A PARISAL BOAT.

A STATIC MODEL.

Fig 1. A Tungabhardra and/ or a Kistna Parisal Boat

Introduction.

When you get an idea, that becomes an itch, the only course of action is to scratch. This is what happened when I came across a boat with a long heritage, similar in some ways to a coracle, but originating from the States of Southern India. The only information that I initially obtained was from the National Coracle Centre in Cenarth, Wales. From the information supplied by the Coracle Centre, it was noted that the Parisal boats were covered with Buffalo or Ox hide, and were treated with tannin derived from the leaves of the Pobbakku Tree.

Research.

Having never heard of a Pobbakku Tree I did some research and found a reference to the tree and its use. A source of tannin for the treatment of the skin of the Parisal Boat of India; the source reference was a book by James Hornell; (Water Transport; Origins & Early Evolution) so I purchased a copy. The book was published in 1946, three years before his death in 1949, aged 84 years. The book covers a wide range of vessels from around the world and Hornell discusses their constructions and their associations. The information within the book will take a few reads to appreciate the amount of interest and all the information that Hornell had in the ancient forms of boats, their constructions and their uses. The book has examples from other books of his and notes otherwise un published, this book is still in print, so is available for purchase or for borrowing from Public Libraries.

There are only a few pages of the book dedicated to the Parisal style of boat and these pages are compiled from notes and articles by others as well as an article by Hornell himself which were reproduced from his article within MAN vol 33 Oct 1933,pp,157-160, published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain, and Ireland. Hornell's writings within these few pages also documents some design variances and identifies the watercourses on which these variances occurred. Hornell indicated that there were three basic forms from three areas, whilst also making references to boats from locations on the same watercourse or nearby. The areas for the basic design or style designated by Hornell were or are; (a) Ciombatore and Tanjore Coracles, (b) Tungabhadra and Kistna Coracles, (c) Kurnul Boat. I made some notes of these boats taken from references within his book in an attempt to make the information more easily understood which I hope are a true and correct interpretation of his notes. The references to the state of origin I have used are the ones currently in use within the Indian subcontinent, which are as near as I can get to the states or territories noted by Hornell within his references. The title by the regional area of the boat is Hornell's reference and may not reflect the local designation, and where he referred to them as coracles I have referred to them as Parisal.

Notes.

The Coimbatore and Tanjore Parisal boat, of the Tamil Nadu state were noted as the smallest, lightest, and simplest of these boats, and were used on the Pykara River, the Bhavani River and upper Kaveri River. These boats were noted as having an outer hexagonal weave of two withies per run, and no inner hexagonal weave, with external dimensions of 5 – 6 feet (1500 -1800mm) in diameter and 18inches (450mm) deep. References from further pages of Hornell's book refer to this lighter boat as the Bhavani type. The propulsion was by paddle (Thuduppu in Tamil).

The Kollegal Boat, of the Kaveri River, was noted as an "also" reference within the section relating to the Bhavani type of boats and was notable as not being round. The description of the shape was quadrilateral with rounded corners, 7ft 6in X 6ft 6in X 2 ft deep/ 2350mm X 2000mm X 600mm. The frameworks of the boats from the Indian Subcontinent have a hexagonal weave to these frameworks. The size of the weave was noted as being approximately 3 to $3,^{1}/_{2}$ (75mm to 88mm) of internal diameter, the boat had no fixed seat, but had an internal frame of stout bamboo ribs. This boats' propulsion was by paddle. The Kaveri River joins the Bhavani River near the town of Bhavani.

All the craft noted by Hornell from Southern India with the exception of the Kollegal Boat, were round in profile.

The Tungabhardra and Kistna Parisal Boat (Kamataka State) when used on the Tungabhardra River had two forms, one was noted as being lighter and used on the upper reaches with a heavier version used further downstream and onto the Kistna River as far down stream as the City of Kurnul (Krnool). There was no geographic reference to either the lighter or the heavier boat to offer these vessels any individuality, however it was noted that the boats from this area were deeper in the draft and more bowl shaped than the Bhavani type, also the hexagonal outer weave was formed from a run of three withies opposed to the two withy run of the Bhavani type and supported with the inclusion of an inner weave of stout bamboo rods. A stout log or block of wood was used as a seat or load point for leverage, as well as assisting in the carrying of the boat on the shoulder supported by the paddle, similar to the principles used by the Welsh Coracle fishermen when carrying their coracles to and from watercourses. This boats' propulsion was by paddle.

