

Design Resource

Pith Work - Thanjavur

Miniature works of Temples and Idols

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Shruti K. and Vijay G.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/pith-work-thanjavur>



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2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
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Introduction

Tamil Nadu the seventh most populous state in India is a land most known for its monumental ancient Hindu temples, classical form of dance Bharata Natyam and for its traditional arts and crafts. Thanjavur is a district in Tamil Nadu, and an important center of South Indian religion, art, and architecture. The rich art and culture of Thanjavur reflects the traditional legacy and ancestral heritage of the ancient times. Thanjavur is famous for its cultural arts, like Thanjavur painting, art plate, Veena and Taval. It is also well-known for its attractive and creative article in pith work, which is a traditional and heritage handicraft of Thanjavur. The place is also famous for its arts like painting, bronze sculptures, and Musical instruments.

Pith is an herbaceous plant grown in water bodies. Artisans make/create many art products using pith. Pith was originally used in Thanjavur for making garlands out of slices beautifully cut into round shapes and then dyed with different colors.



Art piece of Taj Mahal.

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Miniature of Lord Venkateshwara.



Artisan involved in the work.

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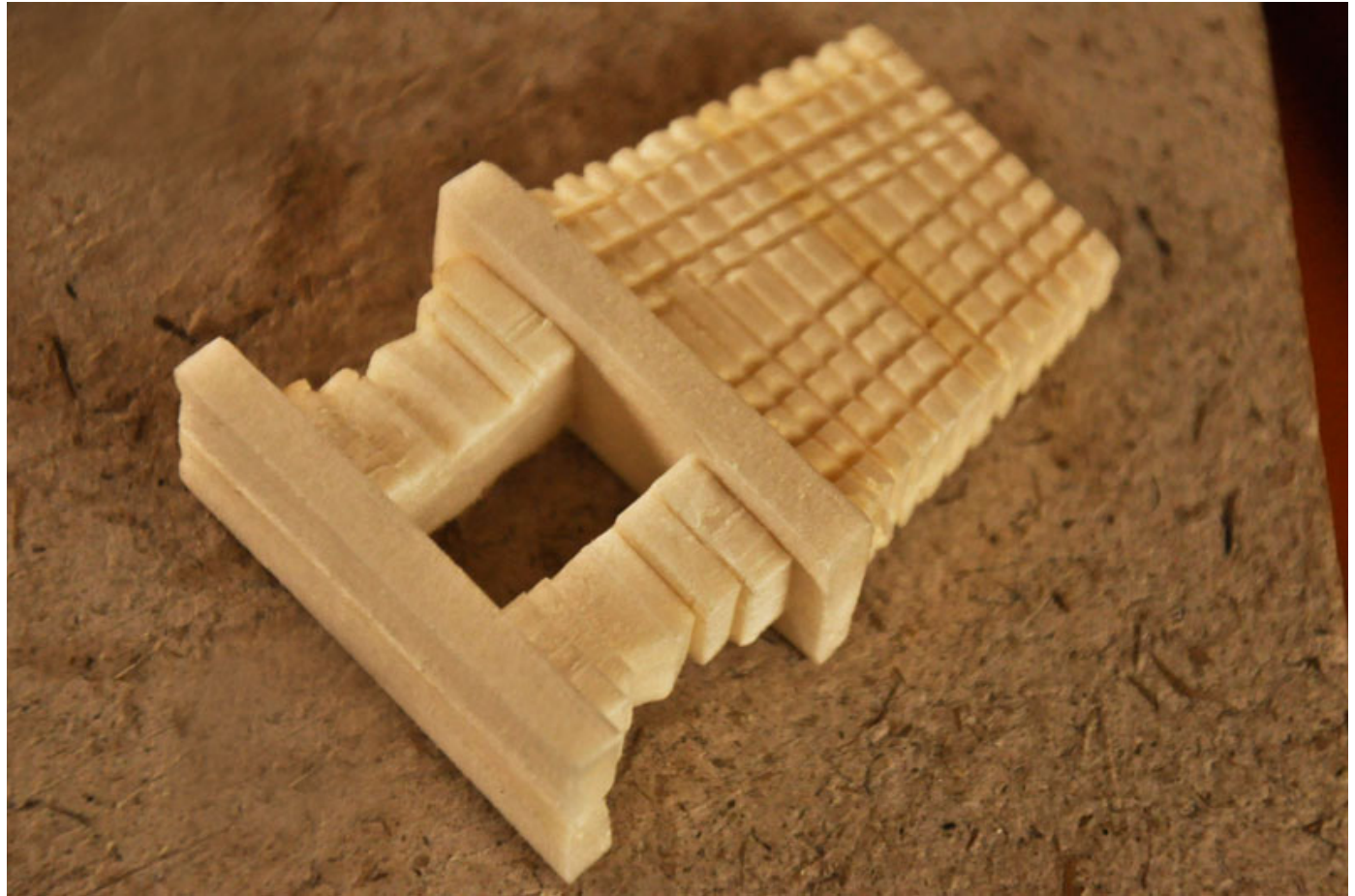
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Carved piece of temple gate.

