

Design Resource

Traditional Wooden Idols - Puri, Orissa

The Icons of Hindu Deities

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and
Sandhya B.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/traditional-wood-en-idols-puri-orissa>



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Introduction

Goa is a state situated in West India, bounded by states Maharashtra in the north and Karnataka in the south, Bhubaneshwar is a capital of Orissa, a state in India. The history of this place is three thousand years old and it begins with Mahamegha-bahana dynasty. The name is said to be derived from Tribuwaneshwar, meaning the Lord (Eshwar) of the three world (tribhuwan). The place has got many names and is also called as city of temples. There are many temples at Bhubaneshwar, Lingaraja temple, Rajarani temple, Muktesvara temple, Siddeshwara temple, Parasurameshwara temple, Ananta Vasudeva Temple, Kedar Gauri temple, Brahmeshwara temple and more are few of known temples of centuries, hence the name and it is referred as 'Temple city of India'.

The most worshipped deity in Odisha is Lord Jagannath and the temple is an important pilgrimage destination for many worshippers of Lord Krishna and Lord Vishnu. It is most visited by Hindus. The icons of Hindu deities are usually made of stone or metal but the idol of Lord Jagannath is made of wood. The legendary story told of the temple origin is that the image of Jagannath, a diety form of Vishnu at the end of Treta Yuga established near a banyan tree near seashore in the form of Blue Jewel. The power of Blue Jewel was that it could give Moksha (Salvation) instantly, so the god Dharma and Yama wanted to hide it in the earth and was successful. The King Indrayumna of Malwa in Dvapara Yuga wanted to find that secretive image and to do so he performs harsh sacraments to obtain his goal. Vishnu then instructs him to go to the Puri seashore and find a floating log to make an image from its trunk. The King finds the log of wood and Yagna God appears and instructs the King that Narayana (Lord Vishnu) should be made as four discrete expansions that is Paramatma as Vasudeva, his Vyuha as Samkarshana, Yogamaya as Subhadra, and his Vibhava as Sudarsana. Vishwakarma appears in the form of artist and the images of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra are created. When this log, radiant with light was seen floating in the sea, Narada tells the king to make three idols out of it and place them in a pavilion. The King Indradyumna got Visvakarma, the architect of Gods, to build a magnificent temple to house the idols and Vishnu himself appears in the guise of a carpenter to make the idols on condition that he has to be left in peace until he finished the work. But just after two weeks, the Queen develops an anxiousness. She takes the carpenter to be dead as no sound comes from the temple. Therefore, she requests the king to open the door. Thus, they visit to see Vishnu at work where he is found to be gone leaving work, the idols unfinished. The idol was devoid of any hands. A divine voice instructs the King to install them in temple and in spite of the idol being without hands is believed to have a watch over the world. For this the idol of Lord Jagannath is made in wood (Neem wood). The image in a temple is dear for a devotee as it bears the mark of his Lord and stands for something which he holds holy and everlasting. One superimposes all the qualities of the Lord on the image and prays. The lord is put over on the image and the image creates divine thoughts in the worshipper. Idol worship is seen all over and it makes concentration easier and simpler.

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The idol of god Jagannath (right) with Subhadra (centre) and Balabhadra (left).

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The wooden idols are coloured to enhance the look.



The wooden idols are being worshipped.

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Artisan carving the idol of Lord Jagannath.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools that are used for the wooden carving are:-

- **Chisel:** Chisels are used to carve and give depth to the wood.
- **Hammer:** It is used to chisel the wood.
- **Wooden Block:** Blocks of neem trees are used to carve the idols.
- **Paint:** Enamel colors are used to paint the idols.
- **Flat Brush:** It is used to give a coat of base color.
- **Round Brush:** Thin round brush is used to give minute details on the idols.



Wood carving tools – metal scale, handsaw, bull point and flat chisel and mallets.

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Neem wood is the basic raw material for idol making.



Emery paper is used to sanding down the rough surface.

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Nails are used to join the wood pieces.



Table buffing machine for smoothening the surface.



Brushes made of squirrel hair are used to paint the idol.

