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Design Research Seminar Report



“Bhagwaan
bananewale
insaan”

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“Bhagwaan bananewale insaan”

A Craft Documentation Project

On stone carvings and sculptures at Bhanashivare, Maharashtra

DRS Report

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Approval Sheet

The Report Committee for Animation Design, Industrial Design Centre, IIT Bombay, certifies that this is the approved version of the following report on:

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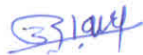
Place: Mumbai

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Abstract

My DRS study is about the stone carving artists and sculptors at Bhanashivare, Maharashtra. It is about what kind of work they get now or what actually do they do now for their living. It also includes how the newer technologies and machineries have affected this ancient art and a large impact of other materials, replacing the beautiful stone sculptures.

This report mainly focuses on the points mentioned above about the craft which is getting vanished with the time. It also contains the artists' views about their work as well as some of my observations and insights after spending almost a month with these artists.

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Introduction

The art of stone carvings and sculptures is known since ages. It can be in the form of God sculptures which are being worshiped or it can be in the form of decorative or other product based designs. The beauty and the hard work with which these amazing artefacts are made make them immortal. And though they are manmade we can feel the nature when we look at them or touch them.

During the period of my research I experienced the same feeling while witnessing these beautiful creations, observed this extraordinary process of making these amazing artefacts. I spent almost a month with the stone carving artists at Bhanashivare and Newasa of the state Maharashtra.

But at the same time I could get an insight into the other side of this art. Similar to any other natural materials and hard working processes, it has also been replaced by newer materials and newer technologies which immensely affected the life of the artisans and made this astonishing art almost vanished.

So, along with observing the beauty of these artefacts and skills of the artisans, I also observed the current condition of the craft and community. After lots of formal and informal conversations with the artisans I got to know their views on the craft and current condition of them.

And simultaneously, I was also thinking about how designers can participate in making this art immortal again.



1. Methodology I used for the project

Reaching to the place and to the artists

As I decided to work on this topic, my first task was to reach to the place and to the artists. Though Bhanashivare is a very small village in Maharashtra, It's not a very isolated place. It is located on a highway connecting two Taluka places in Maharashtra called – Shevgaon and Newasa. State transport buses as well as private transportations like tempo and jeep are available. So reaching to the place was not very difficult for me.



My father used to teach in the college nearby this area, so he helped me in getting some contacts there and I reached to these artists with the help of those contacts.

Research method

When I started interacting with the artists, initially I followed the covert method for the research. I played a role of their customer first and started with some questions about their work. I did not directly ask them about their income or the prices of the artefacts but I asked about their schedule and their work first. Simultaneously, with their permission, I clicked some pictures of their work.

During my second meet with them, I gave them idea of my project and craft documentation purpose. They happily agreed to give me all the information and offered me for any help I would need for the project.

Data collection methods

Observation and Participation

Throughout the duration of my visit, I mainly played a role of a non-participant observer. At first I was thinking of participating in actual carving work but it was not that easy to directly try hands on it. One has to observe it carefully first and has to learn properly before trying it.



I participated in the drawing and some finishing part though, which was a quite learning experience and I got to know about some difficulty level if not whole.

Interviews and interactions

I did not actually follow the formal interviewing process and interacted with them quite informally. First, I tried to make them comfortable by listening to what they have to say and then I tried to ask them about the specific information I wanted to know.



As my guide Prof. Nina Sabnani had told me, I always kept in mind the ethics one should follow during any such project where you have to directly interact with the people and ask any critical or say, personal information.



I had made a list of questions before visiting the place and had always kept it in mind. I took care of not asking them about anything directly which could make them uncomfortable or could hurt them in any way. As my guide had suggested me, I tried not to just open my notebook and sit in front them with a list of questions. Instead, I tried to empathise with them while interacting and tried to make the conversations more interesting.

During the breaks, I used to take short notes and at the end of each day, I would write the detailed notes. I found this method very useful in order to keep track of the information without missing anything and also to plan the further documentation.

2. Data collection (First level)

About the place

Bhanashivare is a very small village in Maharashtra situated on a nice plateau of Ahmednagar district. It is located nearby a big sugar factory which contributes to the big export of sugar from Maharashtra state.



I came to know about the place as the only place in Maharashtra where these artists make the stone carvings and statues and are exported throughout the state as well as outside the country.

