

Design Resource

Wrought Iron Craft of Bastar

Making of Lohshilp

by

Palash Vaswani

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://dsource.in/resource/wrought-iron-craft-bastar>



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<http://dsource.in/resource/wrought-iron-craft-bastar/introduction>

Introduction

Lohshilp or wrought iron craft is one of the most unique and the oldest craft form in Bastar region. It has an aesthetic appeal inspite of its simplistic form. The art originated from the ironsmith community that used to make farming and hunting implements for tribes. Over the years, the craft has beautifully evolved into an artistic form and so has its worldwide demand. Wrought iron work is mainly concentrated in Bastar district of Chattisgarh with Kondagaon, Umargaon and Gunagaon being the main centers.



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History

Bastar region of Chattisgarh is one of the richest areas in terms of iron ore deposits. Tribal, particularly Gond and Maria, specialized themselves in extracting iron from the iron ores, thus forming ironsmith communities in the tribe. The community started catering to the needs of the tribe by providing them tools for agriculture, jungle cutting tools, arrowheads and knives for hunting. Their skill evolved with time as well as experimentation with material and technique.

Gond tribe worships 'Budha dev' as God, which was believed to reside in saja tree, also known as Indian laurel. The tree was used for rituals and was believed to be sacred. It was considered as a symbol of strength by the local tribes. But slowly when Gonds understood the strength of iron, they started believing that their God is in iron too. Cemented platforms were built under the tree and iron tridents, spears and chains were kept as religious symbols. Ironsmiths started experimenting with the religious art forms. They created wrought iron lamps (diya) and also decorated it with animal motifs. They started making figurines of Budha Dev riding a horse. As their art evolved with time, their work also got noticed. Ironsmiths got the opportunity to travel to places with their craft and also learn from the exposure. This resulted in more experimentation with the forms and sizes. This can be seen in the current form of the craft where an animal is depicted in various postures and sizes.

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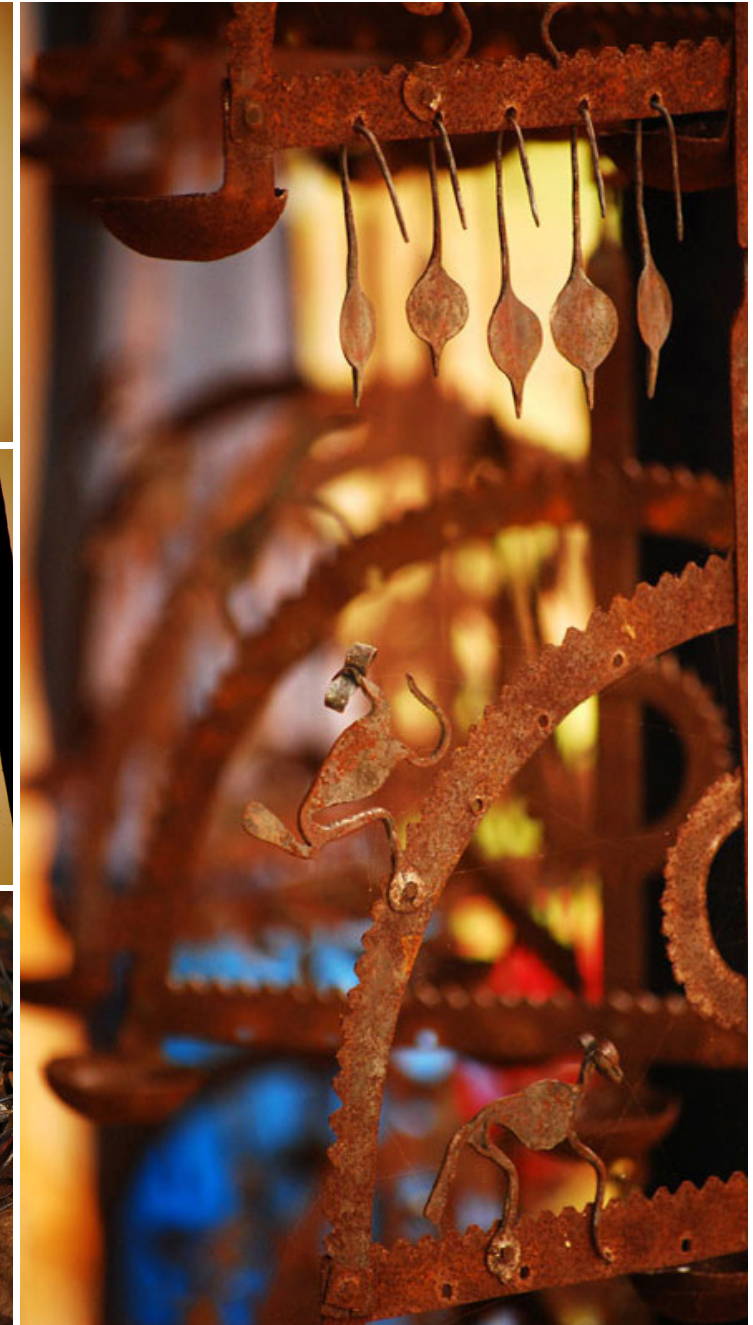
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Place

