

Design Resource

Snake Boat Making, Alleppey - Kerala

Chundan Vallam

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Manasa K. H. and

Hariharasudan T.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/snake-boat-making-alleppey-kerala>



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Introduction

Kerala the God's own country is rich in its culture and traditions followed for centuries. The southernmost state of India and is very known for its greenery, the land of coconuts, heaven on earth, and the God dwelling, abode is this wonderful Kerala. It has rich cultural heritage. The highlights of this wonderful land is that there are many cultural activities that are conducted – performing arts (Koodiyattum, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Theyyam are some of it), Carnatic music, the traditional music – melam is performed at temple centered festivals with Chenda (music instrument) comprising of more than hundred musicians, each performance lasting for an hour and percussion instruments are used mostly during the celebrations, martial art – Kalarippayattu and all the elements of the traditional lifestyle of the people of Kerala are reflected in the folkart and the songs of the divine place. Some important festivals are Onam – that is celebrated in Kerala, it is a crop festival and celebration of the return of Mahabali, the future king (This king ruled “when all men were equal, when no one was poor, when there was neither theft nor dread of thieves”), Kerala Boat Festivals – where fierce boat races are held on the great backwaters of Kerala annually, Vishnu festival – Malayali New Year's Day, Thrissur Pooram – The most spectacular festival celebrated in the month of April (temple festival), Payippad Jelotsavam – another boat festival held in memory for the Prathista ceremony of Haripad Subramanya temple, Attukal Pongala – where women gather to do offerings by cooking pudding to the Goddess in the Attukul temple, Makaravillaku at Sabarimala and Theyyam – worship of the deity in the figure of animals, serpents and trees. Kerala is a land of traditional diversity blending in all.

Among the important festivals, the backwaters of Kerala offer wonderful scenery water carnivals. The Kerala boat festival is an event that platforms the ethnicity of the state and brings out the outstanding team spirit, incorporation and good affairs of the people. The boat festivals are commonly known as Vallom kalli.

Vallom kalli is the traditional boat race that is held in Kerala. They are conducted every year in parts of the state and amazing numbers of people take part and make it more rejuvenating. The boat looks canoe accommodating a specific number of people to paddle and race. The boat festivals are mainly organized through the harvest season that is during Onam festival in autumn.

The begin of this race somehow must have been through the wars during an early 14th century between the medieval kingdoms of Kayamkulam and Chembakassery, King Devanarayana of Chembakassery commissioned the construction of a war boat called Chundam Vallam from a famous carpenter of those days for creating. Hence theoretically, methods for creating these Chundan Vallam (snake boats) are of six fifty years old and Parthasarathi Chundan is said to be the oldest model.

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The race of Chundan Vallom (snake boat) is the chief event hence Vallom Kalli – the boat game is also addressed as snake boat race. The Boat Festival brings out the amusing tradition and diverse culture of the state. It is one of the biggest festivals in Kerala and is held every year. The people celebrate Kerala Boat Festival with great zeal irrespective of any caste and religion and the snake boat race recognition comes with a line of snake boats all set for the greatest happening races stretching from the month of July to September.

The boat is made of Anjali wood; the wood is cut and transported to the location where it is constructed. The making of the boats has to begin on the auspicious day. The processes follow from the Vedas of building boats. The boats are more than a 100ft in length with a rear portion rising to a height of about 20ft. The boat resembles a snake with its hood raised when it is completed. The Hull is built of planks quite to a length of 80ft. The boats are oiled to reduce the absorption of water. It is oiled with fish oil, coconut shell, and carbon, mixed with eggs to keep the wood strong and boat lubricious in water. Only men of the village are allowed to be in the boat and supposed to be dressed in mundu (white cloth) and turban. The villagers worship the boat and men get into the boat barefooted. The leader – Kaarnavan/Karanaadhan, will command the boat with first rudder oar (adanayampu) under him will be three oarsmen who will be responsible in controlling the movement of the boat. People in boat sit two in a row along the length of the boat and they row in the beat of the Vanchipattu (the boatman's song). The main singer will lead the other singers on the platform, standing in middle between the oarsmen to pep them and coordinate their rowing and move ahead.

The Vanchipattu is the song that the singers lead which oarsmen will repeat and move according to the beat. It has a history and started century ago during the former kings of Travancore and Cochin kingdoms. Rowers in the boat races sing the song in varied forms.

