Design Resource

Modakpatra

The Exquisite Artistry of Twashta Kasar

by
Sunny Kolekar
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
http://www.dsource.in/resource/modakpatra

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Introduction

Copper mining has an age-long long history in India, even though it is almost unfeasible to locate specifically ancient mining sites from where the copper ores were initially extracted. The Ayurvedic manuscripts and other ancient texts like 'Rasaratna-Samuchaya' 'Rasarnavam' and 'Yajnyavalkya-Smriti' illustrate the use and compositions of copper along with other metals and the archeological evidences depicts that in India the use of copper has been in practice since Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilization which is crystal clear evident that Indians are masters in metallurgy.

Roha is a small beautiful city in the Raigad district of Maharashtra which is located between the banks of the Kundalika river and the hills of Kalasgiri. It is the end point of central railways (Mumbai) and the beginning point of konkan railways. Roha is renowned for its heritage and the exquisite artistry of twashta kasar: the coppersmiths. Twashta Kasar is the community of coppersmiths in Maharashtra who primarily focused on making copper water pots and later on developed many traditional copperwares like modakpatra, ghangal, parat, bamba, etc.

Modakpatra is a traditional cooking vessel mostly used in the coastal Maharashtra to make steamed cuisines like modak, aaluwadi, patode etc. The muslim community call it dhapa and the major use of it can be seen in their day today lifestyle. Modakpatra is consist of three parts the base vessel for boiling water, a steaming plate for placing the cuisines which has to be cooked and a dome shaped lid to make circular motion to steam.

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History

India is a land of primordial tradition and cultural diversity. Historic evidences and archeological studies are depicting that copper mining in India is as old as its tradition. Ancient manuscripts references describe the different aspects of using copper and making it into lifestyle products. In 'Yajnyavalkya-Smriti' mentioned that Agnau suvarnamaksheenam Rajate dwifalam sate, Ashtau trapuni sise cha, Tamre panchadasayasi. Which means When the metals strongly heated in fire the lose of gold is nill, where as in silver is 2%, tin 8%, lead 5%, copper 5% and iron 10%. In the chapters of 'Rasaratna-Samuchaya' and 'Rasarnavam' depict the mining method, details of alloys and proportions to make different mixtures of metals which is the clear evidence that ancient Indians were masters in metallurgy.

Ayurvedic manuscripts like 'Charaka Sanhita' explain the medicinal value of copper and importance of using copper utensils in our daily lifestyle. Ayurveda describes three fundamental universal energies which regulate all natural process on both the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels. These three universal energies are known as 'Tridoshas' :- Vata, pita and Kapha. As per ayurveda copper has the ability to balnce these three doshas and it can be occurred by drinking 'tamara jal', the water kept in a copper pot over night or for eight hours. Copper also helps to prevent acidity and gastric issues; it is good to cleanse the stomach and also helps in losing weight. Copper is said to have anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties and also strengthens the immune system which helps the body heal better. Copper also helps maintain cardiovascular health as well as regulates the blood pressure. Copper is known to be a brain stimulant which also has anti-convulsive properties, which are good for the brain growth. Copper also helps the thyroid gland work better, calms inflamed joints and maintains skin health. Ayurvedic manuscripts deal a separate wing which describes benefits of metals like copper, bronze, gold, silver, iron etc.

Cultural heritage of coppersmiths in Maharashtra is also as old as its histrionic tradition and culture. In 1730 Ad during the period of Peshwas was the golden era of coppersmiths in Maharashtra and they got exceptional opportunity to showcase and market their talents. In Marathi copper is known as 'Tamba' and coppersmiths known as 'tambat'. Heretofore the tambats were known as 'Kasar' which is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kansya'. Kasar is considered as one of the sons of Vishwakarma the Indian mythological architect who is also having the name 'Twashta', whose other sons were Maitha; the carpenter, Manu; the blacksmith, Daivadnya; the goldsmith, and the Patharvat; the sculptor. Hence the coppersmith community is known as 'Twashta Kasar'.

