



Gulabi Meenakari

Ethnographic Research to
understand Craft System





“

BANARAS IS OLDER THAN TRADITION, OLDER THAN HISTORY, OLDER EVEN THAN LEGEND AND LOOKS TWICE AS OLD AS ALL OF THEM PUT TOGETHER.

-MARK TWAIN

”



INTRODUCTION

Gulabi Meenakari is one of the rarest crafts in India. This art was brought to the city of Varanasi by Persian enamellists during the Mughal era around the early 17th century. The word 'Mina' is the feminine form of the Persian word 'Minoo' and means 'Heaven'. It refers to the azure "Color of Heaven".

Practiced in the by lanes of Varanasi, near Gai Ghat. Minakari is an art form from Persia and involves coloring the surface of metals by fusing different colours. This art was brought to the city of Varanasi by Persian enamellists during the Mughal era around the early 17th century. The word 'mina' is the feminine form of the Persian word 'Minoo' and means 'heaven'. It refers to the azure colour of heaven. In Varanasi, it is practiced on jewellery and home decor items. One can also buy souvenirs like birds and elephants decorated with minakari. It shows most beautifully on gold as its natural sheen sets off the colours best. It also looks lovely on enamel.



Background

The whole ethnographic research study is based on the understanding of the craft cluster, Sustainable and unsustainable aspects of the cluster, and co-design, thus involving the artisans and concerned stakeholders in being able to work on the proposed sustainable solutions for the identified unsustainable practices and implementing those in order to break the cycle of unsustainability.

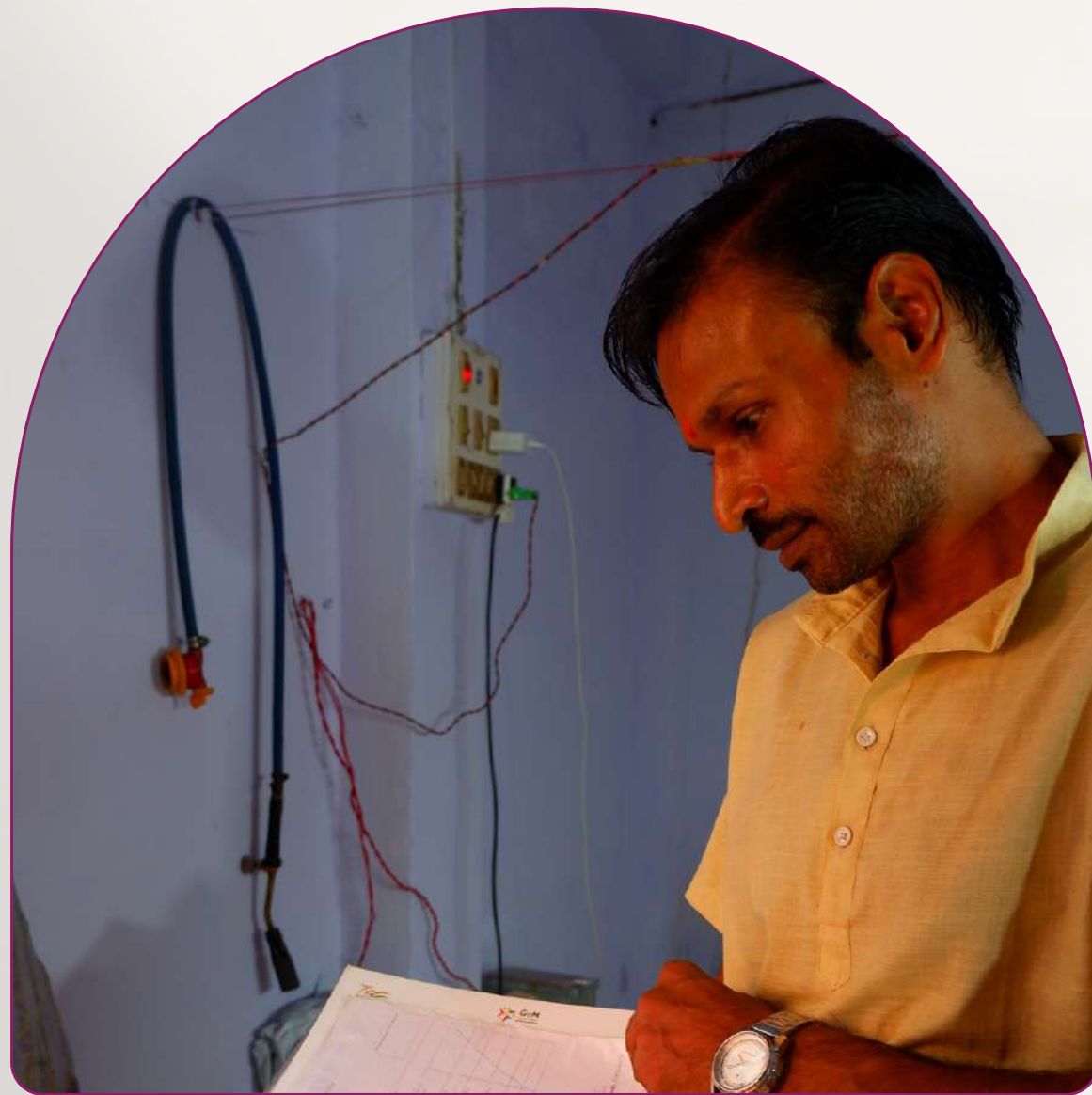
Understanding the system



Artisans

Tarun ji is one of the best gulabi meenakari artisans in India. He has received National and state awards for his designs and artifacts . Gulabi Meenakari or pink enameling of Banaras, is a unique art form, characterized by pink strokes on white enamel. The present meenakars in Varanasi claimed that the position of the art of meenakari was prosperous till about hundred years ago. Now only few artisans are involved in this art form.

Tarun Kumar Singh is one of them. He started taking interest in enameling work when he was young as this was his family tradition. Now he is a manufacturer of gulabi meenakari jewellery & other products since 1998 in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. He trains a lot of people under him. Right now he is training a dozen women under Titan's project in collaboration with an NGO.



Main Artisan



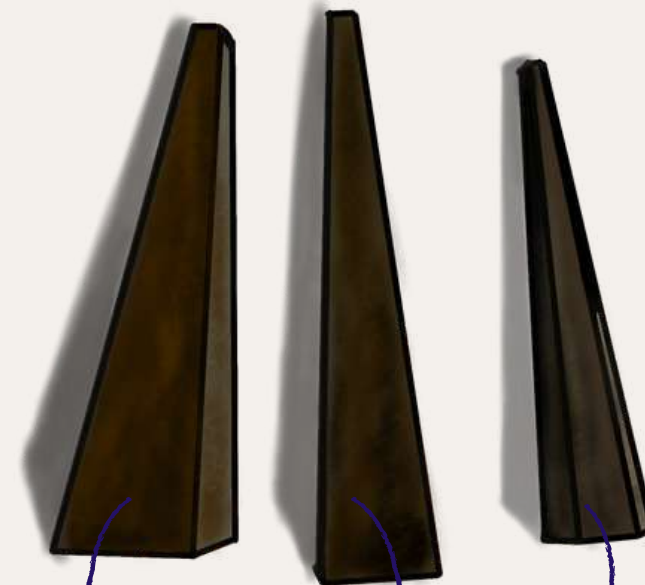
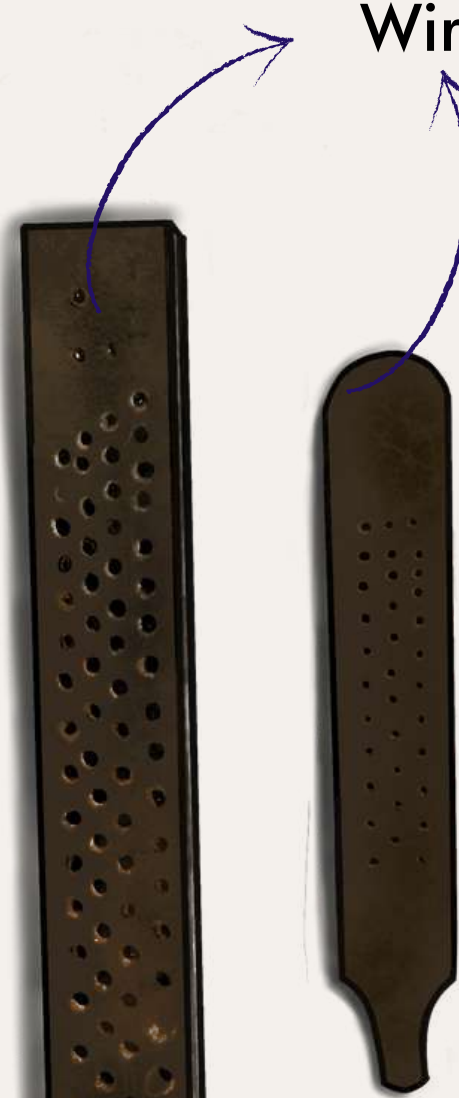
Other Artisans

Various women work under Tarun Ji to train in the art of Gulabi Meenakari. The oldest trainees have been there for almost 4 years now and he takes in new trainees every now and then. These women come from the cluster's neighborhood and are all known to each other through family relations or family friendships. Under Titan's CSR activity, the women have been put in a training system where they are in charge of a product from start to finish, instead of specializing in one task, which is what they were doing before Titan's intervention. They also earn under Titan, a monthly wage.

Diamond file



Wire shaping tool



Shaping tool

TOOLS USED

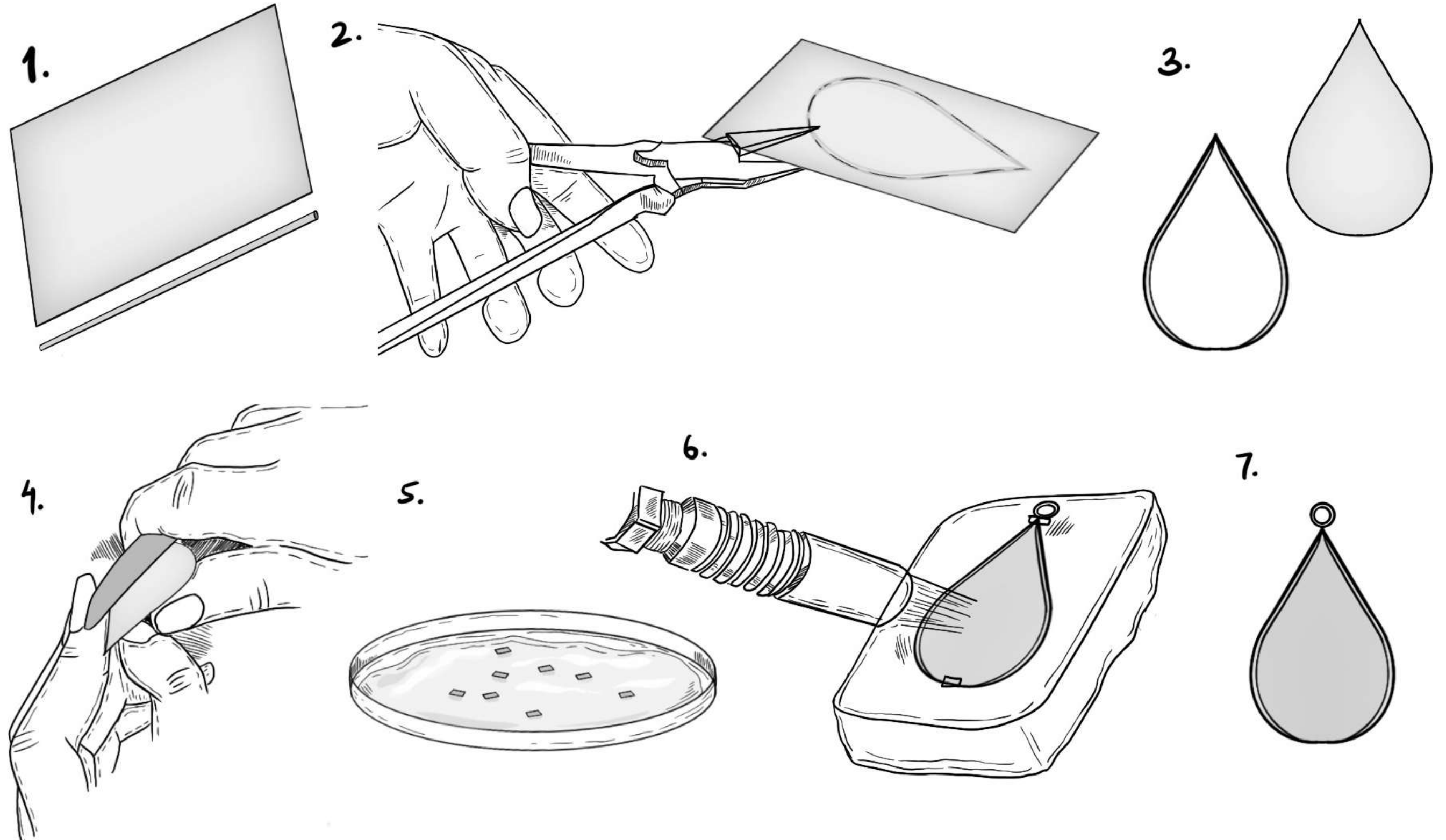
Apart from these distinguished-specialized tools there are some basic tools like pleyer (different sizes), tweezers, kitchen tong, wire cutting tool, fire gun, etc. that are used while making meenakari products.