When I visited the place, I was little shocked finding that there are not many signs about this place or the craft, on

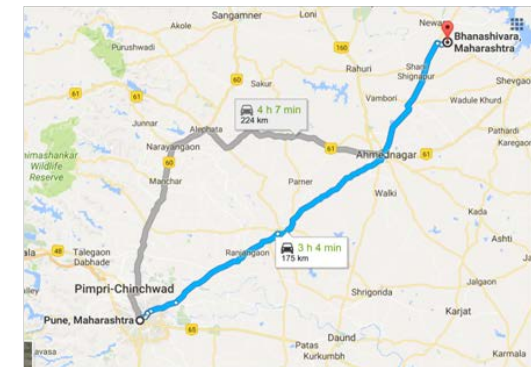
the road leading to the village. All the people and their beautiful work came to my notice almost at a sudden.

During my first few visits, I roamed through the village and observed people. At a first glance, I could see a nice happy place, people busy in their work and a brightness of satisfaction on their faces.

But what I could observe later, after looking closely, was not very similar to all this happy, neat and simple. I will mention all the observations in the later chapters of this report.

In brief, it all began with a nice energetic start and continued with a very nice experience and many insights.

- About 175 Kms from PUNE via Ahmednagar



Map for reference

About the Artists

In the afternoon of my very first day, I visited the area where stone carving artists and sculptors work. They were all busy in their work.

At a glance, I could spot 3-4 groups, who do the stone carvings. Playing a role of a customer, I started interacting with the first group and got a brief idea about their work.

I met first with a group named- Wanjare family. The head of the family – Dhondiba Wanjare (about 65 years old man) – and two of his sons – Sukumar (35 years) and Devdan(40 years) – were working with some of their colleagues. And there were these beautiful stone carvings and sculptures lying around with some raw stones. Then I talked to Makasare family, Dhotre family and few more people around.

Afterwards, I got to know about one more place nearby, which is 15-20 kms away from Bhanashivare, called Newasa, where some other groups of artists make stone sculptures and carvings. I visited Newasa too and interacted with some artists there including – Irle family and Dhotre family.

There are mainly two communities who do this work, one is Hindu-Wadar and other is Mahar community. They are very helping and friendly with each other and often visit each other's place and spend some time together.



About the Craft

What all do they do?

Stone carvings and sculptures from Bhanashivare, Taluka Newasa, have been famous in Maharashtra since many years. All the artists I met during my research period told me that they are doing this from at least three to four generations.

In earlier years, these communities were mainly involved in ancient stoned architectures and temples in Maharashtra. I could visit some of the architectures they mentioned.

Architectures and temples:

There is a very famous temple of lord Duttatraya at

Devgad, Maharashtra. The temple is entirely built in stones and has flooring made of marbles.

It is a very good example of detailed stone work. The idol of lord Duttatraya is very beautiful and gives a nice feeling of peace and holiness. The artists from Bhanashivare as well as Newasa had contributed for this magnificent and beautiful temple.



Shree Dattatraya Temple

Devgad, Maharashtra

17 kms from Bhanashivare
66 kms from Shirdi



The second example of their work is Gyaneshwor temple at Newasa, which is also made entirely of stone and by the artists from Newasa and Bhanashivare.



I visited these temples and experienced the peace and feeling of spiritual richness at both the places.

Gadhi (Fortalice)

The third mesmerising architecture I visited was a fortalice at Bhanashivare. It is centrally situated in the village and we can see the whole village from the top of this fortalice. It is made up of bricks and stones.



The size of this fort and fineness of the architecture brought awe in my mind. As in the picture, the circular as well as octagonal columns of the fort were so big and yet so perfect.



Gadhi (Fort)

Bhanashivare,
Maharashtra





Gadhi, Bhanashivare, Maharashtra

Now, coming to what they continued doing during the recent years and to their main craft that is stone carvings and sculptures.

Stone Carvings and Sculptures

It includes God idols, Saint's statues and product based crafts.

God Idols

"We can make all the 33 crore God idols!" – said Dhondiba Wanjare – one of the artists at Bhanashivare.

I observed that the God idols and sculptures they make are quite different from many other carving or sculpture styles in India.

They do not make idol's proportions as Human's and make them more stylized. They use nice vibrant colors and make specific patterns for the clothes. Mainly they do impressionistic details on the carvings and anyone with the knowledge of Indian Mythology can recognise which God's idol it is!

There are some differences between the designs of Bhanashivare and the designs of Newasa. Use of machines too somewhat affects the styles, but overall feel we get is the same.