Twashta Kasar or Tambats are part of an age old social system known as 'Bara Balutedars' and these are the artisans working and dealing in utensils of copper, bronze and brass. In olden times were based on barter system where people would exchange good for goods or service. The twashta Kasar were also a part of system where the customer would go to the kasar and provide old utensil. Later on the coppersmith would reform the utensil according to the requirement and the artisan would get a bagful of grains as remuneration. The age old system has not changed as yet, except that the remuneration is paid in money. In Maharashtra the Twashta Kasar community can be seen in places like Thane, Colaba, Pune, Ratnagiri, Chiplun, Mahad and Roha.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Raw Materials:
The raw materials used in making of copper vessels are as follows:

Proportionally cut and sorted copper sheets; a visual from a copperware industry.

Machine has stolen the beauty of crafting copperwares; bundle of copper sheets kept for machine mould pressing.

Losing tradition; Machineries have taken major role of making copperwares. A visual of machine pressing copper sheets into a desired shape.

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Tools:
The tools are used in making of copper vessels are bhatas (bellows) for blowing the fire. Sandsi (pair of tongs) Katris (two pair of scissors) Kansis (files), shandhan (an iron bar which has a very shiny and smooth surface) set of Kharvais (bar anvils), Khod (wooden frame which is paired with kharvai as seating) Mogris (wooden hammers), Dabaks (various shaped metal hammers in different sizes), Togar (big iron nails), Adi (circular shaped iron tyre), Mandli (smaller size of adi) and buffing machine.

Kharvais(bar anvils).

Workplace of an artisan.

Kharvais.

Sorted hammers, tong and nails, the inevitable part of copperware tools which beautifies the vessels.

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Composition of tools 'Kharvai(bar anvil), khod (wooden frame), and adi(circular iron tyre).

Iron frame which is used for making copper plates and mandli(smaller version of adi).

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Simplicity gives birth to ultimate sophistication. Mogri(wooden hammer) and wooden blocks.

Traditional geometric compass.

Adi the inevitable tool in the process of making copperwares.

The shining surface illumination; dabaks the hammers.

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Chavarshi, nakhi and chavras the three unavoidable tools which beautifies the copperwares.

'Sandhan' a multipurpose tool which delivers smoothness to the copper surface.

Katris(scissors), geometric compass, togar(iron nails).

Mogris (wooden hammers) the basic need of copper craft.

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Making Process

Modakpatra is a traditional cooking vessel mostly used in the coastal Maharashtra to make steamed cuisines like modak, aaluwadi, patode etc. It is consist of three parts the base vessel for boiling water, a steaming plate for placing the cuisines which has to be cooked and a dome shaped lid to make circular motion to steam. The art of making modakpatra is as fascinating as any other craft. The craft exploration journey taken place in a beautiful place called Roha in Raigad district of Maharashtra. Ethnographically Roha is a small beautiful city which welcomes the visitors with the musical rhythm of the beating sound on copper vessels. There are many small workshops where the coppersmiths work either in a group or in single handed. Ashtami is the workshop locality of the artisan Mr.Yashwant Salvi who was extremely humble and sweet. He was very patient and cooperative during the documentation. In olden days artisans used to make handmade handles and other accessories where as in now the flow of time had stolen the authenticity of craft. Nowadays machine made handles and other accessories are readily available in the market. Machines had made the life of artisans even more miserable by making half of the craft machine made. The current working scenario of copper craft in Roha is, small industries produces basic copper vessels and the coppersmiths would make the final product by polishing and beating it. Where as in I was very much stick to the point of documenting the authentic craft which was impossible but with the extensive help of the artisan; I was successful in making an authentic modakpatra.

