

Design Resource

## Karaikudi Wood Carvings

The Craft of Wood Carving

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Mr. Antony William and Mr.

C. Susanth

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/karaikudi-wood-carvings>



1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
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## Introduction

Karaikudi and the neighboring towns hold excellent examples of Chettinadu architecture. The people of Chettinadu were traders and financiers who valued high living and maintained old traditions. They built all-embracing houses, which today stand testimony to their taste and love for beautiful things. They brought back Burmese teak and European tiles for their mansions, as well as the inspiration from ceremonial and palace architecture, they incorporated the wealth of wood sculpting and craftsmanship from local craftsmen in their homes. The minute carvings on the doors, carvings of idols on wooden blocks, placed above the doors, named as Surya Pallakai, is the first greeting to any visitor, who enters in to any Chettinad house.



Karaikudi village has housed a number of artisan families who are traditionally involved in wood carving.



Artisans work in small workshop inside their houses. vibrant hues.



Mainly the family members are involved in the process.



Workplace of a wood carving artisan.

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Artisan showing a carved piece.



Mainly god and goddess are carved on the wood and hanged/ suspended outside the house for good fortune.



Intricate carving done on a wood plate.

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## Tools and Raw Materials

Tools used in carving are:

- Wooden hammer
- Chisels of various size and shapes
- Files
- Right angles
- Sandpaper
- Scale
- Pencils

Raw Materials used are:

- Wood
- Wax

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Chisels of different shapes and sizes are used to give various cut on the wood in order to carve out an intricate shape.

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Carvers/ artisan use paper to trace the designs on the wood.



A special wooden hammer is used to carve the wood. These are made by the artisans themselves.



Various tools which are made by the artisans manually are used while carving.



Wood is procured from the market and seasoned before it is used for carving.

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## Making Process

The making process involves following steps:

- Seasoning
- Cutting
- Marking
- Carving
- Finishing

### Seasoning:

Wood after obtaining from the market is kept in a well-ventilated place for drying purpose. Seasoned wood is the best for carving as it prevents cracks.

### Cutting:

Big logs of wood are cut into desired size with the help of cutting machine. It is further planned to start the carving.

### Marking:

Artisans make floral motifs or motifs of god and goddess on paper. These designs are then used to trace on the wood with the help of carbon paper and pencil. These are rough sketch which is refined gradually while carving.

### Carving:

Once the design is traced, artisans with the help of chisel and hammer start removing the extra wood. After a certain stage again the marking is done and the detailing is added. Face is the last to be carved. It involves a lot of precision and details.

### Finishing:

The carved piece of wood is rubbed with the sand paper to smoothen the surface. There after it is either colored using chemical paints or polished with wax to give it a shine. Hooks are attached if it is a hanging.

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Artisan showing the template of designs to be carved out of the wood.



The tracing paper is kept on the wood plate and designs are traced on the surface.



Rough sketch of the design.



Gradually the intricate motifs are made on the wood surface.

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Carving starts by removing the extra wood.



Artisans use various shapes and sizes of chisel to carve the wood.



Wood after the initial carving. Thereafter again the sketching is done to mark the details.



Carver/ artist starts the second round of carving for giving details to the planned motif.

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Wooden plate after detail carving has been done.  
Face is carved at the end.



Artisans carving the intricate details.



A final intricately carved piece of woods.



The carved piece are colored with the help of chemical paints.

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## Products

During the ancient days, the Chettinad wood craft was often acknowledged for its magnificent and metaphorical 'Chettinad Nilai' (wooden door frames), which elegantly graced the main entrances of the heritage buildings. Karaikudi is well-known for its treasured 'Surya Pallakai', consisting of exquisite and intricate carvings of images, especially of Gajalakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, and a Kalasam (small pot) with coconut and sprouting mango leaves, embellishing the center of the Nilai, which is the first thing any visitor would worship on entering a Chettinad house. The 'Nilai' is crafted by the 'Aasaris' (carpenters) who produce delicately carved sculptures, statuettes and artifacts. Carvings of miniature birds and floral patterns which were less than an inch took a year or two to complete due to the intricate work. Creative workmanship was found in making of the 'Vahanas' (vehicles to gods) and 'Vellerukku Ganesha' (root of a medicinal plant), which were carved by another group of artisans near Pillayarpatti' temple.



Artisan showing a beautifully carved piece of wood showcasing goddess Lakshmi, Saraswati and Lord Ganesha.



A wooden tile of floral motif on it.

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These patterns are today used for making doors and other wooden products.



Detailed view of a carving.



A carved wood mainly used on the top of the door or entrance.

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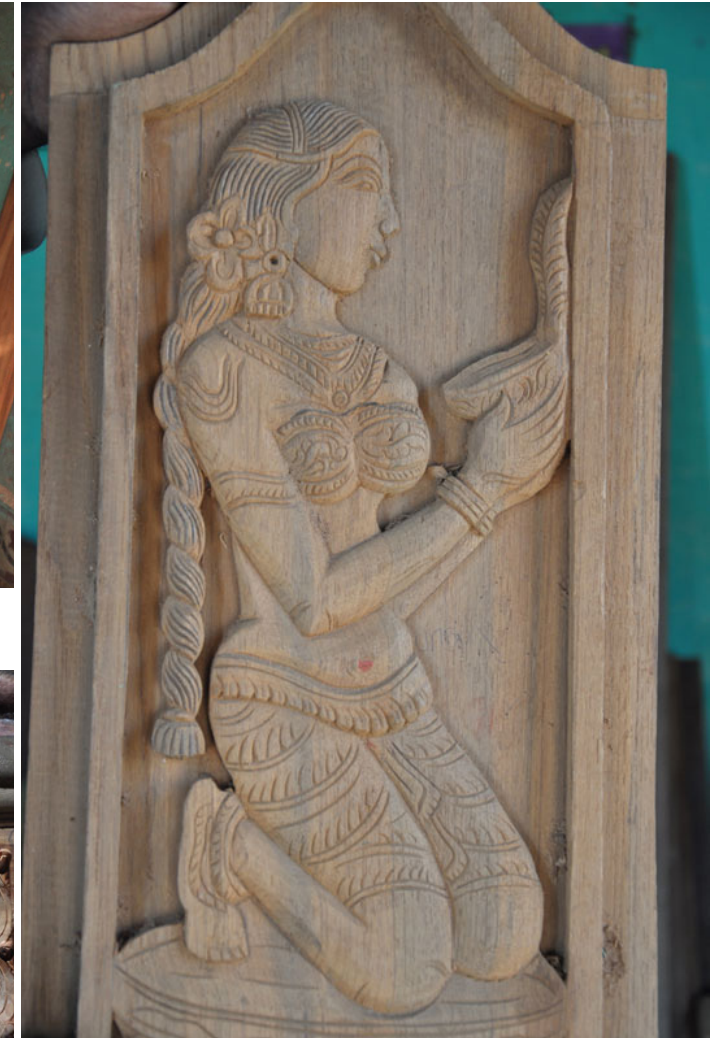
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A piece carved to be used in doors.



Intricately carved floral motif to be used on windows.



Many contemporary motifs are carved on wood to be used for home decoration.

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## Contact Details

This documentation was done by **Professor Bibhudutta Baral**, Mr. J. Antony William and Mr. Susanth C. S. at **NID, Bengaluru**.

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