



A voice at the door. *A place at the table.*

A resident-led way to keep Pune's wadas alive:
hear a story, make something together, and return
when invited.

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How might heritage stay alive while it changes?

Design Days asked us to choose one living heritage and make it useful in everyday life, rather than freeze it behind glass.

WE CHOSE

Pune's wadas, and the shared courtyard life inside them.

1 Who is being left out?

Elders who hold the memories, and young people who never step inside.

2 Who holds the knowledge?

The families who lived around the chowk, and the makers who still practise.

3 How can it change on its own terms?

When the household decides who comes in, and when.

A wada was built around people, not walls.

Families shared one courtyard: festivals, meals, children, chores. That shared life is the heritage.

- Many wadas are now divided, neglected or waiting for redevelopment.
- Temples and forts draw attention; wadas stay “hidden in plain sight”.
- The people who remember chowk life are growing old.



Vishrambaug Wada courtyard. Wikimedia Commons.

OUR PROCESS

From listening to a working prototype

DISCOVER

Listen

Wada visits, 15+ conversations, a 120-response survey in Marathi and English.

DEFINE

Find the real problem

Affinity mapping, empathy maps and journey maps.

DEVELOP

Explore three directions

Wada Marathon, Speaking Artifacts, Cultural Hub.

DELIVER

Build Chowk

A service, two connected phone journeys and a pilot plan.

We listened in courtyards, in two languages.

120 survey responses
65 English · 55 Marathi

15+ conversations with residents, visitors and enthusiasts

2 wadas studied in depth
Shitole Wada, Nana Wada



Field visit, Wadas of Pune research.

People come for the stories, but no one tells them.

66% are drawn by history and stories

64 of the 97 who had visited

43% found missing information or guides

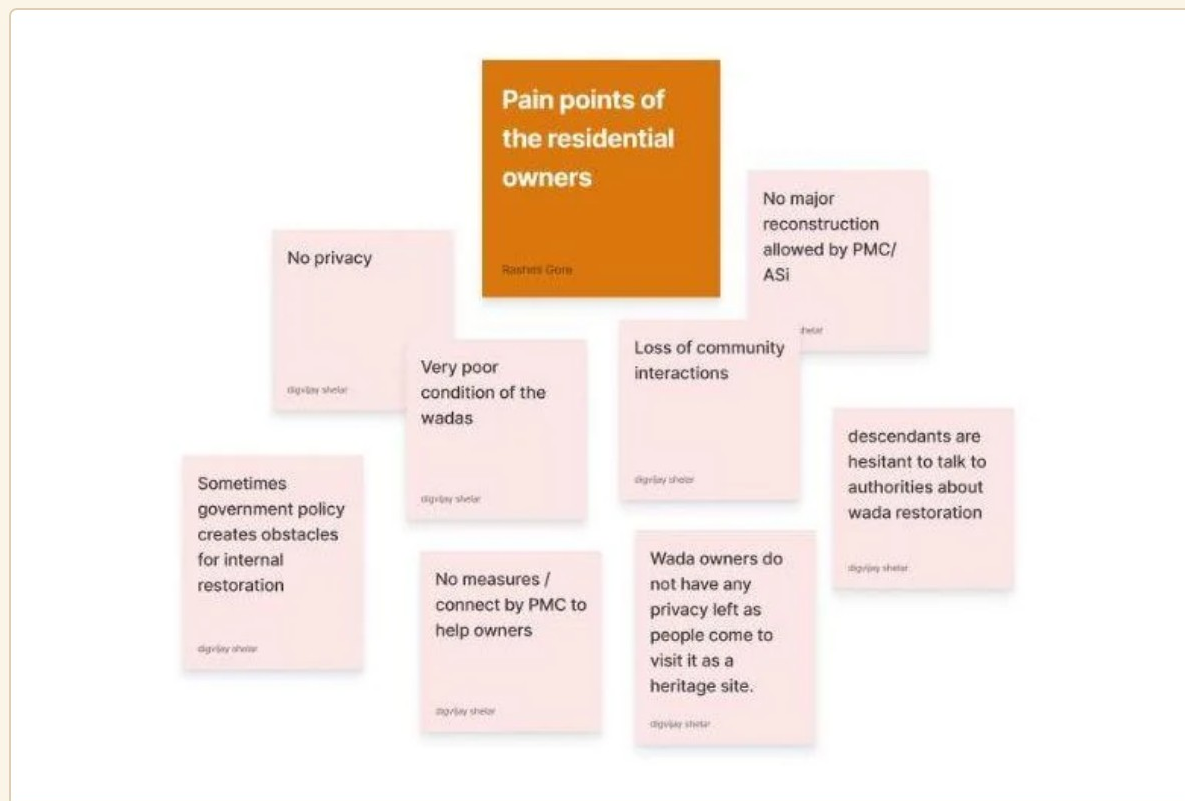
42 of the 97 who had visited

so

A story should meet visitors at the door, in their language, told by the people who lived it.