The list of Vallom kalli events goes like major and minor events.

The major events are:

1. The Nehru Trophy Boat Race in Punnamada Lake, Alappuzha
2. Aranmula Uthrattadi Vallamkali at Aranmula, Pathanamthitta
3. President's Trophy Boat Race in Ashtamudi lake, Kollam
4. Kallada Boat Race in Kallada River, Kollam
5. Pampa Boat Race in Neerattupuram

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6. Champakulam Moolam Boat Race

7. Kumarakom Boat Race

8. Payippad Jalotsavam

9. Kannetty Sree Narayana Boat Race in Karunagappally, Kollam

10. Thazhathangadi Boat Race, Kottayam

11. Gothuruth Boat Race, in the Periyar, Ernakulam

12. Piravom Boat Race in Piravom

The minor events are:

1. Thuruthippuram Boat Race, Thuruthippuram

2. Paravur Jalothsavam & Boat Race in Paravur Thekkumbhagam, Kollam

3. ATDC Boat Race, Alappuzha

4. Rajiv Gandhi Trophy boat race, Pulinkunnu

5. Neerettupuram Pampa Boat Race

6. Karuvatta Boat Race

7. Kavanattinkara Boat Race

8. Kumarakom Arpookara Vanitha Jalamela, Kumarakom

9. Mahatma Boat Race, Mannar, Alappuzha

10. Kottapuram Boat Race, Kottapuram

11. Kodungallur and Kumaranasan Smaraka Jalotsavam, Pallana

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12. Indira Gandhi Boat Race, in Kochi Lake

13. Kaithappuzhakkayal Boat Race, in Kaithappuzha Lake, Ernakulam

14. Biyyam Kaayal Boat Race, Ponnani

15. Uthara malabar Boat Race, Thejaswini Lake, Kasaragod

The Kerala festival dates are certain in accordance with the Malayalam calendar and the local traditions and customs. The Aranmula Boat race is the oldest riverboat celebration that takes place in Aranmula near a Hindu temple devoted to Lord Krishna and Arjuna. People with great enthusiasm come to visit the temple during the festive times and also the great event of snake boat race on banks of river Pampa. The snake boats are addressed Palliyodams which in other words is Chundan Vallom, are the divine vessels of the presiding deity in Sree Parthasarathy temple. There are three important festivals that these snake take part in solemn religious custom – Thiruvonam, Uthrittathi and Aranmula Vallasadya.

Thiruvonam - The special boats that is the arrival of Thiruvonathoni from kattoor is celebrated initially at Aranmula. A boat with necessary provisions and an ever-burning lamp is arranged to set off its journey from the temple Kattoor around 6pm to reach Aranmula around 4am the next day that is the Thiruvonam day. The snake boats accompany these special boats on the way and people of all age groups gather to witness this event.

Uthrittathi - It is considered to be the day of the idol sanctified in the south hence there will be a snake boat regatta in front of the temple in celebrations.

Aranmula Vallasadya - An elaborate and a formal meal for the oarsmen of snake boats at the Parthasarathy temple is served. This mega fest includes people from all parts of the state. Valla sadya is performed in a way; the one who offers the feast must invite the leader (karanathan). The decorated boat will arrive with the other boats. They are welcomed with thalappoli (a traditional procession carried out to attract happiness and prosperity) and offerings, marching to the arranged banquet later.

The Chundan Vallom miniatures can be witnessed in every home as well as the shops and handicrafts emporium across the state. The villagers are occupied in making these miniatures and have made an occupation making these models that are great in demand. These boats are made out of sandalwood or ivory fittings and brass buttons. They are altered sometimes to make candle stands, pen stands, key holders and the prices range less than a hundred rupees to few hundreds depending on the sizes and embellishments of the products. Tourists would want to buy this stuff to take home the reminiscence of the great energizing snake boat event or sometimes just as an element of the land's activity that would keep them excited of the visit.

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“Oba Thudhikum Thanga Laaki” which means shinning gold is floating on the water and the energy from the racing crew.

