

Godavari Singh, a renowned craftsman and Padma Shri awardee (Photo/ANI)

## Varanasi's wooden toy industry thrives with over Rs 40 crore annual turnover, Padma Shri awardee highlights significance

By Suchitra Mukherjee | Updated: May 24, 2024 13:39 IST

Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) [India], May 24 (ANI): The wooden toy industry which was once on the brink of collapse is now seeing significant growth in Varanasi.

With an annual turnover of approximately Rs 45 crore, this industry is employing many, especially women, and enriching homes worldwide with its beautifully crafted toys and decorative items.

Godavari Singh, a renowned craftsman and Padma Shri awardee, highlighted the deep historical roots of the wooden toy industry in Varanasi, dating back thousands of years. "This industry is a major source of employment for thousands of artisans," Singh said.



"Since Prime Minister Modi's intervention, the industry has seen continuous growth, bolstered by initiatives like the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme," he added.

Singh highlighted that the wooden toy industry comprises three main types of work: wood carving, sculpture, and general woodwork. Increased publicity and online sales have significantly boosted business, with exports reaching markets in Canada, France, America, and Japan.



"Nearly thousands of people are involved in it. Its publicity has increased, sales have increased, and the turnover of this business is about Rs 40 crore in a year. We have exporters from Mumbai, Delhi, Madras and Varanasi. They take these wooden toys and decorative items to all places including Canada, France, America and Japan. Now it has gone online, this business has increased due to going online, there is some problem at the moment because eucalyptus wood is not available. Those who make ply are taking away the wood, so we are not able to get the eucalyptus wood," Padma Shri awardee said.

Singh emphasized the need for government support in securing a consistent supply of wood and equitable electricity rates similar to those provided to weavers.

"The government has worked to promote Vocal for Local and for this, they are giving Mudra loan, they are giving ODOP, people have got a shop at the railway station. Our demand is for wood, if we get the wood If we get it in the right way and if electricity is given to us at the same rate which is given to the weavers, then it will be easy for us to expand our business," he stated. Singh remains hopeful that the government will address these issues.



Encouraging the youth, Singh remarked, "There is a lot of enthusiasm among the youth and the children are still connected and are joining this business so that we too can do some good work. I would like to say to the youth to work with your heart and honesty, the future is bright in this business." On a political note, he expressed support for the Modi government, advocating for an honest administration.

