

Design Resource

## Ganjifa Cards - Sawantwadi

Classic Playing Cards

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Design Resource

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## Introduction

The following information has been extracted/generalised from an hour long conversation with the queen of sawantwadi:

Ganjifa is the card game, which is believed that came to India from Persia, which became popular in India during the Mughal emperors reign in 16th century. Playing cards was a part of Indian culture especially during the festivals or functions (occasions) where all the community members sit together and spend their time in playing these cards. Sawantwadi is a place located in the Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra, which was earlier capital of a territory, ruled by the Bhonsle king of the Marathas where the Ganjifa cards are made till date.

### History:

Rani Satvashiladevi Bhonsle wife of Lt. Col. Raja Bahadur Shivaram Sawant Bhonsle talking about the history of Ganjifa cards.



Rani Satvashiladevi Bhonsle

1. **Introduction**
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

Design Resource

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1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

Classic Mughal cards were long with Arabic/urdu language writing on it with 96 cards and 8 suits. Senior King Khem Sawant Bhonsle III heard about the cards from the Telengana region scholars. Based on the administration of the state, 9 department depending on the state i.e. one king was looking after each department of which 1 to 10 are there, 96 cards of colors black, chocolate, red, green etc were there. Earlier cards for royalty were made of ivory, tortoise shell, mother of pearl and for commoners from papier-mache, palm leaf or cloth.

The painted playing cards were formerly made of cloth, heavy paper, thin cardboard, plastic coated paper and cotton paper blend which are usually of palm sized and convenient for handling. As this craft was vanishing, the heirs of Sawantwadi took special interest in learning the craft from Chitrakar community and few craftsmen were also trained in 1972 to safe guard and promote. The Chitrakar community was known for their skill in making of these cards, lacquer ware and woodcraft for which it is known.

A Sawantwadi ganjifa card has 120 numbers (Mughal ganjifa cards have 96 numbers) which were made taking the names of God. "Chankanchan" cards were mostly originated at Sawantwadi where "Chang" usually refers to as instrument and "Kanchan" is means gold. The main aim of these games was to teach and tell the stories from the ancient scriptures and holy books. Some of the types of ganjifa cards were of "Dashavatara" with the incarnations of Lord Vishnu of the Ramayana version. Navagraha or nine planets, Ashtadeekpala ganjifa cards are few variants of the cards, which were very popular. Dasha-Mahavidya cards give the ten forms (rupas) of Mother Goddess. Whereas the Darbari cards have decorative borders, Bazaar cards are without borders that used to be the popular pastime at the Indian courts. Usually in these cards the back is plain and unpainted, watercolors are preferred due to the increased cost of natural colors.



Name board of the royal castle where Ganjifa craft workshop is held.



Queen is the in charge of workshop.



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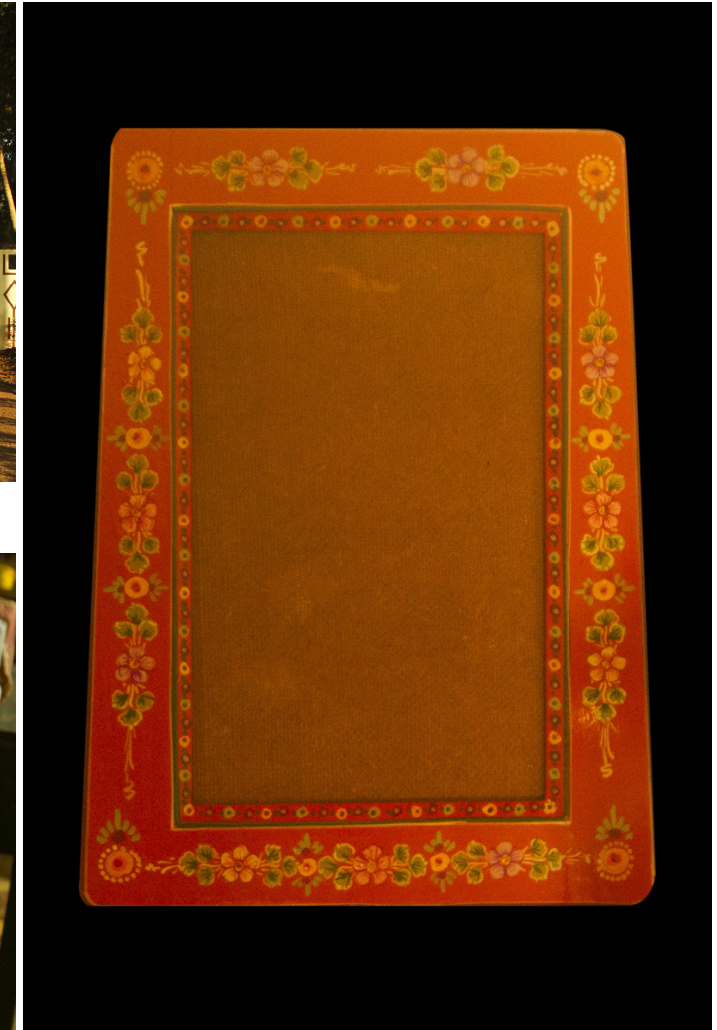
1. **Introduction**
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Royal palace of Sawantwadi.