PRODUCTION PROCESS

Structure

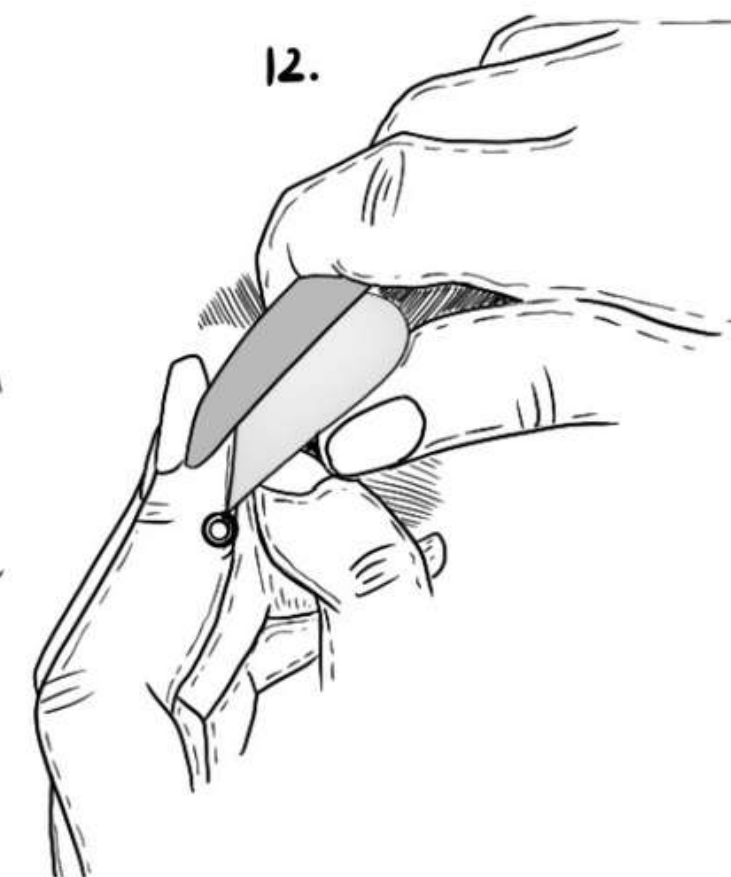
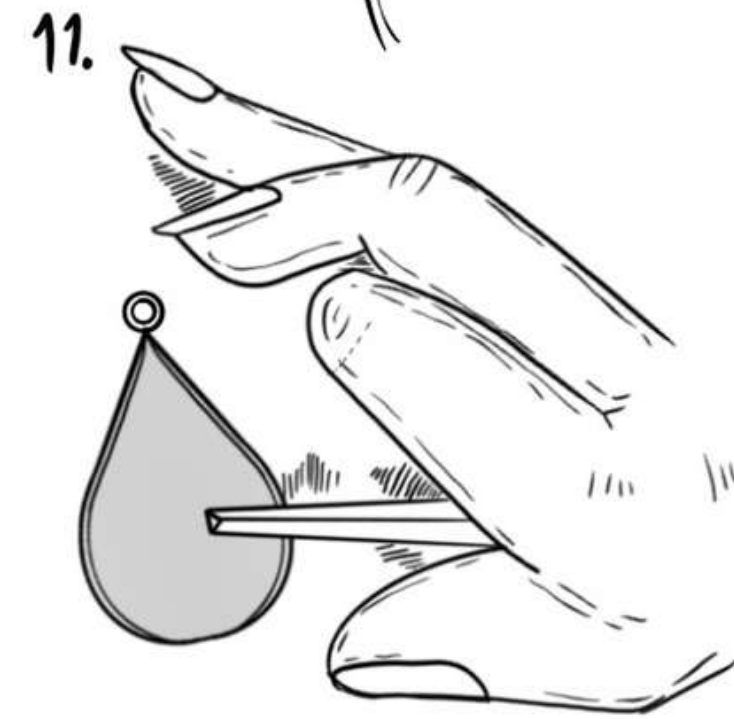
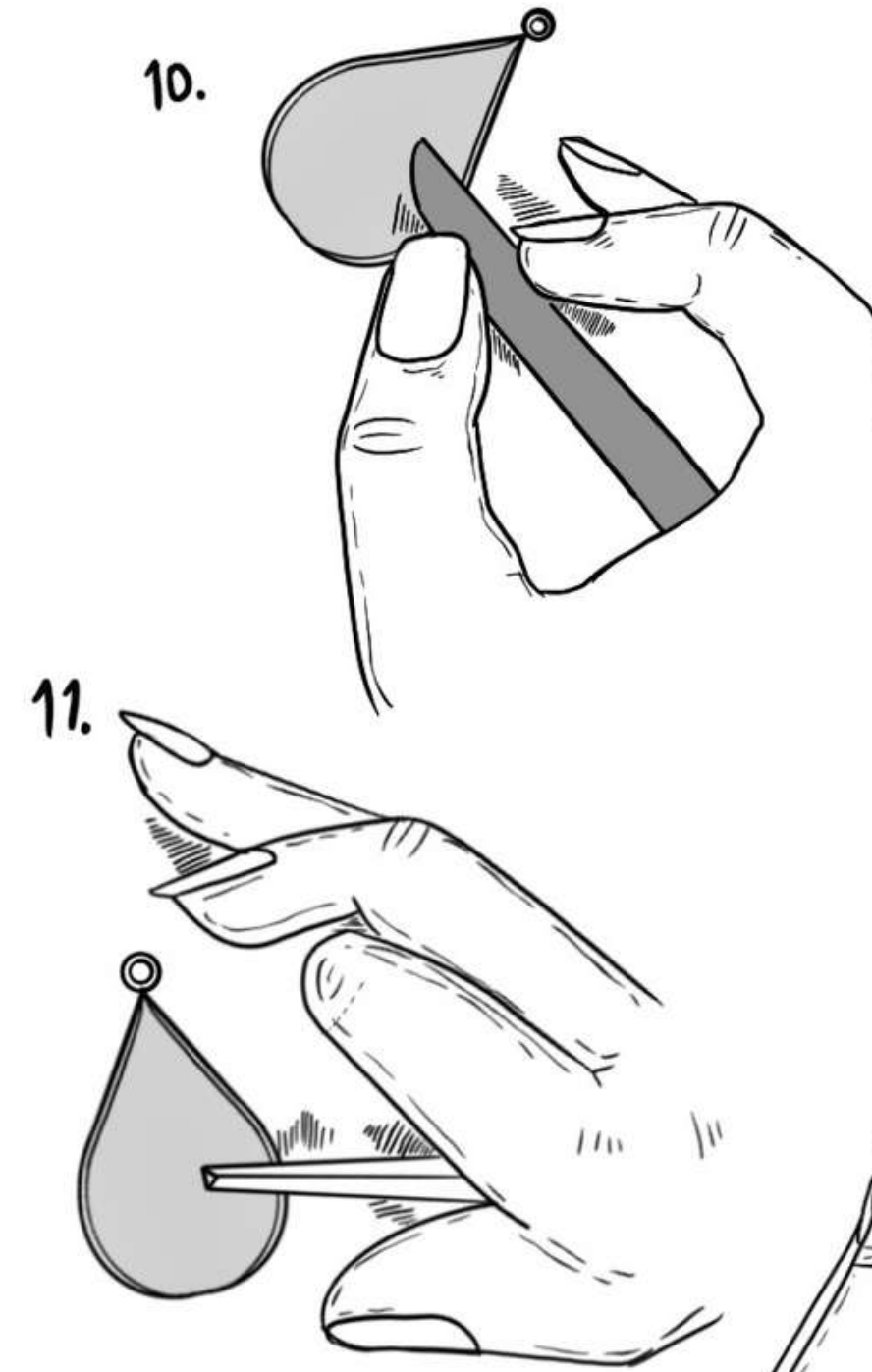
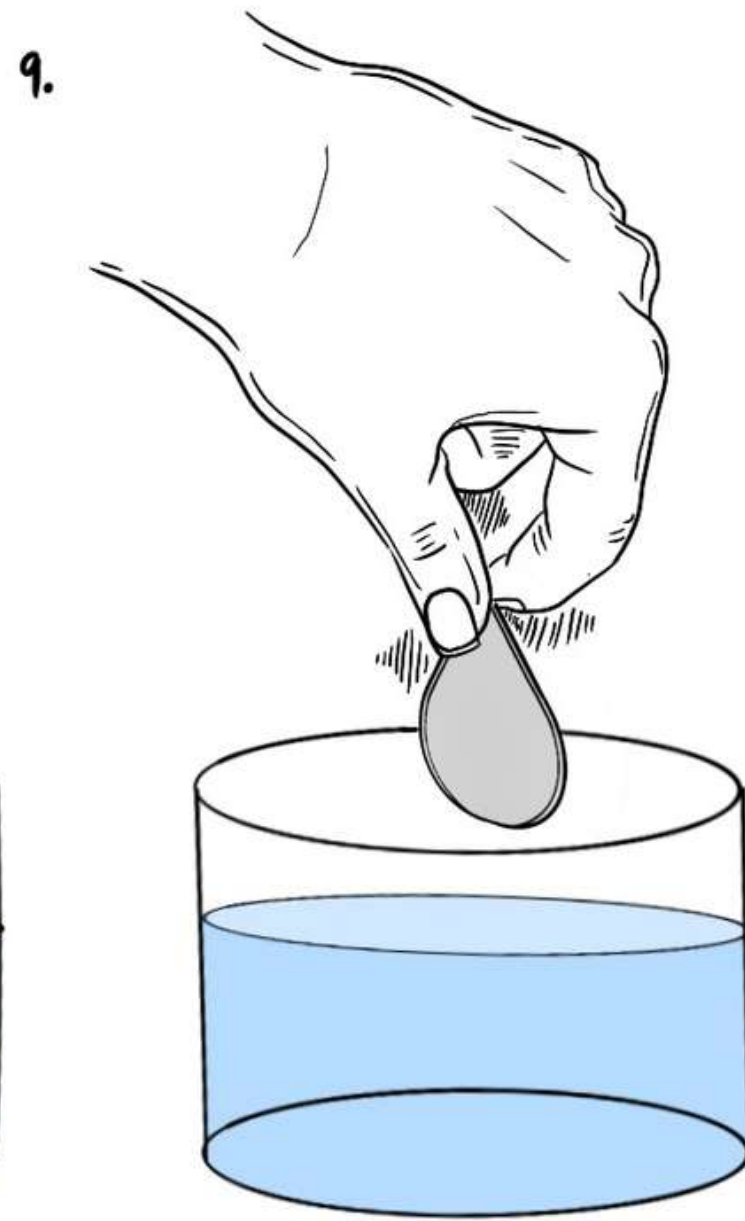
Silver sheet and rod. The sheets and rods are moulded & cut into the required shape. Little pieces of silver are dipped in suhaga. little pieces of silver are then used to fuse the structure. little pieces of silver are then used to fuse the structure.



