

Fig. Outline map of Assam

THE BELL METAL INDUSTRY OF SARTHEBARI

Sarthebari is home to the bell metal industry, the second largest handicraft of Assam. About 40 per cent of the people in the village are engaged in this cottage industry. Bell metal as a craft has survived for ages, yet there is little transition in the method of preparing bell metal items as far as Sarthebari is concerned.



MAKING BELL METAL UTENSILS

The craftsmen, referred to as the Kahar or Orja, still resort to the age-old tools required for burning and shaping the metal. The raw material is often imported from Kolkata and countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh. The process reuses old wares of bell metal and involves the hammering and softening and moulding of the metal.

In the case of Xorai, heavy metal sheets are used to keep its holistic structure and form intact. However, the high cost of the raw material stretches the prices of the final product. As a result, the demand for bell metal Xorai has subsequently reduced.

STYLISTIC MODIFICATION

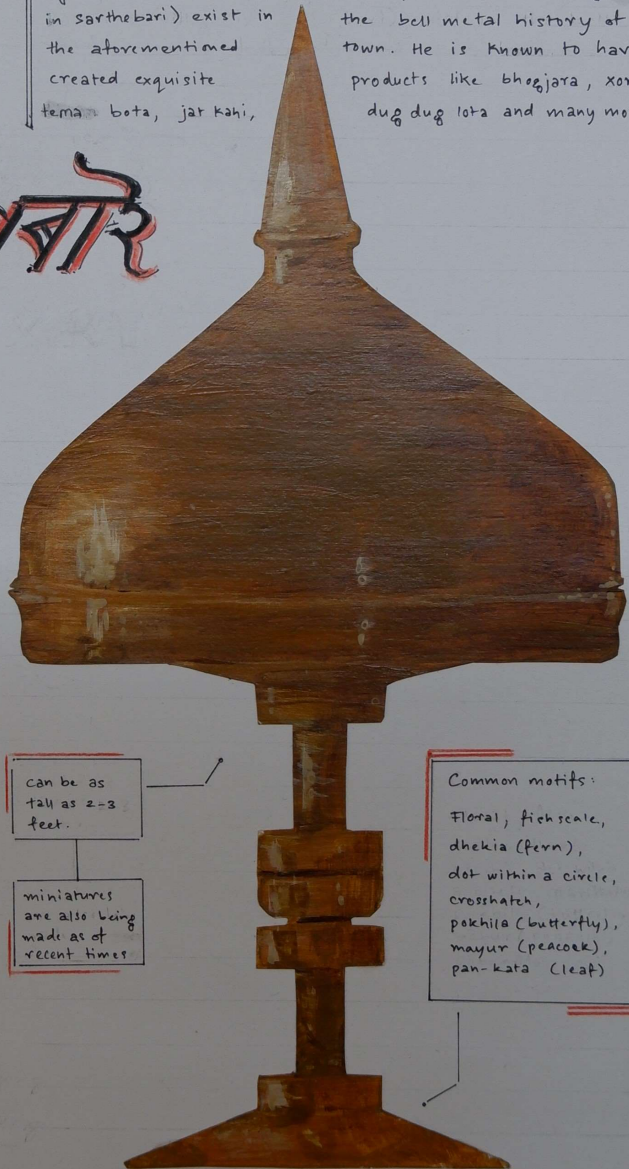
- ▣ EMBOSSEING
- ▣ CHISELING

XORAI - A BRIEF LOOK AT BELL METAL PRODUCTS IN ASSAM

The Xorai is a bell metal product and one of the traditional symbols of Assam. Made of a mixture of 78% copper and 22% tin, the alloy is known as Kah (কাহ) in Assamese terminology. A dish is mounted on a stand originally used to hold offerings to deities. Of recent times, it is also purposed as a decorative piece or to welcome guests with betel nuts and leaves or fruits, or given as a gift to persons of honour during felicitations. Sarthebari in the Barpeta district of Assam is well known for its bell metal craft.

