

Design Resource

## Horn Craft - Cuttack, Orissa

Anatomy of Bird or Animal

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Bhargava A. J.

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://dsource.in/resource/horn-craft-cuttack-orissa>



1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

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## Introduction

WHorn craft of Orissa has been around since the time of Sri Krushna Chandra Gajapati Narayan Deb, which was in 1892. He was the Maharaja of Paralakhemundi. Even prior to his reign horn crafts were practiced, but during his reign a lot of carpenters by birth took up horn crafts. It is said that during a fireworks display a hollowed horn was used as a container, where the Maharaja observed a very unique characteristic of horn, he noticed its plasticity. Upon observing this he then asked for a detailed crane of which he had seen a wooden sculpture to be sculpted using horn. He was so pleased with the artifact and also realized the potential of the craft that he set up a workshop and assigned his carpenters to carve using horn. He decided and made a dedicated team of horn craftsmen who would concentrate on the craftsmanship of the product as well as the accurate anatomy of the bird or animal that was to be carved from the horn.

Many different types of products are being created in the present day, which includes pen stands, house décor, Idols of god, lampshades, combs etc. In some cases, places like Cuttack silver filigree are used along with horn crafting to create ornaments. Initially when horn crafts started booming in the late 1800's combs were the major products that were created. These products were not looked at from an artistic point of view and were used as normal products. It was observed that the horns of animals had a very unique property of having a lot of plasticities, which made them very desirable.

In today's world, horn crafts are looked at mainly from an artistic standpoint. Even in the present day horns are being used to create combs along with many other products which include artefacts like decorative pieces, lampshades etc. but they are not in as high a demand as they once were. A lot of cheaper plastic variants are being sold in the market.

As we heard from the artisan that due to the reduction in the demand for the product the total number of artisans has also drastically reduced. In the district of Cuttack from around 150 to 200 artisans the number has come down to 2-3 artisans in the last 20 years.

Over the years although the products that are being created might have changed, the procedure in which these artifacts are being created has not. Tribes of Santhals, Oraons & Marijas mainly practice this art form.

Utkalika - Orissa State Emporium is an organization which is promoting arts and crafts, helping artisans by buying the products from the local artisans in bulk and selling them in shops and malls. Most of these artisans today are selling and advertising their products in arts and crafts exhibitions.



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Not everyone can simply take up horn carving, without the proper kind of licensing owning horns is a punishable offence. One of the major problems these artisans are facing is the availability of horns. In many cases, artisans have been arrested for the possession of these horns although they have the required documentation for owning these horns. In some cases, they even end up spending a night or two in prison until all the documents are submitted. As the raw material gets harder and harder to obtain the art form also slowly keeps on depleting.



Artisan deciding on which tool to use.



Artifact being washed with the help of a leaf soaked in water.



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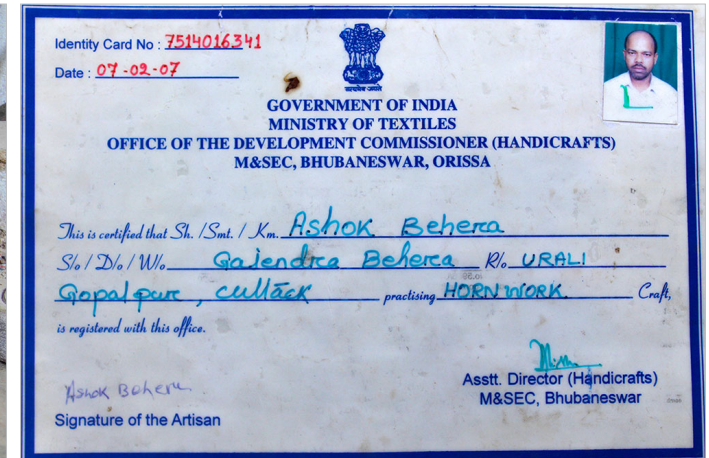
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Some of the finished products (height ranging from 6cm to 30cms).