PRODUCTION PROCESS

Jewellery

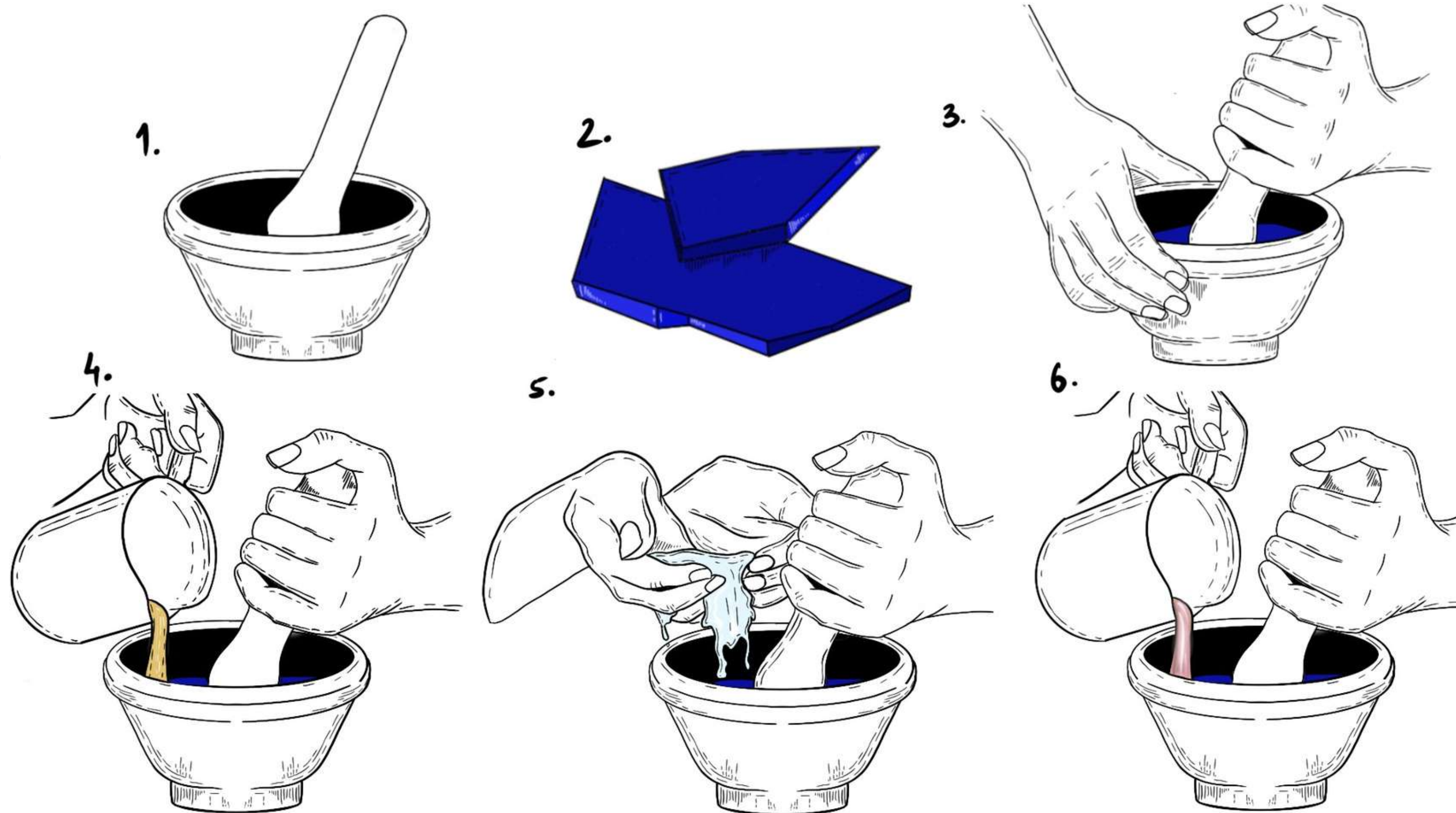
The structure is first dipped in acid and then in water to clarify it. The structure is then embossed and sanded to bring shape and shine



PRODUCTION PROCESS

Meena

Meena is crushed and ground dry. Dry meena is then ground in the water till it's very fine and there is no sound. The ground meena is purified multiple times, once with acid and then with water. Fine-ground meena is mixed with Budana Oil (pomegranate oil) to make it usable.



PRODUCTION PROCESS

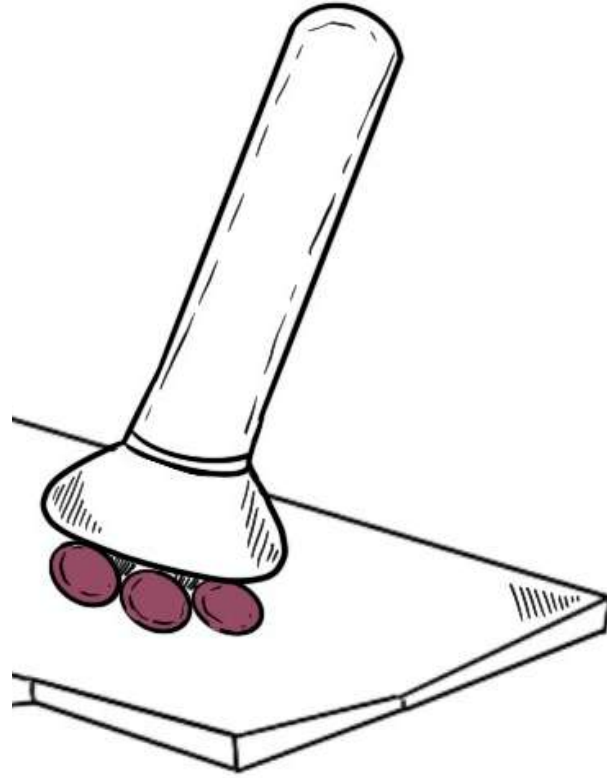
Paint

Metal oxides are sourced which are in little spherical balls. The metal oxides are then mixed with sandalwood oil. They are mixed using a pestle on a flat surface. The paint is scraped using half of a blade and is ready for use.

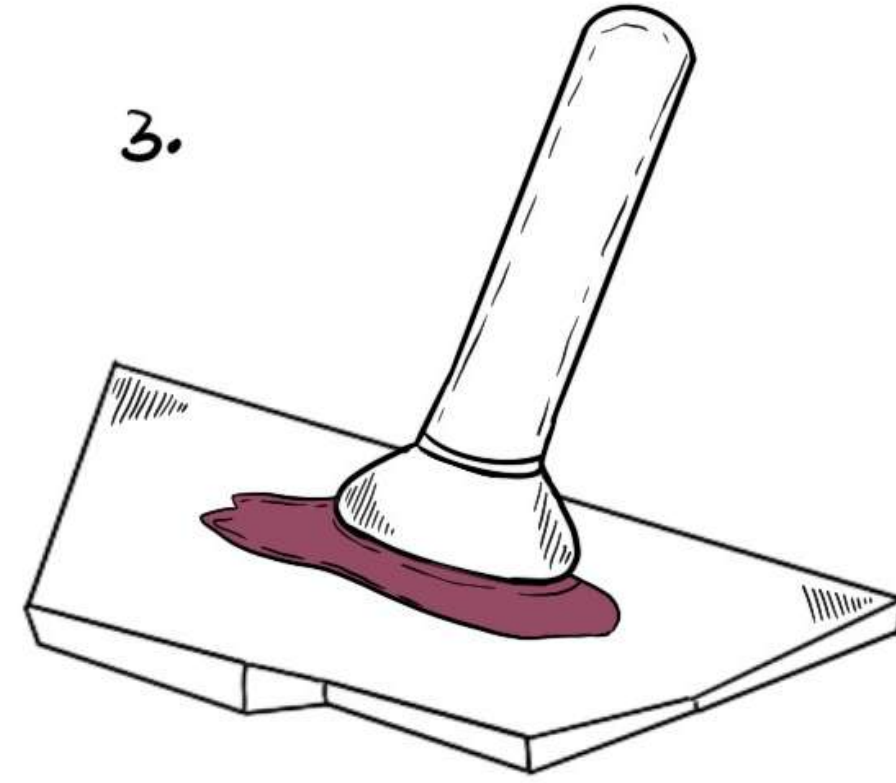
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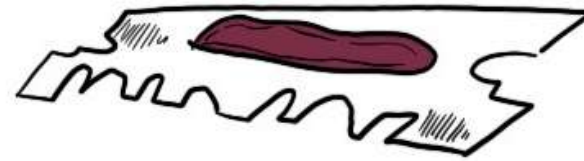
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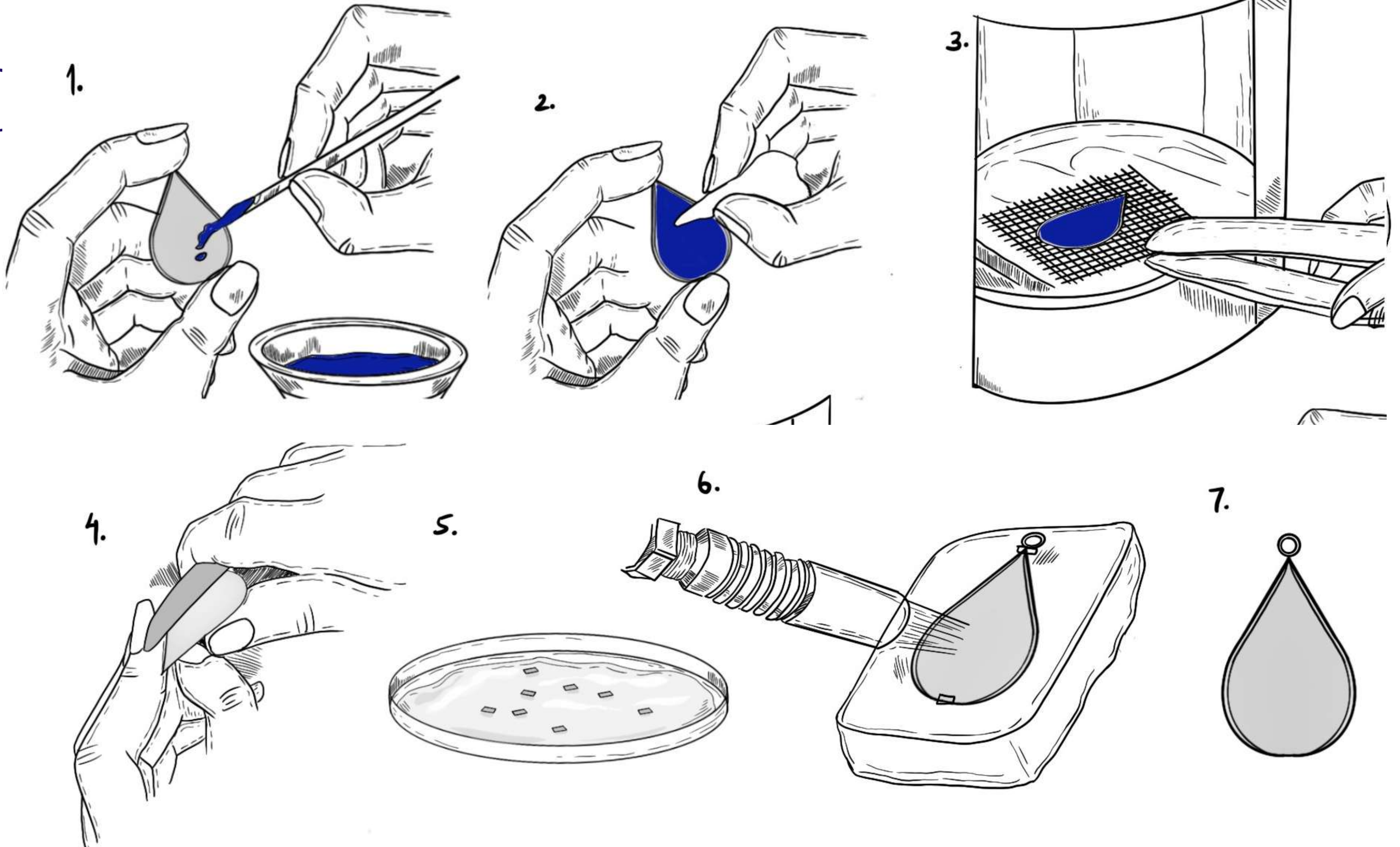
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PRODUCTION PROCESS

