

## Offbeat: Photoessay

### Pots of Dowry / The Hada of Uchhehra

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**By Gopika Nath**  
 Forged in fire, Hadas or pots made from 70 percent Copper ["Tamba"] and 30 percent Zinc ["Jasta"] are a part of the unique tradition and rituals of the people in a 40 kilometre rustic stretch in Central India. The Hadas themselves are about as unique as the stories of the craftsmen and their skill who engage in an arduous everyday battle against cheap plastic goods.

**Pots of Dowry Images**  
 Red hot furnaces with temperatures ranging from 800 degrees Celsius to above 1200 degrees Celsius add colour and warmth to a cold December morning in this Tambekar factory in Uchhehra, Madhya Pradesh, in Central India.



They make a brass vessel called Hada which is used by people in the neighbouring area and is valued like gold in this region and gifted to brides at their wedding as part of their dowry.



The Hada though specific to this region, was ironically not made here but imported from the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh, until one Mr. Harish Tambekar decided to begin this business in his home-town of Uchhehra.



The craft is practiced by about 30 artisans of this craft settled in Uchhehra who migrated from distant Mirzapur in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh at Mr Tambekar's invitation.



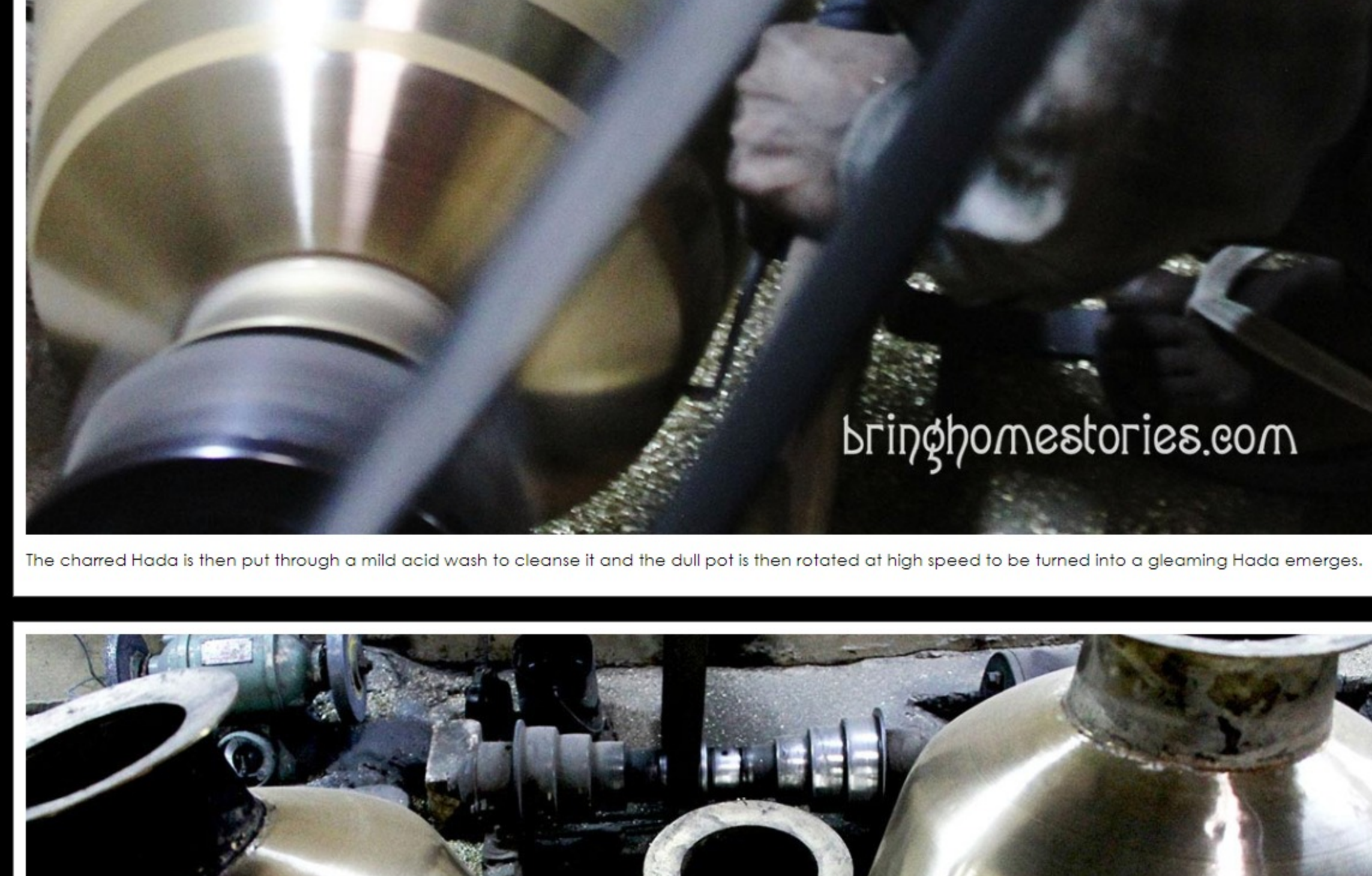
The Hada is made in three different moulds that are then joined together by a generous hammering.



