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business immersion programme



MASTERS' UNION × BOOND FRAGRANCES

Post-Read

Why This Immersion Matters

A small bottle of attar looks simple, which is exactly why the work behind it is so easy to overlook. The Boond immersion traced that work from start to finish in a single day:

- flowers growing in the field
- distillation in copper stills
- the clay and leather crafts around the product
- a local exporter's B2B model
- the packaging that reaches the customer

Few immersions show so clearly how one product depends on a whole ecosystem of farmers, artisans and small businesses.

About Boond Fragrances

Boond was founded in 2021 by siblings Krati and Varun Tandon in their hometown of Kannauj, a town long known as India's perfume capital. Their aim is to revive traditional Indian perfumery, support its artisans, and take Indian fragrances to a global audience.

- Process: every fragrance is made with the traditional Deg-Bhapka slow-distillation method, producing natural, alcohol-free attars.
- Sales: Boond sells mainly direct to consumers.
- Packaging: plastic-free and handmade, with locally stitched pouches and handwritten notes.
- Artisan support: the Boond Artisan Support Fund supports the education and finances of perfumery artisans' families.
- Hosts: the day was hosted by Ranjana and Pranav sir.

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From Soil to Scent: The Farm Visit with Gopal Saini sir

The day began on the farm with Gopal Saini sir. Students learned that a fragrance depends on many things before it ever reaches a still: the soil, the season, the flower variety and the time of harvesting. Smelling and comparing flowers made this immediate. A flower picked at the wrong hour, or grown in different soil, simply does not smell the same.

His discussion of festival demand and flower prices linked the farm to the wider market. Farming decisions are made with an eye on when demand peaks and what buyers will pay. His experience, and the obvious joy he took in sharing it, made this one of the warmest parts of the day.

The Heart of the Craft: The Deg-Bhapka Demonstration

The Deg-Bhapka demonstration brought the whole process together. The steps are:

1. Flowers are heated in a copper still (the deg).
2. The fragrant vapour travels through a bamboo pipe into a receiving vessel (the bhapka), which holds a carrier oil, traditionally sandalwood.
3. Distillation is repeated to raise the concentration of the fragrance.
4. Moisture is removed so the attar stays stable.

What stood out most was that artisans manage the process by touch, observation and years of experience rather than instruments. A bottle of attar carries that judgement inside it. It also explains why the craft is hard to scale or automate without losing its character.

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Earth in a Bottle: Maati and Resourcefulness

Maati, the attar that captures the smell of earth after the first rain, is made by distilling baked clay. Students saw how broken pottery, including discarded kulhads, becomes raw material for the fragrance. This gives a second life to material that would otherwise be thrown away and creates extra value for local potters.

Maati showed how one finished product can depend on several crafts and livelihoods working together. It was a quiet example of circularity built into a traditional industry long before the term became fashionable.

A Craft at Risk: The Kuppi Workshop

The kuppi workshop introduced a craft most students had never heard of. Leather is layered over a clay mould, dried, and finished to make the traditional vessels once used to store and transport attar. Seeing the time and effort involved made it clear why the craft is valued. Learning that only a few families still practise it made the challenge of preserving it feel urgent.

The session also included an open discussion about the use of leather, concerns from vegan customers, and the search for alternatives. It was a useful reminder that preserving a heritage craft and meeting modern customer values can pull in different directions. Businesses that work with tradition have to handle that tension honestly.

A Different Model: Mr. Harsh Tandon at Kalishankar Export

The visit to Kalishankar Export, with Mr. Harsh Tandon, showed another way to build a fragrance business. Their model rests on:

- B2B sales and exports
- paid samples

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- customised fragrances developed to buyers' specifications

It showed how manufacturers respond to customer preferences and serve very different markets from the same base of skill.

Comparing the two models was one of the day's most useful lessons. Kalishankar Export builds value through scale, customisation and trade relationships. Boond builds it through branding, storytelling and a direct relationship with the end customer. Both draw on the same Kannauj ecosystem, but they capture value in very different ways.

The Box Tells the Story: Packaging and Local Livelihoods

Boond's attention to packaging was one of the strongest lessons of the day. Each purchase feels personal because of:

- screen-printed boxes
- handwritten poetry
- cotton testers
- locally tailored pouches

The packaging also creates local jobs. Students heard how writing the handwritten notes helps Sejal's sister save for her higher education, which made the employment impact concrete.

For students from family businesses or building their own brands, the lesson carries over directly. Customers increasingly value the people, effort and care behind a product. A brand that tells that story honestly turns its supply chain into part of what it sells.

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What Students Take Away

The day followed a single journey: from soil and flowers, through the copper still and the clay and leather crafts, to an exporter's catalogue and a handwritten note inside a box. Each stop showed the same thing from a different angle. Value in a traditional industry is created by many hands, and the businesses that last are the ones that make those hands visible to the customer.

Ranjana and Pranav sir made the day warm, interactive and easy to follow. Pranav sir's detailed explanations and Ranjana's stories about the products, people and customers connected the craft to the business throughout.

Questions Worth Sitting With

- Deg-Bhapka depends on artisans' judgement rather than instruments. How can a business like Boond grow without diluting the craft that makes its product distinct?
- Kalishankar Export and Boond draw on the same ecosystem but capture value differently. Which model is more resilient over the next decade, and why?
- The kuppi craft survives in only a few families, and it uses leather, which some customers object to. How should a brand weigh preserving heritage against changing customer values?
- Boond turns packaging into a source of local jobs and a storytelling tool. What would the equivalent be in a business you know or are building?

Glossary

Attar (Ittar)	A natural, alcohol-free perfume oil made by distilling flowers, herbs, wood or earth into a carrier oil.
Deg	The large copper still in which raw materials such as flowers are heated with water.
Bhapka	The copper receiving vessel, usually holding sandalwood oil, where the fragrant vapour condenses and is absorbed.

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Deg-Bhapka method	Kannauj's traditional slow hydro-distillation process linking the deg and the bhapka, still largely run by hand and experience.
Carrier (base) oil	The oil that absorbs and holds the fragrance during distillation; sandalwood oil is the classic base for attars.
Concentration	The strength of fragrance in the oil, raised by repeating distillation with fresh batches of raw material.
Maati (Mitti) attar	An attar made by distilling baked clay, which captures the smell of earth after the first rain.
Kulhad	A traditional unglazed clay cup; broken kulhads can be reused as raw material for Maati.
Kuppi	A traditional vessel made by layering leather over a clay mould, historically used to store and transport attar.
B2B (Business-to-Business)	Selling products to other businesses, such as manufacturers, distributors or exporters, rather than to end consumers.
D2C (Direct-to-Consumer)	Selling directly to end customers through a brand's own channels, without intermediaries.
Paid samples	Trial quantities that potential buyers pay for, which filter serious enquiries and cover development costs.
Customised fragrance	A scent developed or adjusted to a specific client's brief, common in B2B and export work.
Tester	A small cotton swab or strip carrying a fragrance sample so a customer can smell it before buying.
Circularity	Keeping materials in use for longer, for example by turning broken pottery into a fragrance input instead of waste.