

Design Resource

Traditional Ghatam Making - Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Pani Mataqa Making

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Rakshitha

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://dsource.in/resource/traditional-ghatam-making-madurai-tamil-nadu>



1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

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Introduction

Music is one among the performing arts that requires both creation and recreation that includes percussion instrument. Ghatam belongs to the group of percussion instrument. It produces rhythmic effects of sound depending on the force and clay composition that could influence the acoustic effect.

Types of Ghatam:

Ghatams are classified into two different types. Namely:

- Madras Ghatam: Madras ghatam is light pot that can be played easily which requires less force to play.
- Manamadurai Ghatam: Manamadurai ghatam is a heavy pot and is difficult to play. It has a very unique tonal quality that produces sharp metallic ringing sound. This type of ghatam is considered as the superior quality.

The making of the ghatams are dependent on the quality of clay that is used to prepare ghatams. Thus the study/knowledge of the soil is important. The composition of ghatams is mainly dependent on clay as it has a special quality. The appropriate amount of copper and iron filings mixed with clay plays a vital role while baking.

To produce good tone of the pot, thickness of the pot walls is sustained even. The proportion of alloy and metals added during the making process of ghatam decides the pitch of the tone.

Ghatam – A Global Recognition:

T. H. Vinayakram known as Vikku Vinayakram is a Grammy Award-winning Indian percussionist. The credits of globally popularizing ghatam by bringing the revolutionary changes in doing fusion with western music with the earthen pot, using his enough experience of strategic and versatile handling of the instrument by Vikku Vinayakram is the most prestigious element for the country. Sukanya Ramgopal, a disciple of Vikku Vinayakram is also a female leading mistress of ghatam in India.

Position of Playing the Instrument:

Ghatam is played in two different ways.

In North India the instrument is placed on small round block with its mouth facing upwards. They are played on the sides with right hand and on the mouth with left hand. Bangles and rings are also used to create sound.

In South India, the instrument is positioned on the lap by its mouth facing the stomach. It is taped with fingers, wrists and nails on the surface of ghatam. It is the only instrument whose position is changed while playing. Sometimes to delight the audience, the instrument is thrown up and caught in the suitable rhythm during laya vinyasas.

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Significance of Ghatam:

It is very challenging and significant in making amazing sound rhythms with resonance that gives various pitch on the application of different quantities of clay, plasticine and water on the inner surface of it. Thus the professional manufacturers are very cautious on the usage of soils, which is the major element for the instrument's sustainability. It also ensures the safety and security to the instrument while playing ghatam with force.

Terms involved in Soil Science:

Soil is commonly meant as “dirt” or “earth”. In engineering terms soil is indicated as loose rock particles. Soil science includes edaphology and pedology.

- Edaphology: It is the study of ecological study of soil that influences and interacts with the living beings, especially with plants.
- Pedology: It focuses on the formation, description and morphology of soils.

Soil texture is a qualitative classification tool that is used in both laboratory and in field to determine classes for soils based on their physical texture.

Clayey soil is considered as the “skin of the earth”. It is distinguished by its color namely black, white, yellow and red that differs from all other soils, being tough, cold and wet. It consists of organic gases, liquids, mixture of minerals and interfaces with its lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere and biosphere. Thus this particular type of soil is used for making the instrument ghatam.

While making ghatam the five elements of nature like earth, water, fire, sun and air are invariably used. As earth is referred to soil and clay gets bounded by water easily. Sun helps in drying of the earthen pot. Later the clay is baked in fire and since the air is present inside the instrument, it initiates the sound creating its own unique timber.

Main Place to Collect Rich Clayey Soil:

Some parts of the district from Kanyakumari to Cauvery basin including Vaigai River, Tirumanimuttar, Kottakaraiyar and Pambar sub basins are the best suited place to collect the clayey soil. Clay and alluvial soil comprising of sand is well developed along the Vaigai River courses. Places like Ilaiyangudi, Tiruppathur and Manamadurai Taluks are rich in black soil.

