

Statement of Case for Varanasi Soft Stone Undercut Work

- 1- India has a glorious tradition Harappa and Mohenjodaro have been carefully preserved by the museums in India. Today, a large variety of materials are used for the manufacture of the figures of Gods and Goddesses who reveal their spirit in an artistic expression are very helpful for the learning about the rituals, customs and mythology.
- 2- Banaras is older than history, older than tradition, even older than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together" as said by Mark Twain, its very befitting for Varanasi to be the centre of such ancient craft of soft stone toy making and toys which have thousands of mythical and religious stories behind them! Besides Hinduism, Varanasi is also an important centre for Buddhism and Jainism. All the religions sustain peacefully here. The people of Varanasi are fun loving and relaxed. Nevertheless, they are very much attached to the culture of Varanasi and believe in carrying on the family traditions. No different are the toy makers, who keep on increasing the range of their soft stone toys according to the changing taste of people and the market competition. The people of Varanasi celebrate all religions and their festivals. Also, the craft which was once only confined to Hindu myths and traditions has widely opened its arms to embrace other cultures, their myths and traditions in the form of the stone craft.
- 3- The rich tradition of the artisans has been carried forward though generations to the present day. Using the simplest of tools coupled with expertise, patience and perseverance, these artisans create works of splendour, which have few parallels anywhere in the world. Of late stone working is not only restricted to ornate carvings on temples or sculptures of deities, but also used in making items like carved panels, tiles, paper weights, pen stands, models of historical buildings, sculptures of animals and humans etc. Indian artisans now produce a blend of the modern with ancient and are capable of reproducing music in stones. Many production units with latest stone processing technology are also operational in the country. Different types of stones like, marble, soapstone and sand stone are used by craftsmen in India.
- 4- Varanasi is the place where the great examples of stone craft have been seen. Sonia and Kalimohal areas of Varanasi, are the places to where the instances of excellent artistry of stone craft are to be found. Most people of the areas, mainly the artisans of these areas, earn their livelihood by creating outstanding artifacts with stones.
Apart from creating different articles that catch the fancy of the local people and the tourists as well, the artisans create exclusive items that are placed in the trendy house to suit the decorative purpose.
- 5- Soft Stone is an auspicious craft of Varanasi and is famous for the creating designs with the natural veins of the stone. These stone are made without any joints. It is obviously an ancient craft called soft stone craft.
- 6- Varanasi, said to be the oldest living city in the world, is inhabited on the left bank of the Ganges and is world famous for its Ghats. This holy city has been the seat of Aryan religion and philosophy it was also a centre of arts, crafts, music and dances. It also flourished as a commercial and industrial centre famous for its muslin and silk fabrics,

perfumes, ivory works, and sculpture as well as for wooden toys, bangles made of glass and beads.

7- **Community involved:** Artisans from Schedule caste, OBC community are involved with nearly 3500 artisans.

8- **Etymology:** The rich tradition of the artisans has been carried forward through generations to the present day. Using the simplest of tools coupled with expertise, patience and perseverance, these artisans create works of splendour, which have few parallels anywhere in the world. Of late stone working is not only restricted to ornate carvings on temples or sculptures of deities, but also used in making items like carved panels, tiles, paper weights, pen stands, models of historical buildings, sculptures of animals and humans etc. Indian artisans now produce a blend of the modern with ancient and are capable of reproducing music in stones. Many production units with latest stone processing technology are also operational in the country. Different types of stones like, marble, soapstone and sand stone are used by craftsmen in India.

9- **Raw Material:**

Description about Soft Stone/Soap Stone –

Soft Stone is the most appealing of the kinds of lime stones found in the country. It is a “Metamorphic Rock” and also known as “PYROPHYLLITE”, its scientific name. While Marble is the hardest form of limestone, Soap Stone is the softest and is easy to work on. For this specific property of it, any kind of carving can be done by hand on soft stone.

It is interesting to note, there is no homogeneity of colour, tint and texture in soft stone. Two pieces taken out, even from the same block of soft stone, are never alike. Thus, it is virtually impossible to get two carved pieces of soft stone of identical colour or design. You may say soft stone is blessed by nature. They are like free hand sketches by a small child.

Millions of years ago, with far reaching metabolic changes taking place, every kind of organic and inorganic matter on the surface of the earth kept caved in and remained there under tremendous pressure and temperature. This resulted in absolute change in their properties. Soft Stone is one of those natural products.

Soft Stones are excavated from open mines. Large sized boulders are carried to the workshops where they are given desired shapes and sizes by skilled and seasoned craftsmen. The articles thus crafted, are buffed for smoothness. Some are also lacquered to impart sheen and glow

The base material of stone craft in Uttar Pradesh is marble, gorara soapstone and occasionally cuddapah. Ramnagar (a part of Varanasi district), Luxa, Mishir Pokhra, Lahartara and Sarnath is important geographical area for the soft stone under cutwork and which is pre dominantly by the artisans. The important thing is there craftsmanship in this soft stone work which has also known as Soap stone.

10- **Making process:**

1. Cutting

The crafts person while working on the sajjar pathar first studies the natural design contains in the stone selected to work upon. The shaping is done thereafter very carefully with chisel and hammers. Water is sprinkled repeatedly to avoid heat generation. The stone is smoothed by rubbing with sand papers or file. Dimensions of the figure to be manufactured are marked on a

stone slab. Extra edges are removed from the slab by beating with a hammer. Big pieces of stone are cut vertically into smaller slabs, and rough sketches are made on it. The article is taken out from the slab with the aid of a saw. This slab is now converted in the form of the desired figure with a hammer and a chisel. A word of caution here, **wear safety glasses, dust mask and hearing protectors**. These are a necessity and can be gotten at minimum cost at most hardware stores

2. Grinding Minor carvings are done by pointed chisel. A hammer and chisel do further smoothening. Before carving the stone is kept in boiling water overnight and treated chemically. This smoothen and whitens the surface of the stone.

