

Role of Saharanpur in Wooden Craft Tradition in Contemporary Indian Art

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Abstract—The origin of “woodcraft” is about 1300-50 CE in Middle English. The art of wood craft is very old in India. Artistic woodwork began as a temple and palace craft, and flourished alongside architecture and sculpture. Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh is a principle centre for wood carving in India. In Saharanpur, Sheesham is generally the wood of choice, though teak, rosewood, walnut and mango are also used. Designs are first made on paper, and transferred onto the wood using ink. These are then carved using a variety of chisels and after that polishing to bring out the shine of the wood. The first organized wood carving unit is said to have been set up in 1882 by Atta Hussain, an immigrant from Multan.

As a contemporary artistic medium, wood used as a new media in artworks, and is an excellent medium for new art. Wood is used in forms of sculpture, installation, craft, and decoration including chip carving, wood burning, and marquetry. Most of the famous contemporary artists used wood and several types of metals attached with wood for their work high appreciated. Mainly artists are:- Satish Gujral-(Tree of life, Burnt wood), Balbir Singh katt- (Yellow sun split across wood stone), and other artist are Rajesh Sharma, Ramesh Bisht, P.T. Reddy and so on.

This issue will allow me to explore significance of wood is used in traditional and modern styles in contemporary art form as new medium. The whole paper will be divided into some major points, which covers Impact, Significance, innovation and role of Saharanpur in Wooden Craft Tradition in contemporary Indian art. In this paper I will analysis the role of wooden craft in India with special reference to Saharanpur (Uttar Pradesh). In contemporary time artists use wood as a new media in their artwork.

1. INTRODUCTION

The meaning of the term “craft” in old English is ‘strength or skill’, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *kracht*, German *Kraft*, and Swedish *kraft* ‘strength’. Crafts is often used to describe the family of artistic practices within the family, decorative arts that traditionally are defined by their relationship to functional or utilitarian products (such as sculptural forms in the vessel tradition) or by their use of such natural media as wood, clay, ceramics, glass, textiles, and metals.

Along with several crafts, wood craft is a common heritage in India and it’s found across all parts of the country. The origin of “woodcraft” is about 1300-50 CE in Middle English. The art of wood craft is very old in India. Since time immemorial,

throughout the great Indian peninsula wood items were the most luxurious kind; man had started decorating his home by various techniques of wood designing items. They used it to make dolls and toys for their children.

Artistic woodwork began as a temple and palace craft, and flourished alongside architecture and sculpture. Depending on local availability, different woods were used for different techniques with style and fashioned into religious, decorative and functional items. The ancient Hindu temples were decorated with doors, ceilings and various fittings carved in teak and other woods with patterns of extreme richness and minute elaboration. We have architectural remains from Kashmir Smats (Punjab) dating from the 3rd or 4th century, the patterns employed being of a bold and strongly decorative characters. The doors of the Somnath temple, on the north-west coast, were famed for their glory and were highly valued as sacred relics.

The religious product included images of gods and legendary figures like Durga, Luxmi, and Ganesha, etc. Some craftsmen carve a single piece of wood to form an object. These attempts are made for artistic demonstration. Some distinct forms and shapes of items of wood craft have come down from remote past and some innovative forms have been evolved maintaining the custom and simplicity.

Uttar Pradesh is a state of India in which various types of crafts have been found in a cluster. In which woodcraft is one of the famous and their main centres are, Mainpuri, Nagina, and Saharanpur.

Tarkashi, a popular art form from Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh, is primarily brass wire inlay work on wood. The technique Tarkashi had migrated from Mainpuri to Saharanpur, The tarkashi craft of Uttar Pradesh is today known for its fine inlay work with brass wire, strips and motifs on dark sheesham with fine dots and patterned lines and is used extensively for furniture and boxes. Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh is a principle centre for wood carving in India. Wood carving is done entirely by hand. In Saharanpur, sheesham is generally the wood of choice, though teak, rosewood, walnut and mango are also used. Designs are first made on paper, and transferred

onto the wood using ink. These are then carved using a variety of chisels. The article is finished by polishing in order to bring out the shine of the wood. This is usually done with the help of a lathe mechanism. The first organized wood carving unit is said to have been set up in 1882 by Atta Hussain, an immigrant from Multan.