The artisan had taken me to a wholesale vendor who supplies raw materials to artisans and collected two big copper bases, one for the base vessel and the other one for making lid as well as a small copper plate for making steaming plate. Next destination was the retailer of accessories to collect handles, screws, nuts, nails etc. After collecting all essentials we head to towards his very rustic yet beautiful workshop and started working.
Making process started with softening the copper bases in the fire and then by using a traditional geometric compass artisan had marked the measurements. Afterward the metal was again fired and hammered. The alternate hammering and heating being repeated three or four times, till it is beaten into a desired shape. 'Adi' a circular shaped traditional tool used to make dome shape by hammering the copper lid with 'mogri'(wooden hammer) and continued the hammering on 'sandhan' (smooth surfaced iron rod) to obtain a soft and fine texture. Once the lid had obtained the desired shape the artisan began working on base vessel. First the base vessel is hammered on a kharvai (bar anvil) until it attain a preferred shape. Subsequently he matched the base vessel and lid to ensure the measurements and proportions. Later on started working on phool (the lid handle) which is made up of a small copper sheet. Initially the artisan started marking the measurements by using a geometric compass and the excess part was trimmed off by using a 'Katri'(scissors). Then it was kept on 'mandli'(smaller sized version of adi) and hammered to obtain a dome shape, after finishing the phool the artisan started working on steaming plate. The steaming plate has the same making process of base vessel and once the hammering was over the edges were trimmed off to obtain a desired size and later on it was punched with a 'togar'(a big iron nail) and reverse side was hammered to blunt the punched holes. Later on the four parts are fired and hammered once again to make the surface even and smooth.

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The Finished parts are dipped in hydrochloric acid for cleaning and after sometime it is rinsed meticulously. Later on those parts were taken for buffing which is done on a small electronic buffing machine. After buffing, the crafted parts were kept under direct sun for some time meanwhile the artisan had polished three different hammers 'chavarshi' 'nakhi' 'chavras dabak' which are used for beating and making shining texture on copper vessels. The beauty of the art of beating is that, it can vary from piece to piece and artisan to archive the required density of indentations as well as the size and orientation. The beating of dome shaped lid was done on 'Sandhan' which has a very fine and shine finishing. As per my demand he had given very dense and accurate beating which is the distinctiveness of authentic copper craft. The process of beating is done on freehand; a master craftsman can follow the pattern without any guide line traced on the metal. This shows the coordination skill of the artisan. Once the beating of lid was over he continued the beating process of base vessel, steamer plate and the phool(lid handle) which was taken place on a smooth 'kharvai' and the beating were done by two metal hammers called 'nakhi and 'chavras dabak'. The edges were filed to give smoothness and once again it was beaten by using 'chavarshi'(thin edged hammer) to give fitting and finishing. Once the beating process was over, the artisan had started fixing the handles to each piece. It was done after measuring the vessels properly to find out the accurate place where the accessories should be attached.

After fixing the handles the steaming plate was taken for doing Kalai. Kalai (tinning) is the process of giving a silvery shine polish to copper and brass wares which is vanishing from Indian kitchens with the rapid intrusion of the sophisticated utensil alternatives which is utterly unhealthy. Tinning is done to copper and brass ware to avoid chemical reactions and fading. Tinning and retinning is done at the place of coppersmiths and the artisan who is specialized in this process is known as 'kalaiwala'. Kalaiwala first make fire by burning charcoal ,then heated the utensil, blasting it off and on; sprinkled a little nausadar (sal amoniac or ammonium chloride) which gives out deep white smoke and a peculiar ammoniac smell. The powder is then rubbed all over the utensil's interior to rid the utensil of any grit and make it more abrasive.

Then a piece of virgin grade tin is touched to the blasting hot interior of the utensil; the tin melts and is quickly rubbed into whole of the utensil forming a lining of tin in the interior. The utensil is then dipped into a bucket full of water. The sudden contact of the hot utensil with the water creates a shrill and sharp sound that dims with the utensil recovering its normal temperature.

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The firing process of copper to make it soft.

Cooling the fired copper in water.

Repeated process of firing copper which makes metal even more tender.

