

Design Resource

Wooden Idol - Varanasi

Hand Carved Idols

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Aakash Sharma

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/resource/wooden-idol-varanasi>



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

Varanasi also known as Banaras or Kashi is a north Indian city on the bank of the Ganges in Uttar Pradesh. Varanasi is one of the oldest living cities in the world. The word 'Kashi' originated from the word 'kas' which means the shine. Kashi is the original ground created by Shiva and Parvati upon which they stood at the beginning of time. It has always attracted a large number of pilgrims and worshippers from time immemorial.

The art and culture of Varanasi are unique. It is the rich cultural tradition of Varanasi that makes it the cultural capital of India. A combination of archaeology, mythology, geography, art and history makes Varanasi a great center of Indian culture. Varanasi presents a complete museum of Indian art and culture. At Varanasi, one can feel the changing patterns and movements in course of history. It has a rich and unique style of art forms and folk art. For centuries, Varanasi has produced master craftsmen and earned a name and fame for its beautiful sarees and handicrafts.

Besides the famous Banaras Sari, brassware, copperware, Ivory work, glass bangles, Wood carving, Carpet weaving, stone, clay toys and exquisite gold jewellery are some of the other crafts Varanasi city is famous for. This place has been famous for handicrafts items for years. It has been hailed as a leading center for some of the finest Indian handicrafts.

Varanasi is well known across the world for its hand-painted wooden toys. These wooden toys are sculpted and chiselled by artisans, and then attractively painted with bright lacquer colours. This industry is believed to have a 400-years history in the city. This place was one of the largest toy producing centres in India.

Before removing the moulded diyas from the wheel, many patterns and designs are made using design files. Then the articles are dried and fired in the kiln. There are nearly 300 varieties of diyas/lamps made, some with decorations and some are retained plain as well.

About the craftsman and wooden idols:

In Varanasi, many small-scale industries are gradually coming to an end and one among the many is the wooden-idols manufacturing industry. The wooden toys are famous in India and foreign countries as well but the ignorance of the governments has affected this industry to such an extent that it is on the verge of its end. Earlier, this industry used to feed thousands of houses in Varanasi. But now, it has been limited to a few households only.

The craftsman who works on wooden crafts mostly belongs to the Vishwakarma caste. The craftsman who works in wooden idol-making says that he is working for about 20 years in the wooden crafts, and he has gained the knowledge from his father and grandfather, it is a gift he has got from his ancestor. He says craftsmen are not able to come out with an innovative designs.

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The workmanship of wood has flourished in India over the centuries. The cost of colors and dyes, which are used for painting idols and wooden articles are expensive. The wood of Coraiya and Ghurkun are predominantly used by the idol makers because these are soft and can be shaped and cut easily for producing fine finishing in the idols. However, these varieties are not easily available and artisans end up buying Gular, Eucalyptus and other types of wood, which are hard and available at INR 500 to INR700 per quintal. An erratic power supply is another impediment for toymakers.

Dolls made from wood are very popular. Varanasi is known for its carved objects and dolls. Traditional designs are carved on wood and then painted over giving the whole object a rich effect. Craftsmen use Gular wood to sculpt exquisite mythological pieces. This place offers the choicest varieties of wooden dolls blended both in folk and classical forms, which provide an aesthetic appeal with a freshness and charm of their own. Wood carving is a traditional craft of Varanasi.



Wooden craft making place.



The Air India mascot made in wood.

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Saw toll used to cut manually.



Artisan stuck the leg with the help of glue

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Three wise monkeys of Gandhiji.



Elephant toys.

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Tools and Raw Materials

The tools and raw materials that are used for Wooden idol carving are as follows:

- **Chisels:** A long-bladed hand tool with a bevelled cutting edge and a handle which is struck with a hammer or mallet, used to cut or shape wood, stone, or meta.
- **Needle File:** A long-bladed hand tool with a bevelled cutting edge and a handle which is struck with a hammer or mallet, used to cut or shape wood, stone, or metal.
- **Hand Drill:** Portable drilling machine resembling a breast drill but designed to be held and operated by hand.
- **Hathauda-Hammer:** A tool with a heavy metal head mounted at right angles at the end of a handle, used for jobs such as breaking things and driving in nails.
- **Cutting Pliers:** Small pincers with long jaws used for bending or cutting wire or handling small things.



Gular wood (ficus racemose) is basic raw material used for making toys.



Several tools used for hand carving process of toy making.

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Different sizes of nails used to join the body parts of the idol.



Saw tools are used for cutting the raw material.



Wooden hammer.

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Chisels used to shape surfaces in curve.



Try square tools used for measuring the accuracy of a right angle.

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Measurement scales are used to quantify variables.



Drawings are used as a template for carving.



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Making Process

Craftsman gets the order from the customer, based on the customer's requirement. Craftsman starts working on the idol by keeping a photocopy or sketch as a reference.

Artisan uses gular wood to make god and goddess idols. Craftsman gets the order from the local dealers and once the order is confirmed by initial advance payment, the artisan starts working on the idols. Craft man cuts the wood into the required size and a rough shape is obtained by using a chisel once the rough shape is obtained, he starts working on the detailing work of the idol. And every time they carve the wood they dip a piece of wood in water so that it becomes soft and easy for them to carve.