Survey of 120; 97 had visited a wada.

A wada is someone's home before it is heritage.



Affinity mapping, Fig. 7.

Affinity mapping from our research.

- Residents worry about privacy, strangers and upkeep.
- Elders feel their wada, and their memories, are being overlooked.

so

Residents must control what is shared, who enters and when. Nothing happens without their yes.

One visit rarely becomes a relationship.

81% have visited a wada
97 of 120

93% say preserving wadas is important
112 of 120

- Most visits are occasional and one-off.
- People want wadas used for culture and gatherings, not only seen.

so

Give people a reason to take part, and a respectful way to come back.

Survey, 120 responses.

Design the return, not only the entry.

How might a first encounter with a wada grow into a relationship that the household controls?

RESIDENT

“Let me share, and choose who comes in.”

VISITOR

“Help me take part, not just look.”

MAKER

“Pay me fairly to teach my skill.”

Three directions. We chose the one that brings people together.

WADA MARATHON

A trail of check-ins and stamps.

Reaches places, not people.

SPEAKING ARTIFACTS

Objects that tell their own story.

Costly hardware, no relationship.

CULTURAL HUB ✓

Gatherings and making in the courtyard.

Our foundation, made resident-led.

INTRODUCING



The *chowk* is the open courtyard at the heart of every wada, where families met, cooked, celebrated and raised children together. We named the service after the place it brings back to life.

Chowk: hear, make, return.



1 · HEAR

Aaji records a memory on WhatsApp. Once she approves it, it plays at her door.



2 · MAKE

Visitors join a 90-minute session she chooses to host. ₹250, paid once she says yes.



3 · RETURN

A visitor may ask to come back. It's free, and only by her invitation.

Two people, two phones, one shared decision.

AAJI · RESIDENT

WhatsApp

No app to install. Voice notes in Marathi and simple yes or no buttons.