Bastar, a land of tribals, is the largest district in the state of Chhattisgarh. Endowed with rich minerals deposits and precious stones, it forms the southern part of Chattisgarh. The total forest area of the district is roughly 7112 sq km, which is more than 75 per cent of the total area. Tribes consist of 31.8% of the total Chattisgarh population, with 66.3% of concentration in Bastar. The main tribes of Bastar are Gonds, Kamars, Biagas, halbas and Bhatras. This region is also famous for some distinctive and equally beautiful craft forms. Kondagaon is one of the bigger towns in the area and is considered to be the centre of handicrafts manufacturing. Tiju Ram Vishwakarma lives in the Kedaichepda village, which is about 20 kms from Kondagaon. Famous for ironsmith community, the village has about hundred people dedicated to wrought iron craft.



Tiju Ram's wrought iron workshop.



Tiju Ram's home.

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Tiju Ram's home.



Village Kedaichepda, post Palari.



Village Kedaichepda, post Palari.



Village Kedaichepda, post Palari.

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Village Kedaichepda, post Palari.



Gates decorated with wrought iron craft.



Gates decorated with wrought iron craft.



Windows decorated with wrought iron craft.

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Village Kedaichepda, post Palari.

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People

The term 'Gond' has its origin from Telugu word 'Kond' which means a mountain. It is believed that after the downfall of their dynasties, 'Gonds' took shelters in the mountains. Mr. Tiju Ram Vishwakarma belongs to the same Gond community, who are ironsmiths too. He lives in the Kedaichepda village, which is about 20 kms from Kondagaon. Famous for ironsmith community, the village has eight families numbering to about a hundred people dedicated to wrought iron craft.

Tiju Ram learnt the craft from his father and gained experience with time. His vision of the craft changed drastically when he came to Mumbai. With his work experience with a well-known designer, decorating an industrialist's bungalow in Juhu, he started getting recognized by people. He started experimenting with form and material, catering to the various aesthetic needs of people. He has traveled on an invitation to the countries like Italy, Russia and Austria to showcase his work. His recent project includes interior designing of the Northern Trust Corporation's India office in Bangalore. He has been honored with the state award by Chattisgarh Government in 2011.



Tiju Ram's wrought iron workshop.

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Tiju Ram's wrought iron workshop.



Tiju Ram's wrought iron workshop.

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Tiju Ram's house gate decorated with the craft.



One of the other Lohar family.

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Masks displayed at Tiju's living room.



Mr. Tiju Ram Vishwakarma.