3. Buffing

In carving an image, the stone carver sketches a rough outline of the sculpture on the stone - block. The craftsmen, sprinkle water on the stone during the course of their work because of the friction generated due to the constant chiseling away of the unwanted material results in the tools heating up.

4. Polishing Polishing is done for the final finishing with sand or carborundum pieces. Several of the carved artifacts are painted. Others are fitted with the looking glasses, brass fittings etc. Finishing is accomplished in a variety of ways from sand-papering, polishing with multani-mitti or clay, oil and cloth. An outline is drawn on hard or soft stone which is already cut to the appropriate size. Once the outline is incised indicating the shape, the final figure is brought out by removing the unwanted portions. While for the harder stones this is done by chiseling out the extra material, with softer stones. This is done by scraping out the same with a sharp flat-edged iron tool.

Jali Making in the craft: *Jali* work is the Oriental equivalent to the stained glass of our European ohurobes. It would be futile to oompare the merits 'of the two. The former is the Eastern artist's devioe to subdue the fie,roe heat of the sun, while giving free aooe.s to the breeze; the latter is intended for a olimate where wind and cold and rain prodominate. Both alike, however, give that dim religious light, that feelings of subdued oalm, which appeal so strongly to the emotional part of man. Gazing at the beautiful we.t window of New College chapel, lighted by the setting sun, or Btanding by the oenotaph of Akbar with its exquisite soreens of pieroed marble, we feel alike that religious emotion which art at its highest always produces in the mind of man.

Tools: Hammer, Chisel, Pointed chisel, Sandpapers, safety glasses, dust mask and hearing protectors, riffle.

Uniqueness and Traditional Trends: The soft stone craft studied can be classified into following categories- religious, cultural, animals & birds, and traditional and modern themes. All these themes have treated in a different way—for example—religious craft are generally 2 dimensional, hand carved, and painted gaudily. They exhibit Indian motifs and patterns. These toys also tell mythological and religious stories of their time. The cultural theme shows the classes of society, the daily lifestyle and activity of the people in rural India and also some profession which were popular in ancient India. Whereas, the modern craft are generally 3 dimensional, made by turning and have modern patterns and themes.

Cultural: One gets to see the real culture and tradition of India in its villages. Many activities like farming, drawing water from a well, bullock carts, etc. are still thriving in the rural part of the country. Thus, the craft made on this theme primarily show the culture of the rural India which

consequently affects the clothing style, patterns, colors, etc. shown in the toys by the craftsmen. Example The ruins of the old temple of Vishwanath, out of which Aurangzeb erected the present Gyanhapi Masjid. The carving is of the same type as at the Gobind Deo temple and is probably a little older. The sculptured figures were of course all destroyed by Aurangzeb; but the boldly carved scroll work still remains and must have had a magnificent effect on the original buildings

Animals and Birds: Animals play a very important role in Indian legends and myths. There are many stories of kings and queens to support the loyalty of their animals. This has made some animals appear a lot in the toy form. Also, as craftsmen experiment with their craft, they bring in more subjects to deal with. Therefore, many others form of life, like lizards, fishes etc. have also found their place in this craft.

Traditional and Modern: Some kinds of craft are not affected by time and generation and they remain the basic toy that every one as a kid, wants to play with. The best example is the kitchen set for girls. Though a lots of modern soft stone crafts are present in the market. Such toys take us back to the earliest and the simplest kind of toys that our ancestors used to play with. They also show us the glimpse of our present and past culture and tradition. The best modern carving in Benares is to be seen at the Godowlia temple, erected by the Maharaja of Benares. The design of the gateway is obviously taken from the gateway of the Chunar d-rgah, even down to the intermixing of red and grey slope. There are the same "da"ielle" with richly oarved struts on either side of the gateway, and the same profusion of carving. The carving is, however, different.

In the modern gateway the long trailing sprays of vine and lotus are exquisitely carved, and possess the merit of being both artistic and true to nature, the usual "pari." (fairies) are also well oarved and harmonize with the background of vine and lotus. The subordination of these, figures to the general design is oharacteristio of the modern Muttra style. The temple is worthy of the ~ateway. It is a typical eumple of Benares arohiteoture and Benares oarving. The special feature of the Benares temple is. the .. • ikhara," which is composed of several miniature

These soft stone toy dolls, figuring mythological characters, were meant to delight and inculcate traditional values as well. Culled from the trove of Indian culture, these auspicious handcrafted toys are a collector's delight. some Examples of Sandstone monuments in Varanasi:

Benares than in any other district of these Provinces. The following are the most important of the old buildings in Benares hand afford good examples of the earlier Hindu style :-

- (1) The Briddhkal temple in Daranagar, 'probably the most anoiient· building in the Hindu style.
- (2) The Man Mandir observatory, erected by R&ja Jai Singh about 1700 A.D. The carving may be ocmpa Jed with the oarving cn the Gobind Deo temple at Bindraban.

11- Conclusion:

The beauty of soft stone undercut craft is in the fact that they are carved by craftsmen and painted by them. They show a perspective of life. Craftsmen make them according to their knowledge of history, Indian mythology, Mahabharata, Ramayana, etc. But as the craftsmen make some innovative prototypes in soft stone craft they lack the knowledge to copyright and sell it. Other problems faced by them were lack of fast machines, lack of manpower, newer generation doesn't want to be involved, slow process of finishing a toy, and consequently lose business.

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