Goddess Saptashrungi

Here are some examples of their craft.

Lord Ganesha





Shivlinga and nandi



Goddess Laxmi



We can see the difference between the middle sculpture (from Bhanshivare) and the right one (from Newasa).

God Idols



Tuljabhavani



Laxmi



Laxmi

Goddess Durga

The one below is a semi 3D carving which is stylised and the right one is proper 3D sculpture with human like proportions. When I asked the artist he said it was customers demand to make it with human proportions. The clothes on it are the actual clothes.



Aasra (Jaldevta) :

This is a very interesting sculpture I saw at Bhanashivare, made by Makasare family. I immediately asked them about the sculpture. They told me the story behind it. They said these are the seven sisters of Lord Krishna who were killed by King Kansa and they are also worshiped along with Krishna (generally beside the rivers, so are also called Jaldevta).



Aasra (Jaldevta)

Lord Dattatraya

The God has three heads – Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva). Here, in first two images we can see clearly that the first one is made mainly using machine whereas the second and the third one are made using traditional tools – chisel and hammer.

It makes a lot of difference in styles but the details are very similar in all of them.



Lord Dattatraya





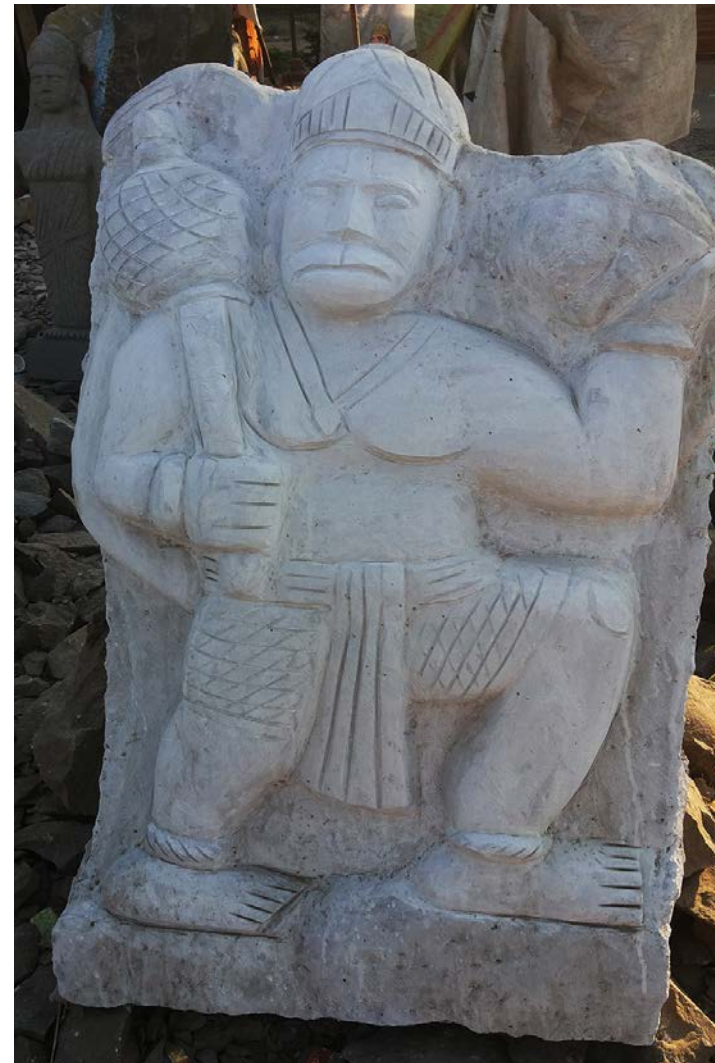
Khandoba (Avatar of Shiva)



Lord Hanuman



Panchmukhi Hanuman





And many more....

Saints' Sculptures

On the customers demand they make the Saints' sculptures too.





They got published in newspapers many times.



Product based crafts:

Along with the Idols and the sculptures, they make product based crafts like grinders (Jaate), Vrindavans, Diyas, Columns or design blocks for buildings, benches in the gardens, etc.

They say that the customers come for these product based crafts, then they like the other crafts too and they buy those. So, they generally keep stock of product based crafts ready to attract the customers.