Vaigai river and alluvial plain in Sivaganga, Devakottai and Manamadurai Taluks are rich in alluvium. Alluvium comprising of sand and clay is well developed in Vaigai riverbed. Usually alluvium thickness varies between 6 and 32mm. The thick and viscous alluvium containing red-lead and manganese found in this region are the prime factors for increasing the sturdiness of the ghatam.

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In Manamadurai utmost importance is given to soil governance that includes the study of chemical and physical properties, its water absorption, and its soil reactivity that is expressed in terms of PH. It is to measure the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. The experts also consider the rainfall on particular region that plays a vital role that adds in deciding the textural feel of the soil. Specific regions are monitored well with respect to time and space for the collection of correct soil sample.

Main Place of Ghatam Making:

Ghatams are manufactured in Panruti, Chennai and Bengaluru. But the main place where the ghatams are manufactured is in Manamadurai of Tamil Nadu. Meenakshi Kesavan (63 years old) is an expert ghatam maker residing in Manamadurai. She and her family are the only ones producing the unique type of ghatam in the town for the past century. She has been involved in making ghatams since she was 15 years old. She got married into a family where at least four generations have made the instrument. Thus from then she is been tapping mud pots for more than four and half decades. She learnt the art of making ghatam from her husband and father-in-law. It is her family that is preserving their 160 years old legacy. As per the information given by her son Ramesh, it takes nearly six years to master the art of making the instrument. But if the person being a non-traditional potter then it takes longer time to master the art.

Ghatam maker Meenakshi Kesavan is fondly called as “the potter who got an award” in the region, as she is been awarded with the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi from the President of India on 11th April 2014. It is she - the very first instrument maker of the country to receive such prestigious award!



Artisan to make a Ghatam pot of soil preparing.

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The Senior Person of the Ghatam Maker Miss, Meenakshi Amma.



Representing of the Ghatam Pottery Making Family.

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Ghatam Maker Mr. Ramesh son of Minakshi amma.

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Ghatam to build a pot of red clay Preparing.



The stuff clay scraping in the pot making Machine part.

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The framed Photograph inside of Mr. Ramesh has to Respected by Ghatam instrument player.

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The framed photograph of Miss. Minakshi receiving it from the president.



Ghatam Maker Miss. Minakshi as Receiving the Moment at Function.



The Framed Certificate.

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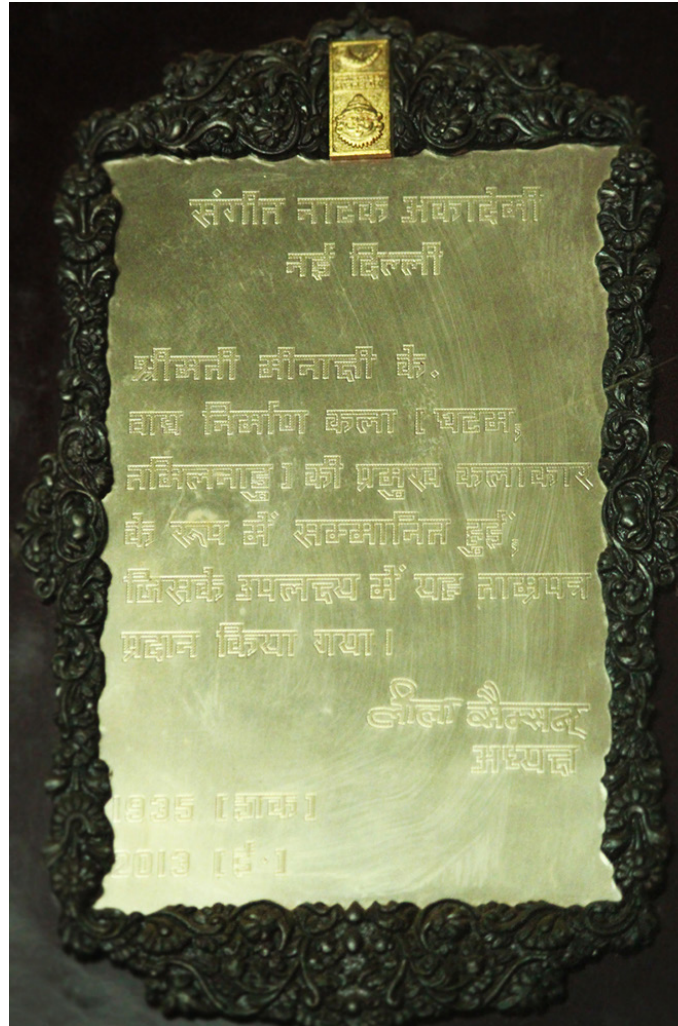
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The certificate of Sangeeta Natak Academy New Delhi, to them got Miss. Minakshi for the Ghatam Making Art.