Different types of Ganjifa cards are based on Indian mythology theme.



A photo frame painted with Ganjifa art motifs.



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1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



A beautiful tray colored with vibrant color is painted with floral motifs.



Wooden box painted with God and Goddess's theme.



Framed card of Mysore styled Ganjifa made in Mysore in the year 1997.



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Ganjifa card depicting a character from Dashavtar of Lord Vishnu.



Cards made in Thanjavur painting style.

### 1. Introduction

### 2. Tools and Raw Materials

### 3. Making Process

### 4. Products

### 5. Video

### 6. Contact Details



An ancient Indian game known as chaturanga designed with Ganjifa motifs.



It requires great skill to paint the intricate Ganjifa design.



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1. **Introduction**
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Different tools are used as support for paint to obtain precise shape and form.



Vibrant and royal shade colors are used to paint.



Ganjifa card depicting Lord Durga, Painted in Orissa style of painting.



Ganjifa Cards painted with different characters and symbols.



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## Tools and Raw Materials

Style of Ganjifa cards was set to stories and shloka's from the epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata and many more scriptures. In olden days the Ganjifa cards were made using tortoise shells, ivory and brass disc, which was decorated with precious stones and metals. But now at present Ganjifa cards are made only using plain paper, painted using water and fabric colors.

- Scissors – To cut the unwanted parts of the paper.
- Paper – It is the raw material of these cards.
- Compass – To obtain the round shape.
- Plane Paper – Used for painting, available in local market.
- Colors – Water and Fabric colors are used to paint the cards.
- Paint Brush – Different sizes of paintbrushes used in color filling and sketching.
- Adhesive – To stick the papers.

1. Introduction

2. **Tools and Raw Materials**

3. Making Process

4. Products

5. Video

6. Contact Details



Water based colors and fabric colors are used for painting.



Chisels, files and hammers are used to make different types of wood products.



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Source:

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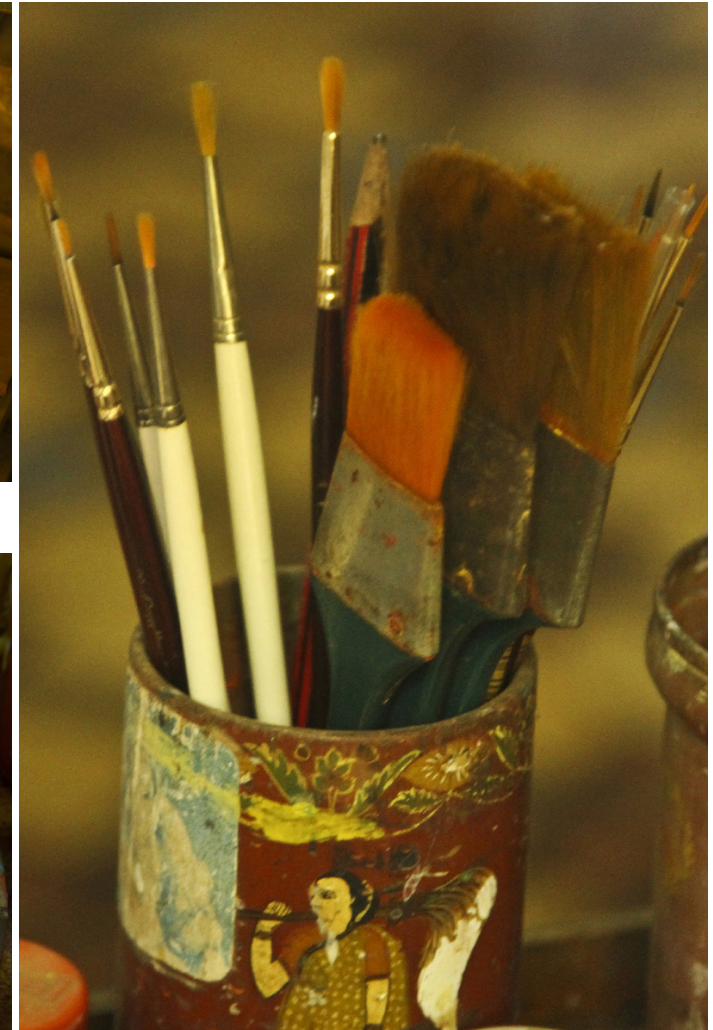
1. Introduction
2. **Tools and Raw Materials**
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Wood is used to make boxes and other products.