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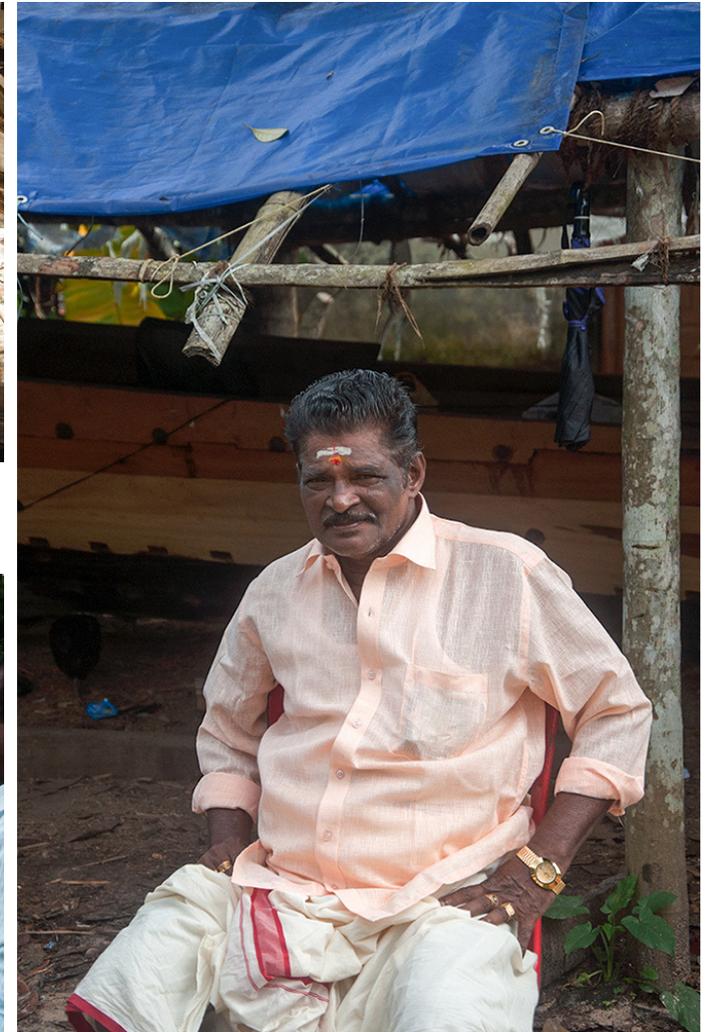
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The working team rejoicing with the dance and tribal song.



Nethi Pattam is being arrayed on the tail part of the snake boat.



Mr. Uma Masheswaran is a boat craftsman who has almost completed in making of 11 snake boats.

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Gabriel owns the snake boat, investor on the racing crew.



The early snake boat, which has been carved according to the traditional tribal on the Amaram.



The pattern used on the snake boat as per the early ancestor is being followed as a traditional culture.

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The snake boat is under shelter and when the race season starts it will be released to the river.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Following are the tools and raw materials required for snake boat making:

- **Wood:** Anjali wood is the basic raw material used in making of boat.
- **Glue:** Coconut oil, cotton, resin is used to make glue which is used in making of snake boat.
- **Handsaw:** I used to cut the wood into required size.
- **Hammer:** Tool with a heavy metal head mounted at right angles at the end of a handle, used for jobs such as breaking things and driving in nails.
- **Metal Melting Tong:** It is used while melting the metals to make nails and washer.
- **Spirit Level:** Spirit level, bubble level or simply a level is an instrument designed to indicate whether a surface is horizontal or vertical.
- **Angel Grinding Machine:** Using an abrasive wheel as the cutting tool.
- **Power Drill:** It is used to drill holes and the hull.
- **Washer and Nails:** It is used as the lock.
- **Chisel:** It is used to carve the wood into required shape.



The wood used in building the boat is Anjali or Poovarasu, which is being cut down from the closer forest.

