Design Resource

Wood Carving - Kerala

The Wooden Crafts

by
Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Mr. Antony William
NID, Bengaluru

Source:
http://www.dsource.in/resource/wood-carving-kerala

1. Introduction
2. Machines and Tools
3. Making Process
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Introduction

Vayalar and Andhkaranazhi beach is located in Alleppey district of Kerala, which is 5 km from Cherthala. Vayalar is a part of the famous vembanad backwaters. The major livelihood of people here is coir making, fishing and shrimp farming. A large number of people who are both skilled or unskilled labourers, work in the coir industry, the sea food industry, wood carving and boat making activities near Cherthala. The traditional houses and temples in Kerala are made of wood. The themes for wood carving crafts are taken from puranic scenes and figures of animals, flowers are carved on furniture, wooden door frames or arch, antique furniture. The main items made of rose wood are animal figures like elephant, horses and tiger and figures of Buddha and Christ statutes, Kathakali masks, pen stand and dressing table are also made out of rose wood.

The statue is carved from white wood locally called as Khumir or Khumal.

The craftsman uses different types of tools to carve the statue.

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Craftsmen at work.

The minute and intricate detailing works are happening on the statue.

The carving is done on the wood railing.

The artisan is doing structural decorative works on the wood.

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The artisan is doing ornamental works on the flat piece of wood.

Carving work is being done on the leg of the furniture.

Various tools are used for the wood carving work.

The craftsman is doing the intricate work on the wooden piece.

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Machine and Tools

The tools are made locally by the blacksmith called Kollan. Most of the tools used are called "Ullies" (chisel). The big chisel is called 'ChuruttuUlli' and the small chisel is called 'KochChuruttuUlli'. Other tools used are:

- VattaVathala - Another variety of chisel.
- KuttuVadhi - Hammer.
- KeetUlli - Small tool used to carve the minute/fine detailing on the wood.

The wood used for carving is white wood, locally called Khumir or Khumal. It's a rare tree, popularly found only in Kerala and in the border of Karnataka. In general, the wood found in Kerala is soft comparatively, durable and easy to carve.

A hand operated mechanical wood cutter.

Different types chisel used for engraving the designs on the wood.

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Set of tools used for carving on the wood.

The small chisel locally called Keet Ullies is used for detailed designing.

A chisel which is locally called Vatta Vathala.s.

Wooden hammer, locally called as Kuttu Vadhi is used for chiselling.

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A machine to make holes.

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Making Process

Furniture Making

Statue Making

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Furniture Making

The process of making the furniture includes three steps – outlining, carving and detailing. The wood carvers are well-versed with the patterns and designs and hence, do not possess a sketchbook, as they have inherited the skill traditionally from their previous generations. They use the template only for outlining and the remainder is done from memory. The process of making the furniture is as follows:

Step 1 - Outlining:
• The outline is drawn on the wood using a template.
• The edges of the wood are cut using the machine as per the design on the template.

Step 2 - Carving:
• After tracing, the wood is carved at the edges with the help of wooden hammer and a flat chisel.
• For carving, firstly, the head of the statue is carved.
• Then, the other parts are individually carved.
• The individual parts of the statue are joined by using wooden pieces, nails and gum/adhesives.

Step 3 - Detailing:
Detailing is done with the help of small Ulli (chisel) and not a hammer, as the wood used for carving is very soft.

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The craftsman cuts the wood using mechanical wood cutter.

Each part of the furniture is individually cut and carved.

The process of carving has begun.

The wood is chiselled to get a basic shape.

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The edges are smoothened out with the chisel.

The frame work of the chair is ready.

Using the template the design is traced on the wood.

The outline is traced on a piece of paper and the design is carved.

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Multiple tools are used to carve various designs.

The final product is ready for polishing.

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Statue Making

The woodcarvers of Kerala are skilfulin making and carving statues of various shapes and sizes. The difference in the process of making a statue and furniture is that for making a statue, they only use hand tools. However, for making furniture, machines are used. This is a traditional art inherited from their earlier generations. They use the template only for outlining and the remainder is done from memory. The process of making the statue is as follows:

Step 1 - Outlining:
- The outline is drawn on the log of wood using a template.
- The edges of the wood are chiselled as per the design on the template.

Step 2 - Carving:
- After tracing, the wood is carved at the edges with the help of wooden hammer and a flat chisel.
- For carving, firstly, the head of the statue is carved.
- Then, the other parts are individually carved.
- The individual parts of the statue are joined by using wooden pieces, nails and gum.

Step 3 - Detailing:
Detailing is done with the help of small Ulli (chisel) and a hammer, as the wood used for carving is very soft.

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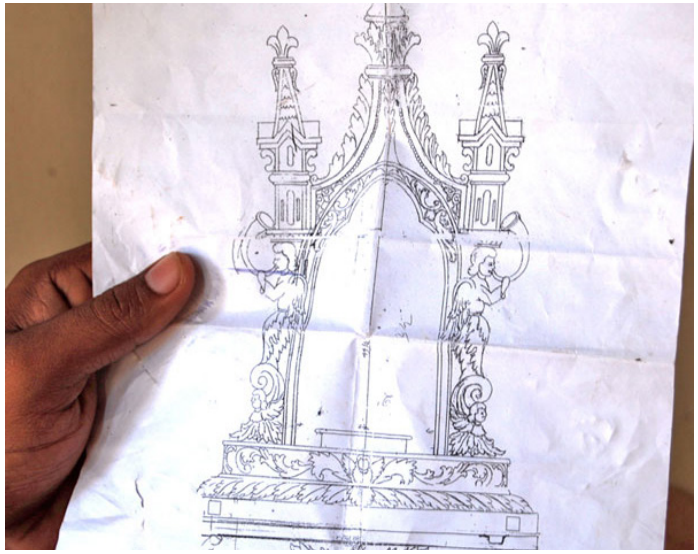
The craftsman is cutting the log with a mechanic wood cutter.

The effigy is used to carve the outline and aligned on the wood for carving.



The design is used for reference.

Reference image.

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The carving begins from the sides of the log.

The wooden hammer helps in engraving on the wood.

The craftsman skilfully carving the statue.

The wood carver is giving facial detail to the statue.

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The different parts of the statue are carved separately.

The artisan engrossed in carving process.

The sharp edged chisel is used for the fine detailing.

All the different parts are joined together using nails.

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The final statue of the saint is now ready.

The statue of Saint Mary, skilfully made by the artians.

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Links

- Craft Design in India
- Online Infomation Centre for Crafts
- Handmade in India
- Crafts Council of India
- Craft Mark

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This documentation was done by Professor Bibhudutta Baral and Mr. Antony William at NID, Bengaluru.

You can get in touch with Professor Bibhudutta Baral at bibhudutta[at]nid.edu

You could write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

Helpdesk Details:
Co-ordinator
Project e-kalpa
R & D Campus
National Institute of Design
#12 HMT Link Road, Off Tumkur Road
Bengaluru 560 022
India.

Phone: +91 80 2357 9054
Fax: +91 80 23373086
Email: dsource.in[at]gmail.com