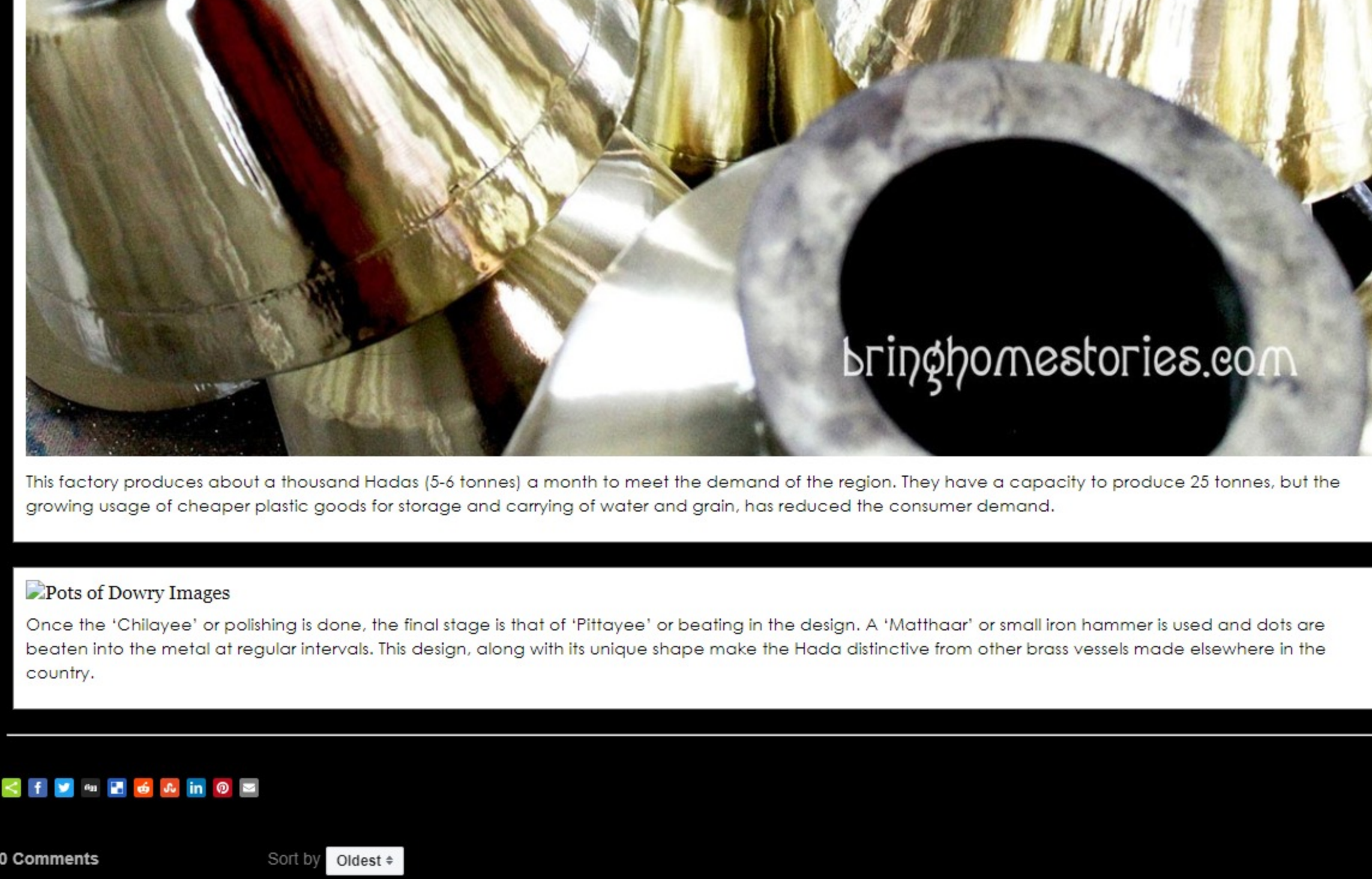
Once the three pieces have been hammered in place, each pot is checked from the inside to see if there are any spaces. This is done in daylight, but under a shelter so that open spaces can be detected as light coming through the inside of the vessel.



After all stages of joining and repairing, the Hada is put through its final ordeal by fire. Only when the Karigar (worker) is satisfied that everything is order, is the vessel removed from the fire. In this process, the Hada now looks almost totally black.



The charred Hada is then put through a mild acid wash to cleanse it and the dull pot is then rotated at high speed to be turned into a gleaming Hada emerges.



This factory produces about a thousand Hadas (5-6 tonnes) a month to meet the demand of the region. They have a capacity to produce 25 tonnes, but the growing usage of cheaper plastic goods for storage and carrying of water and grain, has reduced the consumer demand.

**Pots of Dowry Images**  
 Once the "Onlayes" or polishing is done, the final stage is that of "Pittaves" or beading in the design. A "Matthar" or small iron hammer is used and dots are beaten into the metal at regular intervals. This design, along with its unique shape make the Hada distinctive from other brass vessels made elsewhere in the country.

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