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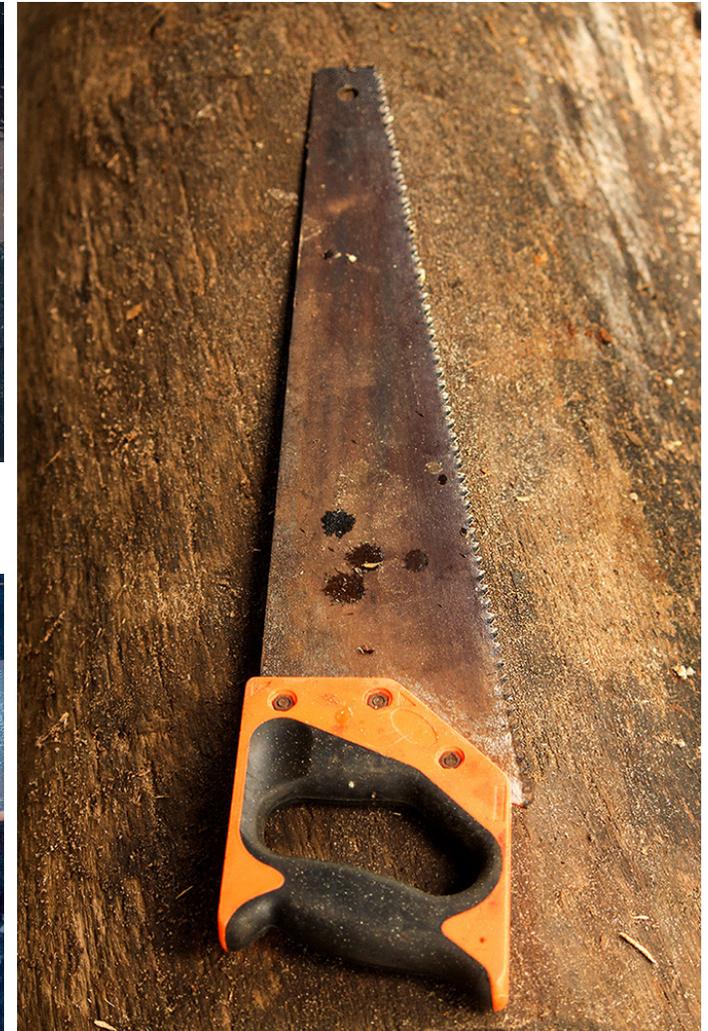
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Different types of chisels, nails and plier used in carving the boat.



The Sledgehammer and Tack hammer is used to place the nails accordingly.



A Crosscut saw is used to cut the wood into measured size.

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A Block Plane, which is used to trim the unwanted layers of the wood.



A Wood Router is used to shape the edges of the surface.



A Planer is an electric tool used for making wooden surface smooth.



A Drilling machine is used to drill the holes on the wood in required shapes and depth.

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Tools and process to heat the iron to shape it in a required size.



A rectangle head iron nail to fit in the boat according to the connected layers.



A big sized iron nail to give a strong hold on the wood.

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Glue made from wooden wax, cotton and coconut oil to fix the joint of two pieces.

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Making Process

These paintings do not depict mythological characters or images of deities, but depict social life. Images of human beings and animals, along with scenes from daily life are created in a loose rhythmic pattern. Painted white on red mud color, they are pretty close to pre-historic cave paintings in execution and usually depict scenes of human figures engaged in activities like hunting, dancing, sowing, harvesting, going out, drawing water from well, drying clothes or even dancing.

Warli Earthen Pot Painting/ Flower Vase Painting or bottle painting are one of the very simple art performed and are followed by the artisans of Raghurajpur. A plain Flower Vase or an empty bottle is bought in use (bottles are been washed cleanly and check if any dust particles exist) for this art to be performed upon, smooth surface turns to rough surface with the help of sandpaper. Cloth is applied on the bottle with the help of homemade glue which in turn, creates canvas base. Bottle is painted with the help of white base cote, it's left for drying under the sun for about an hour. Brown or white paint is applied as background over its surface with a thick paint brush. Choosing a design from either mind or from the customer's order, artisan starts creating a rough line drawing with the help of pencil. Drawing is made on the tracing paper where all the elements are added, artisan traces the design on bottle using carbon sheet.

Outlines are drawn using the white color for a clear visibility. After the object is dried, artisans paint the object over reference drawings. The paints that's used are mainly enamel based and are applied with the help of either flat or round brushes. Shading and highlighting give a brilliant light effect. While shading is used to detail shadows, highlighting emphasizes the brighter areas. Blending is also an advanced miniature Art painting technique that is used to merge colors in one area with surrounding areas, to give the impression of a smooth and natural movement. Outlining technique is used to separate various parts of the painting. Dry-brushing is a miniature Art painting technique that involves emphasizing certain parts of the painting with a brush that has barely any color on it. The color used for dry-brushing is lighter than the base color. Once painting is completed, the bottle is kept for drying for about 6 hours after applying clear varnish for better shine. Varnish also helps in protecting the paint from damage and peel.