Parlandu Award of Excellence 2016 to Mr. Ramesh.

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Artisan Mr. Ramesh with Red Color Ghatam Pot.



Artisan Mr. Ramesh will be Lead vocals Ghatam.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools and raw materials used for making the percussion instrument ghatam are as follows:

- **Clay:** Clay is the main substance that is used for making the instrument.
- **Water:** Water is used while shaping the earthen pot and for kneading the clay into required consistency.
- **Sand:** Sand is mixed with clay in an appropriate quantity.
- **Lead and Graphite:** They are mixed with clay to enhance the sound of the instrument.
- **Potter's Wheel:** Potter's wheel is used for shaping the instrument.
- **Thread:** Thread is used to take off the shaped clay article/pot from the potter's wheel.
- **Wooden Spatula:** Wooden spatula is used for beating the pot.
- **Round smooth Stone:** Stone is used from inside the pot to level the surface of pot.
- **Kiln:** The pot is baked in the kiln.
- **Red or Yellow Polish:** Polish is applied on earthen pot to enhance the beauty of the instrument.



Devices that are used to solve the hard soil.

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The red-black heap of mixed soil required to make pottery.



The device is used to bring in soil and water.



Grandmother to sweep mud and fill in the basket.

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Artisan helps them to make a pot of soil mix with water.



Red clay ready to make the pottery.



Artisan mixes up the red clay in Hand.



Artisan sit in front of the pot making machine.

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Artisan check the surface of the pot making machine in hand.



The Artisan takes to help in blade scraping the pot bottom.



The Artisan take help in strip to scraping the pot bottom.

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Clay mixing machine.



Wooden tools used to shape and give facets to the Ghatam pots.



Ghatam Sound testing electrical instrument.



The black clay disorder of the filter device.

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Filtered dry soil in the metal basket.

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Making Process

Clay is the main substance used to make this instrument. Using some suitable alloys and chemicals proportionately to clay results in causing different sounds of specific pitch. In fact the soil science plays a vital role to create the most entertaining source for the humankind. In case if the aspect of soil governance is not taken into consideration then the result could cause the distress. Thus the artist analyzes the soil sample in more efficient way. Hand analysis is the easier way to detect the physical properties of the soil.

The clay used for ghatam making is been collected from five-six ponds. Every clay sample has its own apparent moisture content, porosity, absorption capacity, density and specific mechanical strength. Thus the quality of clay is the most important factor that has to be taken care of. The clay is allowed to dry for two days. The components of the mud are separated by sieving and dissolving in water followed by filtration. Then the mud is mixed with the sand collected from Vaigai River. An appropriate amount of lead and graphite are added to it, to improve the tone. This mixture is rich in calcium lime, ash, red lead, sodium silicate, manganese, iron and plasticine which enhances the metallic sound of the instrument. This mixture is further stamped completely for six hours (Kneaded with the leg) and kept aside for two days. After two days, when the clay gets stronger it is used for casting the pot.