Jewellery

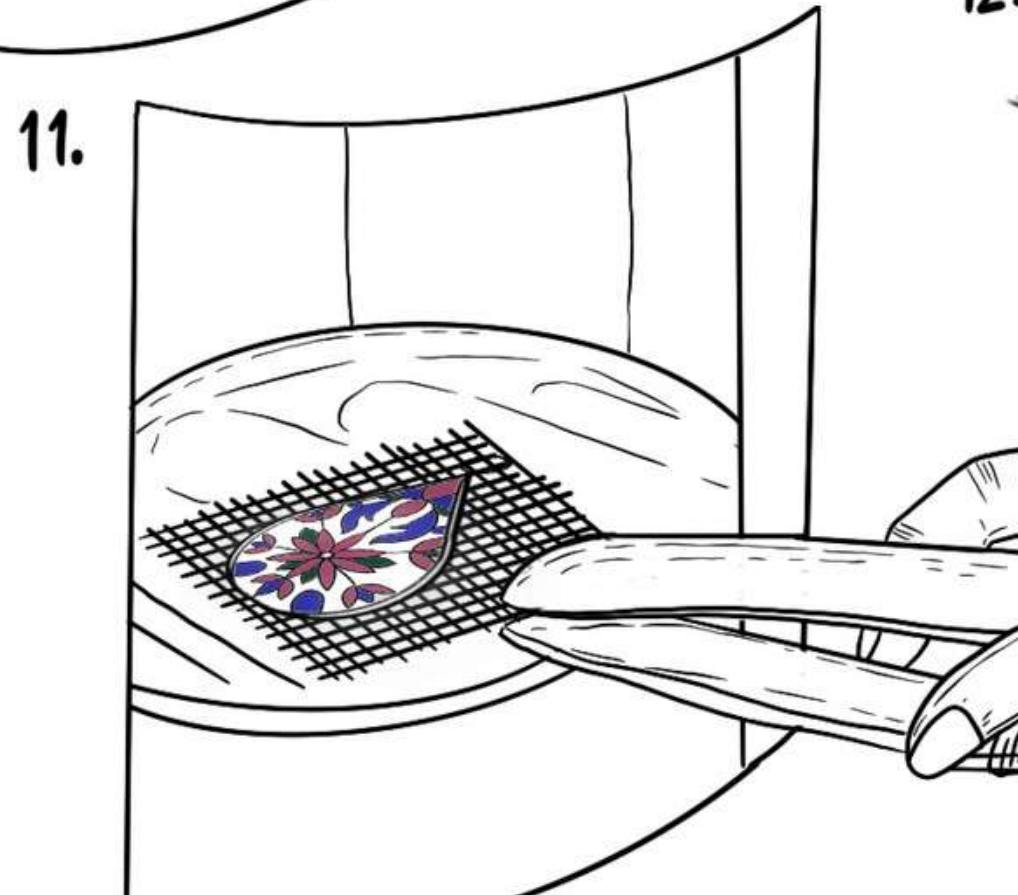
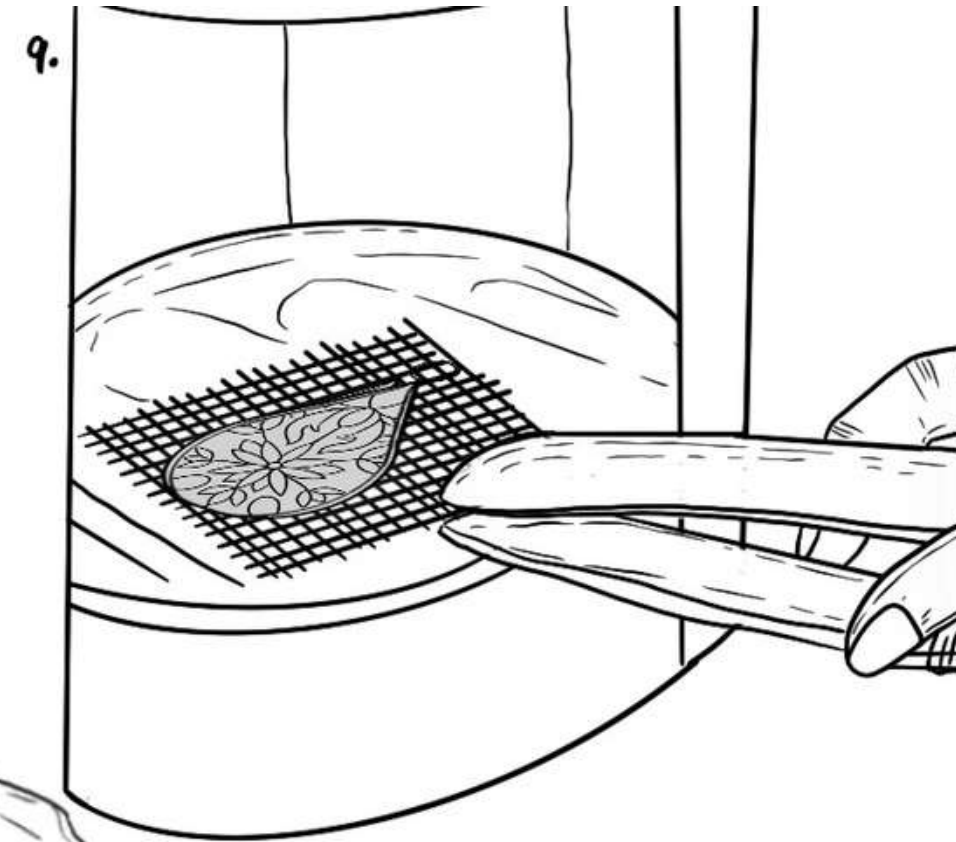
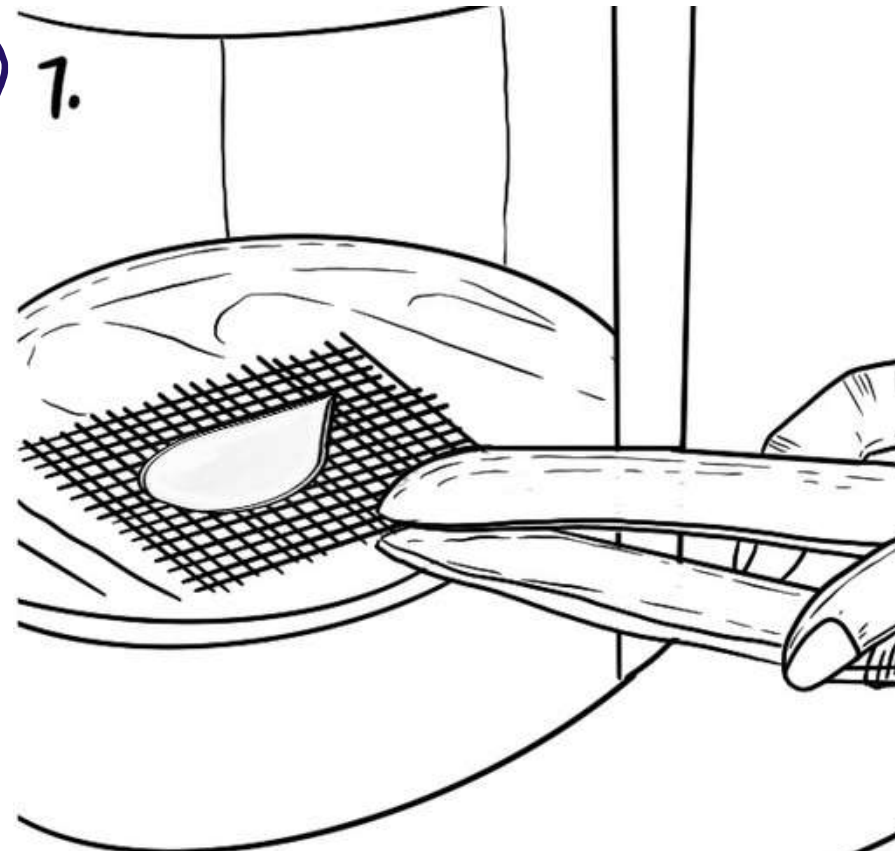
The base meena is deposited in the front. The oil in the meena is removed with the help of a tissue. The meena is solidified in the furnace. White meena is deposited in the front of the structure which is put in the furnace to solidify.



PRODUCTION PROCESS

Jewellery

base design is made from the paint on the structure. It is put back in the furnace to solidify it. The painting is completed. The final jewellery piece is washed with shikhakai and ritha. The final jewellery piece is ready to be packed.



Analyzing the system



System Identification

ENVIRONMENT	Competitors, Area, Market, Govt. Policies, NGO, Artisan families, Titan- CSR, GI Tag, Silver & Meena prices, craft councils, labor laws & unions	
INPUT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raw materials• Tools & machinery• Human resource• Infrastructure• Partners/vendors	THROUGHPUT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Process: Structure, meena, paint, paint brushes, jewelry• Packaging• Shipping• Sales & Marketing	OUTPUT <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Products• Byproducts• People• Profit• Digital presence• Recognition
FEEDBACK <p>National & International recognition, women empowerment, no hierarchy, low income, poor infrastructure, inconsistent packaging, lack of proper equipment, no branding, communication barrier, no HR</p>		

S W O T

S

- Empowering women.
- National/international recognition.
- Integral part of India's craft history.
- Independence & self confidence.
- Legacy (Skill passed through generations)
- Cynosure "Gulabi" (Pink) meena, which is not used anywhere else
- Corporate interventions (CSR)

O

- More collaborations with designers and brands eg: Titan
- International recognition can help boost sales
- Low competition.
- No visual branding, clean slate.
- Infrastructure can be improved to increase productivity.
- Full usage of every material.
- CSR activities can make an impact and keep the craft alive.