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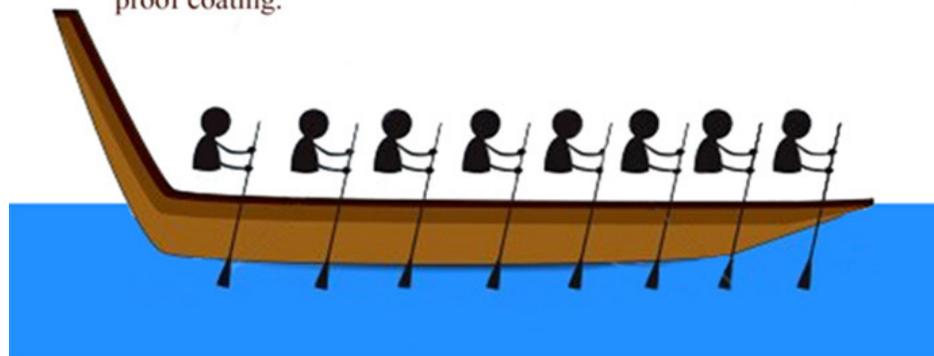
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Making Process of Snake Boat

1. Initially firm support for the building boat is constructed
2. The stencils are then prepared as per the required size and shape.
3. These stencils are then cut and placed at several intervals.
4. Wood is then cut into strips into required size.
5. These wooden pieces are then assembled and positioned over the both sides of the stencils.
6. Required wooden pieces are added one above above to form hull of the boat.
7. Once the hull is formed, the stencils are removed.
8. Middle planks are then made.
9. ext outer stems are attached.
10. Glue is used to fill the gap between inside and outside layer of hull.
11. Holes are made using drilling machiones and nails are passed through these holes and hammered.
12. Finally boat is completed by polishing the hull using water-proof coating.



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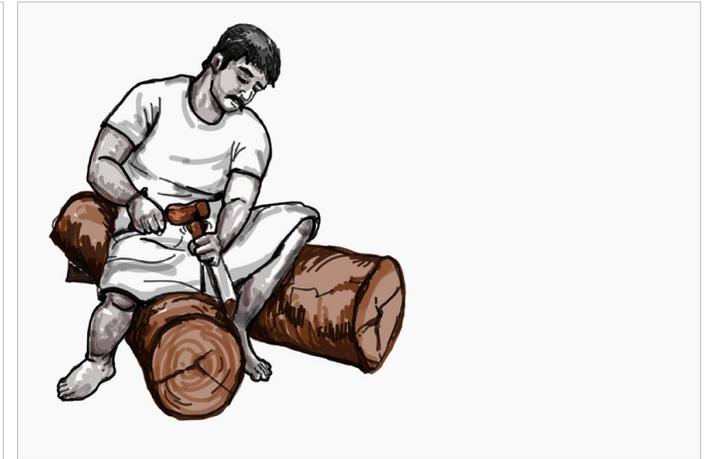
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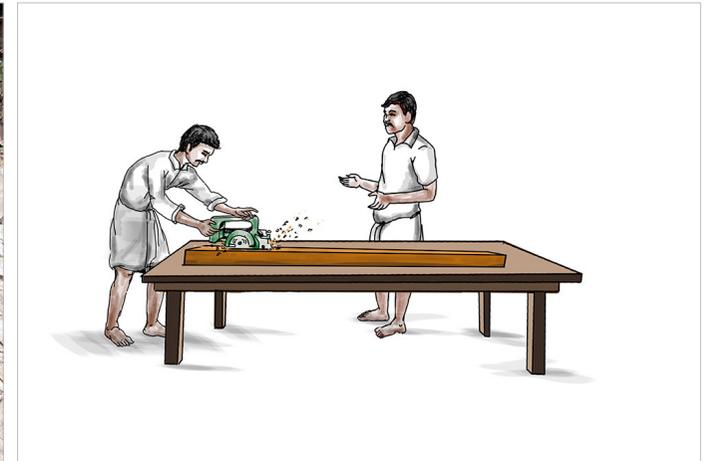
The wood (log) is the basic element in boat making.



The chief carpenter known as Aasari chooses the tree and cut it.



The reference frame that is made out of wood decides the shape and size of the boat.



Wood logs are cut and made straight using wood planers.