Product based crafts



3. The whole process of the craft

Material and tools

Stone:

They use mainly two types of stones for the carvings and the sculptures. They call them white stone and black stone. The white stone remains white for years and is used for product based work like grinders, lamps, benches in the garden etc. Black stone initially looks white but afterwards it becomes black and smoother. It is mainly used for idols of Gods and building blocks of temples.

Mainly, basalt rock is used which comes under hard stones and it is the most durable but the most difficult to carve.

Tools:

They don't use much advanced tools, in fact they use traditional methods or tools for many purposes.

For example,

- For sketching they still use charcoal or a piece of brick.

- They use a L-shaped scale for other measurements and for measuring the right angle triangle



- They use the traditional tools like hammer and different types or sizes of chisels (flat, pointed, round-headed and toothed, etc.) depending on the need of the design and type of stone.
- For carving the rough shape out they use a machine which has a circular blade. This is the one and only machine they have and they use it for marking the outline or negative space too!!



- For making a circle they use a piece of hard wire bent at the centre



Process

During the first few visits, I saw many carvings and sculptures made by them and I decided to buy one too, for which I could follow the whole process of making it and gave them an order of a mini-elephant sculpture. I clicked some pictures in-between at various stages.

The process they follow include following steps:

I. Sketching and rough markings

Graph method

To my surprise, the artist actually followed the graph method using an image as a reference. He explained the graph method in detail.



As I mentioned earlier, he used a piece of charcoal for sketching and then he directly started making the markings with the machine. He made multiple slanted lines for marking the negative space which he would carve out afterwards.

After rough markings the stone looked like this:



Then he headed towards roughing or it is also termed as pitching out.

II. Roughing or pitching out

It begins with the removing away of large parts of the rock using a point chisel and wedge-shaped pitching chisel, after which more precise markings are made

using charcoal. Until this stage I couldn't figure out how he would carve the figure with such rough markings, but to my surprise the whole design was already fit in his head.

The mini-elephant started emerging out at this stage like this:



III. Refining the shape and carving out the negative space

Carving out the negative space was quite difficult and a work of patience. It was done by older members in the family who were patient and skilful with the chisels and hammer.



It took one full day for this task, as there was a high risk of breaking out of any part if it was done in a hurry.



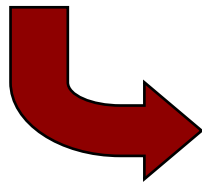
IV. Finishing the details

Then it was time to add some details and decorate the mini-elephant. The younger artist did the markings with the machine first and then his father carved them more skilfully with chisel.



One more step of finishing was to file the surface and clean the details, but due to shortage of time I had leave the place. The artist explained me the filing process and he said that I can do it and only requirement is to do it patiently. So I carried the mini-elephant structure with me to Bombay and then I tried to make the surface smoother and tried to do the detailing which was really

interesting but difficult at the same time. It took me three full nights to carve out the details. After filing it, I was quite happy with my own work, though I couldn't match to their work.



Final sculpture after filing

If we take a look at the few clicks at various stages, we stay amazed how this stone has gone through various stages to become final lively sculpture!



Dimensions : 1' X 1.5' X 0.5' foot

V. Painting

They colour the sculptures and carvings with general oil paints. During my visit to the place there was only one painter who would paint all the crafts in the area.

Mainly, God and saints idols are painted. The artist does his job very well and makes the craft livelier. He maintains a certain style in his work and has a quite good knowledge in mythology. When I asked him about it, he said he got all the art from his father and he maintains the designs or the details added to the particular God idols.



Combination of vibrant and contrast colours is used very effectively. The carving artists takes the painters advice

while adding the details to the God idols as he knows them quite right.

Following is a carving of Lord Dattatraya which he painted when I was there. He was doing it very patiently and with a lot of concentration. I really liked the way he added the details to the three heads after which anyone can recognise the three different Gods- Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh.



VI. Selling/marketing

Now comes the part where they have to sell their crafts. But to my surprise, when I asked them about the marketing, they told me that they never carry the

sculptures to the market and they sell the crafts there only.

As we can see in the image, they just make the crafts beside the road and keep them there for the sell.



They say that they get orders there itself and then they make the crafts and deliver them to the clients.

Also the fact is there is not consistent demand for these crafts in the market. So it becomes quite difficult to carry the craft back and forth.



There is a shop in the town - Newasa, which is run by a businessman, but due to some internal conflict (which I will mention in the next chapter) they do not choose to sell their crafts there.

During my stay there, I witnessed all the stages of the craft making process and got to know many things through their own words.