Artisan's certificate from the Govt. of India.



Polished artifact.

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## Tools and Raw Materials

Tools and raw materials used for Horn Craft are as follows:

- **Horns:** Horns of different animals like deer and buffalo are used in the making of these artifacts. Hollowed horns are used in the making of artifacts like bird's wings, smaller parts in other bigger artifacts etc. and the horns that aren't hollow are used to create the body of the elephant, the peg that separates the toes on sandals and other such artifacts.
- **Coal:** This is another important raw material used in the making process of these artifacts. It is mainly used to polish and give a jet-black look to these artifacts.
- **Files:** Different grades of files are used to smoothen the artifacts as well as in the shaping of these artifacts. Semicircular and circular files are used to smoothen the artifacts with small grooves.
- **Hammer and Chisel:** These are the two of the main tools used to do the rough shaping for most of these artifacts. The chisel is also used to reduce the thickness of the horn so that it can fit into the motor.
- **Hacksaw:** This is used to cut the horns into required lengths and sizes.
- **Table saws:** They are used to cut thick and bigger horns to required sizes and lengths.
- **Drilling machines:** These are used to drill holes into these horns. In many cases hand powered drilling machines are used as the hollow horns are delicate and may break at the force of electric powered drilling machines.
- **Motor:** A motor is used to rotate these artifacts at high speeds while they are carved with the help of files, also the buffing and polishing process is completed this way for certain artifacts.
- **Buffing machine:** These machines are specifically used to give the final finished products a shiny and glossy surface. They are mainly used while creating artifacts, which are made of many different pieces.

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Files of different grades.



Motor used to rotate artifact at high speeds.



Table saw to cut larger pieces of horns.



Drilling machine along with a file.



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Buffing Machine.



Hollow horns.



Hollow polished horn.



Charcoal used to give a shine on the artifacts.



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Amputation saw used to cut the horns.



Buffalo horn.



Hammer come chisel used to shape the horn.



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## Making Process

Making Process of Horn Craft is as follows:

- Depending on the type of final product required suitable type of horn is selected and work is started. Generally buffalo horn is used for the process of carving. Deer's horns aren't used in the process of carving they are mainly used as obtained.
- Once a horn is selected then it is roughly sawed for a flattened top. Then using a hammer and a chisel one end of the horn is made slimmer to insert into the motor shaft for turning process to cut the horn to a desired length.
- The horn is then shaped using the sharp tips of the files. Once after making any kind of a change to the artifact it has to be inspected. And then the carving process can be continued.
- Once the carving process is completed sandpaper is used for buffing the artifact, after which a wet leaf is used to clean and smoothen the artifact.
- Charcoal is mixed with water and is then applied to the artifact which fills up all the small gaps on the artifact making it look jet black.
- Using a clean piece of cloth the artifact is then dried and removed from the motor.
- If required painting is done now along with other fine details. After this, the product is ready for sale.
- In the case of artifacts, which are made of many different pieces, they are all sculpted, detailed, polished and painted separately and once all the separate pieces are ready they are then glued together and are set aside to dry.
- Artifacts, which include flattened pieces like the wings of the birds and the fishes are all made of hollow horns, as they are translucent and give out beautiful colours and look like finished products.

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Buffalo horn being trimmed.



Excessive horn being sawed off.



Artisan sawing the horn.



Reducing the thickness of the horn to fit it into the motor for rotation.



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Horn being rotated at a high speed.



Sawing off the jagged edge of the horn



Carving the horn using the sharp edge of a file.



Roughly shaped horn.



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Creating a hole in the horn.



Shaping the horn.



Finer details being shaped on to the horn.



Buffing the artifact using a sand paper.



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Cleaning the artifact with a piece of cloth.



The final Product.