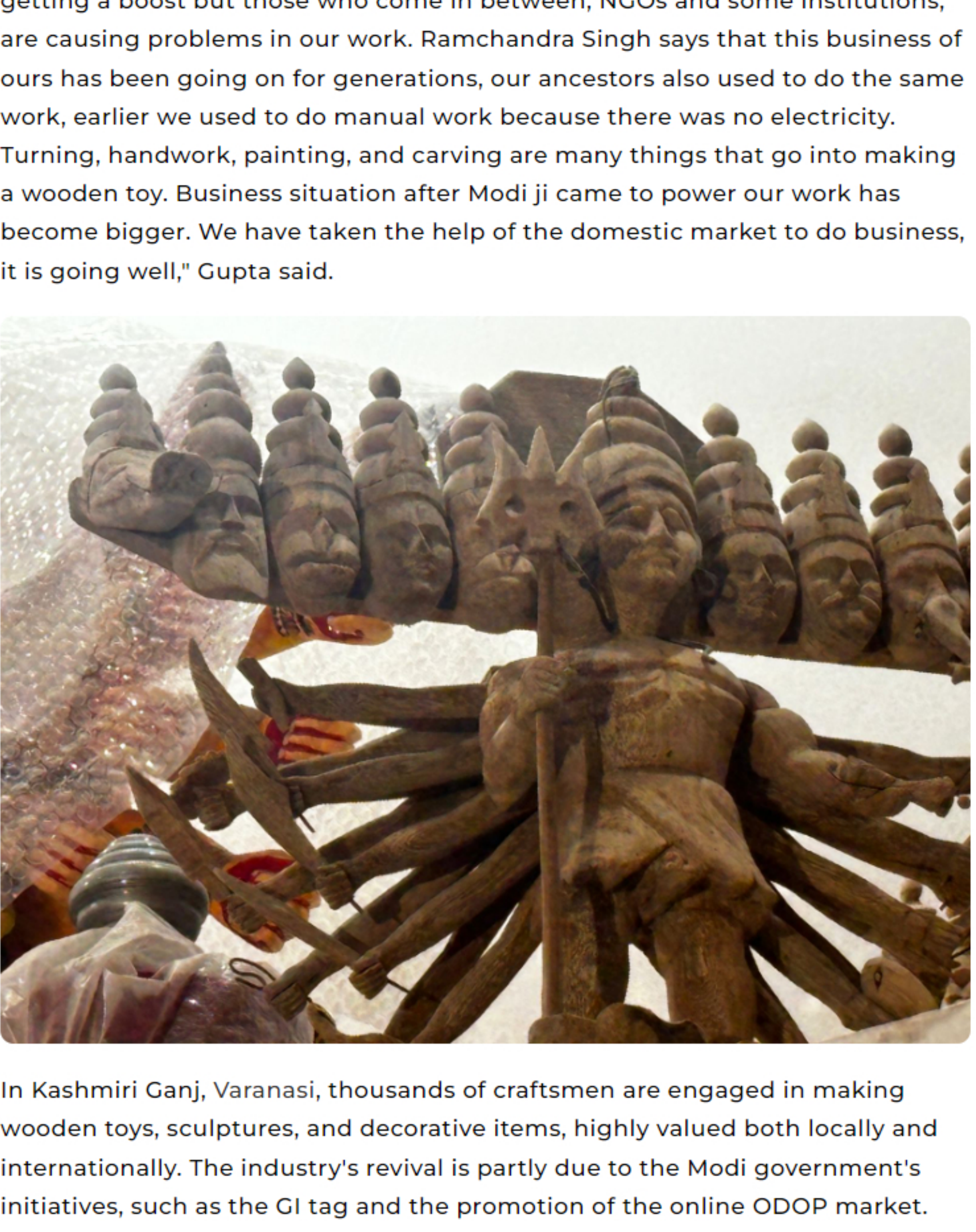
"We believe that every person should vote and everyone should vote, there should be an honest government and no one can be better than the Modi government," Singh said.

Krishna Gupta, a young businessman in the wooden toy sector, acknowledged the ancient origins of the trade and the changes it has undergone over time. He credited the GI tag obtained through Modi's initiative for boosting the industry's profile.

"We do the business of wooden toys. This has been going on since ancient times. Many items were made in it. There have been changes in it over time. Children's toys and other items are available all over the world. Propaganda happened after the Modi ji initiative, this business got a GI tag. Krishna said that there are some facilities required due to which we are not able to expand our business much like weavers get electricity facility, we do not have that facility and there are some middlemen because of them we face problems, we are also struggling for this," Gupta said.

He highlighted the positive impact of the Modi government on their business, emphasising the importance of the domestic market.

"There are those who take our work forward, if BJP is at the centre, we are getting a boost but those who come in between, NGOs and some institutions, are causing problems in our work. Ramchandra Singh says that this business of ours has been going on for generations, our ancestors also used to do the same work, earlier we used to do manual work because there was no electricity. Turning, handwork, painting, and carving are many things that go into making a wooden toy. Business situation after Modi ji came to power our work has become bigger. We have taken the help of the domestic market to do business, it is going well," Gupta said.



In Kashmiri Ganj, Varanasi, thousands of craftsmen are engaged in making wooden toys, sculptures, and decorative items, highly valued both locally and internationally. The industry's revival is partly due to the Modi government's initiatives, such as the GI tag and the promotion of the online ODOP market.

To sustain and expand the industry, local businessmen urge the government to provide electricity at the same rate as weavers, ensure the availability of mill and eucalyptus saplings, and address health concerns related to wood dust exposure. Addressing these basic needs could further enhance the growth and heritage of Varanasi's wooden toy industry. (ANI)