



CINTA SILPA

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[A collection of multi-faceted research articles]

Edited by

Malamoni Goswami

Pranjal saikia

CINTA SILPA

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Woodcarving, a Neo-Vaishnavite Traditional Art Form of Assam: with special reference to Barpeta Sattra Woodcarvings

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Introduction:

Woodcarving is the action or skill of carving wood to make functional or ornamental objects. Wood is light and can take very fine detail so it is highly suitable for masks and other sculpture intended to be worn or carried. It is also much easier to work on than stone. According to Merriam Webster, Learners Dictionary, Woodcarving is the art of cutting designs in to wood or carving objects out of wood. In India the antiquity of the use of wood has been pushed back to the Indus civilization. It has been cherished that to the Harappans used timber constructing their buildings and beams covered in painting finished with a top dressing beaten art.¹ It is to be mentioned here the Bhakti movement resulted primarily in the formation of a distinct regional identity and the creation of a uniquely Assamese style of architecture for the sattra institution, which patronized a vernacular literary tradition besides taking beneath its façade the artistic creativities of the people in diverse fields. Woodcarvings were one of the fields which emerged in direct response to the movement and the cult of Bhakti began to flourish in 16th-18th century. The carvings based on their article mainly of the Bhagavatpuran and the Ramayana and sometimes from day to life of the people living in that area. A particular class of people engaged in doing different art works like preparing masks, the costumes, engraving wood panels, illustrating the manuscripts etc. were called Khanikar² in sattra circle.³ In this regard prominent art historian Naren Kalita holds