Her approved story →

Her hosting terms →

Coordinator

a real person checks every yes

← Seat and return requests

ROHAN · VISITOR

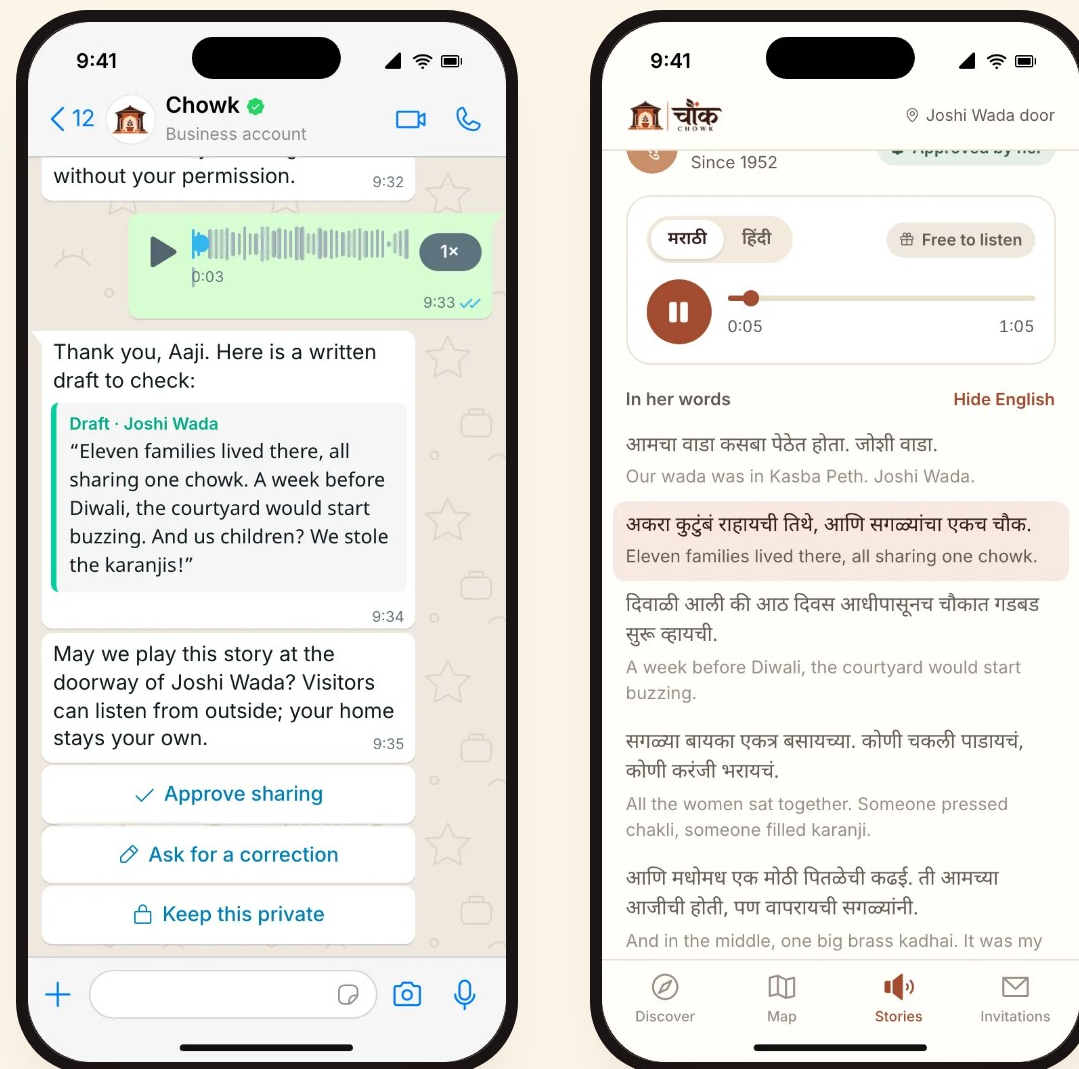
Chowk app

Scan the door to listen. Discover, request a seat, ask to return.

Who does what, from the first knock to the return.

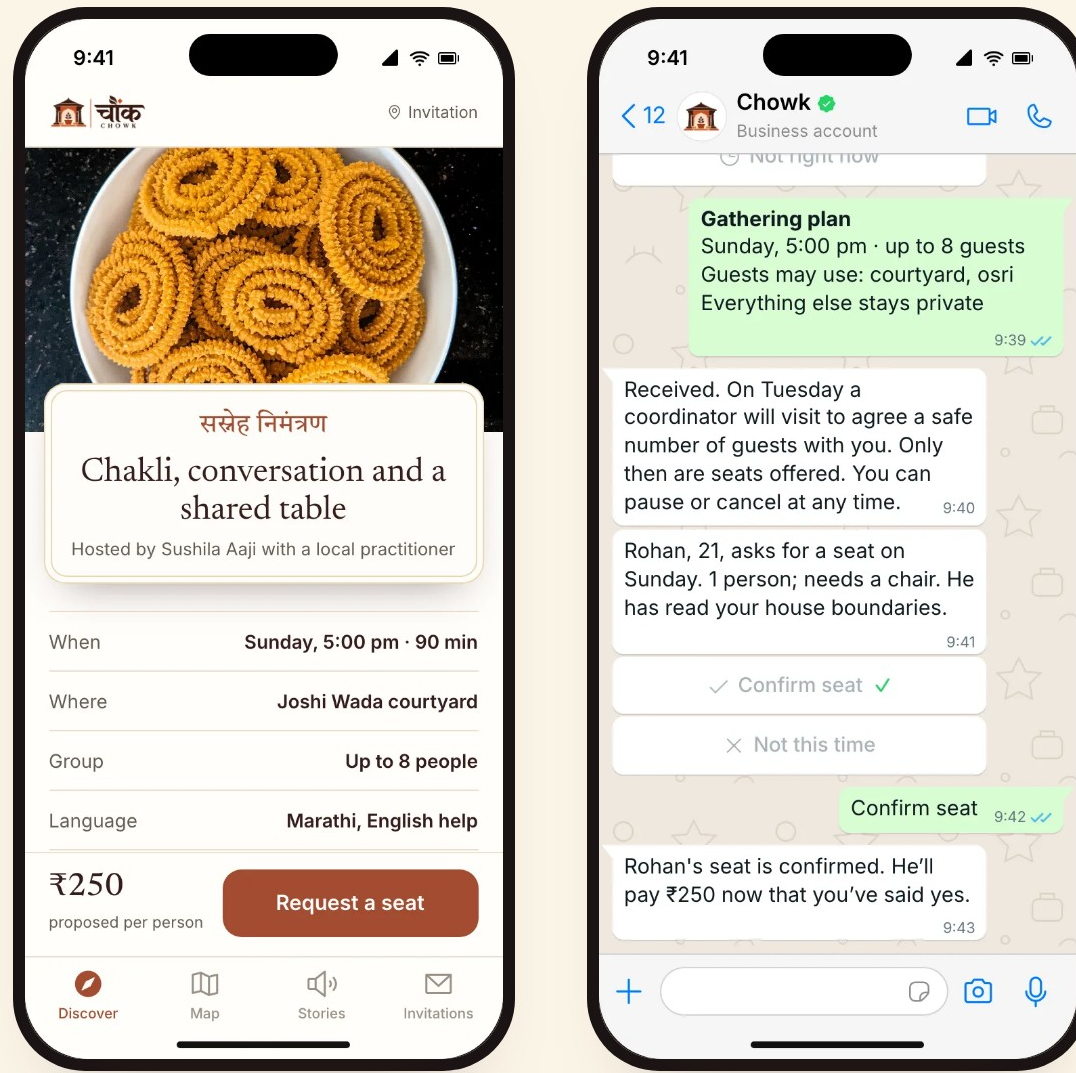
	REACH	AGREE	HEAR	MAKE	RETURN
Aaji	Met in person through her wada's residents and the local mandal. A coordinator explains Chowk in Marathi.	Hears the terms read aloud. Says yes on WhatsApp, and can stop at any time.	Records a voice note. Approves, corrects or keeps it private.	Sets the day and guests. Confirms each seat.	Says yes or not this time to each return request.
Rohan	Finds the story at the door, on a heritage walk, or through college and heritage groups.	Reads what the gathering asks of guests.	Listens at the door, in Marathi or Hindi.	Requests a seat. Pays ₹250 once she says yes.	Asks to come back. Free, whenever she invites him.
Coordinator	Visits households; finds makers through Aaji's own circle and women's self-help groups.	Records consent, story rights and a safe guest number.	Turns the voice note into a draft for her to check.	Shares the invitation. Is there on the day.	Passes on requests. Checks in with her after each visit.
Behind	Partner list: residents' groups, mandals, heritage walks.	Consent log; withdrawal works at once.	Story stored with her permission; the door player reads it.	Payment held until her yes; fees split 90/60/40/35/25.	Pilot measures logged after every session.

