

Bankura Wood Craft

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Wood carving prevails all over India since time immemorial with several designing traits in different regions. India is cherishing the pleasure of wood carving from the dawn of civilization. Every state with their own cultural taste has introduced a unique style which consequently has led them to having a distinct identity of their own. Every state has their own cultural tradition and they have chosen wood as a prime medium to bring forth their creativity.

Tamilnadu, a rich province with great cultural heritage is engrossed in creating giant chariots decorated with elegant figurines. Karnataka, a hub of exotic sandal wood is immersed in creating beautiful elephants, pens, pen-holders, combs, trays, boxes, key holders, small figurines, chiseled with their own delicacies. Rajasthan, as known to all, is perpetually famous for their wooden decorations on doors, wooden panels, frames, pillars, brackets etc. They even carve out beautiful animal figurines, the famous Rajasthani puppets, exquisite jewelry boxes etc. The



**Image 2: replica
of Bankura
terracotta horse**

culture of Orissa, as most of the people know, revolves around the Divine grace of Lord Sri Jagannatha. The image of Lord Jagannatha itself is made of a wooden structure which inspires the crafts persons to create many more articles carving the wood. The colourful wooden toys, sticks, dolls and tiny replicas of Lord Jagannatha, his brother Balaram, sister Subhadra are the prominent instances of the local handicrafts.

West Bengal, an eastern state of India, with a saga of



Image 4: Goddess Durga

sculptures with traditional and contemporary motifs got



Image 6: Progress

enriched chronicle of culture, too bears distinct traits of expertise which vary from one region to another. Bankura district of West Bengal is uncontroversially famous for its Panchmura terracotta crafts. Terracotta and stone sculptures have left a mark of superb

craftsmanship of Bankura terracotta artisans. Being influenced by such a fame and adoration, the wood carvers

of Bankura got enthusiastic to create wooden sculptures with the same popular motifs. Hence the wood

sculptures with traditional and contemporary motifs got abundance in the markets of Bankura. Besides, the

terracotta horse, sculpture of Goddess Durga the availability of other images like animal figures,

sculptures of other gods and goddesses, idols, home-accessories are to be found today. For easier portability,

longer durability and lesser weight than the terracotta

articles the wood craft of Bankura is facing a greater prospect in supplying the desired wooden items.

Villages like Rampur, Jagadalla, Beliatore, Hatgram, Simulberia are engaged in creating these aesthetic specimens

and some of the artisans have even achieved award for their creative excellence.



Image 3: Lord Sri Krishna



Image 5: Goddess Saraswati



Figure 7: Animals and birds

In this way the wood craft of Bankura is probably approaching a wider market to be created to face the world with an increasing luminescence.

An Interview with Hira Lal Karmakar



Shri Hira Lal Karmakar is the founder and main artist of Creative Handicrafts (<http://creativehandicrafts.net>). He is originally from Bankura district of West Bengal in India. He is one of the spontaneous and experienced craft artists of India. He is also a NATIONAL AWARDED artist for the excellence in stone curving. He can be contacted at 08926416117.

Chitrolekha: How did you get into the profession? Was it in your family?

HLK: Wood carving was in my family. My family members were actually clay artisans who used to make idols of gods and goddesses for various occasions. I learnt stone carving from an artisan and I worked on it for five years or so and then I moved on to wood carving.

Chitrolekha: You got the President's Award for stone carving and still you left it?

HLK: Yes. Actually there is a ban on quarrying stone in the Susunia hill and good stone is not easily available. Again, I wanted work with another medium.

Chitrolekha: What are the tools do you use?

HLK: We use mainly the traditional tools. But I have made some special tools for finer impressions. We do not use any automatic machine for creating the products. So no product is identical with another.

Chitrolekha: How would you describe your art? What are your objects of inspiration?

HLK: After my training in stone, I could make any figure. In my younger years I used to make figures in imitation of figures of Kerala, Mysore and Orissa. But when one of my works was rejected for nomination in the national competition and I was told that the work lacked any originality, I was shocked. Some well-wishers advised me to develop my own style of work. So I started my own way of making art objects. I draw inspiration from simple things of nature and life and from our traditional mythology.

Chitrolekha: But it must have created some problems for marketing your products? How did you make it?

HLK: Yes. It was very hard to enter the market. I was perplexed. I had to go through a long struggle. But after some years my products began to be accepted in the market. Buyers from Orissa, Assam and even Meghalaya order my works.

Chitrolekha: What is the prospect of this craft? What about the younger generation?

HLK: The prospect is very high. There is a huge demand in the market for wood crafts. We are hard-pressed because of the number of order. All of our works are pre-ordered. You cannot buy any if you have not ordered. Many young people are coming to this profession. I run Creative Handicrafts. But the problem is that it takes four-five years to learn the craft properly and this collides with the period of formal education.

Chitrolekha: What is the average standard of formal education of the apprentices coming to this profession?

HLK: around Class VIII.

Chitrolekha: But isn't proper education necessary for newer designs and newer ideas and proper marketing strategies?

HLK: Yes, of course. One of the main problems with this craft is that much of the work lacks quality. Some artisans prepare duplicates just for money and they don't have proper knowledge of the art.

Chitrolekha: Does the business run throughout the year? Or is it seasonal?

HLK: No. We work throughout the year. But sale increases during the winter for local tourism in Bankura.

Chitrolekha: Do the artisans depend on other profession like farming?

HLK: Yes. Many of them have lands. But farming can be done just for one season and one month. I also possess some. But the busy artisans cannot get time for it.

Chitrolekha: How many artists are working here? Any idea?

HLK: About 180–190 artisans are there at Simulberia.

Chitrolekha: Do you have any idea of a wood carver's average monthly income?

HLK: About 5000–10000 rupees depending upon the quality of works.

Chitrolekha: Do you have any cooperative for the artisans' welfare.

HLK: No.

Chitrolekha: What has been the governments' response to this craft?

HLK: We used to get good response from the governments in the 80s, but after 1990 or so they have become indifferent to this craft both at the state and national levels. We are simple people and have some simple necessities in life. We don't want money from them, but if we get some honour and recognition for our hard works, we can work better happily and it can attract people from other professions.

Chitrolekha: What would you suggest for making it a profitable and respectable profession?

HLK: Here a training centre should be established for making the artisans aware of the modern techniques and modern machines. They should be exposed to new ideas. The whole business has to be modernized. The artisans should have access to modern communication tools like the internet. Otherwise, we will have to struggle very hard with the Chinese products made of machines. They have already entered Indian market.

Chitrolekha: Do you see any hope from the new government of Bengal?

HLK: We live in hope. We work in hope. We wait for many things. But we don't know whether our simple demands will be met or not.

Acknowledgements

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Arnab Majumdar is a Freelance Writer. He is interested in documenting traditional handicrafts of West Bengal.