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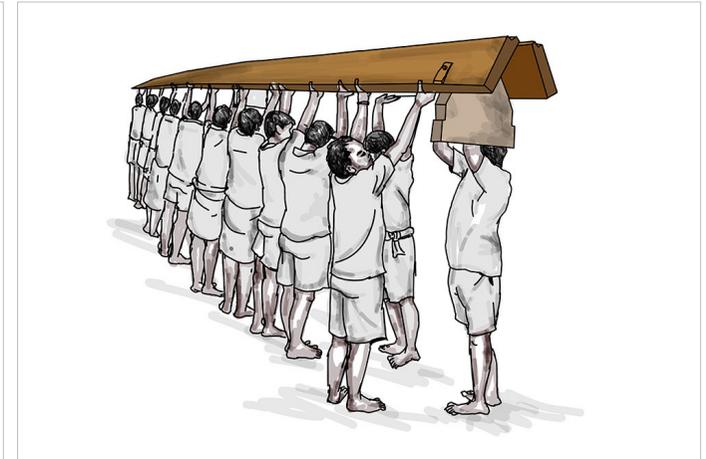
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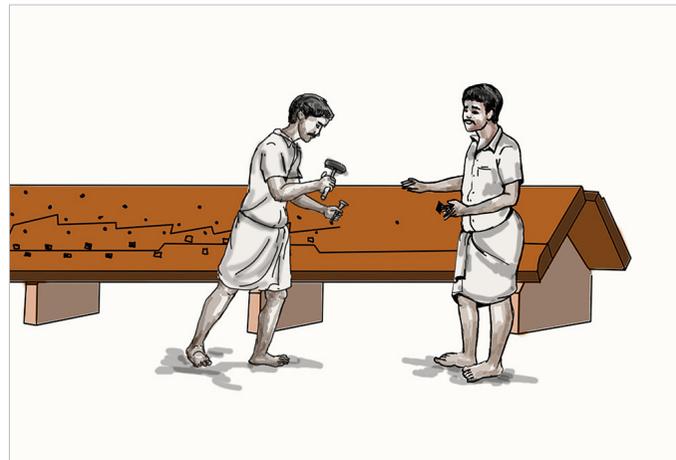
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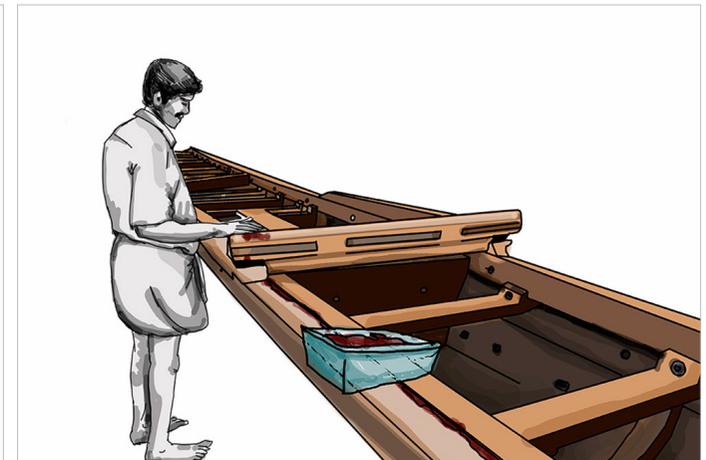
The side and bottom pieces are fixed together using customized iron nails.



The boat is turned upside down and the reference frames are being removed from the boat.



Each wood piece is fastened using customized rectangle and round shaped 10 inches nails.



Using the customized glue and iron nails, inner parts are joined to body.