Aaji decides what leaves her phone.



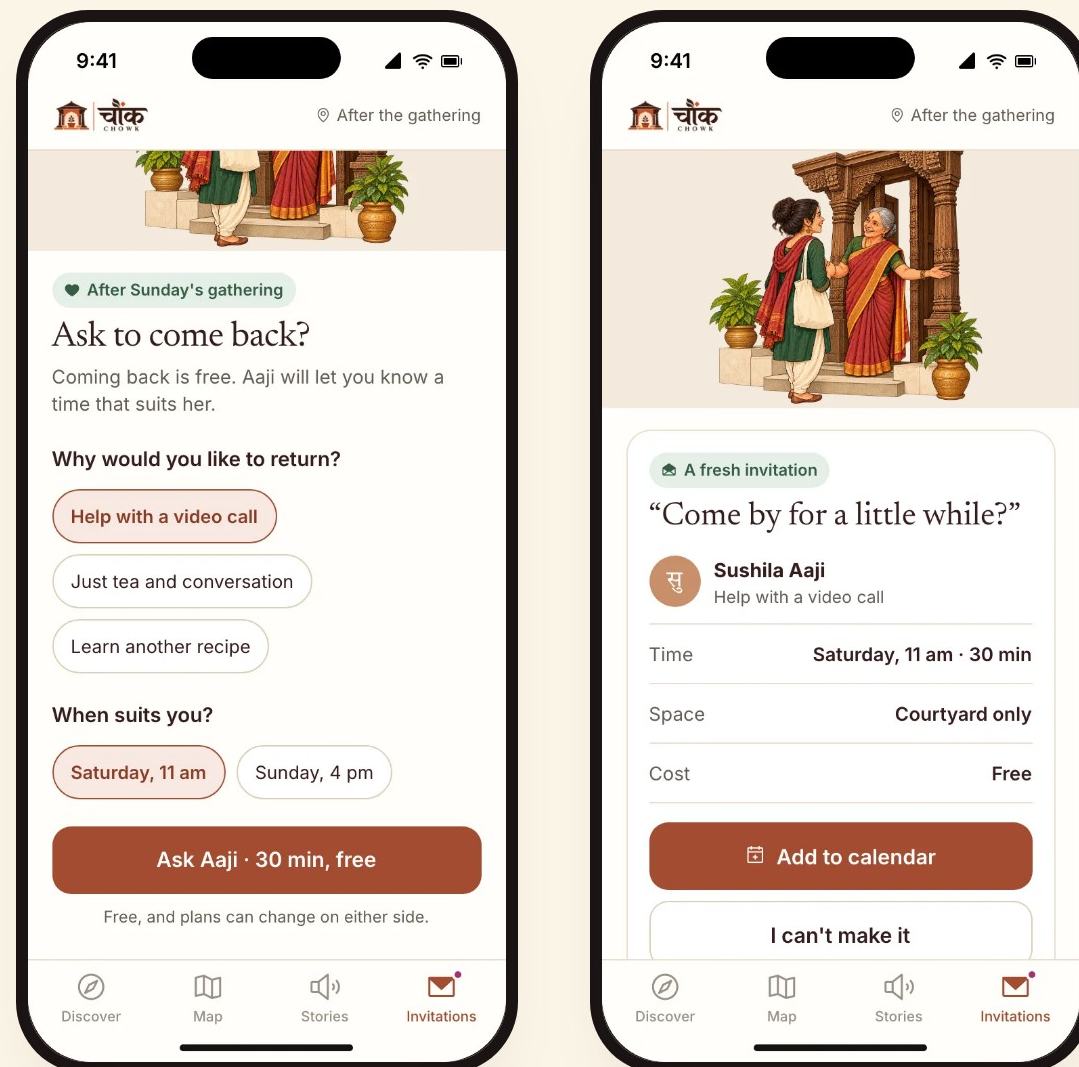
- 1 She sends a voice note in Marathi.
- 2 She approves, corrects or keeps it private.
- 3 Only then does it play at her door, in Marathi or Hindi, with a transcript.