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Detail is carved on the pith using a knife.



Cut pieces of designed pith.



Semi-finished model of a temple.

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Different stages of idol making.

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tools-and-raw-materials](http://www.dsource.in/resource/pith-work-thanjavur/tools-and-raw-materials)

Tools and Raw Materials

Different types of tools are used to engrave the pith. The tools used are purchased from local markets. The pith used for carving is Shola pith material and it is procured from Andhra Pradesh once in a year and stored. The craft is made at home premises itself. These craft requires no complex tools. Below are some of local tools used:

- **Sola Pith Plant (Netti):** Used to make the miniature art piece.
- **Long Knife (Kathi):** Used to carve the pith into required shape and size.
- **Small Knife:** Used to carve the minute details of the design.
- **Carborundum Stone (sana kal):** Used to sharpen the knife.



Carborundum stone used to sharpen the knife.

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Shola pith by which the miniatures are made.

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Different types of knives used to carve the pith.

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Making Process

Sola-pith is a milky-white, light weight sponge-wood which is grown in marshy waterlogged areas. The biological name of shola pith is *Aeschynomene Indica* or *Aeschynomene Aspera* (bean family) and is an herbaceous plant. Good quality pith is pure white in color with soft surface and no cracks, while poor quality pith is one with reddish core and a hard bark and has many nodes. The pith material is almost similar to thermocol, however pith is much superior to thermocol in terms of softness, texture and luster and is preferred by the artisans. The pith plant seeds are sown in the month of February or March, which grows up into a matured plant within five or six months. These plants become light when dried. The plant grows majorly in the marshy areas of Bengal, Assam, Orissa and the Deccan.

Artisan of Thanjavur, working on this craft purchases the raw materials from Rajmundri in Andhra Pradesh. The pith plant is brought in pieces rate which will start from five rupees. The outer brown skin is removed by cutting with the help of a sharp knife. The inner soft white portion of the stem is used to make the art pieces. The pith locally known as Netti is cut into fine pieces of different designs and shapes as per the requirement of the product to be made. For basic carving long knife is used and for detail and minute carving small knife is used.

The carved pieces are assembled together and stuck with adhesive into one piece of art. Blue prints of the design or photos are used as reference to make the miniatures. It takes one day to make small figures whereas 10 to 12 days to finish a detailed designed big Ganesha idol. It takes almost a month to finish set of art piece of a place or temple. Sometimes customers send the reference of the art piece they want to be made. Some pith works are painted with water colors to make it look colorful and attractive. Customers rather demand for plain pith work craft as they resemble to ivory works.

Thanjavur pith work is famous for miniature works of Thanjavur temples and idol making. The finished pith work is generally fixed to a wooden base and covered with glass to protect from dust and moisture. This helps to preserve the works for years. For normal pieces ply wood made stands are used as base, whereas for big and important pieces teak and wood stands are used. Miniatures of rural and urban place are also made, which are decorated with lights. The art pieces made of pith starts at the range of fifty rupees and goes up to lakh.