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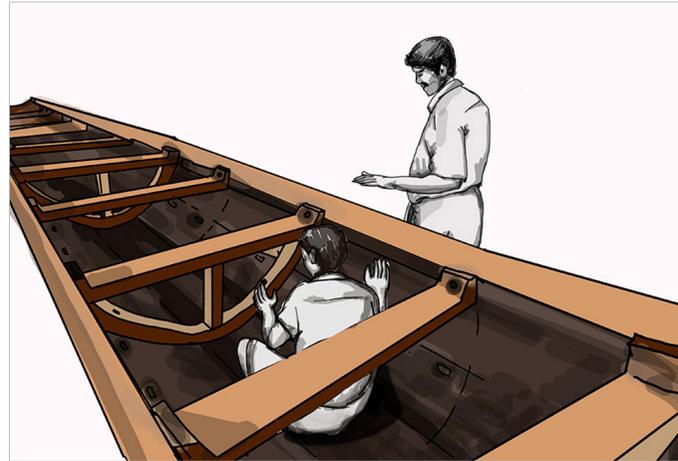
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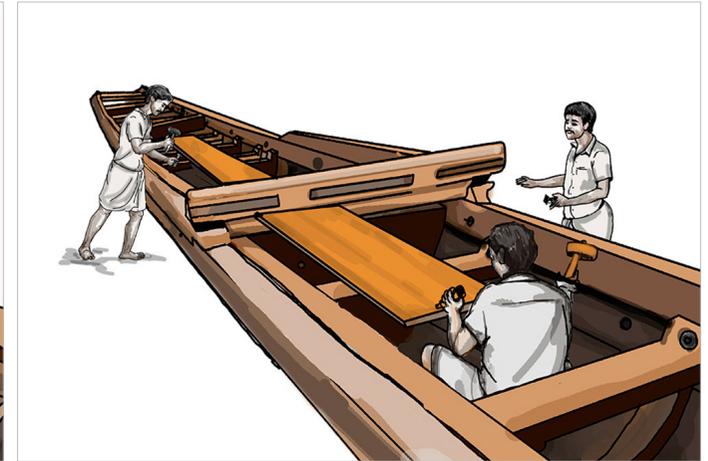
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The supports (main frame) given inside the body of the boat is called as Padi and Manikaal.



Flat wooden plank is assembled to body which is used by racers for sitting.

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Artisan is chiseling to make a hole.



Artisan is drilling an in-depth hole on boat to fasten wooden plank with iron nail.

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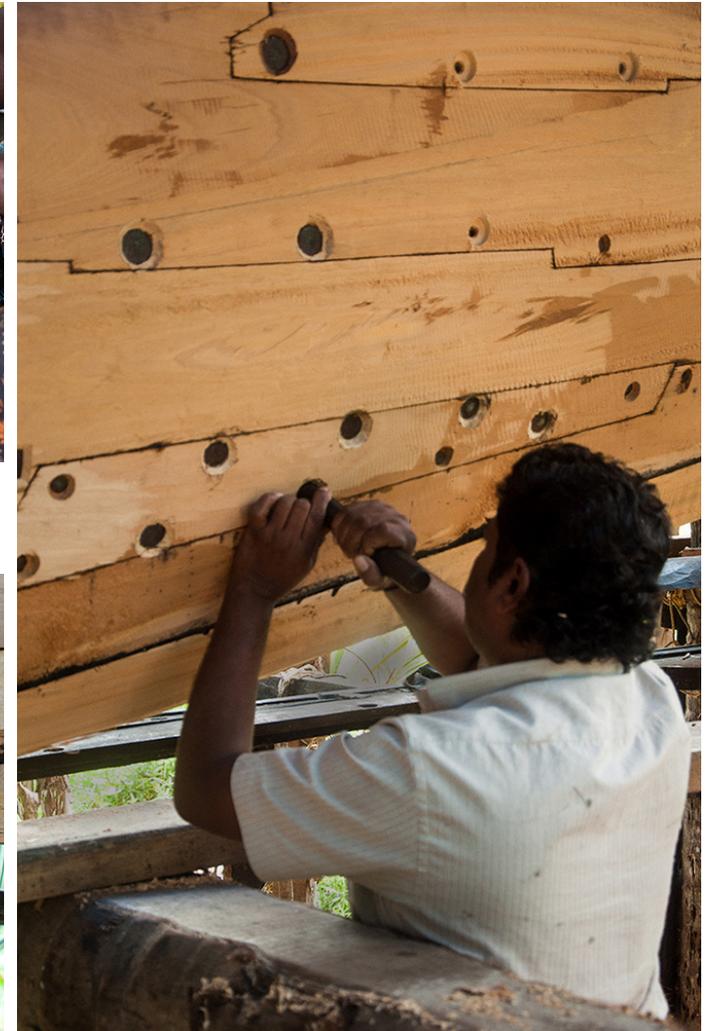
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The custom made casted iron nail is ready to be nailed as per the measured size.



Artisan is trimming a rectangle shape on part of the boat.



Artisan is hammering the iron nail to the boat without damaging the wood.

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Artisan is hammering the rectangle headed nail to fit into the slot and give a strong hold.