A seat is a request, not a ticket.



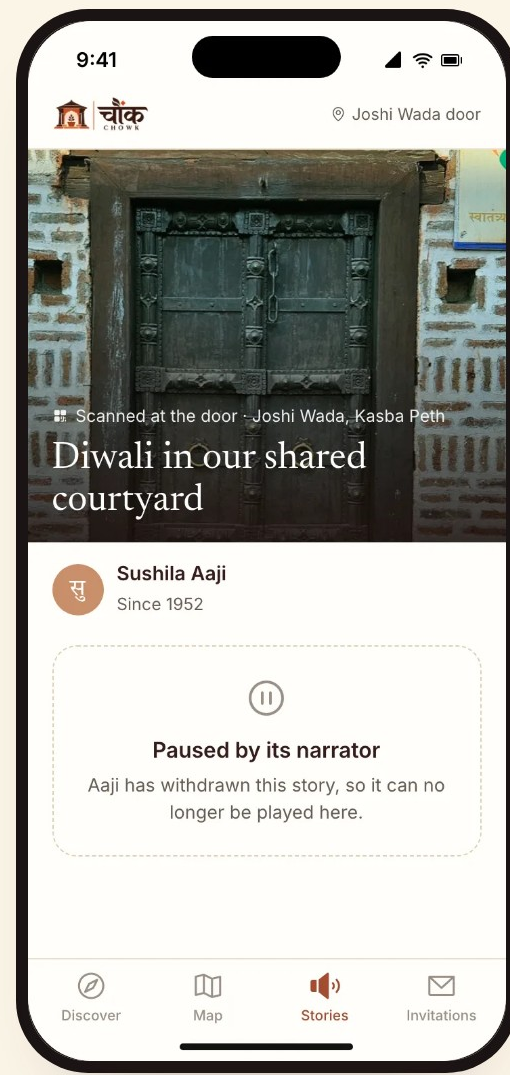
- 1 Aaji sets the day, guests and private rooms.
- 2 Rohan reads the invitation and requests a seat.
- 3 She confirms. Only then does he pay ₹250.

Coming back is free, and starts with her invitation.



- 1 After the session, Rohan asks to visit again.
- 2 Aaji accepts, suggests a time, or says no.
- 3 No points, no passes. Just a welcome.

Every step can be stopped.



- ✕ Keep the story private, or withdraw it later. The door stops playing it.
- ✕ Don't host. No gathering is listed.
- ✕ Say not this time to a seat or a return visit, no explanation needed.

Why Aaji says yes four times.

HER STORY

Before it leaves her phone

It is her memory and her voice. Nothing plays at the door until she approves it.

HOSTING

Before her home opens

A wada is a home before it is heritage. Residents worried about privacy and strangers.

EACH SEAT

Before someone enters

She decides who comes into a private home, and Rohan pays once she says yes.