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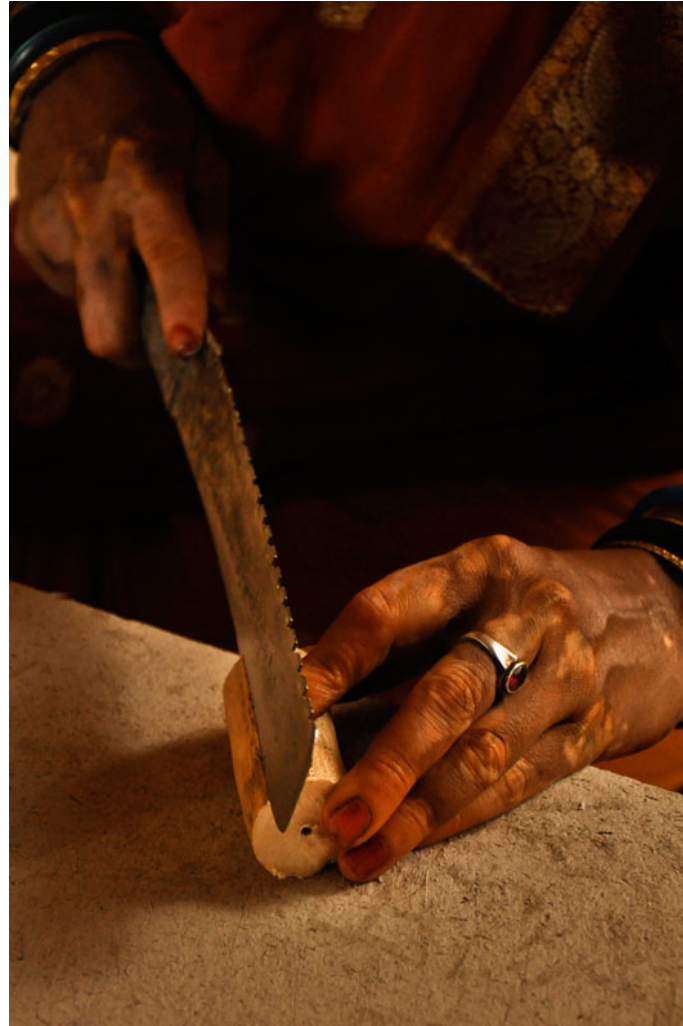
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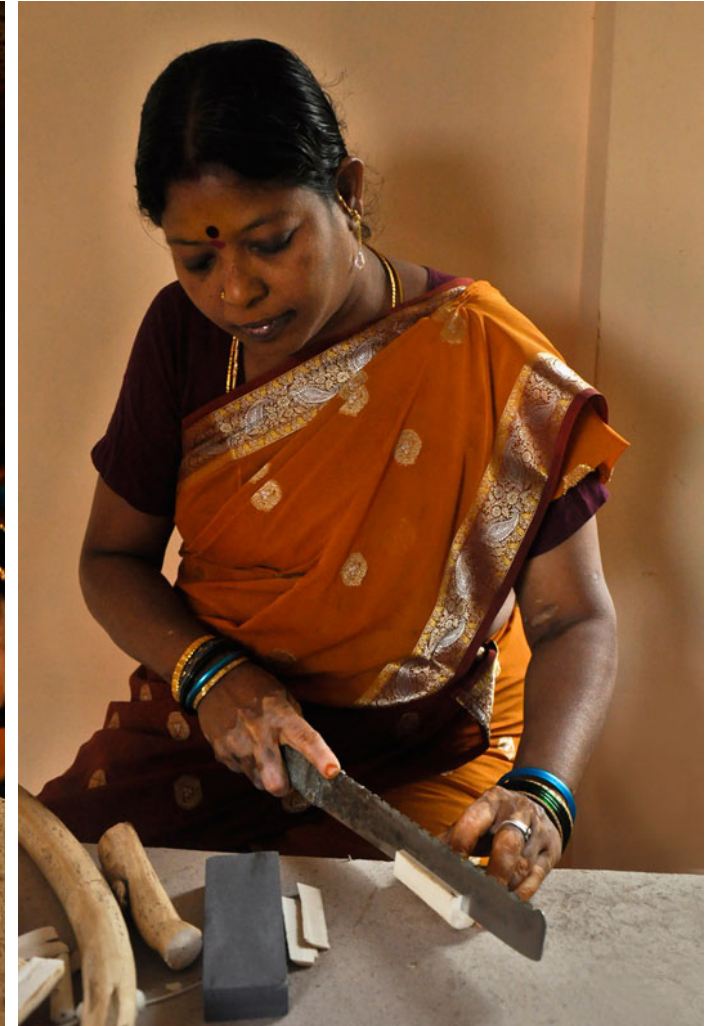
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The outer skin of the pith is cut and removed.



The white part of the pith is used to make the miniatures or art works.

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Pith is cut into different size shapes according to the design of the product.

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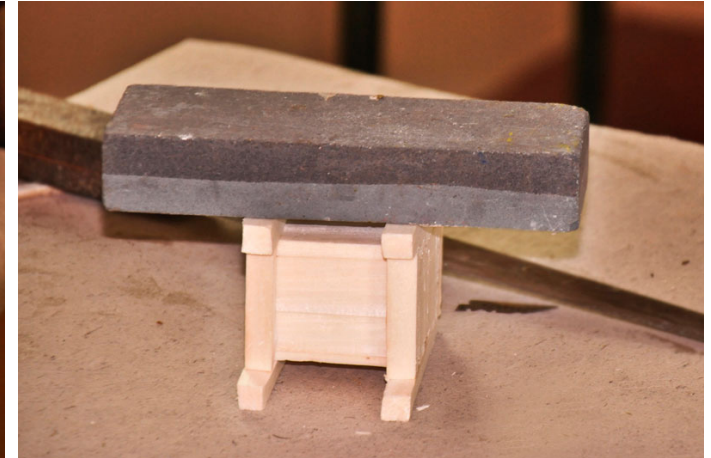
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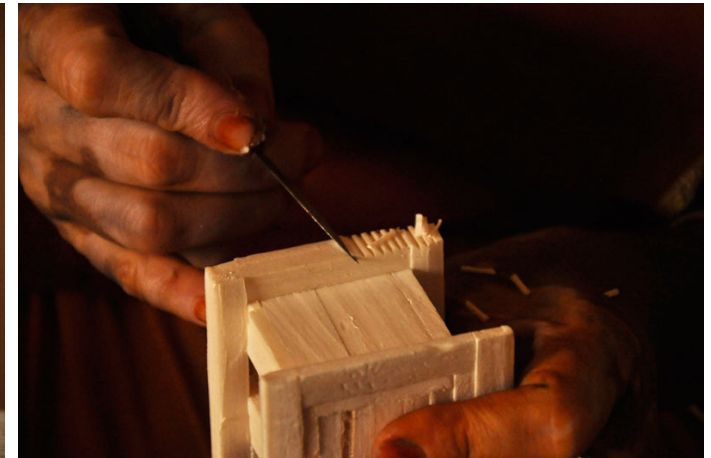
The cut pieces are joined together using adhesive.