Once the idol is completed, it is painted with attractive bright colours.



Artisan starts to carve wood piece to basic shape.



Artisan is given basic shape to the toy.

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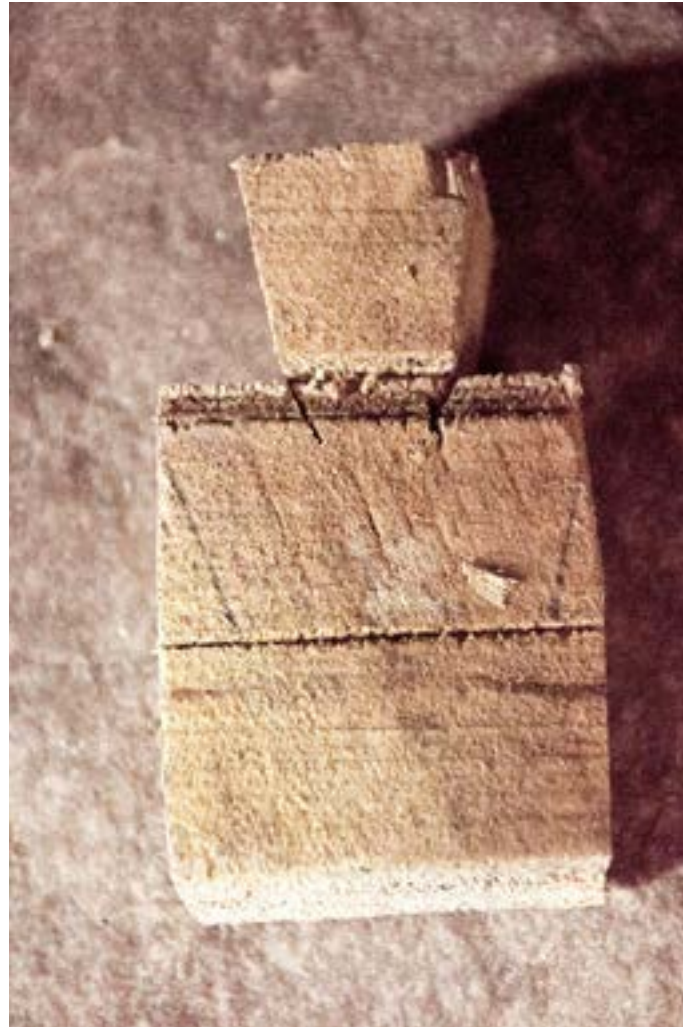
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Roughly carved wooden pieces.



Artisan assuring with adjournments of the different parts of the toys.

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The wooden block getting carved to get a desired shape.



Chisels are used to get a correct forms of the toys.



Toy is getting carved to get more detail.



A wooden anvil is used in props for holding the toys with the grip to carve.

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Basic shape of the toy.



Carved toys are lightly warmed to remove the excess moisture.



Facial part is getting carved by u shape chisel tool.



For the smooth carving of the details, the artisan holds the body of the tools with less pressed.

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Gular fig (Ficus racemose) is used for carving in Varanasi.



File is used to smoothen the surface.



The carved portion are filed to even the surface.



The shape of the leg is attached and stuck on the particular place.

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The parts of toys are carved separately then joined together with the help of glue.



Artisan assuring the placement of the hand to the toy.



The toy is kept for drying after each part stuck.



Artisan applying adhesive on the top.

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Cap is fixed on top and left for drying.



After drying cap is fixed with nail for durability.



Toys are arranged before colouring.

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Products

Varanasi being a pilgrimage Centre, the toys mostly represent deities from Hindu mythology. Some toys like child Krishna flying on the very huge bird, ducks, cows, horses, wooden sugga (Parrot) and charkha (spinning wheel) are fixed on the marriage mandap (altar). Mandwakasugga is gifted to the newly married. Craftsmen in Varanasi switched to wood and stone since the ban on ivory and have continued to carve wood with equal intricacy.

Toys and idols of gods and goddesses are prepared by cutting, peeling and shaping the wood with knives and other equipment. The colours used to paint toys are bright and usually applied in primary colours. The ceremonial parrot is painted with turmeric (yellow), Alta (red) and green colour. The tools are a carpenter's tools a saw and a chisel for working on the wood. The idols can be found in all sizes, from 1-inch idols to large 2 feet tall idols.

- Lord Ganesh on flying peacock
- Flying Hanuman
- God and goddess idols
- Birds
- One inch Ganesh idol
- Musicians
- Elephants
- Lord Krishna idol

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Attractive Ganesa idol with bright colours.



Lord Ganesha sitting on the chariot.



Toys depicting musicians.

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Krishna with Gopikas.



Showcase of wooden Toys.



Lord Jesus on the cross.

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Load hanuman carrying Sumedh Parvat (mountain).



Beautifully carved animal and birds on the memento.



Lord Ganesha.

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This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral and Aakash Sharm 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:

Key Contacts:

Khilauna Udyog Sahakari Samiti Ltd

Varanasi, UP, India

Phone: 0542 6529998

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](mailto:dsource.in[at]gmail.com)

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