W

- No hierarchy.
- No proper training curriculum
- Improper training.
- Poor Infrastructure.
- Lack of proper equipment.
- Inconsistent packaging.
- Communication barrier.
- Lack of proper amenities

T

- Cluster does not have a proper business plan
- Low confidence.
- Increased market competition due to advanced machinery.
- Intricate work affects their eye vision a lot.
- Chronic backache.

PESTEL Analysis

POLITICAL

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed the exemption on import of duty-free items as an incentive to exporters of handicraft items to give a boost to the sector.
- Gulabi Meenakari being taught to women to empower them under the "Samarth" programme by the govt.
- Gulabi Meenakari products being the official gifts to foreign politicians and dignitaries by PM Modi.

ECONOMIC

- In the month of September 2020, fund of Rs 2.8 crore was approved for the integrated project for development and promotion of handicrafts of Varanasi by the Ministry of Textiles to overcome the COVID-19 crisis faced by the artisans.
- Handicraft exports from India increased by almost 2 per cent year-on-year to US\$ 3.39 billion in FY20 and is expected to increase by 3% in the next year.

SOCIAL

- Increasing interest in made-in india items, especially the indian crafts
- More of the global customer base now engaging in exploring traditional indian products and jewellery
- Community engagement by encouraging family members to join in and learn the process

PESTEL Analysis

TECHNICAL

- The high usage of internet has lead to the craft now reaching a global audience through various streams, enabling them to view and buy the products they want.
- Advancements in terms of heat generation have lead to the artisans acquiring a furnace that is portable in nature.

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Rise in awareness of the problems artisans go through and the need to push traditional and antique crafts has lead to involvement of NGOs and major companies to invest in and collaborate with the craftsmen.
- Increased presence in the global market has lead to improved opinions and renewed interest of Indian customers as well

LEGAL

- Implementation of the Dastkar Shashktikaran Yojna a programme that enables community empowerment to mobilise artisans into self-help groups.
- Implementation of the Artisans (Welfare and Promotion) Bill that provides institutional and financial assistance to the artisans living in rural areas and for matters connected therewith.

Our Interventions



PROBLEM 1 - VISUAL COMMUNICATION

- **PACKAGING**

They have a very basic packaging that does not reflect the brand because they aren't consistent with it and buy whatever is available.

- **ONLINE PRESENCE**

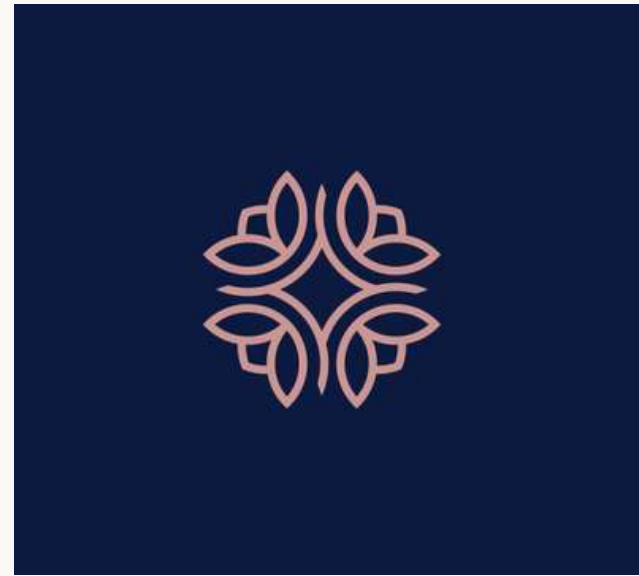
They have almost null online presence, their website takes you directly to indiamart's website.

- **OFFLINE BRANDING**

There is no proper pamphlet, brochures or catalogues. they do have a visiting card but that is too cluttered and does not serve the purpose.

- **BRAND IDENTITY**

There is no brand identity, people don't know them with a particular sort of visual or word.



”
AS
UNIQUE
AS
YOU ARE

@gulabimeenakari



MOODBOARD

Through Product Photography



Campaign Based

We executed a photoshoot where the artisans themselves were models. These photos will be used for running social media campaigns to make a connect with the audience.



Artistic

Some non-traditional photos were taken to create aesthetic visuals to attract more customers. Following "what looks nice, sells more"



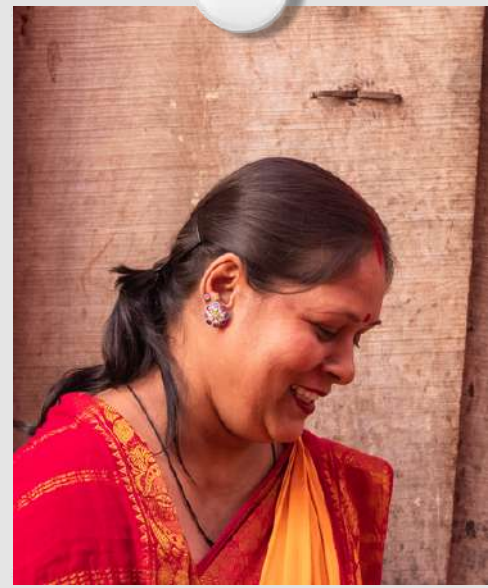
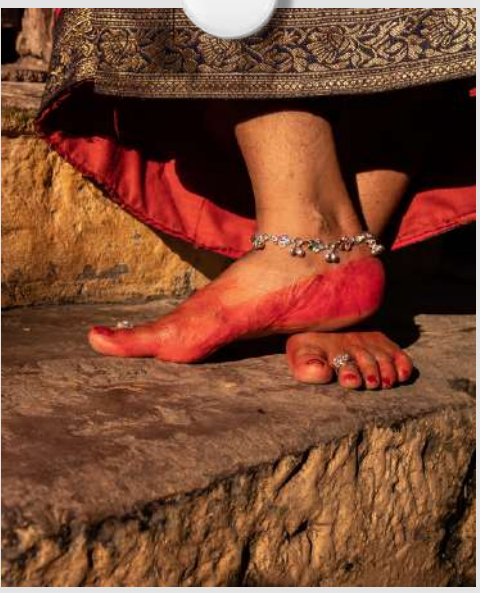
Studio Shots

These kinds of photos are taken against White or black background where the product is the only emphasis. They supposed to be used for website and product listings.



Editorial

A spontaneous photoshoot with a model was also conducted for an editorial type visual for future media marketing.



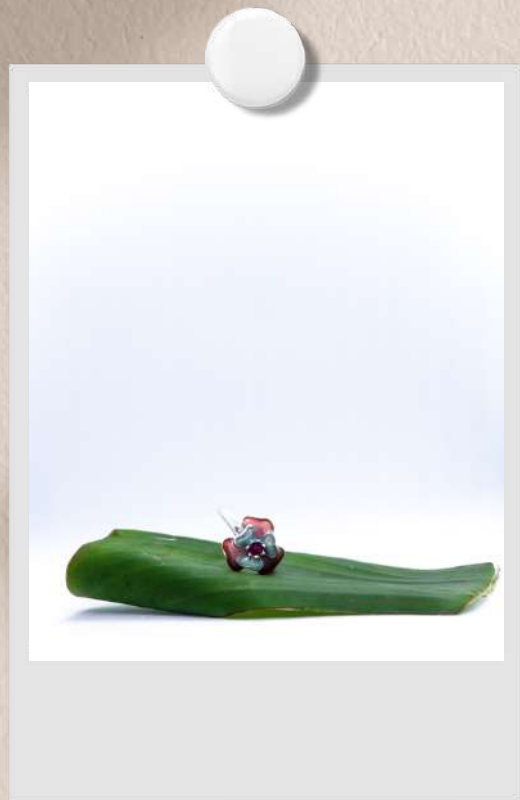
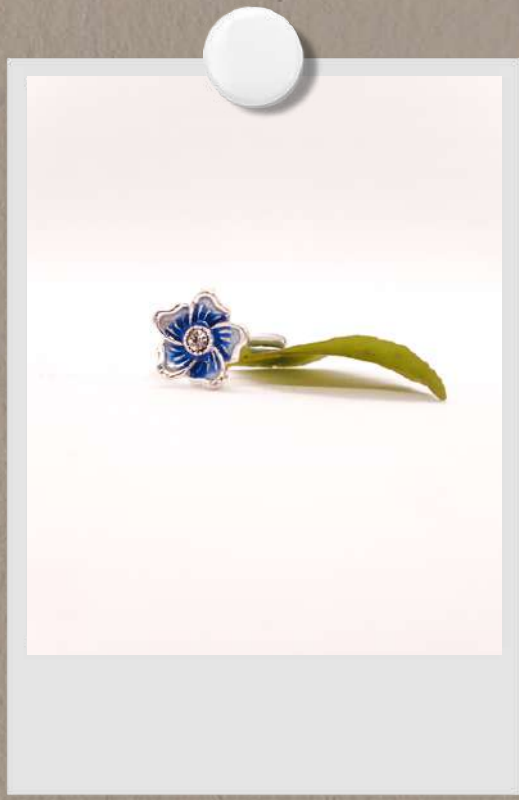
CAMPAIGN

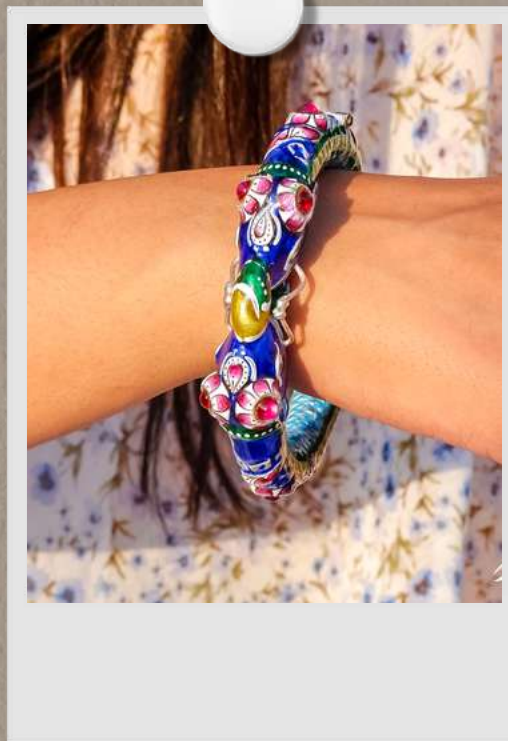
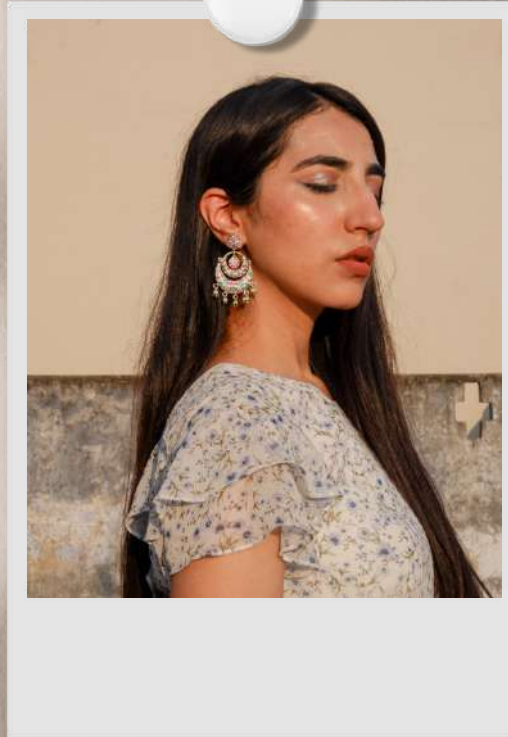