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## Products

These artisans make many different products, which include birds and animals like cranes, elephants, peacocks etc. These products are of varying sizes ranging from a 3cm keychain to idols as big as 1m and in some cases even bigger.

Depending on orders or requests even bigger or smaller products can be created. Upon enquiring the artisan about his biggest work yet he replied telling that he has made an idol of Ganesha, which is 4½ft tall. Also when it comes to the styling of these products, any kind of product can be created depending on the order. Traditionally birds like cranes and peacocks, and animals like elephants and tortoises are made, but on demand, any kind of product can be created.

Artisans these days are making artifacts with the trend that is currently catching on in the market, making it easier to sell the artifacts. So depending upon the market requirements products are made. In today's market you can find products like key chains, pen stands and paperweights, which have been created in the recent past because of the current requirements and trends.

The smaller products like key chains can cost somewhere in the range of INR 30 – 50. As the size and the quality of the products go up the cost of the final finished product also increases and can cost lakhs for a single piece. The pricing of these artifacts also depends upon which horn is used for the making.



An elephant pen stand.



Deer being chased by a tiger.



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A crane feeding its young.



Mother bird feeding its young.

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Deer taking the leap of faith to evade the tiger.



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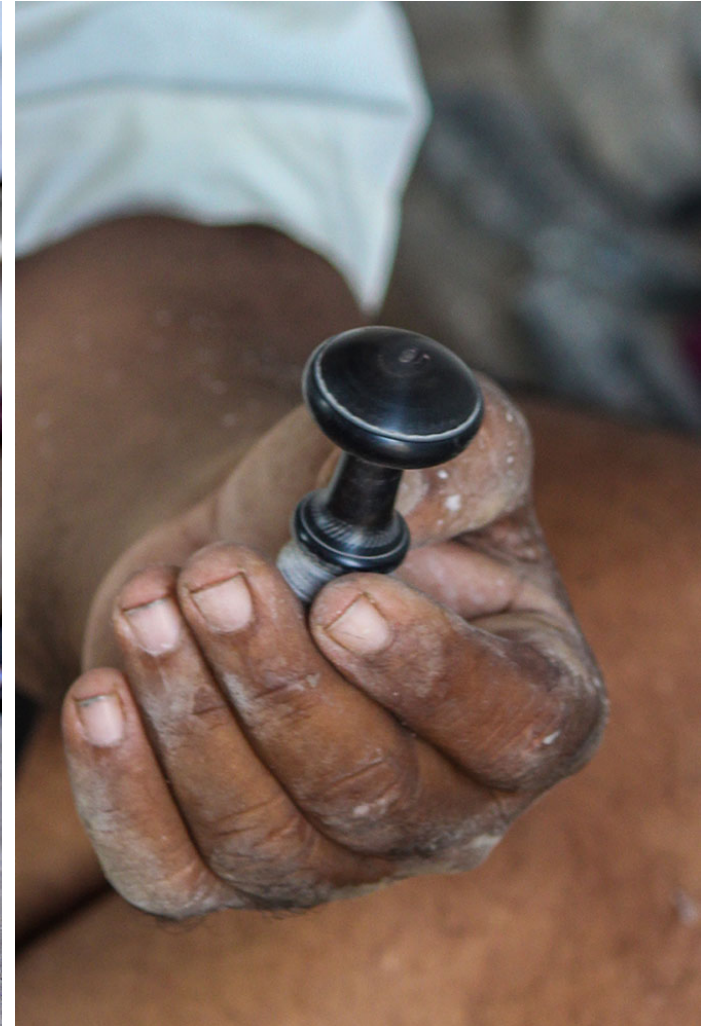
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Two male peacocks.



The toe separating peg on sandals.

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## Video



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## Contact Details

This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Bhargava A. J. at **NID, Bengaluru**.

You can get in touch with him at [bibhudutta\[at\]nid.edu](mailto:bibhudutta[at]nid.edu)

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

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