A lump of clay is put in the centre of electric wheel. As the wheel starts turning, the clay is shaped with hands. When the pot is shaped it is taken out from the wheel and set for tempering. The tricky part lies here in this stage. The tempering of ghatam is the trickiest part used to improve the tone. Artist holds the pot in left hand and rotates the stone inside the pot to check the strength of the wall and to smoothen the surface. Later by using a wooden spatula and stone, beating gets resumed. At this point the instrument weighs nearly 16kgs. Once the beating gets finished it is dried in shade for couple of weeks and then warmed for four hours under a fierce sun. Later yellow and red polishes are applied to the pot and fired in the kiln for twelve hours. At this very point half of the instrument's weight is shed when baked. Thus the final product weighs nearly 8kgs that makes the beautiful music!

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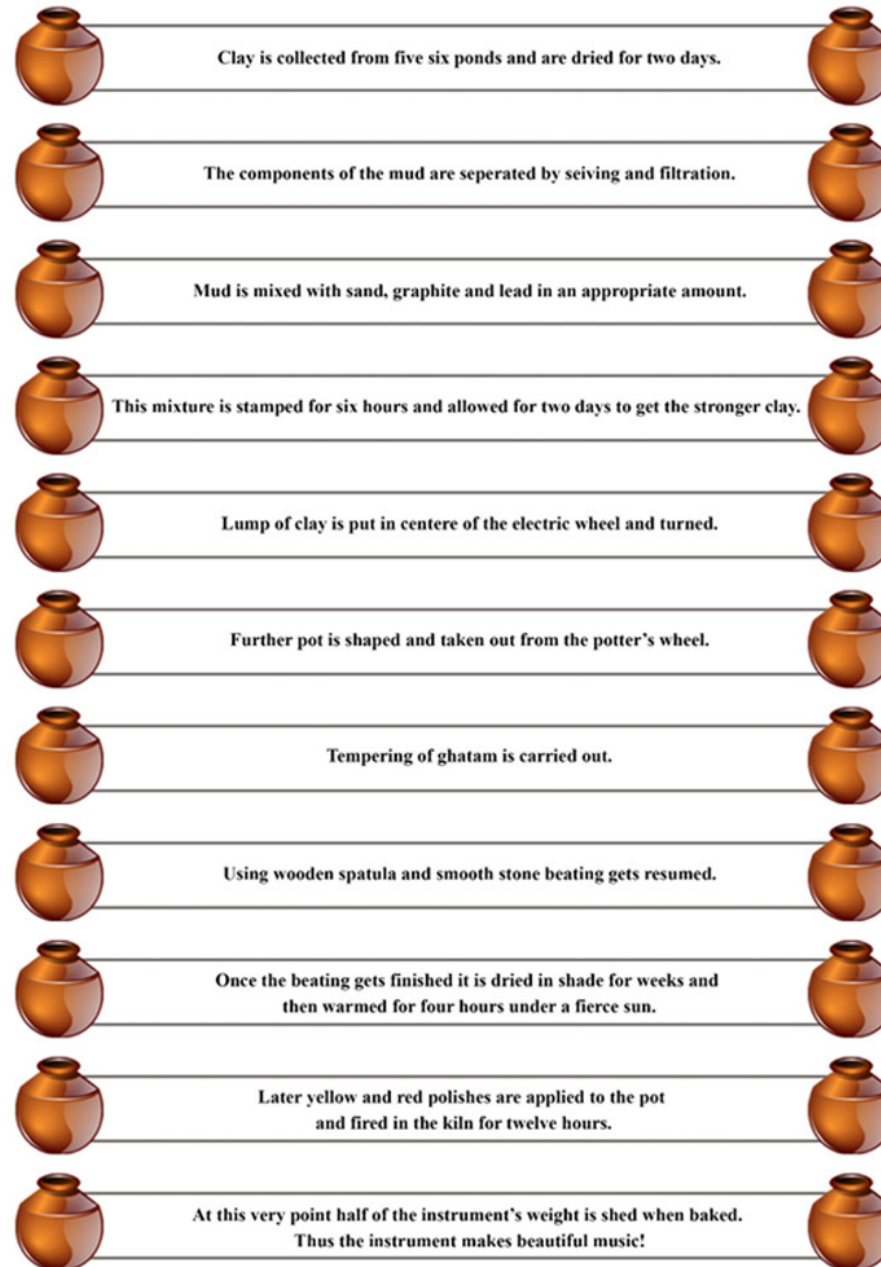
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Flow Chart:



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Stuff clay being collected in the ground place.