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Process

The raw material used for the craft is predominantly recycled iron scrap, taken from household or market. The main tools used are Dhukna Sar (furnace), Muthli (hammer), Chimtas (forceps), Sandasis (tongs) and Chenni (chisels). These tools are made locally by the lohars themselves. The process starts with scrap iron being beaten repeatedly when hot. It requires no casting and molding. Desired shape is given carefully by beating it at necessary spots. Then unnecessary portions are cut away and filed to remove sharp objects. On completion, varnish coat is applied to enhance the luster. Both hollow and solid figures are made. For making a hollow figure, iron sheets are folded, cut and filed as per the need of the form. In a solid figure the main body parts are made first and then the detailing is done with the help of small chisels.

Tools and Materials:



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Final Product:



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Products

The craft that started from catering to farming, hunting and ritualistic needs is now a beautiful work of art in demand. Wrought iron products include Deepak, which is made of many shallow bowls like lamps (diya), bird and animal figures, small diamond shaped leaf like structures and vertical and horizontal rods. These deepaks are the specialty of the ironsmiths in this area. These are available in the forms of Laman Diya (hanging diya) and Khut diya (stand diya). Many new forms like masks, hangers, innovative lamps, wall hangings and showpieces are also available. The horse of Raodev is most popular and is made with just two legs. The new forms in the craft reflect the realities of the changing times and a craftsman's response to it.



Showpiece made of wrought iron.



Hanger.

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Laman Diya.



Laman Diya.



Laman Diya.

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Experimentation with wrought iron masks.



Wall hanging.

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Laman Diya.



Candle stand.

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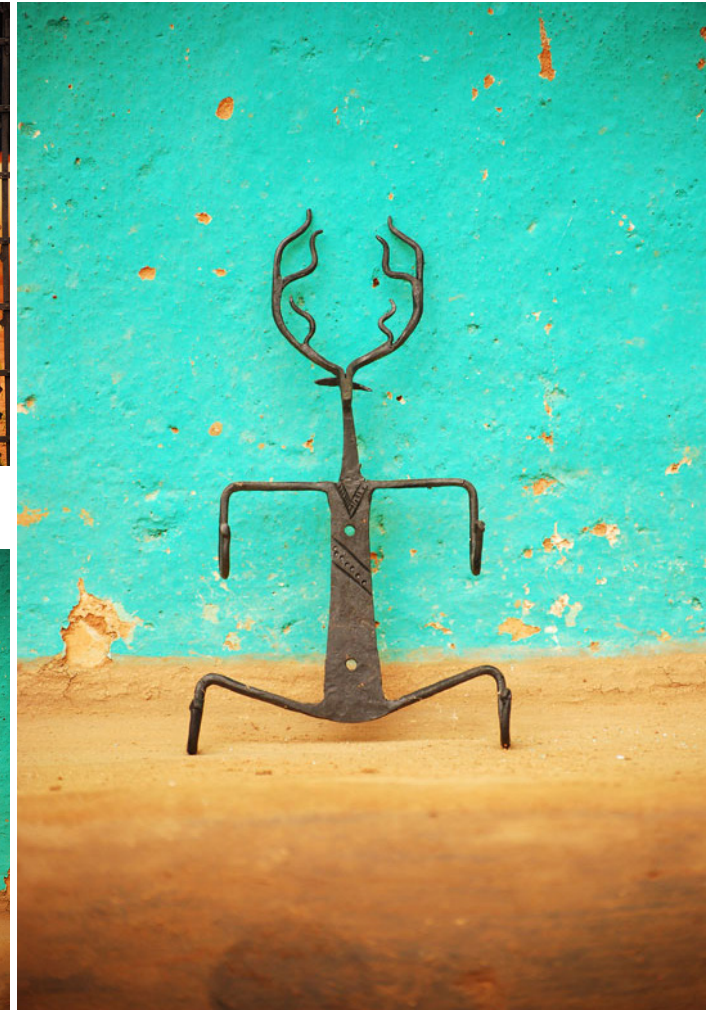
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Decorations on a house gate.



