

KINHAL: The Exquisite Craft of Karnataka

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ABSTRACT--- Karnataka has a huge repository of timeless crafts which needs to be preserved and continued and Kinhal craft is one among the many. Kinhal Craft is a traditional woodencraft local to the town of Kinhal. It is culturally a rich craft of hand painted wooden articles. The craft flourished under the royal patronage of the Vijayanagara Empire and received support from the Nawab of Koppal Desais of Kinhal and more importantly from the Nawab Salar Jang of Hyderabad. The entire town of Kinhal is famous for its toys and religious idols. The Chitragars paint gods and goddess of Vaishnavism and Shaivism, scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Skandapurana, Navagrahas etc. The method of preparation with the light wood, kitta and lejjawara is distinctive. The art form is thematic and possesses a powerful energy with a colourful appearance and is aesthetically beautiful. This paper deals with the cultural resources of local communities in Karnataka, the effects of technology on the craft and a need to revive the Kinhal toys that possess an intense flavour of Karnataka's heritage.

Keywords: Kinhal, Wooden toys, Chitragara, Kitta, Lejjawara, Technology.

KINHAL: THE EXQUISITE CRAFT OF KARNATAKA

Karnataka is a land steeped in History, Art and Culture. It also has a rich tradition of exquisite craftsmanship. Major crafts practiced are Gudigar works (made of sandal wood and rose wood), inlay work and carvings, bronze statues, lacquer ware toys from Channapattana and Kinhal, Bidriware, Batiks and home decor products. The regional spread of handicrafts in the State, the manner in which they are made and their history is discussed in this section. Karnataka has a huge repository of such timeless crafts which needs to be preserved and continued.

LOCATION

Kinhal is a village in the southern state of Karnataka. It is located in the Koppal taluk of Koppal district in Karnataka. Koppal, now a district headquarters is an ancient *Kopana* major holy place of the Jainas. Palkigundis described as the Indrakilaparvata of epic fame and there is an ancient Shiva temple called the *Male Maleshwara*. There are two Ashokan inscriptions at *Palkigund* and *Gavimatha*. It was the capital of a branch of Shilaharas under the Chalukya's of Kalyan. In Shivaji's times it was one of the eight *prants* or revenue divisions of Southern Maratha Country. (Chitnis, Krishnaji Nagesh Rao, 1994: 155)

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Kinhal Craft is a traditional woodencraft local to the town of Kinhal, or Kinnal, in Koppal District, North Karnataka, India. (Kinhal Craft: Glasgow Kinnal Project)

HISTORY

Kinhal with its immensely rich artistic heritage was once a flourishing centre for crafts, famous for exquisite carvings in wood. The place has a legacy of the ancestors who created the mural paintings and the intricate work on the wooden chariot at the Virupaksha temple at Hampi.

The craft flourished under the royal patronage of the Vijayanagara Empire and it is claimed that the village of Kinhal was awarded as "Inam" to artisans' community by the Vijayanagara Kings in appreciation of the work rendered by the artisans for the palaces, Temples, Chariots etc. After the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire in 1665, the craft received support from the Nawab of Koppal Desais of Kinhal and more importantly from the Nawab Salar Jang of Hyderabad. (<http://ipindiaservices.gov.in/>) Apart from Kinhal, the craft is also believed to be practiced at Harapanahalli, Kampli, Kanakagiri and other places.

KINHAL CRAFT

Kinhal Craft is a traditional woodencraft local to the town of Kinhal. It is culturally a rich craft of hand painted wooden articles. The entire town of Kinhal is famous for Kinhal toys and religious idols. The Kinhal Craft possesses a powerful energy with a colourful appearance and are aesthetically beautiful. The breathtaking designs of the Kinhal art can be easily differentiated by other forms of art by its vibrant colours and intricate designs. The process of production is fairly simple. Gokak in Belgaum district was noted particularly for artificial fruits and vegetables. This handicraft flourished there during the middle of the 19th century. First the wood is cut into convenient pieces depending upon the kind of article to be produced. Secondly the piece of wood is cut until it acquires the proper shape and the rough portions are filed.⁴ (Menasinakai S.S 1961: 5) Indigenous Kinhal toys have the Geographical Indication number 213 from World Trade Organisation. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Geographical_Indications_in_India)

THEMES

The art form is thematic and the chitragars painted themes, gods and goddess of Vaishnavism and Shaivism, scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Skandapurana, Navagrahas are also made.