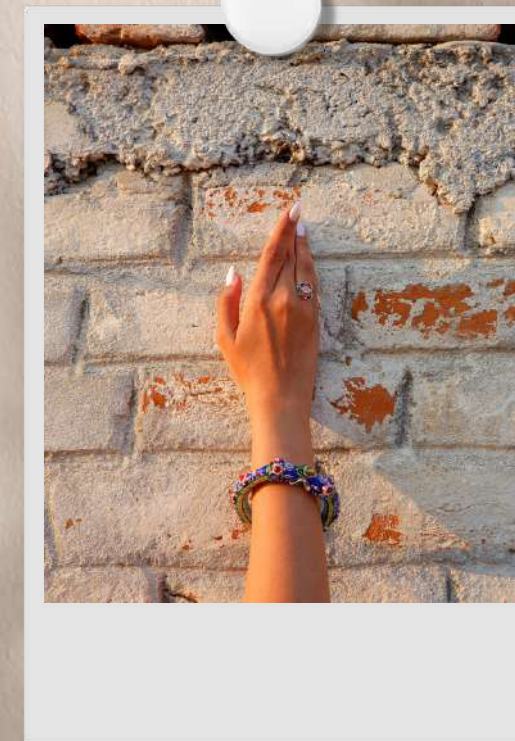
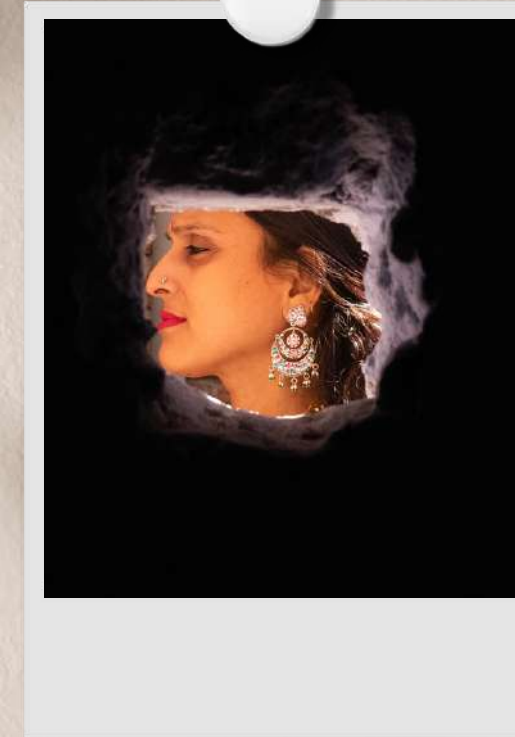
ARTISTIC







EDITORIAL



Through Branding



TARUN KUMAR

LOGO

For the logo, we incorporated a gulabi meenakari motif in the pink color that is used for the meena. With it we added Tarun ji's name for a finished touch.



Packaging

Stickers are proposed for their already existing packaging boxes so that there is no wastage but still some sort of branding available.



TARUN KUMAR

Brand name

Earlier his work was under the name of Gulabi Meenakari but now he has his own name as an artist for his brand name, which establishes his separate identity.



Social media

All their social media channels were reactivated with improved presence to create a buzz around new generation.

BRAND NAME

BRAND MARK

TARUN KUMAR

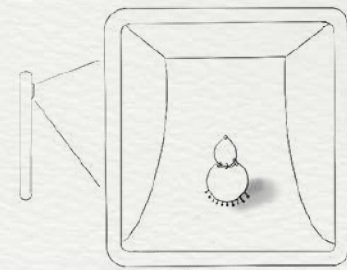


LOGO

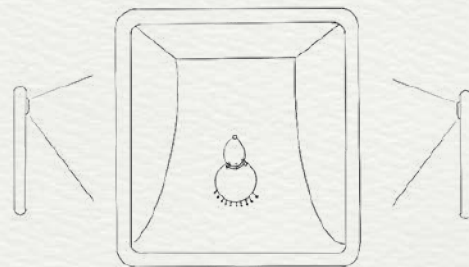


INFORMATIONAL POSTER

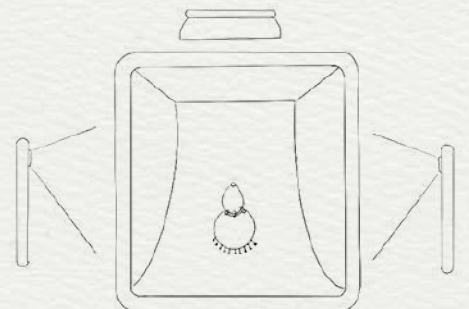
How to use light box?
लाइट बॉक्स का उपयोग कैसे करें?



For Shadow
छाया के लिए



Playing around shadow,
creating 30 degree angle
छाया के चारों ओर खेलना,
30 डिग्री का कोण बनाना



For Pitch White
Background
पिच सफेद पृष्ठभूमि के लिए

Workshop



Visual communication

Workshop was conducted by design & branding specialist Ms. Diksha Soni where artisans were trained onto how the beauty created by them are to be well presented while viewed through customers's eyes.



Photography

The artisans were trained on nuances of photography through lightbox as well as usual smartphones post which they were able to overtly spot the difference it created in their product presentation & marketing.



Social Media presence

Artisans were encouraged & trained to create accounts & post on social media, how to go trending via photos, videos, music - tips & hacks as Insta reels, youtube shorts, fb watch etc. are ruling it all & can help enhance sales.



Autonomy

By conducting this workshop, confidence & self belief was built in the artisans where they felt they too could beat the competitors in market & in future they could start their own ventures & they're self sufficient for it from all ways.

PROBLEM 2 - ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

- **BRAND EXPANSION**

They don't have an entrepreneurial mindset and see themselves just as artisans than as entrepreneurs and so, have plans of expanding and growing the business.

- **WORKSHOP INFRASTRUCTURE**

The infrastructure of their workshop - including the tools, the equipment, the entire base setup as well as the amenities were very basic. They were just enough to do the job, but not conveniently.

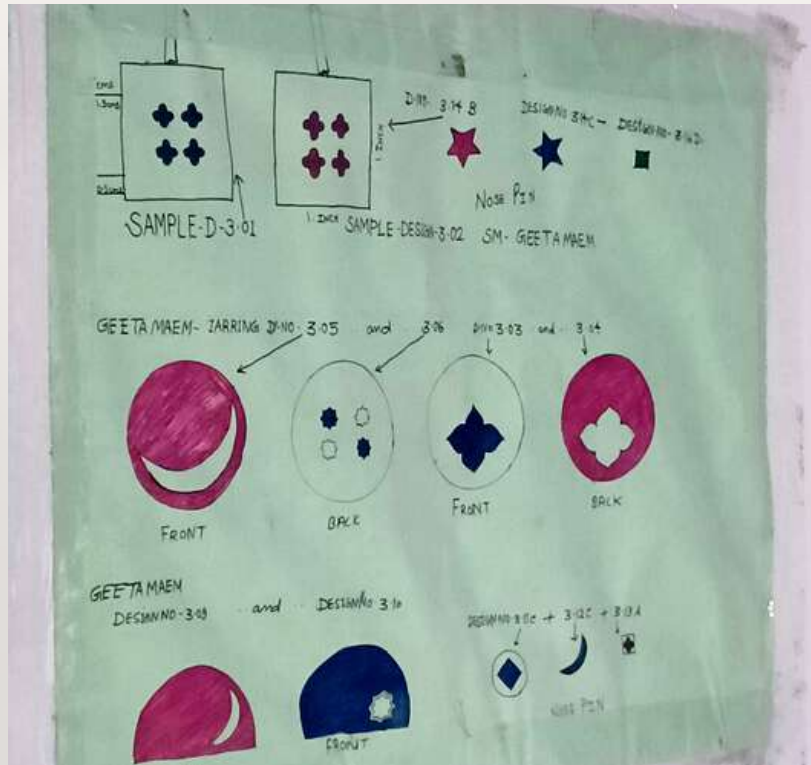
- **SENSE OF RECOGNITION**

The artisans had low morale, confidence, and hardly any sense of pride and recognition for the work they were doing. Because of this, they weren't very bothered with the entire system.

- **COMMUNICATION**

Since the artisans have only worked in their community, they haven't had the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of people, or limited exposure affected their communication skills.

What changed?



Understanding of the design process

Earlier there was only verbal explanation of the design process, now every process is mapped visually, step wise, therefore making the process more clear.



Room lighting

Earlier the workshop did not have proper light sources, now there is proper lighting and proper focused lamps therefore solving various health issues, like eyesight and improved quality of work.



Tools/equipments and storage

Earlier there were no specialized tools, now they have proper specialized tools with proper designated storage.