Depiction of a local God riding a horse.



Key hanger.

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Candle stand.



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Showpiece depicting a tribal woman and her baby.



Wrought iron mask.

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Showpiece portraying boat race.



Showpiece portraying a local village dance.



Showpiece portraying an old man.



Laman diya.

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Showpiece portraying an old man.



Laman diya.

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Wall hanging.



Khut diya.

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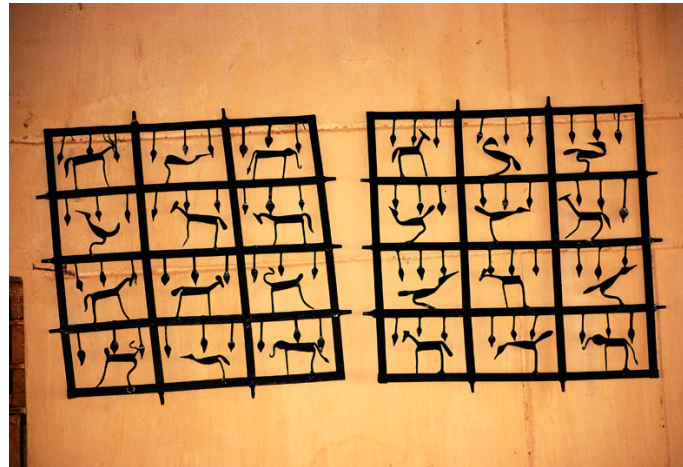
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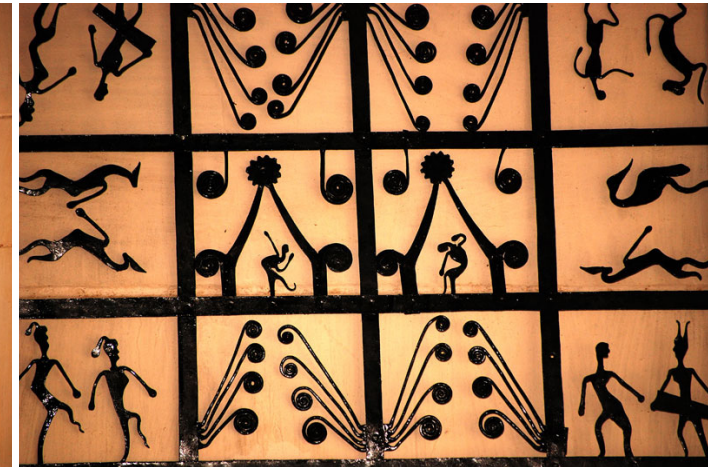
Laman diya.



Different poses of animals and birds on a wall hanging.



Wall hanging



Intricate yet simplistic details in a wall hanging.

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Close up of Laman diya.

Laman diya.



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Shilpgram

Shilpgram Sevagram:

Shilpgram Sevagram Narayanpur was setup by Chattisgarh Handicrafts Development Board in 1993. The purpose of setting it up was to boost the local crafts of the culturally rich region of Narayanpur. It also aimed at rehabilitating the locals from the naxal hit zones and give them a source of livelihood. Currently five hundred craftsmen work for shilpgram and 41 families stay at the campus. Apart from specializing itself in Bamboo craft, it also focuses on wrought iron, stonework, terracotta and seeshal craft. The campus runs training programs for the locals. Many craftsmen from different states are called to teach the locals. Around 3500 people from Abhujmadh region alone have been trained in bamboo craft. The centre has installed new machines like bamboo treatment plant, furnace etc. to help the craftsmen. Mr B.K. Sahu is the current officer in charge of Chattisgarh Handicrafts Development Board in Bastar region.



Shilpgram Sevagram Narayanpur.



Shilpgram Sevagram Narayanpur.

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Wrought iron showpiece at the gate.



Wrought iron workshop.