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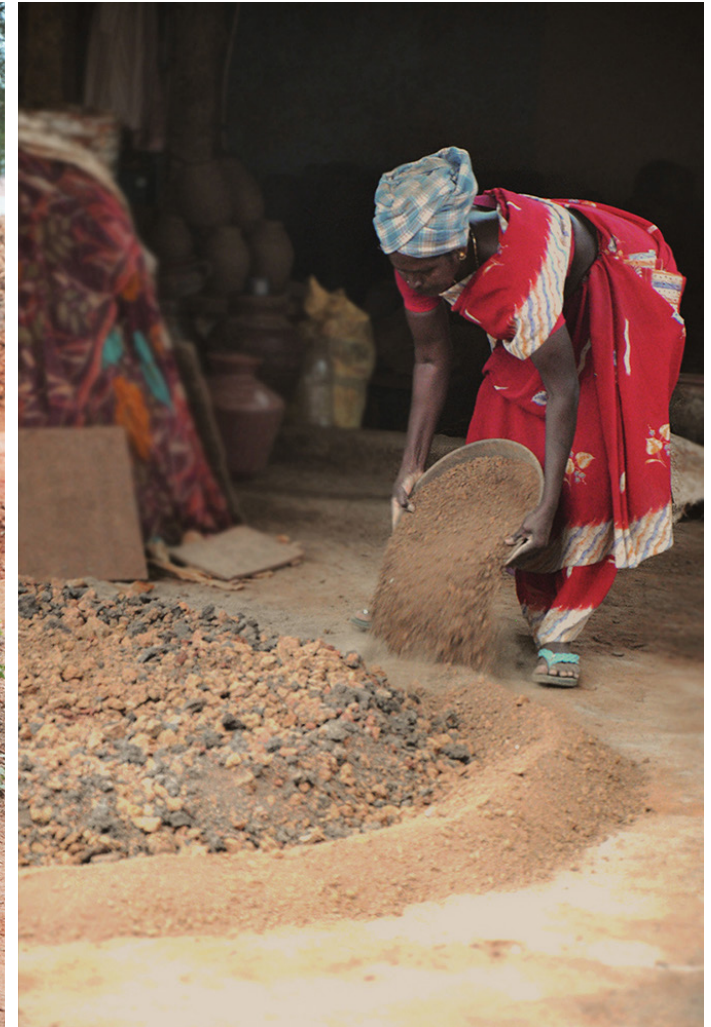
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Women carrying soil basket.



Support staff arranging the graphite+lead+mud around the red soil for storing water.

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Support staff stacking dry clay.

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Stacked clay is sprinkled with water.



Clay is soaking in water.



Artisan ready to make the Ghatam Pot.

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Artisan sculpts the Ghatam pot on the Electric clay spinning wheel.



Thumb hands are being used to shape the pot.

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Artisan use two hands inside to given shapes.



Giving the wide shape.

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Raw clay lifted up to maintain the height.



Observing the round shape.

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Artisan shapes the pot using fingers.



The artisan has to give the shape of pot neck.

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Finishing the neck part.



Maintaining wall thickness inside & outside.

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Artisan uses the fingers for required clay form.



Clay is shaped applying for the neck part.

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Artisan uses wooden tool dipped in clay water to give a deep profile near neck.



Generally customized tools are used to get certain profiles.

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Artisan cleans the pot surface using cloth.



A finished pot is being removed from the wheel using the thread from bottom.

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Artisan uses both hands to lift the pot from spinning wheel.



Dried in diffused sunlight for day.