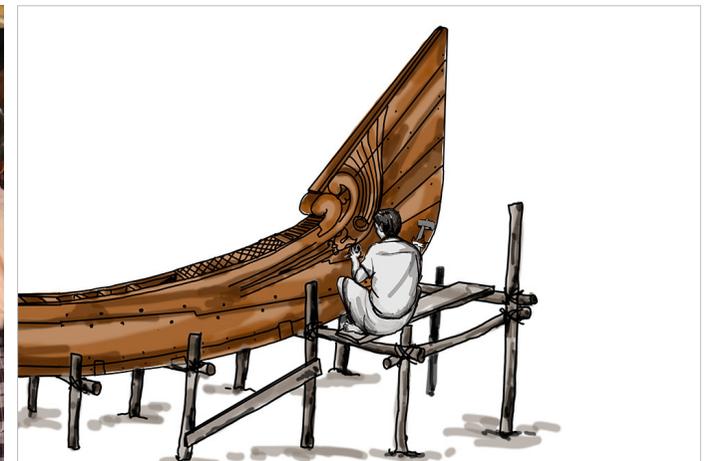


A frame is set on the boat known as Vedithadi; on this plank the cheerers stand and energize the racing crew with their traditional song.

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Artisans are placing the plank that supports both ends of the boat for a firm grip.



The artisan to give an inspirational design is carving, Amaram the tail part of the snake boat.

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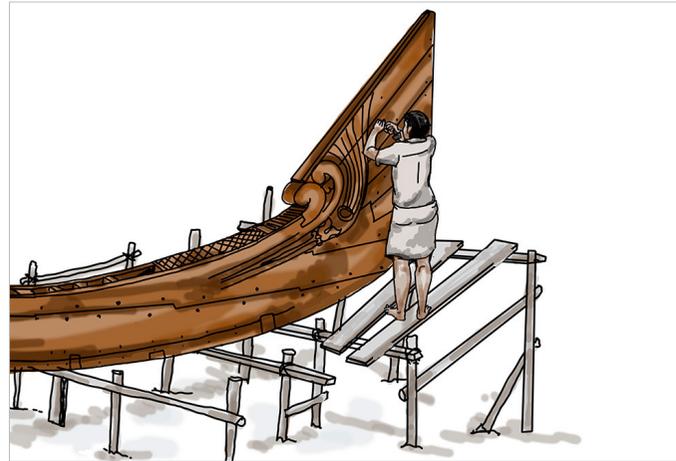
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Amaram also consists of Netthi Pazaghai which can be detached from the boat is being decorated by artisans.



Artisan is trimming the extra layers on the plank where the racing crew sits.



By using the Wooden Router artisan is shaping the edges.



Artisan uses electric Planer to smooth the surface of the plank.

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NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/snake-boat-making-alleppey-kerala/making-process>



After fixing the iron nails and applying glue, the boat is kept for dry to hold strong and tight.



The Oars used by the racing crew for the friction of movement in the water.

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Dream of the racing crew is completed with a magnificent look.

Design Resource

Snake Boat Making, Alleppey - Kerala

Chundan Vallam

by

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Products

Snake boat is named after the village names in Alleppey. The people of the village fund the money invested in the making of boat. This boat race is believed to be the pride of the village and they worship it as a deity. The making of snake boats is not an easy task; more than 20 carpenters are involved in making of the chundan vallam. It takes about eight to nine months to complete the boat. This boat is of about 135 feet long & 53 inches wide. And thick long Anjali or poovarosu wooden planks are used for the construction of the body of the boat. The boat is made in such a way that it should have a place for about a 111 of people to sit. The structure of a snake boat is constructed in such a manner that the head & tail will project 5 & 3 feet above the water level. The carpenters are paid about 1500 Rupees per day and the total amount spent on making of the snake boat is around INR 60 lakhs.



The extremely narrow and long racing shell that is also known as Chunda Vallam is ready for the race.

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One among the racing crew honor's the snake boat with spiritual worship.

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The back end part of the Snake boat is called as Amaran, which is being decorated with traditional cloth, lemon and flower garlands.



The traditional vintage Oar, which has long handle and long blade for the friction in the water as per the motion.

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The front beginning part of racing shell is being decorated with vibhuthi a sacred ash that is believed as a symbol of victory.

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Video



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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Manasa K. H. and Hariharasudan T. at [NID Campus, Bengaluru](#).

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