Heavy object is kept on the joined model to fix them perfectly.



Extra sides are cut and removed and this way the art work gets its perfect shape and form.



Details are carved using small knife.

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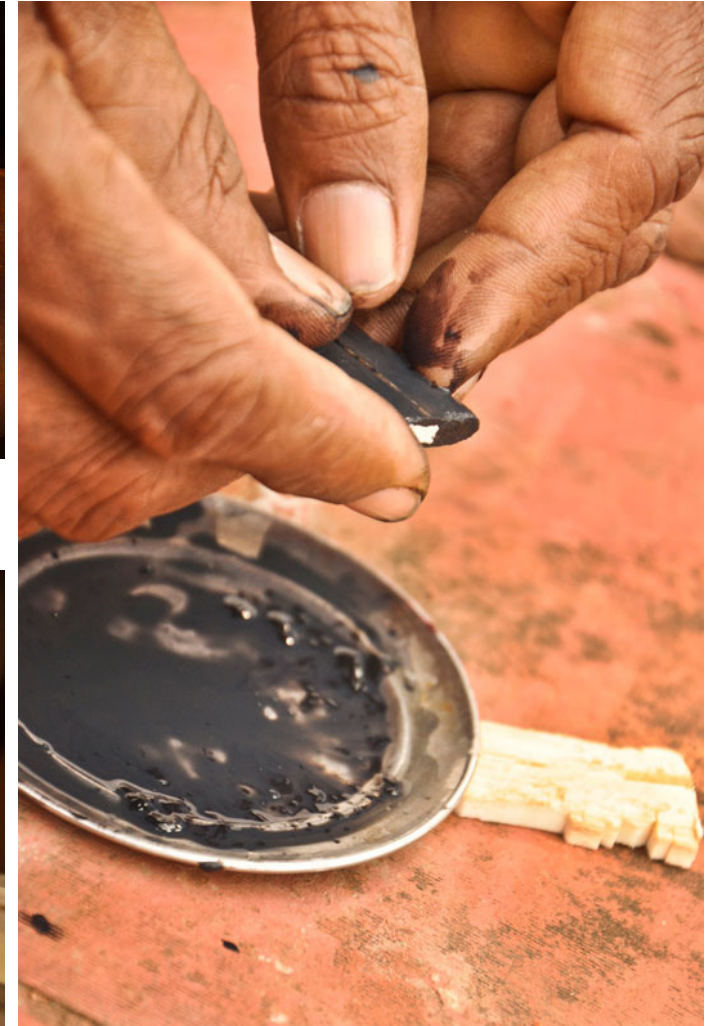
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Floral patterns are carved on pith.



The designed pieces are colored with water colors if required.



The carved designs are cut into required quantity and sizes.

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Colored pieces are dried in sun.



Design pieces are pasted to complete the temple model.



Semi-finished model of a temple.

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Displaying different stages of a temple model.

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Products

Pith work is a traditional art of Tamil Nadu. The main art pieces are the miniatures of Thanjavur temples. The other art pieces are idols of god and goddesses, Taj Mahal, Brihadeshvara Temple, Tirupathi Temple, Madurai Menakshi idol and temple, miniature models of rural and city places and home decoration items. The product starts from the range of 150 rupees and ends up in lakhs. The products are designed according to the artisan's creativity. To avoid from dust the product is covered with a glass case/frame which preserves the product for more than 20 years.



Temple of lord Shiva beautifully engraved.



Pith carving of a temple idol.

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Miniature of Tirupathi temple.



Twenty year old art piece of pith work.

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Detailed carved figure of Lord Venkateswara.



A miniature of Murgan Temple of Tamil Nadu.



Miniature of Thanjavur temple.

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Video



Pith Work Part 1



Pith Work Part 2

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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Shruti K. and Vijay G. at **NID Campus, Bengaluru**.

You can get in touch with

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