Artisan marking the measurements with the help of traditional geometric compass.

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Artisan marking the centre point with the help of traditional tools.

Making of lid: Mogri(wooden hammer) and Adi(circular shaped iron tyre) the tools which is used to obtain the dome shape.

Beating the copper on Sandhan(an iron rod with smooth surface) to give even texture.

Beating the copper on Sandhan.

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Close up view beating process on Sandhan.

Repeated beating process on Adi(circular shaped iron tyre).

Dome shaped lid.

Making of base vessel: copper is getting beaten on Kharvai(bar anvil).

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Inspecting the measurements and proportions.

Lid and base vessel: just after obtaining the desired shape and size.

Final touch up of the lid to attain accurate fitting.

Perfection makes an art master piece; taking precise measurements by the help of tools.

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Marking the radius of phool(lid handle).

Trimming the surplus of copper plate.

Beating process of copper plate to acquire the shape of phool.

Beating of phool on Mandli(smaller version of Adi): a close up view.

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Trimming the copper to an accurate size of steamer plate.

Beating process of steamer plate on Kharvai(bar anvil).

Artisan using the traditional cutting tool 'Katri' to trim and size copper.

Rechecking the measurement.

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Punching holes on steamer plate by using Togar (the big iron nail).

Reverse view of steamer plate after punching.

Close up view of flattening the rough surface with the help of dabak(iron hammer).

Flattening the rough surface with the help of dabak(iron hammer).

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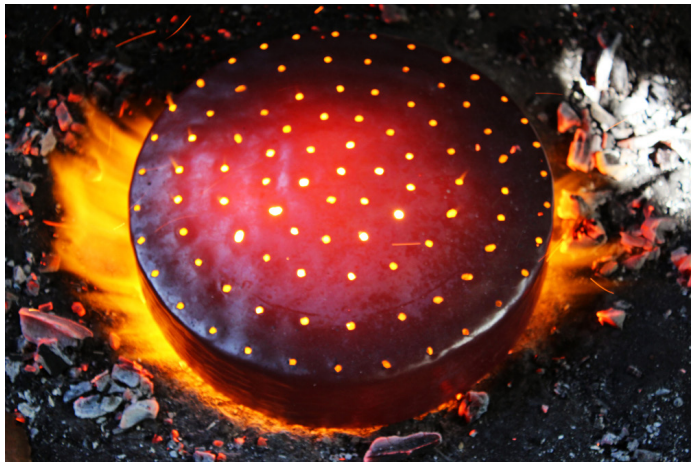
The four elements of Modakpatra after obtaining their shapes.

Artisan making fire.

Firing the lid on a high temperature.



Firing the steamer plate on a high temperature.

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Copperwares are kept for drying.

Final beating process of lid on Adi.

Repeated beating on Sandhan to ensure the fineness.

The lid after the final beating process.

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Giving more accurate shape to the phool.

Artisan assembling the khod(wooden frame) and kharvai(bar anvil).

In the fullest form: Khod and kharvai.

Beating the phhool on Kharvai.

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Copper nuts to screw the handles of modakpatra.

Brass handles of Modakpatra.

Giving acid wash to copper vessels.

Buffing the copper with the help of electronic buffing machine.

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Wiping thoroughly and ensuring no water left on copper to avoid stain marks.

Buffing process of dome shaped lid.

Buffing process of steamer plate.

Washing the copperwares.

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Lid and steamer plate is kept for drying under sun.

Polishing the dabak (iron hammer) to give fine and smooth surface.

Chavarshi, Nakhi, Chauras dabaks are the iron hammers which are used for beating and giving texture to copper vessels.

Close up view of Sandhan(an iron bar which has a very shiny and smooth surface).

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Artisan in the process of beating dome shapped lid on Sandhan.

Beating process of copper to give texture and firmness.

Luminous beaten texture.

Base vessel is beaten on Kharvai to give glow and texture.