To keep the craft alive, few folk elements of North Karnataka have been incorporated, while retaining the old Kinhal way of painting. They now carve artefacts that are more saleable like the wooden cradles, flowers, fruits, vegetables, decorative planks and the Kama-Rati idols. Traditional items such as Vahanas, Palanquins and Chowkis are made against order. The Kinhal Gowri is a famous wooden doll. (Interview with Chitragar Anjaneyalu at Kinhal on 12/012/2016, 12.10 PM)

MATERIALS REQUIRED IN THE PREPARATION OF THE KINHAL TOYS

Wood (both soft and hard), liquid gum, tamarind seeds - crushed to make a paste called 'Sari', Kittaa a sticky substance made out of sarli sawdust and jute rags, Bilidu: a white paste made out of limestone, chalk powder, white stone powdered and added with water, pebble stones, colours: natural, synthetic, enamel (for outlines), etc. (gold colour and silver colour), Thin cloth, Vamish, Paint brushes (made of squirrel tail hair) and tools. (Interview with Chitragar Santosh at Kinhal on 12/012/2016 at 2 PM)

METHOD

Lightweight wood is used for the preparation of the artefacts. The paste used for joining the various parts is made of tamarind seeds and pebbles. Juterags, soaked, slivered into pieces, dried, powdered, and mixed with saw dust and tamarind seed paste is made into kitta. A mixture of pebble powder paste with liquid gum is used for embossing the ornamentation and jewellery on the body of the figure. Once the components of the figure are assembled, kitta is applied by hand all over, and small pieces of cotton are stuck on it with the tamarind paste. Over this is applied the pebble paste which forms the base for the application of paint. (<http://craftythingsmade.wordpress.com>)

WOOD

Light weight wood such as Polki wood is most commonly used in this craft. Hale or Halugathi wood is used for making articles in which tuning work is involved. Mostly this wood is used in making cradles. Hire Bevu is used in making planks and pedestals for images.

The small toys are made of both lightweight wood as well as hard wood. The following list gives the names of the soft wood and hard wood for make the vibrant Kinhal toys.

LIQUID GUM

Solid Gum is used for making the liquid gum. The solid gum is powdered and soaked in water till it completely dissolves. Then the solution is filtered for removal of suspended impurities.

SARI

This is a paste made out of crushed tamarind seeds. The seeds are pounded into tiny pieces and soaked in water for about 12 hours to soften. The softened pieces are taken out from water and ground into a paste on a hard surface by means of a grinding stone. The paste is boiled in water till it gets the consistency of a dough and it is called as 'sari'. It is

used as an adhesive in the craft and also in the preparation of 'kitta'.

KITTA

This is a sticky substance made out of sari/, sawdust and jute rags. Jute rag is soaked in water for 12 - 15 hours, after which, it is slivered into pieces with a chisel. These pieces are then dried and rubbed by hand on a hard surface to reduce them to powder. The jute rag powder and saw dust is mixed to sari and the mixture beaten with a mallet till the ingredients get thoroughly mixed. The final mixture is known as 'kitta', which constitutes an important item in the manufacture of toys. This sticky dough is daubed on the articles roughly after assembling the several components of a particular piece, and allowed to dry in the open for a day. The daubing of kitta is very essential as without it, the components may not hold together for long and may fall out. Besides, the layer of kitta on wood sets right all malformations

BILIDU

Bilidu is made using a white paste made out of limestone, chalk powder, white stone powdered and added with water. For this, sunaburule is essential in the preparation of bilidu. Pebbles of sunaburule are pulverised by a grinding stone. The powder is sieved with a thin piece of cloth and to this, fine powder is added a little water to form a paste. Out of this paste, pats of bilidu are made and kept in reserve for ready use. Pats of bilidu are pounded and mixed with liquid gum and glue, and ground well for a thorough mixing. This mixture is known as 'gachu'. (Interview with Chitragar Anjaneyalu at Kinhal on 12/012/2016, 12.10 PM)

PEBBLE STONES

Pebble stones are used to smoothen the figure after the thin cloth is applied with Bilidu. These are basically river stones of different shapes and sizes.

COLOURS

Only few Colours, mostly Primary colours are used by the chitragars. The background is usually monochromatic and flat. Red colour is mixed with white colour which serves for the colour of skin, while gold colour for ornaments, crown, thrones. etc.,

NATURAL COLOURS

Natural colours are prepared at home by the Chitragars. White is prepared from limestone, and various colours are made from tin. The artisans also use red earth and carbon black (lamp black). These colours are mixed with watery gum.

SYNTHETIC COLOUR POWDERS

Burnt sienna, raw sienna, lemon chrome, oxide green, emerald green and ultramarine are the synthetic colour powders used in the making of paints.



OIL COLOUR TUBES

Oil colour tubes of scarlet, burnt sienna and lemon chrome are used in the making of paints. These powders constitute the pigment of the paint, whereas liquid gum and glue constitute the medium. The powder of particular paint is dissolved in liquid gum stirring well with finger in an enamel bowl.(http://ipindiaseservices.gov.in/GI_DOC/)

LEJJAWARA FOR SILVER COLOUR

For Silver colour 'Lejjawara', which is a combination of tin powder and 'maravajra' (tree gum) is used. Alternatively, silver foil is used for painting ornaments, etc.(Interview with ChitragarAnjaneyalu at Kinhal on 12/012/2016, 12.40 PM)

GOLD COLOUR

'Lejjawara' after powdered is mixed with French polish mixed with Kesari /yellow colour applied.Transparent colour less varnish is also used for glossiness of the dolls.