4. Their views (On the craft and their overall experience)

“Stones are our life!” – One of the artists



Work Satisfaction

I saw both the cases here. Some of them are very satisfied with their work, while some of them have totally opposite opinions.

During the first week when I met first family – Wanjare family – among these artists, I asked some of the members this same question if they are satisfied with the work or not? And I got a very positive reply. The head of the family – grandpa – said that they do this since many generations and it is like their own original art. They had options to switch to other businesses at bad times but they never left their craft.

Then I asked him if they get enough work and in case they don't then what do they do. He said that they continue making Gods' idols and some products like grinder, lamps etc. so that whenever customers come asking for these they can directly sell it to them. So they never actually sit idle. They work consistently.

He seemed so proud while mentioning the fact that he feels like “the king” as there is no one above to order him and he can do what he likes.

On the other hand, I met some artists, especially at the town place Newasa, who, first of all, asked me if I have some big contract to offer them. They say that they don't get enough orders nowadays and even if they get some, they end up getting a very less margin for their work.

Internal conflicts and interaction with customers

Through my observations as well as through interaction with the artists, I got to know about the internal conflicts in there too. When I was interacting with one of the group of artists, they said that the businessmen in the town don't let them get the work directly. Through their contacts businessmen get the contract and hire the artist to do that work. So, the artists don't get enough money for their own work. They don't give them any credits too.

They were even angry with the customers. They said customers give orders, agree on some amount, but when order is ready they start negotiating. The artists at the end have to accept whatever they get, because already there is very less amount of orders they get. They say that



customers don't appreciate the hard work behind the craft and they just end up saying that this should not cost much or we can't give this much price for such a small work.

Interaction with a businessman:

I went to visit the town – Newasa as well and interacted with one of the businessmen there. He gave me all the information about their work, number of artists work for them and that he gets many orders from cities like Pune, Shirdi, etc. He can't do any stone craft though; he just manages the whole business.

About the other artists in the same field

I observed that all the artists, among themselves, were very helpful to each other, even though they were competitors of each others.

But one thing I noticed was that they were quite against the migrating communities from North India who came to Maharashtra. Though they were not saying anything bad or disrespectful about them but they certainly think that they get less amount of work because of these other state artists.

As I mentioned above they were also against the businessmen in this field who earn a lot just because of

their contacts and politics. The artists said that the businessmen don't let customers reach to them directly.

Alcoholism and other Health Issues

Alcoholism is one of the main problems they face these days and they themselves know this and say this. But they fail to do anything for it. They say they have to consume it in order to work next day with energy.

They also face some health issues because of the dust being spread in all over while working with the machines and also the noise of the machines. They say they are used to it now and don't care much about it!!

My interaction with them was quite informal, but I think because of that they spoke much more clearly and put their views in a straightforward way.

5. *Kal, Aaj aur kal* (yesterday, today and tomorrow)

During the whole period of my visit, I interacted with the three generations of these artists and I could observe some of the clear differences in their views or in their working styles. I interacted with 65–75 years old artists as well as 30–40 years and at last with few children from the community too.



I got to know through their words about many facts and changes they experienced through many years and through many generations.

Here are some of their words as well as my observations on the basis of following categories:

Amount of work

As I was already been guessing this and curious about, I got to know from their words too that the amount of work that used to happen with stones has certainly been reduced.



And one of the main reasons behind this is that the stone is already replaced by cement and Plaster of Paris today. This applies to all the product based work as well as craft work.

Almost all the groups had this same fact to share that they are not getting that much work and hence it is becoming more and more difficult surviving with this art.

Intervention of machines

Intervention of machines is again one of the main changes these two generations have experienced. Similar to any other field, the young generation loved the machines here too. And this love is so much that they use machines for everything during the carving process.

As I mentioned in earlier chapter, the young artist was using the machine directly even for the marking and sketching the rough figure. I was surprised to see that and was confused if the artist was really fast or he is just impatient!!



And this brings me to another main difference between the two generations and that is: Patience!!

Patience

Certainly I could see that the younger generation has less patience than the older generation and hence the chiselling out part or detailing out stage is mainly carried out by older artists only.

The older artist- grandpa – guided his son time to time and asked him not to use machine directly, but his son was not listening to his advice and started using the machine directly.

Lifestyle, work culture and working styles

According to my observations and some conversation, I can say that lifestyle has certainly changed a lot but their work culture hasn't changed much. And on the other hand working style has become slave of machines.