Painting pallet used to mix the colors to obtain different shades of colors.



Different sizes of brush are used in the painting.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/tools-and-raw-materials>

1. Introduction

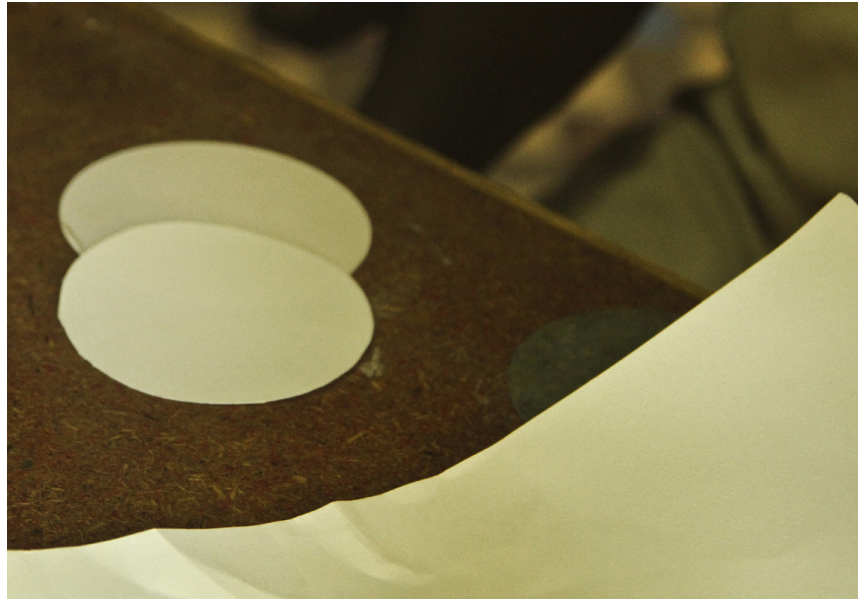
2. **Tools and Raw Materials**

3. Making Process

4. Products

5. Video

6. Contact Details



Paper is used to make cards.



Scissor is used to cut the paper in required form to make the Ganjifa cards.



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## Making Process

Ganjifa cards are generally circular in shape and hand made in the following way. A plain sheet of paper is marked with on circles of about 64millimeter (mm) to 68mm diameter, which is cut with scissors evenly from one side. Watercolors are applied as per the requirement of the sketches. Usually the borders of the cards are drawn of the required length and painted along with the compass for the neat circular outlines of the cards. Main sketch (in center) of the cards are painted in the card with minute details of eyes, nose, hair etc. It is further dried under direct sunlight for about 15-20 minutes. Few cards are embossed to get the three dimensional effect with pasted gold leaf as ornaments and borders with contrast colors and coated with varnish for shinning look. Ganjifa cards are also used to educate the common in the kingdom. Earlier (96 cards were used) the sheets of paper were coated with tamarind paste (seed powder and oil), cooked with mud and Arabic gum. Few layers of the paper were grouped to form the thick layers and dried, further rubbed with the stone for a smooth finish. There was a time when the cards were made with cloth and a layer of stucco (chalk or zinc oxide mixed with gum) by which they retain their richness and glow. The backs of the cards are usually colored with black or dark colors and their faces with different colors. Generally, picture of the lion or sun consists of black color as background where-as king picture consists of white color as background, similarly a lady picture consists of red color background, a solider with golden background, Lake with green background, where about ninety six cards of eight suits are made. Presently a set consists of twenty cards in five colors or values.



Initially to make the Ganjifa cards the paper is cut into required form.



Cards are made in circular, oval and rectangle form.

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details

Design Resource

## Ganjifa Cards - Sawantwadi

Classic Playing Cards

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral

NID, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Border is painted with yellow paint as a base color.



Compass is used for exact circular shape.



The outline is drawn with orange color.