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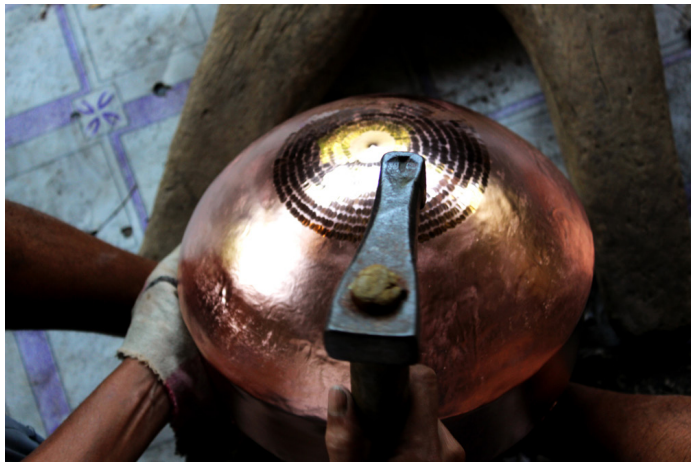
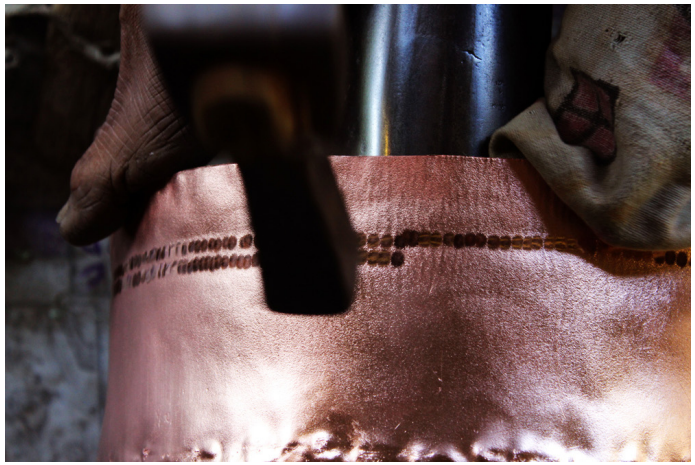


Close up view of hammering.

Downside of Steamer plates are beaten by chavarshi dabak (iron hammer) to give a leaf shaped pattern.

Interior of steamer plated are beaten with Chauras dabak(squire iron hammer).



Beating the base vessel with Chavarshi dabak to give bend.

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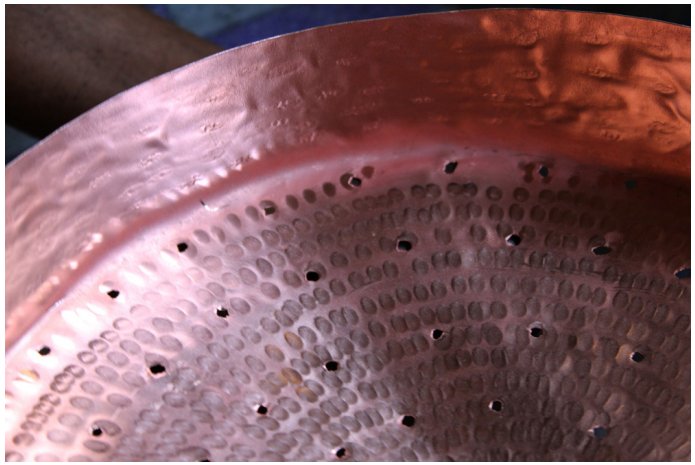
Examining the measurements and fittings.

Finishing process of steamer plate.



Finishing the edges of steamer plate.

Finishing the edges of steamer plate.

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Checking the fitting of steamer plate.

Making a hole on steamer plate by using togar(iron nail).

Attaching the handle to steamer plate.

An inner view of steamer plate after fixing handle.

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Steamer plate after attaching both handles.

Firing charcoals for Kalai(tinning process).

Applying tin on hot copper.