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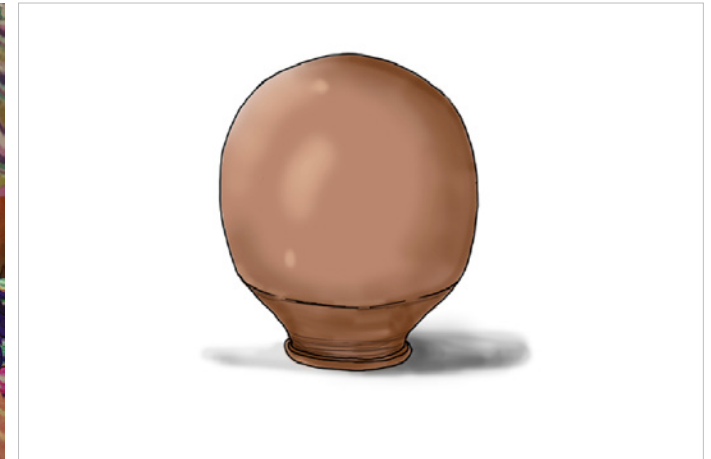
Unwanted clay is scraped at the base using cotton thread as backside is flat.



Artisan giving dome shape manually to ghatam at the back side.



Beating the surface using wooden spatula from outside and a flat stone is supported from inside to make hard and to gain strength.



A completed Ghatam Pot (before baking).

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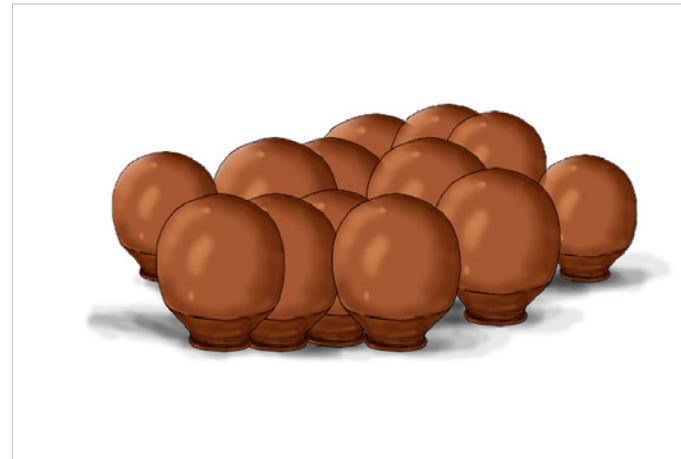
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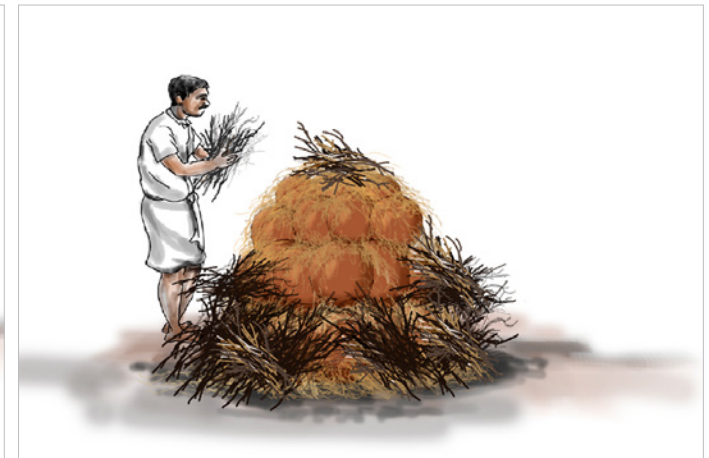
L Semi-finished Ghatams. Layer by layer excess of wood is scrapped off.



Semi-finished Ghatams are stacked for backing.



Dry rice grass, Husk, firewood are used for baking process.



Artisan arranges the firing materials with Ghatams.

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Distributing the fire evenly all over is required during baking process.