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Oil based paints(Asian paints) are used to colour the idols.

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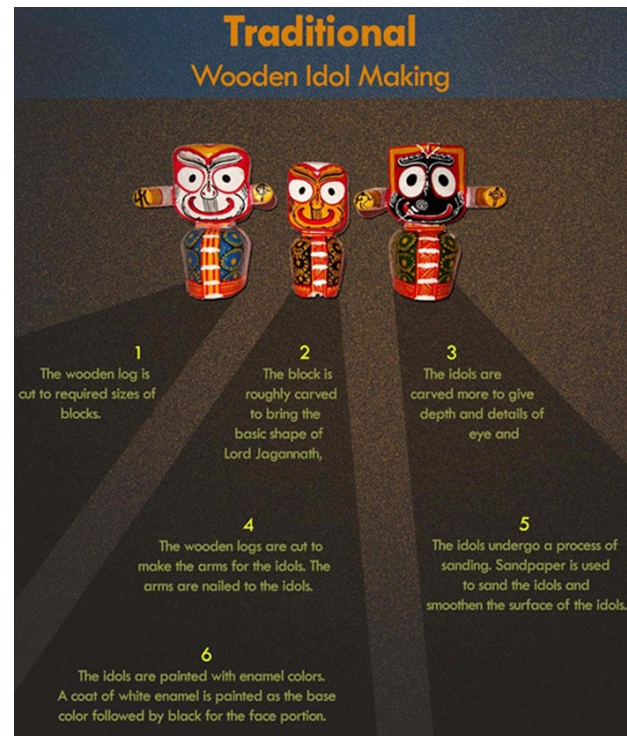
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Making Process

The wooden idols are carved to make replicas of Lord Jagannath at Bhubaneswar. Every twelve or nineteen years these wooden figures are ritualistically replaced by using sacred trees that have to be carved as an exact replica at the temple. Nabakalebara is a symbolic recreation of wooden forms of deities at Jagannath Temple, Puri. In the temple there a periodic restoration of wooden forms and the occasion occurs for every twelfth year of the previous Nabakalebara. The wooden idols are cut to blocks of required sizes initially. The blocks are roughened with the help of chisel and hammer. The sides of the block are roughened first, nose and the eyes, and the depth for the eyes are chiseled. The arms are attached by nailing. The idol is sanded with sandpaper to give a smooth even surface. The idol then is painted with enamel colors. The most used colors are black, white, red, yellow, and blue. A coat of white enamel paint is given as the base color. Black color is filled for the face and further detail work is done using complementary colors. The idols follow certain measurements where only an experienced carver would be able to manage with the measurements to be able to attain number of replicas of the idols same as all. The eyes are painted with black and white circles. Lord Jagannath, Subhadra and Balabhadra are painted with respective colors. Once the idols are completely painted they are packed or arranged for the display to market in the stores.



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Neem wood is used for making god idols according to the Bhavishya purana.



Artisan chiseling out the wooden block to get a rough shape.



Wooden handed flat chisel is used to carve the wood.



Roughly carved wooden block.

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Smoothing the rough surface of the wooden idol.



Handsaw is used to cut the wood according to the required size.

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Arms for the idol are inserted by hammering the nails.



The figurine of lord Jagannath is carved finely.

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The basic coat is applied to the wooden idol.



The painted wooden idol is dried.



Emery paper is used to smooth the uneven surface.



Black colour is applied to the face.

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Enamel paints are used to colour the idols.

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Round brush is used to paint the idol.



Detailing the eye by enameling black colour at the centre.



Finely detailed Lord Jagannath idol.

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Products

The Traditional wooden idols are made with appropriate measurements and sold as presents, mementos and idols to worship. There are particular measurements to make an idol and only an experienced carver would be successful to maintain the size of idols with the replicas made. The idols are made in bigger sizes as well. The price varies according to sizes of idols. The idols are made of neem wood and not of stone or metal. Three idols- Lord Jagannatha, Subhadra and Balabhadra are worshipped.



Idol of Hindu deity Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra.

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Array of wooden idols with different sizes.

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Video



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