Wiping the copper with cotton to give evenness.

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Firing the copper once again.

Steamer plate after doing Kalai(tinning process).

Punching the dome shaped lid with traditional tools for fixing handle.

Dome shaped lid.

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Artisan creating circular patterns by using chavarshi dabak.

Close up view of making circular pattern.

The master craft piece, ensuring the quality check.

Texture of the copperware is given by beating them continuously by using metal hammer and bar anvil.

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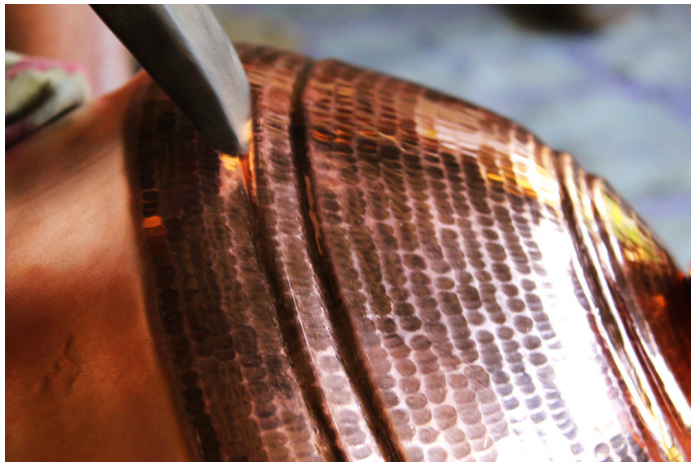
Kalaiwala(the artisan who does tinning) and Kasar (coppersmith) with their masterpiece.



Work place where the shimmering copperwares get ready: artisan's workshop.

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Products


Final Product: Modakpatra


Other Products

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Final Product : Modakpatra

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Exquisiteness of vigilantly handcrafted master piece; Modakpatra.

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Source:
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Time, dedication, skill and compassion which glorifies a traditional handicraft. Which make them classic and beyond all new intrusions.

Each and every single elements were synchronized well to give birth to this magnificent handcrafted piece of art.

Closely beaten texture shows the skill and compassion which was patiently paid by the artisan to make his artwork a masterpiece.

Design Resource

Modakpatra

The Exquisite Artistry of Twashta Kasar

by
Sunny Kolekar
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
http://www.dsource.in/resource/modakpatra/products/final-product-modakpatra

Glory of an age long tradition, legacy of rich culture, sweetness of traditional cuisine.

The base vessel of modakapatra which makes the medicinal steam to cook cuisines.

The process of placing steamer plate before cooking. A preheating process.

Human beings are the enlightened creation of supreme power; who have beautiful hands to create adorable things. Modak: a traditional cuisine of Maharashtra.

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Final process of making modak.

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Serve the humankind: Functional process of an enchanted master piece.

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Source:
http://www.dsource.in/resource/modakpatra/products/other-products

Other Products

Roha is a true destination for visitors to collect purely hand crafted copper vessels and as per requirement they even reproduce age old designs as well as contemporized designs. But the current scenario of market doesn't give ease to the artisans to make what they want to make. According to artisans only once in a blue moon there are requirements for any design innovations apart from that the cluster is focused on large production of water pots in different shapes and sizes and they even produce brassware also.

The magnificent beauty of shimmering metals.

Design Resource

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Source:
http://www.dsource.in/resource/modakpatra/products/other-products

A very usual visual; beautifully aligned and kept for sunbathing.

'Kalash' brass water pot kept for finishing.

The group of artisans creating brass and copper water vessels (Kalash).

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The magnificent beauty of shimmering metals.

The group of artisans creating brass and copper water vessels (Kalash).

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The magnificent beauty of shimmering metals.

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Contact Details

This project was done by Sunny Kolekar at IDC, IIT Bombay.

You can get in touch with
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You could write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

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Yashwant Pandurang Salvi
A kind old coppersmith who works in copper workshop showed me the process of making Modakpatra.
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