

Wooden Toys of Varanasi Weakly Developed the Isolated Sector and Shortages of Income and Employment Opportunities

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Short Communication

Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh is well known for lacquered wooden toys. Toys and miniature kitchen sets for children are reproduced in vibrant colors. The craftsman, who practices this art, passes it on from one generation to another. But the scope of this craft is limited. Toys are found in all sizes and prices. These toys are sold out briskly in the months of fairs and festivals. July to November is the booming season for sales of wooden toys (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Wooden toys.

The art of toy making is an ancient craft. Excavated toys and dolls have been found in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. The main purpose of these toys is giving joy and a means of recreation for children. It also reflects the ethos of rural India. Colorful items depict village scene, bullock carts, elephant, and women with pitcher. Miniature size sets of cooking vessels in wood are produced in bulk. The traditional sets of

idols influenced by the taste of god and goddess are in much demand during the festive season. Lacquered toys are exported from one city to another for the purpose of selling. A great variety of toys are produced in Kashmiri Ganj Khojwa. Nearly 40% production is meant for export to other cities. Wood blocks are cut into desired shapes. Sand paper and hammer give shape and smoothness to the designed piece. Various parts of toys are joined with adhesive then heated to remove moisture. Hand carving is a very slow process as wood cutting is turning from hand carving to lathe machine.

Machines are of two types:

Spindle-turning wood piece rotate and grains throw out in the same direction.

Faceplate-in which wood particles run vertical to the rotation in the lathe?

Ecclesiasticus says, "And in the handiwork of their craft is their prayer [1]."

It is about craftsmen, their entreaty is their creation. Nowadays, machine work is popular because it is done with care, fineness, and brings smoothness with intricate details. Handmade toys are very expensive. The toys are dipped into distemper. When it dries it is carefully painted with duco white paint. Last coat of lacquer is applied to bring shine to the surface of the toy. When toy piece is placed on the lathe the lacquering process is done. Hand lathe is more suitable for delicate items. While the machine rotating it generates heat by friction, lac becomes soft and it is easily applied on the woodenware. The craftsman manipulates the lac color stick by heating. Lac stick is pressed against the wooden toy to be lacquered. Various colors are used and some intricate patterns are painted over the lacquered pieces. Bright primary colors are used to give gaudy look. Around 25 to 30 pieces a painter completes at a time. This is the process to prepare a toy. 10 to 15 craftsmen work together in a workshop (Figure 2).

Various types of woods used for toy making are:

- Safeda – Eucalyptus is used for lathe application.
- Kirbil – usually hand carving is done on this wood.
- Gulhar – has thick fibres, not suitable for intricate carving.
- Shisham – yellowish white wood.
- Kaima – it has thin fibres used for fine carving.
- Keria – obtained from Bihar is best wood for carving.
- Gulhar, Sagwan, Kaima woods are produced in Varanasi.
- Materials used for wooden toys are given below:
 - Rukhana Baaki, Chaurasa, Batali, Berma (used for making hole).
 - Chausi (peeler) to peel off extra wood.
 - Aari (cutting tool) is used for cutting.
 - Lac is used for coloring.

- Kholian is a fine work tool.
- Reti (foiler) used for foiling.
- Hathoda or hammer.



Figure 2: Making of wooden toys (Gannu Lal, Age: 69 Years, Experience: 40).



Figure 3: Taking craftsmen problems (Godawari Singh, Age: 67 Years, Experience: 40 Years).

Religious and cultural themes are in fashion for making toys. Traditional and modern both show us the glimpse of our present and past culture and tradition. Cooking sets are not affected by the time and generation. A girl loves to play with these traditional toys (Figure 3).

Some craftsmen's are in very poor condition. A craftsman Godawari Singh informed, "Keria wood is best for wood carving, but the government banned its cutting and use [2]".

He has been trying to inform the actual problems faced by craftsmen of wooden toy to the Prime Minister of India through a letter. Some problems mentioned in his letter can be summed up below:

- Craftsmen face electricity problem, economic conditions have become very poor.
- Mostly craftsmen have sold out their homes and started pulling rickshaws.
- After 1980 Keria wood is banned for supplying, eucalyptus is used for wood carving, which is costly and not durable.
- Keria tree is densely found in forests of Bihar. As it grows fast, it needs to be cut down regularly. And if not, it gets destroyed. Cutting helps trees growth.
- This tree is used as fuel and nothing else. This requirement can fill through other trees.
- Lack of payments makes it down. They are not able to supply large orders and consequently business bears the loss.
- Their children don't want to adopt this business.



Figure 4: Hand carving-Narendra Singh, Age: 42 Years,(State awardee).

- Lathe machines are less in quantity because payments are very small and as a result craftsmen cannot buy expensive machines and set up workshops.
- Craftsmen are illiterate and do not know about fast machine.
- Craftsmen face some problems relating to patent issues due to lack of copyright knowledge.

- Hand carving is not adequate for this art because it takes too much time as compared to machine.

Production costs of wooden toys are continuously increasing. Prices of raw materials are doubly increasing every year. Besides, the restriction on Keria wood has added to the anxiety of the artisans. Eucalyptus and Gulhar are commonly used in contemporary time. "Lack of financial help and loan for the trade are the main reason which discourages the wooden craft and craftsmen [3]" (Figure 4).

In order to achieve excellence in technology and aesthetic vitality the traditional craftsman and artist have expanded their forms and range of materials. New novel methods, materials have been discovered due to advancement in science and technology which has led to achievement of new directions in this field of art. In the present times craftsman and artists believe in development of objects possessing all virtues of a fine art and also being sympathetic to the environment. A craftsman and artist in short can be defined as a person enriched in creativity and working continuously by hand in various types of craft media to produce exemplary beautiful pieces of finest crafts in order to attain spiritual harmony [4-10].

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