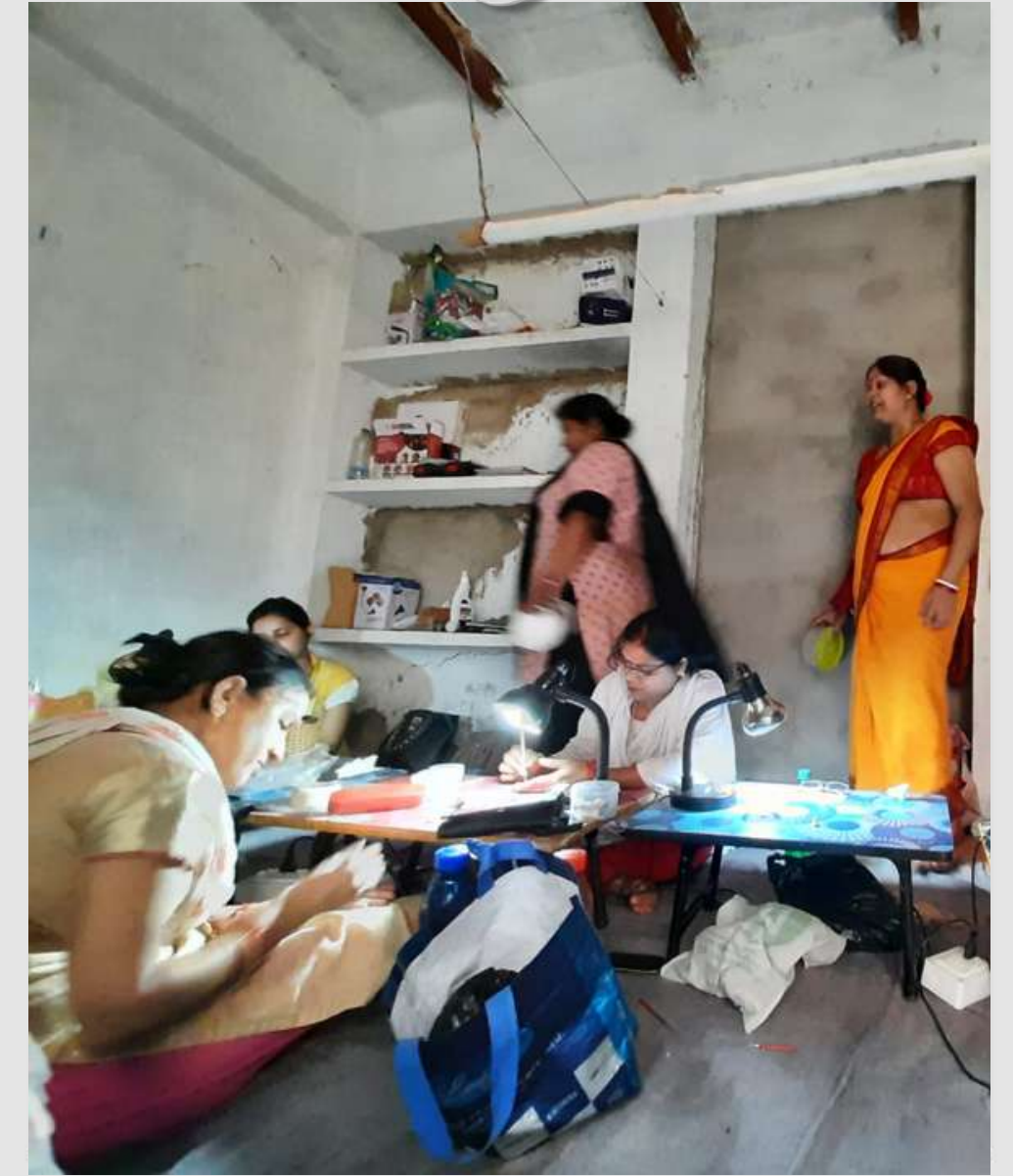


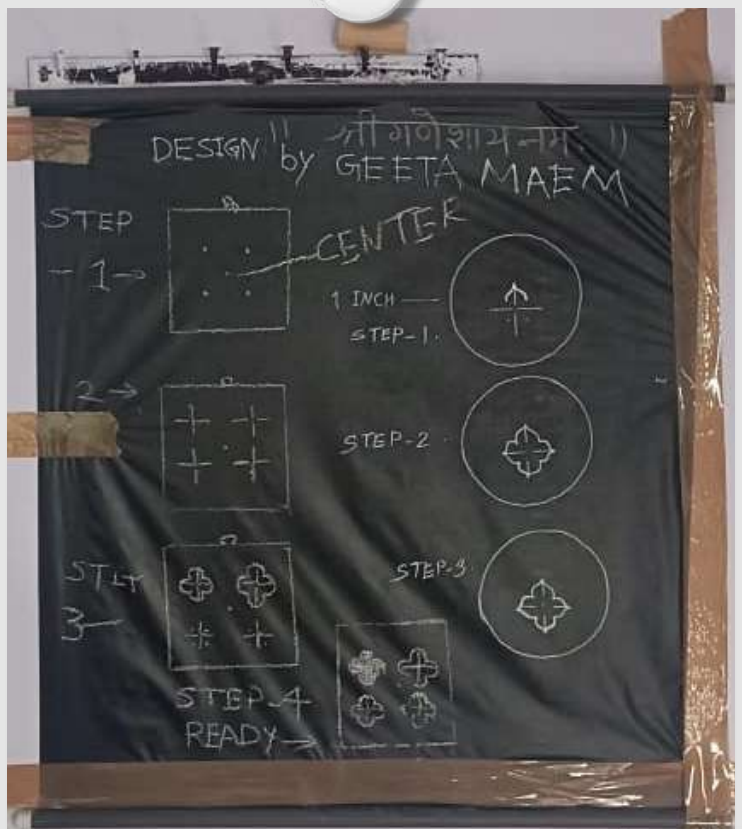
Hygiene

It was observed that the artisans had access to proper clean washrooms, separate washrooms for males and females.

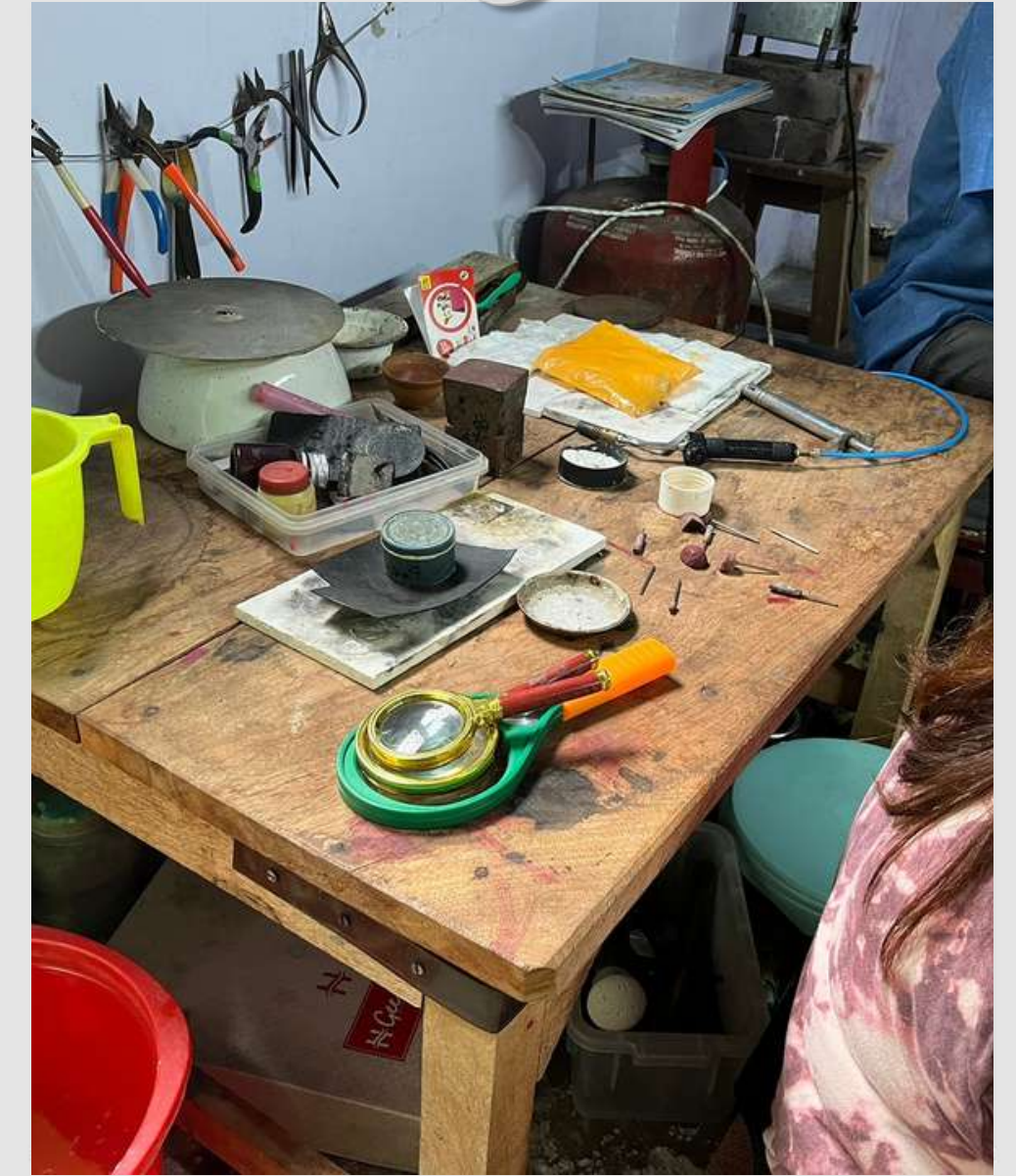


BEFORE THE INTERVENTION





AFTER THE INTERVENTION



Milestones



Brand Collaboration

Collaborating with brands like Pinjore which are is a brand craft based brand and also with heritage hotels so that they may keep articles in their stores.



Hotel Collaboration

Collaborating with heritage hotels like Hotel Rime Vista, which are a presentation of the Indian heritage and culture.

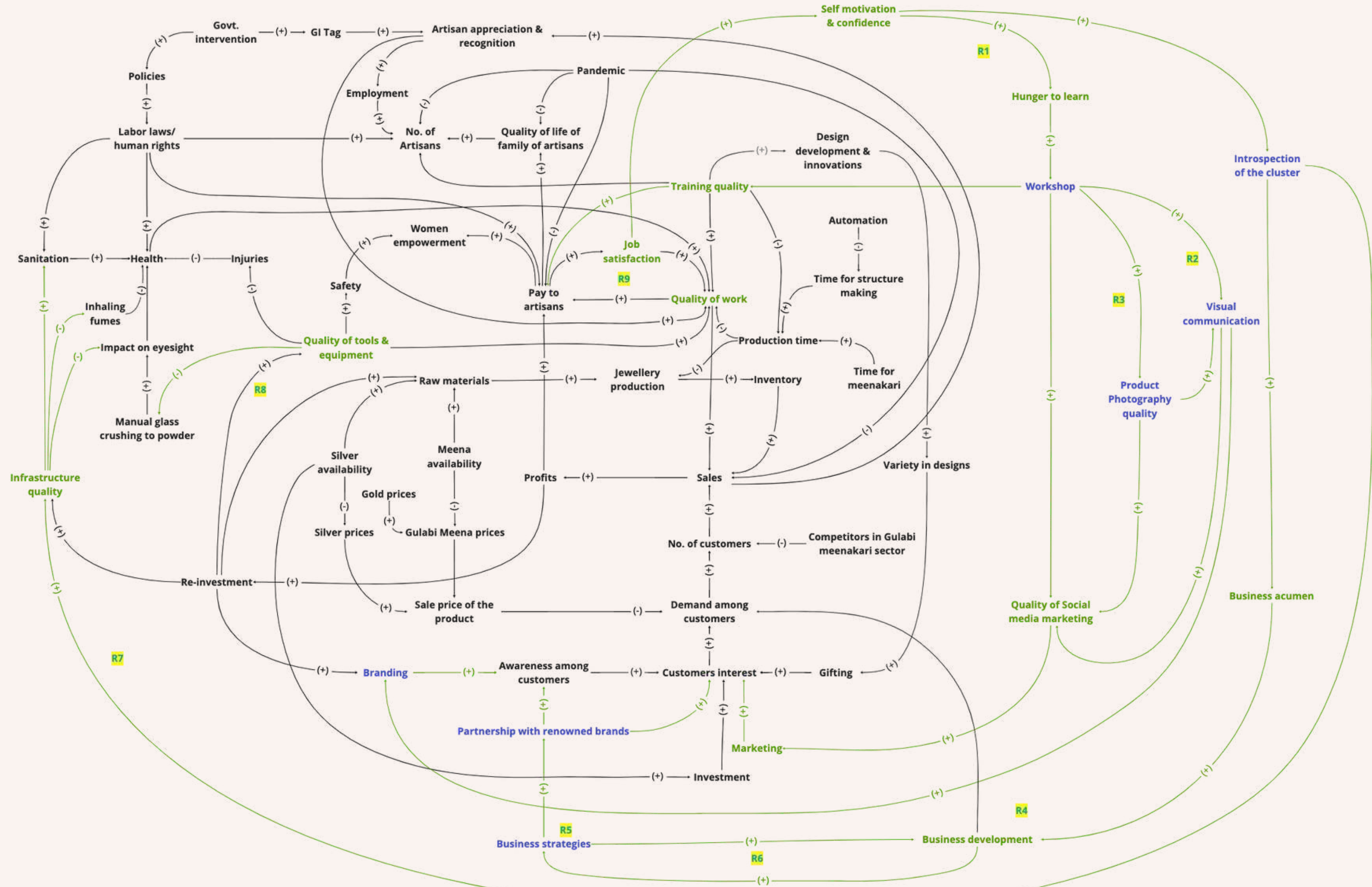


Influencer Collaboration

Collaborations with heritage influencers bringing attention to things in Varanasi that are special to the culture and also with fashion influencers.

Analyzing Impact





Parameters



Brand Collaboration

Business grows through working together with various brand to bring in their fame into our benefit. Collaborating with bigger brands ensures bigger discoverability. We compare the type of collaboration for our cluster before and after our intervention.



Sense of recognition

It is important for the artisan to have an internal sense of recognition for their work and their achievements. The levels of that were compared.



Tools

Every cluster needs specialized equipment for the artisans to be able to execute the minute details and complex designs on various materials and surfaces in a better manner. We compared their old tools with the usage of new specialised tools and it's impact on the products.