Wrought iron craftsmen.

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Wrought iron craftsmen.



Wrought iron craftsmen.

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Wrought iron craft in making.



Wrought iron craft in making.

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Wrought iron craft.



Figures displayed in the craft.



Figures displayed in the craft.



Craft store room.

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Wrought iron craft.



Khut diya.

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<http://dsource.in/resource/wrought-iron-craft-bastar/shilpgram>

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Craft store room.



Bamboo workshop.



Bamboo workshop.



Locals from naxal hit areas learning the craft.

Design Resource

Wrought Iron Craft of Bastar

Making of Lohshilp

by

Palash Vaswani

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Wood workshop.



Wood workshop.



Design Centre, shilpgram.

Design Resource

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Source:

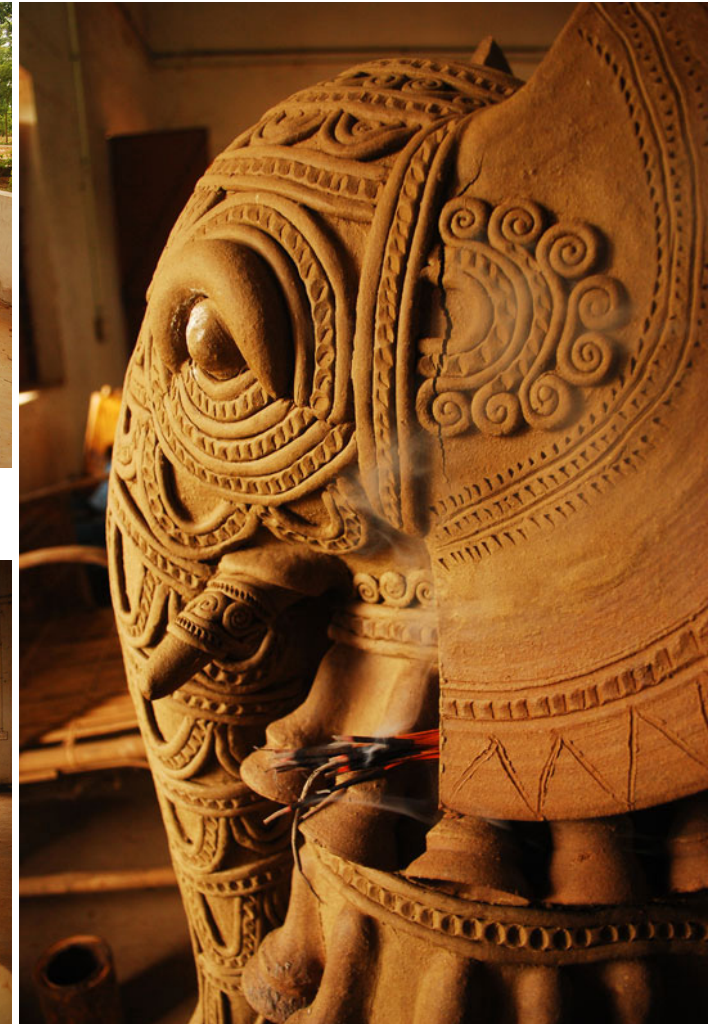
<http://dsource.in/resource/wrought-iron-craft-bastar/shilpgram>



Furnace.



Terracotta storeroom.



Bastar elephant in the store room.

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Newly built cottages for craftsmen.



Local temple.



Terracotta pots.

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Guest room.



Shilpgram Office.



Tribal women living in the centre.

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Shilpgram Office.



Traditional tribal painting of Bastar.



Mr. B.K. Sahu, current officer in charge of Chattisgarh Handicrafts Development Board in Bastar region.

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Video



Lauhshilp in Making

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Source:

<http://dsource.in/resource/wrought-iron-craft-bastar/contact-details>

Contact Details

This documentation was done by Palash Vaswani, Design Associate, **IDC, IIT Bombay**

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