As a contemporary artistic medium, wood is used in traditional and modern styles, and is an excellent medium for new art. Wood is used in forms of sculpture, craft, and decoration including chip carving, wood burning, and marquetry. Wood offers a fascination, beauty, and complexity in the grain that often shows even when the medium is painted.

2. STUDY AREA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on secondary data. The secondary data has been collected from the reports of government of India and states as well as the articles published in journals, books, magazines, e-books, so many e-resources etc. The published articles are also main resource of this Paper and this research would be accomplished using the descriptive method.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the very old period the people used to pay due attention considering and realizing the significance of Wooden craft therefore various scholars and researchers worked in an artistic style consequently provided us deferent trends of wooden craft, some of them are mentioned below-

- **Trends evaluation in wooden folding screen of Saharanpur**, research done by **Ayushi Verma and Ila Gupta**, published in the magazine **Chitrolekha International magazine on art and design** Vol.6 no.1, 2016
- **Wood Handicraft a study of its origin and development in Saharanpur**, Research done by **O.C. Handa and Mandu Jain** Published by **Indus Publishing Company New Delhi**.

There are also various works related to wooden craft in Saharanpur.

4. CENTRES OF WOOD CRAFT IN INDIA

Over the time, various centres of wood craft emerged, each with its distinct style. The main locations, along with their typical products are:

- Andhra Pradesh: Bhongir and Madhavmala - carved chairs, mirror frames, idols; Udayagiri - wooden cutlery.
- Assam: carved sinhasanas(thrones) for prayer houses.
- Gujarat: Pethapur – printing blocks; Surat – engraved and inlayed sandalwood and teak boxes; Bhavnagar, Rajkot, Mahuva – chests
- Himachal Pradesh: Kangra – carved doors, windows, panels.

- Jammu & Kashmir: carved walnut wood utility and decorative items – bowls, trays, jewellery boxes, screens, tables, cupboards.
- Karnataka: Kumta – carved figures; Mysore – carved rosewood animals, especially elephants.
- Kerala: Trivandrum, Trichur, Ernakulam, Cochin – ebony, rosewood and sandalwood figures.
- Madhya Pradesh: Indore, Alirajpur, Bhopal, Ujjain, Ratlam – carved wall panels, boxes and furniture.
- Maharashtra: Miraj – musical instruments.
- Orissa: Puri – wooden masks and raths (chariots); Baragarh – toys
- Punjab: Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Bhera – furniture; low relief carving, with geometrical, animal, floral motifs.
- Rajasthan: Bassi – carved figures, wooden shrines; Pipar, Bhari Sajanpur – bowls.
- Tripura: carved plaques, tribal and animal figures.
- Uttar Pradesh: Sahranpur – screens, folding tables, trays, bowls, boxes; Pilkhuwa, Farukkabad – printing blocks.

5. WOOD CRAFT TRADITION IN SAHARANPUR

Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh is a principle centre of wood carving in India. Which provided an excellent medium for art, Wood carving is done entirely by hand. In Saharanpur, Sheesham is generally the wood of choice, though teak, rosewood, walnut and mango are also used. Designs are first made on paper, and transferred onto the wood using ink. These are then carved using a variety of chisels. The article is finished by polishing in order to bring out the shine of the wood. This is usually done with the help of a lathe mechanism. The first organized wood carving unit is said to have been set up in 1882 by Atta Hussain, an immigrant from Multan. Closely associated with architecture, wood carving incorporated the design vocabulary of architectural carvings. These influences continue to reflect in the finely shaped screens and jaalis work, anguri and the elaborated floral and creeping plant leaves patterns found in many contemporary products from Saharanpur. It was also influenced by Kashmiri designs, with many of the crafts person having descended from Kashmiri immigrants. With its development into a major hub for woodwork, wood carvers from other centres have also migrated here. As a result, Saharanpur can boast of a wide and highly skilled repertoire of techniques and products, catering to both the domestic and export markets.

6. WOOD CRAFT PRACTICES BY CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS IN INDIA

Wood works provided an excellent medium for artists in India. Most of the famous contemporary artists used wood and several types of metal attached with wood for their high appreciated work. Mainly artists are:-

Dhanraj Bhagat worked on several media like paper-Mache, aluminium, copper and stone, most of his known works are in wood and is characterized by their geometric shapes his best is Bull made of wood.

Chintamoni Kar was a globally recognized Indian sculptor, who created sculpture with the aid of various materials like terracotta, metal, stone and wood. His *Flight* was used Mahogany wood.