The bell metal industry in Assam dates back to the time of the Mauryan period. Written records of the 14th century provide ample evidence of Sarthebari's association with bell metal craft. Some names like that of Pushparam Kahar, one of the freedom fighters involved in the revolt of Lachima (village in sarthebari) exist in the bell metal history of the aforementioned town. He is known to have created exquisite products like bhogjara, xorai, tama bota, jar kahi, dug dug lota and many more.

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can be as tall as 2-3 feet.

miniatures are also being made as of recent times

Common motifs:

- Floral, fish scale,
- dhekia (fern),
- dot within a circle,
- crosshatch,
- pakhila (butterfly),
- mayur (peacock),
- pan-kata (leaf)

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Bidar, Karnataka

Bidar is a city in the north-eastern part of Karnataka. It is the hub where Bidri metal craft is still practiced and the ideal place to see the best Bidri art and the local craftsmen at work.

XORAI

Bidriware

Bidriware is manufactured from an alloy of copper and zinc in the ratio 1:16 by casting. The zinc gives it its deep black colour. There is a special soil found exclusively in the Bidar Fort that is used to make the mould for the wares. The craft gets its name from the very town it was first developed in, in the 14th century C.E. under the rule of the Bahmani Sultans, Bidar in Karnataka.

The xorai is an offering tray made using the craft of Bidar-Bidriware. The object is used to hold dry fruits or kept merely as a decorative piece due to the intricacy of the inlay work. It was also given as gifts to nobility and had high value.

typically around 1-1.5 ft.

500-700 gm

Types of Bidri work.

1. Teh nashin
2. Attabi
3. TarKashi - wire work on grooves
4. Zar nashin. - inlay with high / low relief.



Teh nashin
- thick inlay of gold / silver in deep engravings on a base metal surface.



Attabi
- silver inlay background and black designs.



The art form as we know of it today was developed with a mix of Turkish, Persian and Arabic art and intermingled with local styles to give rise to a unique style that was distinctively Indian under the rule of the second sultan Alauddin Bahmani.

I placed the xorai originating from Aisam in Bidar, Karnataka and changed the craft associated with the object to the craft of Bidar. It takes a rounder and smoother form as opposed to the cruder sharper of the original xorai and fused its plain body with leaf motifs and more patterns to match the art form developed in 14th Century C.E. Bidar, under the rule of the Bahmani Sultanate.

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XORAI

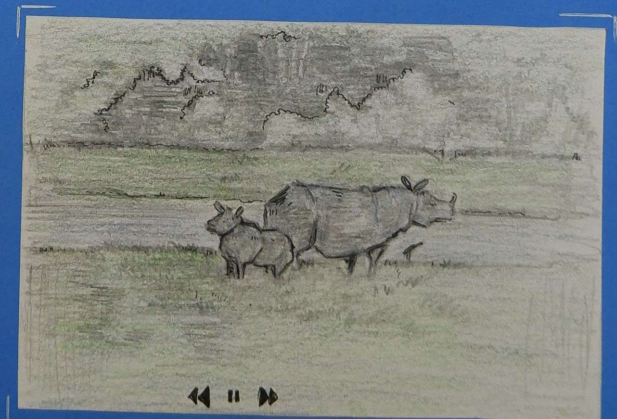
The bell-shaped object with its historical linkage to Assam - the xorai originates in Sarthebari in the BARPETA district of the state. The product would be constructed by the hands of skilled craftsmen in bell metal. A now obsolete form of craft, the industry in Sarthebari started its decline around the 2040s-50s. Among its little known attributes to people outside of the present day ghost town, the xorai would also be crafted as tall as 1 metre high but it slowly took its small form as we see of it today.

Despite sticking to its original look and feel, the interior contains a holographic device operating on voice recognition that guides you through Assam, its rich history and as a map.

It also serves as a small decorative with its shape being recognizable as unique to Assam.



300 grams



Ⓧ Kaziranga National Park

As of 2023, the state of the bell-metal industry has been stagnating, almost on the verge of dissipating. If I were to think of the xorain in 100 years, since it already seems to be losing its religious significance and holds more attention as a decorative piece, reducing the size and repurposing it to become like a sort of picture book to showcase Assam's rich history would give it more of a value factor.