ENAMEL PAINTS

Enamel paints (white, aluminium, etc.) are also used by the craftsmen when the article requires a lustrous finish. However, enamel paints are sparingly used as the cost of these paints is high. These are used for outlines such as lips, eyes, eyebrows, etc.When paints are made of 'alaku' or metallic powder, French polish is used as the vehicle.

THIN CLOTH

Old thin cloth is used for the purpose of pasting on the toy, after application of kitta. This is pasted on various parts towards joining the same.

VARNISH

Earlier the varnish was prepared by the Chitragars at home, but now a day they buy them. The varnish helps to keep the gloss of the colours i.e., helps to bind the painting and also to preserve the picture. It also assists to act as a water proof.

PAINT BRUSHES

The brushes are made by the chitragars themselves out of tuft in squirrel's tail. The tufts of squirrel's tail are fixed at the end of a bamboo splinter and are tied with yarn smeared with gum.

TOOLS

Tools such as chisel, files, jack plane, gauges and snappers, handsaws and axes, hammer, etc. are used. As the craftsmen are engaged in the art form for a long time and it is hereditary, the tools in their possession at present have been purchased and today, they have improved tools like vices, drills, blowers, machinery (a hand operated lathe), etc'

PRODUCTION PROCESS

The process of production is fairly simple. Gokak in Belgaum district was noted particularly for artificial fruits and vegetables. This handicraft flourished there during the middle of the 19th century. First the wood is cut into

convenient pieces depending upon the kind of article to be produced. Secondly the piece of wood is cut until it acquires the proper shape and the rough portion are filed.(S.S. Menasinakai 1961: 7)

The production process can be set in the following 12 stages of work. The first 5 stages are preliminary where the chemicals and paints needed are prepared, and the rest are stages of actually making the toys. 1. Preparation of Liquid Gum, 2. Preparation of Sari, 3.Preparation of kitta, 4.Preparation of Bilidu, 5.Preparation of paints, 6.Reducing the wood to shape, 7.Assembling the pieces, 8.Daubing of kitta, 9.Pasting of cloth, 10.Application of Bilidu, 11.Painting and 12.Finishing.("Kinhal Toys – Training Project"(PDF). *Crafts Council of India. p.24*)

Reducing the wood to shape:Wood is cut into blocks according to the size of the figure. As the wood is very light and does not afford a smooth ground for carving, the figure has to be made by assembling several pieces. Body, head and pinion of figures of birds are of wood and legs are of wire. The pieces forming the several components of the figure, carved from the cut pieces of wood are smoothened by using rough and smooth files.

Assembling the Pieces:The component pieces after smoothening are assembled using nails and adhesives. Where wire is used, as in joining legs and horns of animals, it is straight away fixed in the wood.

Daubing of Kitta:After assembling the several components of the figure, kitta is daubed by hand all over the pieces. A layer of kitta on wood will be of 1/16" thick and that on wires is pasted till the wired portion attains the thickness proportionate to the wooden piece. Kitta being daubed, the figure is smoothened by light filing.

Pasting of cloth:After making the surface of the figure smooth, pieces of thin cloth are pasted on it by using sari made of tamarind seeds. Care is taken to paste the cloth in such a way that no wrinkle is formed. To improve the grip of the paste, the cloth is rubbed with a round stone with smooth surface.

Application of Bilidu:The pieces of cloth are pasted on the figure,Bilidu is applied on it by means of a brush. Three coatings of bilidu are applied, each coating being applied after the previous one has sufficiently dried up. Bilidu serves as a base for painting.

Painting:Prepared paints are applied on the figure by means of a brush with all care. There is not standard colour scheme and it mostly depends on the craftsmen's creative imagination. After the colours are filled in, a thin file of varnish is applied. As mentioned earlier, the varnish helps to keep the gloss of the colours and also to preserve the picture. Usually, red, green, yellow, blue, white, brown and black colours are used directly. The main colours used by artisans are red, yellow and green.

Finishing: After completing the painting, eyes, mouth and such other features are marked and final touches are given to the figure.("Kinhal Toys – Training Project"(PDF). *Crafts Council of India. p.24*)

KINHALA: VARIANTS

Apart from the thematic figures, other toys like Bride and Bridegroom, Animals and Birds, Decorative Plates, Palanquins and Pedestals are made by the chitragars. To keep the art alive the design has been adopted for furnitures by the artisans which are very popular.

The uniqueness of Kinhal Craft is that the toys are made mostly of light wood. Machine lathe is not used for making the toy. Colouring is done by artisans by hand through brushes and as per the imagination of the artists. Lejjawara' - a paint made by Tin Powder and Tree produced gums are exclusively used for Kinhal toys. The height of Kinhal statues ranges from 6 inches to 15 feet. The paintings are Thematic and Puranic themes done by hand through brushes by artisans. The artists' imagination/ creativity are involved for the painting. Though not an endangered art form, it needs a market. One should encourage the children to play with these vibrant wooden toys which are toxin free and keep the art and culture alive. Many Contemporary artists are inspired and have taken the influence of the indigenous art form and have created renowned works of art.

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PHOTOS



Mask of Gramadevata



Devotee



Durgamma, Yellamma, Chowdi



Hanuman, Garuda



KinhalFurnitures