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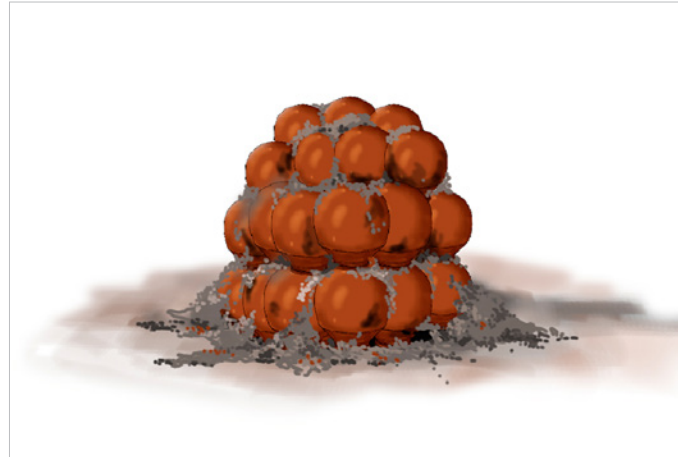
by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Rakshitha

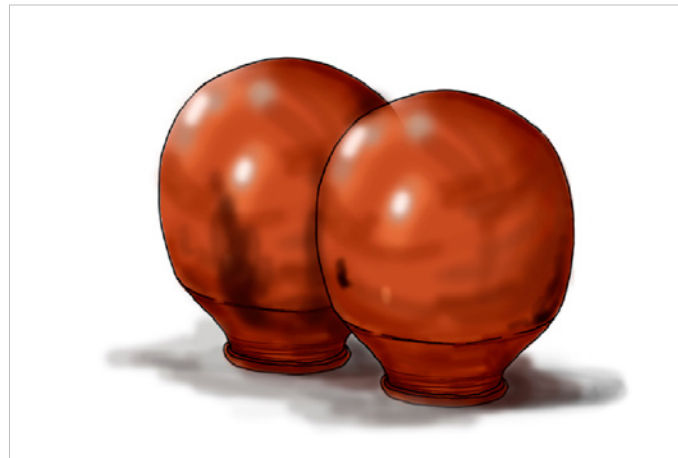
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Source:

<http://dsource.in/resource/traditional-ghatam-making-madurai-tamil-nadu/making-process>



At-least 2 hours required to cool.



Baked Ghatams.



Full finished Ghatam after varnishing.

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Products

Over the years making of ghatam has seen many changes. The instruments that are made these days tend to be players preference. They are manufactured lighter, smaller and more elegant. Thus they are very easy to carry around. But the ghatams made at Manamadurai are still the heaviest variety. They weigh thrice as much as a cooking pot and at least double thickness. In a year nearly four hundred ghatams are made but only 40% of the pots that are baked turn out with the desired tone and shruti. These ghatams are sold for INR.600 per piece.



Designed Red & Brown color Pottery products in Godown.

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Red color Ghatams stored step by step in room.



Designed flower Pot & Water storage pot products in store room.



Ghatams stored as they fail the tone test.

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The embossed Dasara art in Ghatam.



Finished flower pots stored in a room.



Ox made of terracotta art from clay.

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Traditional terracotta stove.



Long necked pots.

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Ghatams kept for drying.



Jug shaped pots.

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Fully finished Ghatams which pass tone test.



Outside stored Ghatam & pitcher.

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Male & female Terracotta Toys shaded in Red color.



Flower pots for baking.



Pots in different designs.

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Mini pots in drying process.

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Video



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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Rakshitha at [NID, Bengaluru](#).

You can get in touch with

- Prof. Bibhudutta Baral at [bibhudutta\[at\]nid.edu](mailto:bibhudutta[at]nid.edu)

You could write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

Key Contacts:

Shri. U. V. K. Ramesh, Senior Craftsperson

Manamadurai, Tamilnadu

India

Mobile: 09842075876

Helpdesk Details:

Co-ordinator

Project e-kalpa

R & D Campus

National Institute of Design

#12 HMT Link Road, Off Tumkur Road

Bengaluru 560 022

India

Phone: +91 80 2357 9054

Fax: +91 80 23373086

Email: [dsource.in\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:dsource.in[at]gmail.com)

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