Morale

The confidence, enthusiasm, and discipline of the artists makes up an important part of their psyche. We compared their levels of morale before and after our intervention.



Infrastructure

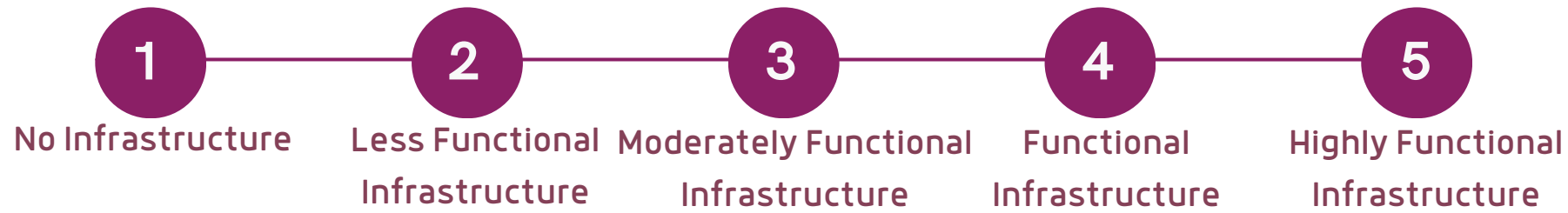
For the proper functioning and wellbeing of the employees/artisans, there are various factors that come into play like state of the workshop, lighting, storage, chances of injury if any due to open wires, wrong placement of gas cylinders and blow torches



Brand Collaboration



Tools



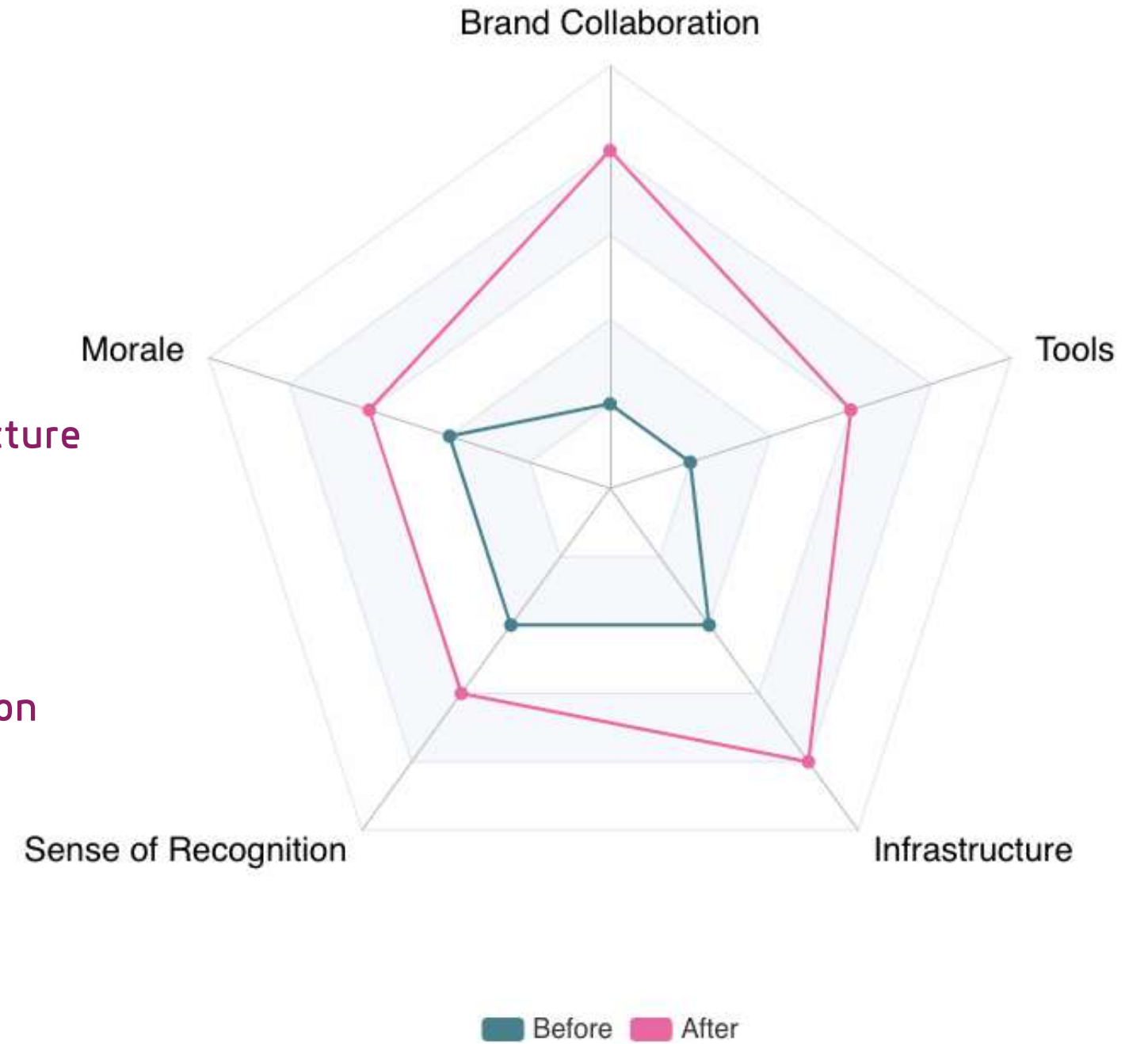
Infrastructure



Sense of Recognition



Morale



Parameters



Photography

Products are the key to this business and if they aren't presented well it directly impacts sales. A comparison in their product photography techniques will help us to show the impact that our workshops made.



Social Media Presence

These days social media is one of the key areas for marketing, it's important to understand their use of social media platforms to promote their products better and reach a larger audience.



Brand Identity

Our cluster was under the big umbrella of Banarasi Gulabi Meenakari and didn't have any identity of their own. So we're studying this to compare how individual identity will help them establish as a brand.



Designs

Even though the craft is old, there's still scope for innovation in designs. Artisans have to improvise their work as per the ever-changing market. This parameter will help us understand if they are experimenting or stuck on a few.



Amateur Beginner Intermediate Professional Expert

Photography



Unaware Aware Omnipresent Active Renowed

Social Media Presence



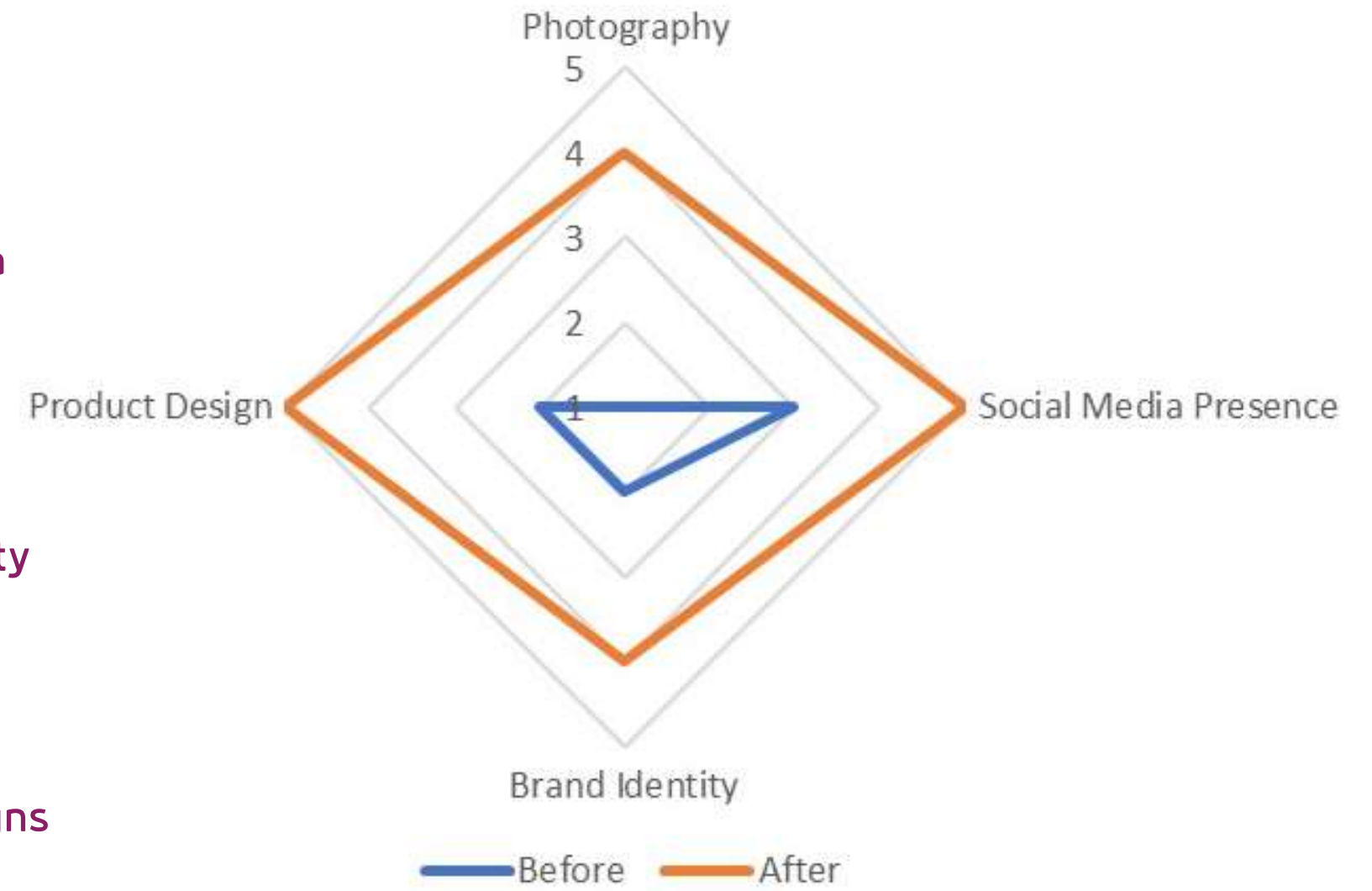
Absent Basic Only logo Full branding Great recall value

Brand Identity



Basic Traditional Contemporary Modern Luxe

Product Designs





Conclusion

The current fanfare of Indian crafts by famous figures has led greatly to the rising awareness and demand for various traditional Indian Crafts and Gulabi Meenakari is at the head of that rise. The beautiful Indian patterns and vibrant colors leave people- both Indian and Global mesmerized.

Titan undertakes a lot of CSR activities that function under various different kinds of SDGs, one of those projects being Kashika which works for the empowerment of women and decent work and economic growth for specific crafts, namely- Weaving, Zari Zardozi, and Gulabi Meenakari in the city of Varanasi. The impact of the project, as observed from the primary research in the Gulabi Meenakari end, has been positive and there is a lot of scope for expansion into other SDGs to widen the scope for betterment and improvement.

Through this project, we got a chance to study in detail the current situation of Banarasi Gulabi Meenakari and identified the areas where the problems lay. The major areas were categorized as Infrastructure, health, business, branding, communication, management, and human resource.

Solutions were devised to help solve the problems that the artisans face. The solutions involve an overhaul of the current digital presence, rebranding, guidelines for various purposes, a new training structure and floor plan. A workshop was conducted to train and enlighten the artisans about nuances of visual communication, branding, photography and social media presence which shall help in enhancing sales & in turn overall business. Radar graphs were devised to understand, analyse & measure pin pointly the actual intervention impacts.

All of it enabled the artisans to be independent, and confident and realise their full potential and put the same in front of the world as a strong brand, also shall boost the artisans in case of future entrepreneurial opportunities.



Thank You!