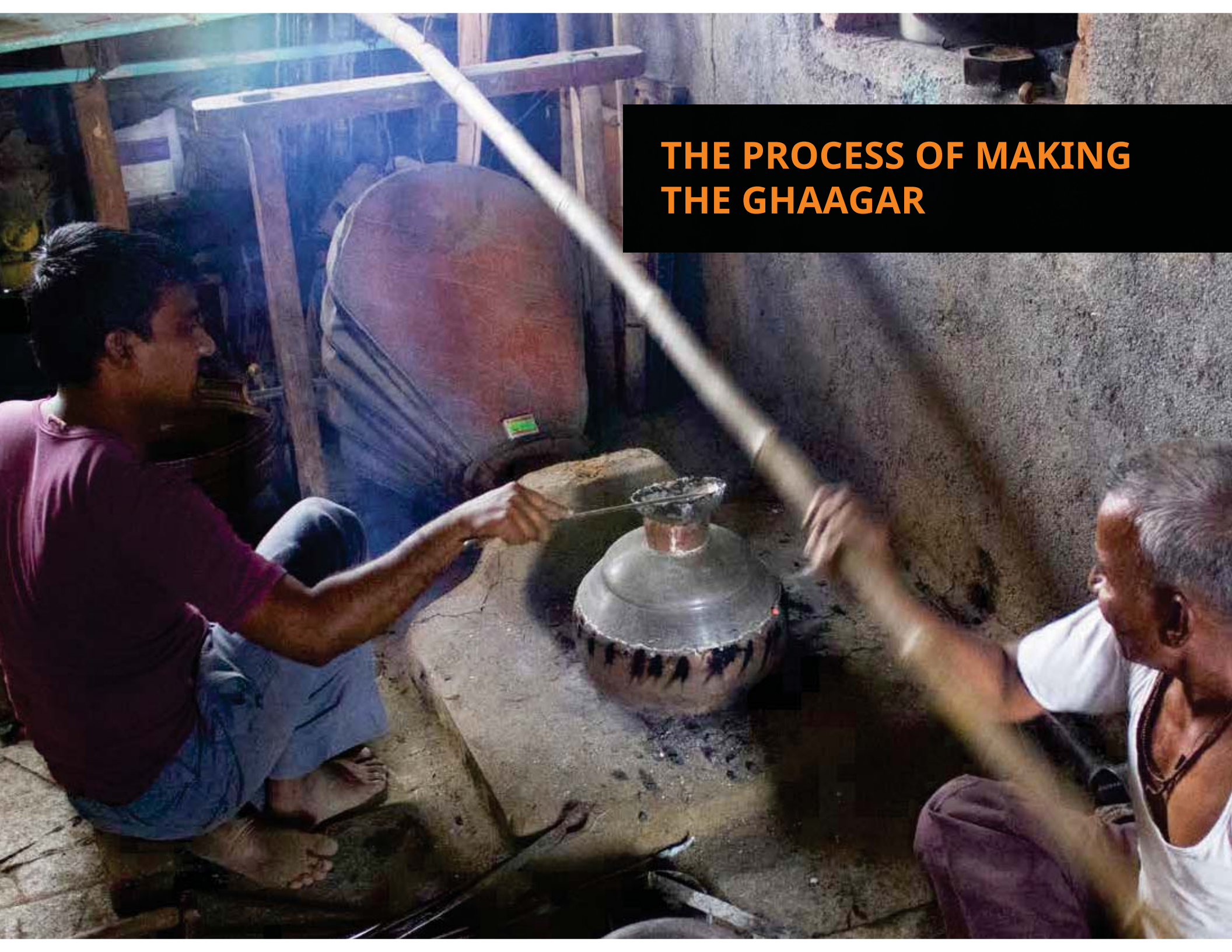
Everytime the Daag is made, an offering of some sweets or sugar is made to the bellow, as it is extremely risky to make a Daag everytime. If at all anything goes wrong and the Daag blows up it can instantly kill a person. The offering is made to thank the God for letting this happen without any mishap.

Lead is extremely bad for the Daag. Even a small amount can completely destroy the Daag. It makes the Daag extremely hard, which can lead to its breakage after it is put on the Ghaagar.





## THE PROCESS OF MAKING THE GHAAGAR









## NECK

The neck is made of copper for all Ghaagars. The copper sheet cut in the size in joined to make a cylinder and then beaten to fit it into the ring. A groove is created between the ring and the copper sheet which holds it together. The bottom half of the neck is also beaten to fit into the upper portion of the Ghaagar.



## THE UPPER AND LOWER PORTIONS

If the upper and lower half of the Ghaagar aren't machine made, they are beaten and folded into their shape from a circle made of brass sheets.

Gores hire a person to do this job as it requires a lot of effort and time and can delay the other process of making the Ghaagar. The person I met made almost 60 upper and lower portions each in a day. He beat 6-8 circles at a time.

### Images

Left: Lower portion being beaten from a copper circle

Bottom left: Machine made upper portion

Bottom right: Difference in handmade and machine made lower portions







## UPPER PORTION OF THE GHAAGAR

The Upra is different from the lower portion of the Ghaagar in a way that it has a groove about half way down. A special tool is used to mark the circle where the neck fits.

### Joining Neck and Upper portion

The neck is joined to the upper portion by beating the edges of the neck against it and then adding the Daag on it.







## MIDDLE PORTION OF THE GHAAGAR

The middle portion is made from a flat sheet of brass/copper. It is measured, cut and joined to make a cylinder. This cylinder is then beaten using different tools to give it a convex shape.

### Joining the upper and middle portions

Once the neck and the upper portion are joined, cuts are made on the upper and middle portions to join them together. Daag is added and all of this is then placed on the bellows and heated to blend the Daag with the joints making them extremely strong. Once the unit cools down, it is beaten and given shape and dents are fixed. After making the upper portion ready, the ring is attached to it.