A RETURN

Before a second visit

Coming back is a fresh invitation. A friendship needs both people to want it.

so

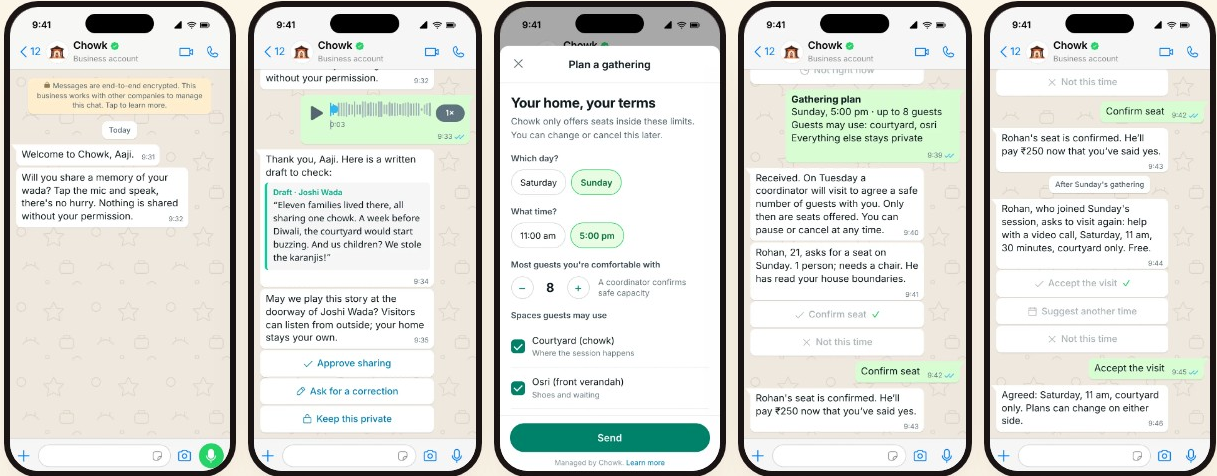
The friction is deliberate, and it is light: one tap, in Marathi, on the WhatsApp she already uses. Rohan sees “Waiting for Aaji” instead of a booking. The pilot measures how fast hosts reply and whether they ask for fewer prompts.

PROTOTYPE · EVERY SCREEN

Fifteen screens, two phones, one flow.

AAJI · WHATSAPP

Shown in English. Aaji sees it in Marathi.



Her welcome

She approves the draft

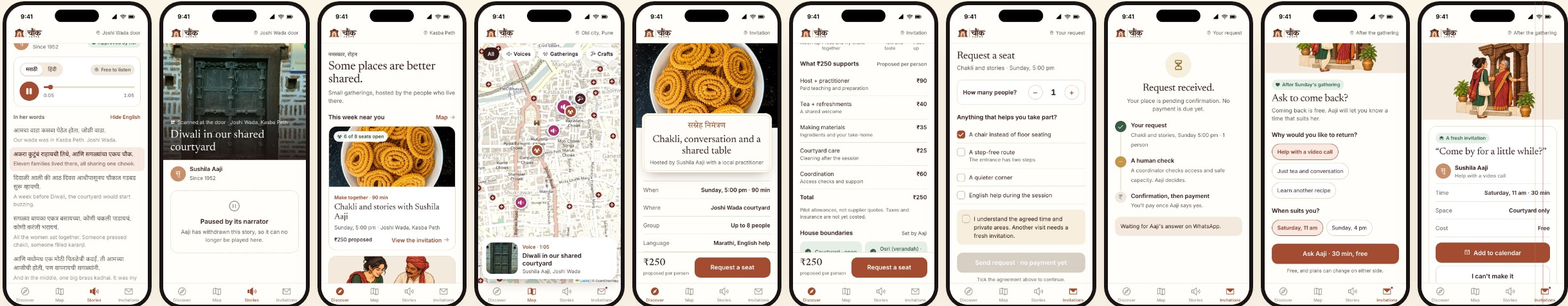
Hosting on her terms

She confirms each seat

A fresh yes to return

Open the full prototype ↗
chowk-prototype.vercel.app

ROHAN · CHOWK APP



Her story at her door

Paused by its narrator

Find a gathering

The map of the peths

The invitation

Where ₹250 goes

Request a seat

Her yes, then payment

Ask to come back

Come by for a while?

WHY EACH DECISION

Every choice traces back to what we heard.

WE DESIGNED	BECAUSE	THE PILOT MEASURES
Aaji speaks on WhatsApp, in Marathi	Elders hold the memories; 55 of 120 answered our survey in Marathi.	• Stories recorded with no help
She approves, corrects or keeps it private	Residents worry about privacy and strangers.	• Drafts approved vs kept private
Her story plays at the door, with Hindi audio and a transcript	66% come for stories; 43% found information missing.	• Listens at the door, and finished
Hosting is a separate yes, on her terms	A wada is a home before it is heritage.	• Host comfort after every session
A making session, not a tour	57.5% want events in wadas; 75% value authenticity.	• Seats requested vs offered
₹250, paid once she says yes, split in the open	Makers want fair pay; 70% saw poor upkeep.	• Visitors who would pay again
Coming back is free, by her invitation	Most visits are one-off.	• Return invitations accepted

Survey: 120 responses, 97 of whom had visited a wada. Affinity mapping from our research.