Border of all circular cards is painted with two colors.



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Classic Playing Cards

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Another line of green shade is painted adjacent to the border.



Lacing of dots painted on the base color.



Sides are painted with floral designs.



Base color is filled in the middle area of the card.



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Classic Playing Cards

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Basic outline of any character is drawn first as a base.



Poster colors are used in painting.



The parts of the character are filled with different colors.



The anatomy of the character is drawn perfectly.



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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/making-process>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. **Making Process**
4. Products
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Jewelries and accessories are highlighted with yellow color.



Outlines and other details are painted in the end.



Finished product.



Varieties of Ganjifa cards painted and kept for drying.

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## Products

The colorful and precisely hand-painted Ganjifa cards are made of different sizes which has been played from centuries. The decoration of the cards depends on any set of arrangements made by the artist. In Sawantwadi, the designs of Ganjifa cards are mainly based on Dashavatara motifs, which are the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu. The cost of Sawantwadi hand painted cards is Rs1500 for 120 cards whereas cost of hand painted with Mughal motifs is Rs1200 for 90 cards.

Sawantwadi Ganjifa cards are four types based on,

- Dashavatara ganjifa cards - Lord Vishnu, there are the ten embodiments and general cards
- Bazaar ganjifa cards
- Darbari ganjifa cards
- Nine planets (Navagraha) ganjifa cards

1. **Dashavatara** is the ten embodiments with ten suits of Lord Vishnu: each having 12 cards.

- **Matsya** – Matsya is the first embodiment of lord Vishnu which is form of a fish.
- **Kurma** – The second embodiment of Vishnu, which predates Varaha.
- **Varaha** – Varaha is form of boar (male pig).
- **Narasimha** – Often visualized form half man and half lion.
- **Wamana** – The fifth embodiment of lord Vishnu in the Hindu purana.
- **Parashurama** – The successor of Brahma and pupil of Shiva, which is the sixth avatar of Vishnu.
- **Rama** – Rama is the 7th embodiment of lord Vishnu who is also known as chief male character of Hindu epic 'Ramayana'.
- **Krishna** – Is one of the most attractive gods among all.
- **Balarama** – The elder brother of lord Krishna, and Shesha, reflected as the Sankarshana form of Vishnu and the eighth embodiment of Vishnu.
- **Kalki** – It is the last embodiment of Lord Vishnu, it is referred to 'Kalki', which means foulness.

2. **Bazaar Ganjifa Cards** are without borders. The cost of cards is not expensive.

3. **Darbari Ganjifa Cards** have decorative borders and the cost of cards is expensive.

4. **Nine planets (Navagraha) Cards** with the stories related to the nine planets.

1. Introduction

2. Tools and Raw Materials

3. Making Process

4. **Products**

5. Video

6. Contact Details



Design Resource

## Ganjifa Cards - Sawantwadi

Classic Playing Cards

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Source:

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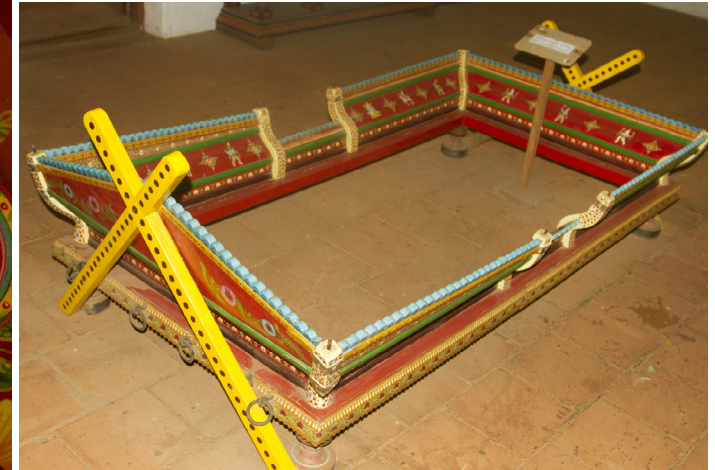
1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Ganjifa cards and a cardholder made of wood.



Small drawer made of wood, painted with Ganjifa motifs.



Wooden cradle painted in Ganjifa style.



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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/products>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Fish shaped product is painted depicting the game of Pallanguli.



The inside view of the Pallanguli game which is played with seeds and Shells.



Candles stand painted with vibrant colors and designed with floral motifs.



An old wooden sofa and frames painted in Ganjifa style.



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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/products>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



An old wooden chair painted with floral patterns.