Fig. 6.1 Flight, Mahogany wood, 1965

Sankho Chaudhary began close to cubism. His themes have included the female figure and wildlife. He was worked in a wide range of media, and has produced both large-scale reliefs and mobiles e.g. *Figure of woman*, in wood.

Satish Gujral experimenting and creating new forms in different mediums, initiated with an organic evolution from lived reality and delving into the very essence of the substance – this has been epitomized by his burnt wooden sculptures. He liked the sooty blackness of burnt wood from which he created deities and other forms combined with a hint of vermillion and gold like glowing embers of the elemental fire. This medium interconnected the tradition with contemporary sensibilities which he infuses into his work. He later started exploring the colours and textures of granite. His burnt wood is e.g. *Tree of life* and *Raising of Lazarus*.

'Tree of Life' is a semi-abstract form created with burnt wood. The intricate sculpture has been rendered to create a complex labyrinthine structure with the use of material like pigment, beads and shells.



Fig. 6.2

- **Title:** Tree of Life
- **Creator:** Satish Gujral
- **Date Created:** 1993/1994
- **Physical Dimensions:** w580 x h1440 x d190 cm
- **Type:** Burnt Wood
- **Rights:** National Gallery of Modern Art,

Balbir Singh Katt used traditional Indian subject created with a contemporary sensibility. Or even, the combination of different mediums, such as Balbir Singh Katt's use of marble and wood together in 1967 e.g. Yellow sun splite across wood stone and others artist are *Jeram Patel*, *Ramesh Bisht*, *P.T. Reddy*, *Dhruve Mistry* and others used wood with other materials



1. Impact of wood in contemporary Indian art:

From ancient era, human beings are utilizing the wood into various form of art, whether it has been used to construct the building to make daily use items. We observed abundantly the used of wood in contemporary Indian Art, whether we look at art of satish Gujral or the art work of Rajesh Sharma. Likewise there are many examples of Indian contemporary art whose art is the medium of art and he has been success to express his inner feelings by this medium.



Figure 7.1 wood installations by Rajesh Sharma

In today's period the wood is being used as a valuable art form because nowadays another option of wood is available such as metal, fibres and synthetic wood is used for wooden doors and windows, so the texture of wood amongst people and their desires of colour and form remain in such a way that people like to make colourful texture, doors, windows, almiras and furniture. As a result we see the utmost use of Indian Art and thus Indian artists are using wood as an important art medium considering the changing environment whose example is being seen in different art activities of Indian contemporary art. For instance Delhi Art Fair 2017 where some articles made of shining wood were kept to exhibit and being seen it looks like wood is the medium of art.

In Indian architecture lattice and doors were made of iron and stone and in making such items human beings were used to tackle many difficulties because cutting the stone into pieces or melting it is very challenging work, although the use of wood made this task more easier in place of it because it can be easily rotated and twisted or it can be easily inlaid for the purpose of decoration. Thus wood has been an important part of architectural art so this is nothing but an integral part of art.

In the contemporary Indian art artists use different art forms like metals, aluminium, iron, plastic and stone etc. To create art sculpture, installation and assemblage. There is a lot of difficulties in using these items because casting and moulding metal and iron is difficult and a lengthy process although it is very easy to cut the wood into pieces and to make it an artistic work for the expression of inner ideas. In such a way the wood has been a significant medium for artistic work. Wood works provided an excellent medium for artists in India. Most of the famous contemporary artists used wood and several types of metals attached with wood for their highly appreciated work. Mainly artists are:-

Dhanraj Bhagat, Sankho Chaudhary, Ram Kinker Baij, Rajesh Sharma and so many artists worked on several media like scrap metal, lime, organic materials like wood. Which is available largely in forest near Khairagarh like acacia (Babool), sheesham, teak wood, and so on.

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8. CONCLUSION

Briefly, it can be concluded by only expressing that in modern world as we all know, the wood has been an inseparable part of human beings, without taking use of it, it seems like our decorative works are imperfect. So, since the time when its significance and its various uses emerged in a result of inventions and creations, artists also worked as an art work and in their artistic works they exhibited differently and showed us various styles, uses and its methods, characteristics and new trends of wooden crafts.

Specially in Saharanpur when we study the wooden craft then we come to know about creative works such as Tarkashi, wood engraving, jaali work, anguri and so on.

Undoubtedly Saharanpur plays a significant role in the field of wood craft.

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