VISUAL IDENTITY

A courtyard, a tulsi, a word in Marathi.



The mark

A wada doorway with a tulsi in the courtyard: home, care, and something growing.

+



The wordmark

चौक in Devanagari first, CHOWK below. The haldi diamond is a diya's flame.

DISPLAY

Newsreader

Headlines and stories

INTERFACE

Inter

Buttons, labels, data

MARATHI

चौक . आजी

Tiro Devanagari Marathi + Noto Sans Devanagari

Wine

#4B1E25

Headings, the app bar

Clay

#A34C32

Actions, the wada mark

Magenta

#AA316C

Labels, emphasis

Haldi

#C3964B

Highlights, festive accents

Tulsi

#365C45

Consent, approved states

Sand

#F3EADD

Paper, backgrounds

Speak like a neighbour, not a platform.

Her words first

Marathi first, then Hindi and English.
Voice before text.

Ask, never assume

Every step is a question she can say no to.

Short and warm

One idea per message. Plain words an elder reads at a glance.

A home, not a venue

Guests are welcomed, never sold to.

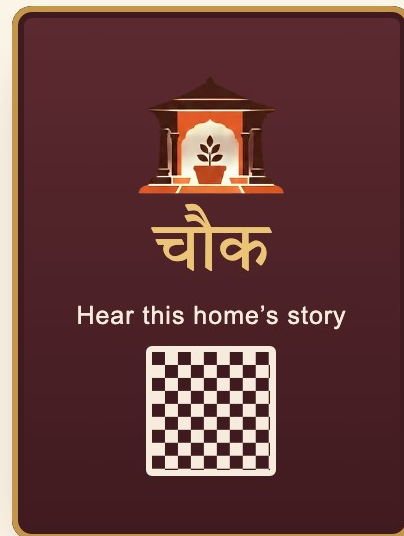
WE SAY	NOT
Guest	User, customer
Gathering	Event, slot
Invitation	Booking
Her story	Content
Come back	Rebook

“Come by for a while?”

The words a return invitation opens with

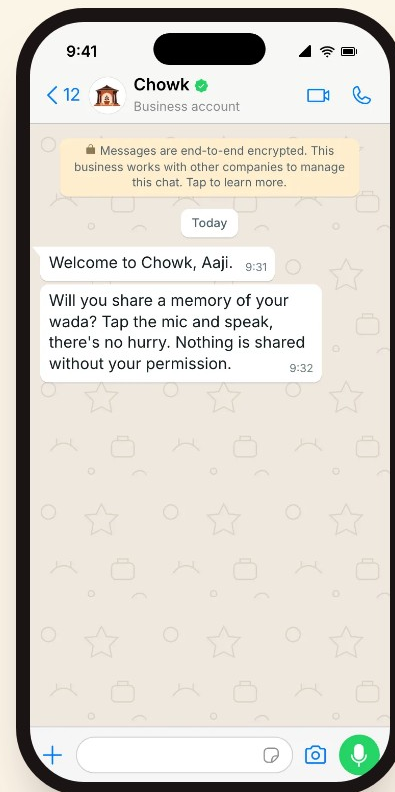
IDENTITY IN USE

One courtyard, everywhere she meets it.



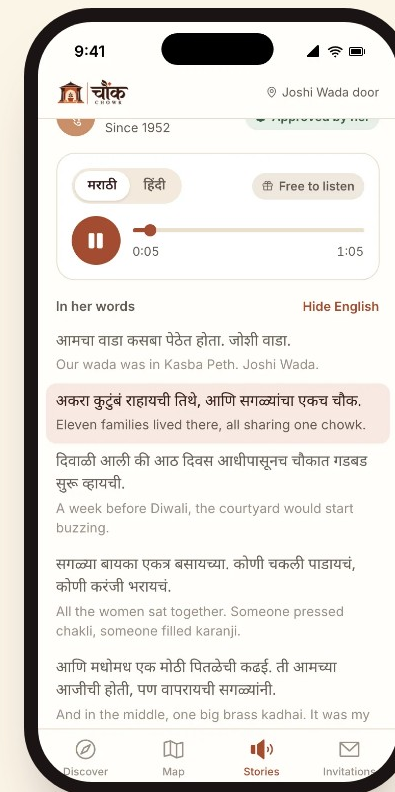
At the door

A brass-and-wine plaque. Scan to listen.