A game known as chaturanga painted in Ganjifa style.



Back side view of chaturanga game.



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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/products>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



A small jewellery box.



Jewellery box painted with intricate designs.



Wooden table painted with Ganjifa patterns.



An old framed Gajifa card.



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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/products>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Wooden Palki designed with traditional patterns and painted with Ganjifa designs.



Checkers game with dolls represented as soldiers to play.



Wall hanging of Ganjifa art.



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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/products>

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Dressing table with a small drawer painted in Ganjifa style.



Playing cards with its case.



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Classic Playing Cards

by

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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/products>



Small wooden box painted in Ganjifa style.



A set of table and chair embellished with Ganjifa style.



Photo frames made of wood painted with floral patterns.

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Design Resource

## Ganjifa Cards - Sawantwadi

Classic Playing Cards

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/products>

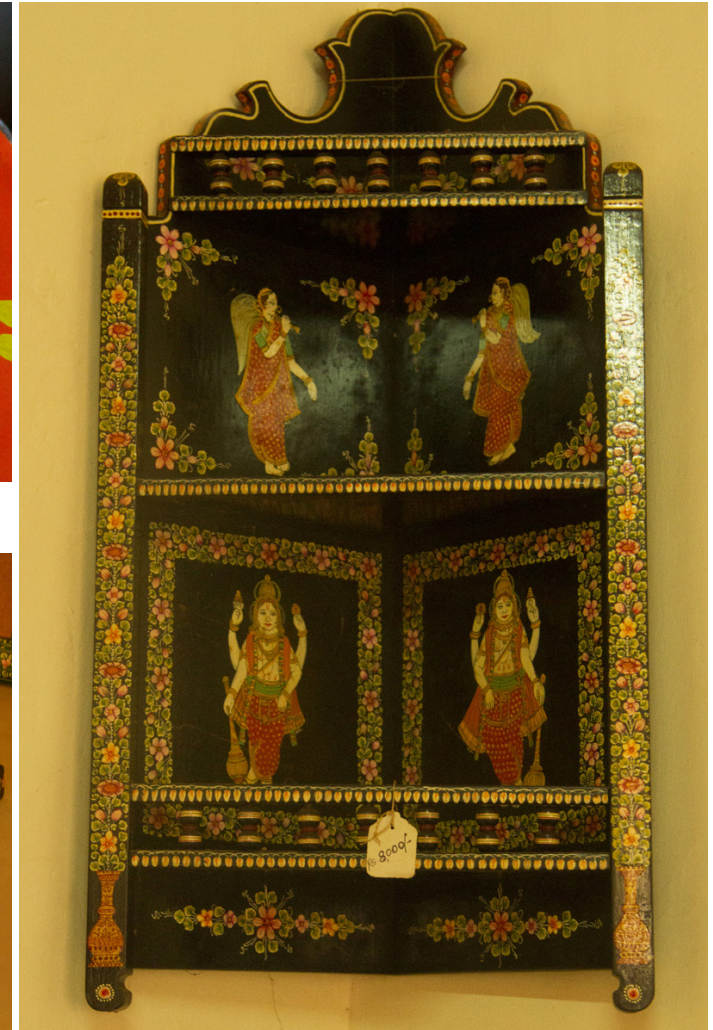
1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. **Products**
5. Video
6. Contact Details



Playing card painted with Indian style.



A plastic tray painted with Ganjifa art.



A wooden shelf depicting the painting of God and Goddesses in Ganjifa style.



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<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ganjifa-cards-sawantwadi/video>

## Video



Ganjifa Cards - Sawantwadi

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. **Video**
6. Contact Details

Design Resource

## Ganjifa Cards - Sawantwadi

Classic Playing Cards

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## Contact Details

This documentation was done by Professor Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S., Lija M. G., Vijay G. at **NID, Bengaluru**.

You can get in touch with Professor Bibhudutta Baral at Email: [bibhudutta\[at\]nid.edu](mailto:bibhudutta[at]nid.edu)

You could write to the following address regarding suggestions and clarifications:

### Helpdesk Details:

Co-ordinator

Project e-kalpa

R & D Campus

National Institute of Design

#12 HMT Link Road, Off Tumkur Road

Bengaluru 560 022

India.

Phone: +91 80 2357 9054

Fax: +91 80 23373086

Email: [dsource.in\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:dsource.in[at]gmail.com)

1. Introduction
2. Tools and Raw Materials
3. Making Process
4. Products
5. Video
6. **Contact Details**