They have started using mobile phones and cameras for their business but compared to the world around they still haven't reached so far. And unfortunately, I could say that day by day, the craft is becoming money centric business and it is becoming less art and more product based work. Especially younger artists are more interested in product based work like grinders, lanterns, etc. for which they have to work less and they can get more money.

Women's contribution

It was sad for me to hear that they still don't allow their women to participate in the craft work. They feel that this is risky for them and they would not be able to handle machines or chisels. They help them in farming.

I was glad though to hear that they don't restrict the women from education, they used the word 'homemakers' for their wives and they treat them respectfully!

It was something like this:

"Don't cry my son, I'm just going to bring some water, I will return soon with water."

"I will serve lunch for you in a golden plate, don't cry my boy, I'm just going to bring some water!"

I asked her if she goes to school and she said yes and she likes it very much!!

Next generation

I got the opportunity to interact with their kids too. I was happy to hear that they all go to school now.

At the same time, when I was taking the photographs, one of the girls asked me if she can sing a song and I can shoot a video of her.

I said, "Okay!"

She sang it really well; but the lyrics kind of touched me and hit my head with a great power!



While talking to them, a question struck through my mind, "What we as designers can do for the craft and the community?"

And I think, one of the major contributions can be through their education, because according to me, only a proper education can play an important role in their lives!





6. My insights

The complete duration of my visit and the conversations with the community were very insightful for me. It gave me a quite different perspective of the craft and I could closely look at totally different views and opinions.

Close look at the craft and community

As it was my first experience, initially for a couple of days, I couldn't really see much, but afterwards when I started talking to each one of them I got lots of newer things and I can say I got a close look at the craft and community.



After spending each day fully with them, I could nicely adapt their schedule and could get insight of their lifestyle and struggles that they have to face at each stage.

Has it all become money centric?

Initially when I was visiting to different groups and talking to different people, I had this feeling if it has all become money centric and if the art is being replaced by mere a business.

Afterwards I got that I was not completely right. I think it's also the world around which has changed a lot. The material replacements from natural stone to marble or cement has certainly reduced the demand of the stone carvings at a great extent and there is no funding option for this artists other than making some business out of it and making more product based work which is sold rather than just doing the craft work.

Almost all the artists have this opinion that they really like making stone carvings and sculptures. In their spare time they keep making newer designs and when customers come for product based craft, they like the craft too and then they buy it. So it's not like that they make the craft only after getting the orders.

Designers' intervention

There are some issues which I think really need to be worked upon and we as designers could contribute to. And one of them is tools. I think that they do not have proper tools with specific uses. They use only one machine with a flat blade and they use it for everything. It doesn't work nicely for smaller carvings, but out of lack of tools they use the same at every place.

The second important thing is marketing. According to this is the time to bring them to bigger market too, one option can be online selling.

One more thing I thought necessary was to document their craft and their whole process at a much larger scale which can motivate all of them and which can work as reference material for their new generations or other artists who might be interested in the craft.

Role of education

Similar to every field, I think, there is a large need of education here too. While saying that I'm not pointing to their skills but I could see somewhere there is less motivation, less involvement. And I think through

education they will be more responsible, more committed to their work.



Here, when I'm saying education, I don't mean only mainstream education but also vocational training or some relevant education, relevant to their art and craft.

And I'm sure, with the skill set and originality they have in their craft, they can reach around the world!



A short video about them

I had shot some videos while interacting with them and made a short video which can briefly tell their story and take us at the place... to them...

Here is the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsQwMuZN6C4&feature=youtu.be>

Learning and Conclusion

First of all, I am very happy that I chose this topic and I the opportunity to meet all these artists. At first, interacting with them and getting the desired information from them, without making them extra conscious, was really difficult, but afterwards when I became a familiar figure to them and vice a versa, it all became a lot easier and they themselves started telling me their views and stories.

I got answers to many of questions. It is clear that the amount of work has reduced a lot and the craft really needs to be conserved. Designers' Intervention at some parts will certainly make some differences. And also, education can play a major role in making the artisans; especially the new generation artists, more responsible and can motivate them to rise higher and higher with the amazing skills they have.

Witnessing all the process so closely and observing such wonderful crafting skills was astonishing. The whole period was very insightful for me. I would really love to contribute as a designer in making the craft immortal again and to work upon the design problems which I got to know throughout the project.

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Thank You