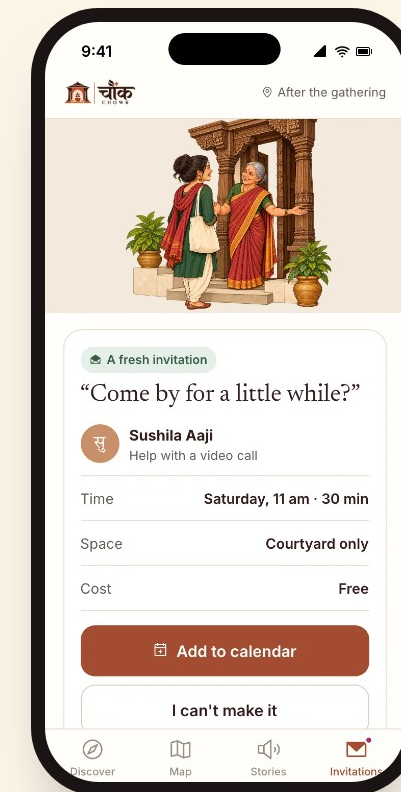
On her WhatsApp

Marathi, voice first, one-tap replies.



In the app

Wine bar, clay actions, her voice at the centre.



The invitation

Haldi accents mark a moment to celebrate.

Built for Aaji first, and for everyone.

CAN'T READ OR TYPE

Voice, not typing

Marathi voice notes and one-tap buttons, on the WhatsApp she already uses.

CAN'T HEAR WELL

Read along

Every story has a transcript that follows the voice.

CAN'T SEE WELL

Listen first

Stories are audio first, in Marathi or Hindi, played at the door.

NO SMARTPHONE

A person to help

A coordinator can record or book on someone's behalf.

MAKING IT REAL

What ₹250 pays for.

Host + practitioner	₹90
Coordination	₹60
Tea + refreshments	₹40
Making materials	₹35
Courtyard care	₹25

A 90-minute session: a welcome, making chakli together, tea, and something to take home.

so

The fee pays fair work. Coming back is its own invitation.

MAKING IT REAL

Start with one household for 90 days.

DAYS 1–30

Agree

Consent, story rights, safe capacity and fair fees with one household.

DAYS 31–75

Try

Three making sessions and free story listening at the door.

DAYS 76–90

Decide

Host comfort, visitor value at ₹250, real costs, return invitations.

so

Our survey did not test the ₹250 price or willingness to host. The pilot does, before anything grows.

JUDGING CRITERIA

How Chowk answers the brief.

IMPACT

Elders' knowledge stays in use, and makers are paid to teach.

66% come for stories · ₹90 of every seat to the host and maker

INNOVATION

A visitor becomes an invited guest; consent is designed in.

Return by invitation · any step can be paused

ACCESSIBLE

Marathi voice on WhatsApp; Hindi audio and transcripts.

No new app for Aaji · a coordinator can help

UTILITY

A real reason to visit: a story, a skill, a shared table.

57.5% want events in wadas · 43% missed information

REALITY OF PRODUCTION

WhatsApp, a light app, one coordinator, one 90-day pilot. Then wada by wada.

Tools that exist today · costs shown line by line · one coordinator per peth

EMOTIONAL QUOTIENT

“Come by for a little while?”

Her voice, her door, her yes

CHOWK

The first visit opens the door. The second makes it matter.

A resident chooses. A visitor participates. A courtyard stays in use.

Digvijay Shelar + Priyanka Wakchaure
Team Katta · MIT Institute of Design, Pune

[Try the prototype ↗](#) [All deliverables ↗](#)



SOURCES

Where every fact and picture comes from.

FACTS AND RESEARCH

384 wadas over 100 years old; 113 awaiting demolition. Pune Municipal Corporation report, via [The Bridge Chronicle](#)

1 in 4 urban elders live alone (25.3%). Agewell Foundation survey of 10,000 elders, via [Deccan Herald](#)

Survey: 120 responses (65 English, 55 Marathi), 97 of them past visitors. Our own research, Team Katta, 2026.

Field visits and interviews: 15+ conversations; Shitole Wada and Nana Wada. Our own research.

READING

Nagapurkar, Narkhede & Sheriff (2020). [Energizing the Future with Memories of the Past: The Wadas of Pune City](#). E3S Web of Conferences 170.

Mohite & Mistry (2025). [Heritage management for Wadas in the core area of Saswad, Pune](#). IJIRT 11(12).

The Indian Express (2025). [Hidden Stories: Wada architecture](#).

Sahapedia. [Heritage sites map](#).

PHOTOGRAPHS · WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

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