## JOINING THE LOWER PORTION

The whole upper unit is then joined to the lower portion. The joints in this case are fixed differently than others. The person fixing the joints sits on top of the Ghaagar. He has an iron ball in one hand which goes inside the Ghaagar and the other hand has a hammer which is used to hit from the outside. Hitting the hammer on the same place as the iron ball on the inside helps fix the joints. The same process of applying the Daag, heating and shaping is then repeated.











## WASHING AND CLEANING

Once the Ghaagar is ready, comes the cleaning. Tamarind, soap and diluted acid is used to clean the Ghaagars. The acid they use is extremely strong and creates a pungent odour and gives out smoke once it comes in contact with the metal. It is shocking to see that no safety gear is worn mb them when they use the acid.

While cleaning, acid is first used to clear all the dirt and stains. After that tamarind is used to clean the Ghaagar further. And then it is washed with water.



Separate cotton cloth is kept to wipe the Ghaagar. No oil should come in contact with the Ghaagar after cleaning as this can make it difficult to beat the Ghaagar later for aesthetic purposes. They don't even let their hands come in contact with the outer surface. The Ghaagar is carried around by holding the ring and the insides of the neck.





## BEATING THE GHAAGAR

After cleaning, comes the time to beat the Ghaagar to make designs on it. This is done purely for aesthetic purposes and doesn't improve the strength or stability of the Ghaagar. This beating (called Thoke Marne) is done using special hammers which have a shiny front. These are rubbed on a polish stone or a rubber sheet to make them shine more before beating. An iron brush is then used to scrape the top of the Ghaagar to give it a shine.



## TRADER/SELLER'S ASPECT OF THE BUSINESS

The seller provide the artists with the raw material and the Ghaagars are

made on order. Once all the Ghaagars are ready, they are taken to the seller on the same day.

The rate as of December 2015 for a sheet of brass was Rs 340/kg and for copper was Rs 425/kg.

The USP of these Ghaagars is their high resale value. Customers can get up to Rs 270/kg for brass and Rs 320/kg for copper upon resale. The new Ghaagars are sold in the market at the price of Rs 500/kg for the brass and Rs 550/kg for copper. Labour charges are unanimously

decided by all the traders and workers. And as of December 2015, they were Rs 60/kg/person.

### Images

Left: My Grandfather in our shop.

Right: My uncle who now looks after the shop





## LEGACY OF THE GHAAGAR

The tradition of making the Ghaagar was passed down from Chandu Gore to Sudhir Gore. But they aren't looking forward to their next generation to taking this further as they feel it is a dying art form. They feel there won't be much market left for this in a few years. With the advent of steel and plastic vessels, the importance of these Ghaagars has reduced. People still buy it though for they have a high resale value. Most of the kids in the Gore family know the process of making Ghaagar since they have grown around it but none seems to be interested in taking it up as a profession.

## E-COMMERCE

I asked the Gore family if they have thought about selling these Ghaagars online as there will be a good market among the city dwellers who aren't aware of these. They said that since most of them aren't that educated, they haven't gotten into it. Also they are very satisfied with the number of orders they currently get as it occupies most of their time in the week. But they aren't averse to the idea of selling it to newer customers if they receive some help.

## RESALE AND RECYCLING VALUE OF THE GHAAGAR

As mentioned earlier, these Ghaagars are still famous in villages because of their resale value. A lot of the old Ghaagars come to the Gore family, they then shape it, remove dents, repair joints, clean it, and make it new to sell it again. This becomes a win win situation for all.

## INSIGHTS FROM CHANDU GORE

I had some of the best conversations throughout the project with Chandu Uncle. He is a man of wisdom who gave shared his stories which teach us a lot of things in life.

According to Chandu uncle, the Ghaagars made these days are not of the best quality as the labour charges they get are based on quantity and do not depend on the quality of the Ghaagar. So the more the number of Ghaagars they make in a day, the more money they get. He isn't very happy with it but he say you have to go with the flow.

Making these Ghaagars involves a lot of physical hardwork. And for his age Chandu uncle is extremely active and does the same amount of work as his young son. Out of curiosity I asked Chandu uncle if his hands and back didn't hurt at the end of the day because of the constant beating of metal. His answer left me speechless. He said, "What is the point of cribbing over such small things, everyone has to die one day," This showcased what a hard, dedicated and consistent worker he was. I was really impressed and spellbound by his determination.

I loved his enthusiasm for travel. He has seen almost all of India. He kept saying you should enjoy life. What is the fun in running behind money. He was very content with the amount of money they currently made.

## INSIGHTS

Being with the Gores made me realise what dedication and hardwork means. There was so much to learn from the whole family, not just in terms of work but also in hospitality, living together, living a life with less technology. I realised how addicted we are to the digital world. They have television and phones too but no one was constantly peeking into their phones. There was a routine to life, time for work, time for quality conversations, time for chai.

A sense of community was clearly evident in the area they stayed in. Everyone steps outside their house in the evenings for chats, kids play outside - without parents having to worry about their safety.

It felt wonderful to see something in the making that has been a part of childhood and growing up years. The hardwork and effort that goes into making a single Ghaagar makes you appreciate it's beauty even more. I felt more connection with my grandfather as well when he told me stories of how he started the shop and the efforts he took to get it going.

My only regret is not having tried my hand at making a Ghaagar. I tried asking them to let me do it, but I guess they didn't trust me enough with the hammers yet. Maybe the next time I visit Barshi, I might make at least one dent in the metal.

This project doesn't end here for me. I am currently looking into how I can help them expand their market to the city through e-commerce or other retailers. Hopefully there will be some breakthrough.





