

Ignite Innovate Inspire

# PROVOKE

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₹100

EXOTIC  
HOLIDAY

**IT CAN BE  
AN IGLOO  
OR CAVE**

HOW AIRHOSTESS  
TRAINING CAN  
HELP ON GROUND

SHOULD YOU SAY  
**I LOVE YOU**  
TO CHILDREN

CEVICHE,  
**VIRAT KOHLI'S**  
*FAVOURITE DISH*

## ADITI BALAN

OK WITH  
GLAMOUR, IF  
STORY NEEDS IT

**TOY TRAINS**  
NOT JUST FOR KIDS



**PRIDE**



# Carving divine images



The day starts quite early in Madhavmala, a village in Andhra Pradesh, where wood carvers have created a niche for themselves in the wide pantheon of divine figures. **Sandy and Vyjay** bring us the story of the artisans, who carry forward a tradition that they have inherited from their forefathers

The first golden rays of the sun caress the green paddy fields that glisten with the lustre of fresh dewdrops. An assortment of fowl, which have taken shelter in a mango tree for the night, swoop down clumsily, in quick succession. An old man who is in his eighties gets up from his spartan bed in the small verandah of his house. The first thing he does is to pour water on some wooden blocks that are kept near a well. He then finishes his morning ablutions and after a cup of tea, is bent over his work and passion.

It is 6.30 am and while the day is still

just beginning for many others, the old man is an epitome of concentration and hard work. He is going to work through the day for a solid 12 hours with just an hour's break to attend to his biological needs.

This seems like a typical morning in any Indian village. But this is no ordinary village, neither is the old man. The octogenarian is Chinnachari and the village is Madhavmala in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh.

Chinnachari is a wood carver who has been breathing life and divinity into plain

blocks of wood for over sixty years. His deft fingers and sharp eyes are his tools while the tools that he uses for his craft are mere instruments that transform his imagination into wooden reality.

Where ordinary people see just a plain block of wood, Chinnachari sees the images of the Gods and Goddesses of the Indian pantheon. He visualizes scenes from the Indian mythologies and transfers his vision through his creativity to the wooden blocks, transforming them into works of art. What is amazing is the fact that Chinnachari does not need a reference drawing or design. He does it



all with the sheer power of his mind and imagination.

Chinnachari hardly speaks as he is so focused on his work, with a smile he gestures at you to take a seat and continues with his work which requires total concentration and attention to detail. Chinnachari like many other artisans in the hamlet of Madhavmala learnt his craft on the lap of his father, who learnt it from his, and so on. He is the fourth generation wood carver in his family, taking forward a historical artistic tradition that dates back some hundreds of years.

Wood carving is practiced by the artisans of Madhavmala as a legacy that they have inherited from their forefathers. About forty households in the village are engaged in wood carving and Chinnachari is a shining beacon to the old and young artisans, who lovingly refer to him as "Dronacharya." They respect his knowledge and skill and are eager to follow the path shown by him. He happens to be the oldest practicing wood carver in the village.

Wood carving is regarded as probably one of the most ancient of arts that has survived the test of time. Evidence of wood carving can be traced as far back as the paleolithic age. In India too the temples of the region have always been centres of art and architecture and have fostered various art forms. Wood carving is one of them. Wood carving is relatively more demanding than stone carving because of the nature of wood which can crack easily. Hence it requires a lot more patience, precision, and dexterity.

Madhavmala, owing to its proximity to many temples in and around Tirupati has historically catered to the demand for wood carving from these temples. Earlier the wood used for carving was Red Sanders, a type of sandalwood which grew verdantly in the region. However owing to government restrictions on use of sandalwood, the wood generally uses is Neem, Teak, Mango, and others. Though even today most of the end

products of the Madhavmala wood art are related to mythology and the Gods and Goddesses from the Hindu pantheon, there is a perceptible shift with more contemporary uses of the products for interiors of houses and as door frames.

The winds of change and development have blown over Madhavmala and there may not be many takers for the artistic profession of wood carving amongst the current generation. This does not bode well for the future of this inherited rich legacy. Take the case of Chinnachari, his son has followed in his footsteps while out of five grandchildren only one has opted to continue the family tradition. Lakshman is proud to keep the flag flying high and take the fine art of wood carving of Madhavmala to new heights. On the other hand, his twin brother



Ram has set his sights on becoming a Chartered Accountant and setting up his own consultancy firm. Another sibling is a software engineer in a leading IT company in Bangalore.

So how will the esoteric art of wood carving of Madhavmala survive and flourish?

Here is where the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Authority, in collaboration with Grassroutes, which is an organization committed towards the revival of rural arts, crafts, and culture, have stepped in. Together they have come up with a unique and sustainable model of tourism that not only generates alternative employment in the village but also nurtures the craft of wood carving.

The model envisages an intensive village experience for tourists combined with workshops and live demonstrations of wood carving. On the one side, the model makes use of the village resources itself for hospitality services while on the other hand it hopes to generate more interest in the art which will help it flourish. Considering that the wood carving art would be the crux of all tourist activity as well as revenue generated thereof, it is hoped that more and more youth of the new generation take up the art and take the exquisite wood carvings of Madhavmala to reach far and wide.

It is dusk and the darkness of night looms over Madhavmala. In Chinnachari's house, a picture of the late Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, N T Rama Rao, hangs from the wall. A young Chinnachari stands beaming next to the Chief Minister. It is a photo that has been taken at an award ceremony where he received a State award.

It is almost 7 in the evening and Chinnachari is still at work. I sit in front of him watching intently, but he is still the epitome of concentration, just like how he was when he started early in the morning. I marvel at the fact that he does not even need glasses to practise his craft.

Jimmy, the friendly neighbourhood village mongrel snuggles against me and wants to sit in my lap. Chinnachari at last looks up from his work, and with a half smile at me shoos Jimmy away and gets up.

The day's work is over.

I too get up and head out to take a walk in the village. I think about the future of wood carving in Madhavmala and I see a glimmer of hope for this beautiful art.

I look up at Lakshman Achari, Chinnachari's grandson and smile at him.

*(The writers blog at [invoyager.com](http://invoyager.com) and they can be reached at [invoyager18@gmail.com](mailto:invoyager18@gmail.com))*



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