The Kurnul Parisal Boat (possibly Krnool, Andhra Pradesh State) was noted as being the largest vessel with a diameter of 14ft, 4250mm and a depth of 3 - 3ft 6in, 916- 1065mm, with the means of propulsion made by either pole or paddle. There are vessels noted that were larger and carried 50 people or 40 bags of grain. Hornell also notes that the purchase of the Kurnul boat was expensive and in 1918 could cost 100-150 rupees, or £7,10s 0d. (£7.50p) up to £12.15s. 0d. (£12.75p) where in comparison, a Bricklayer in England would earn £2 per week, or a Tram Driver 30/- or £1.50p per week.

To add a little more confusion over what size these boats were, the Bhavvani type were noted as 5 – 6 feet in diameter and so were the Tungabhardra type, but also noted, were some boats of 10 feet plus in diameter from the same regions. These vessels are fascinating subject in themselves, and the information available seems to be restricted to what Hornell noted in 1933, as there appears to be no recent documentation to be found.

From Hornells' notes, the boats within the picture below could be what he was describing as the Bhavani Parisal Boat.

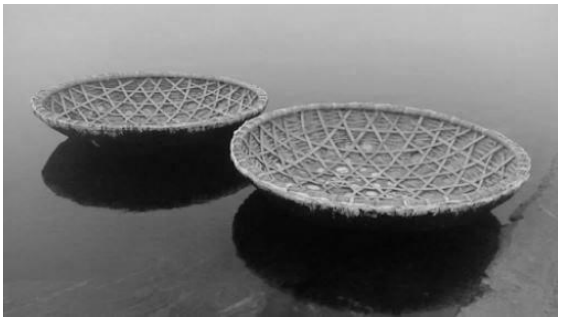


Fig 2.

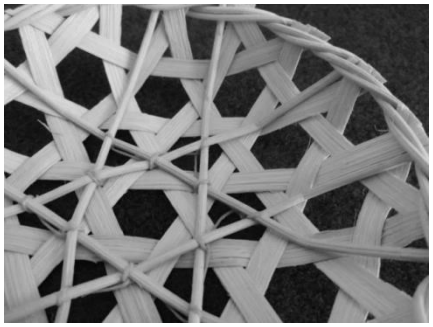
The building of the model Parisal Boat.

The raw materials for this model are rounded and flat rattan cane for the shell structure, Chamois leather for the covering, strip wood pine for the paddle, and a short length of dowel for the seat.

The model followed the design principles of the prototypes where an inner hexagonal weave forms a rib structure and the outer hexagonal weave forms the frameworks for the shell. The Parisal Boat is formed by drawing the woven mat up into a gunwale line similar to the practise used to construct a Teifi Coracle, by sitting within the boat to hold the frame down whist at the same time lifting the frame perimeter up to introduce a gunwale. But as with all model coracle construction you can't sit in the middle so a build jig will be used to hold the woven mat and ribs in place whilst the gunwale of the boat is inserted.

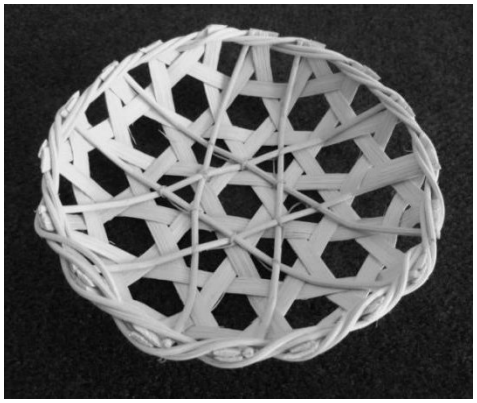
The internal three way framework of stouter ribs adds strength to the outer weave and offers support for the eventual internal loads. There are photographs of Parisal Boats with deck boards on these stouter ribs which would distribute a load weight more evenly and offer a protection against accidental damage to the hull integrity. Below is a photo of this inner frame within the model.

Fig 3.



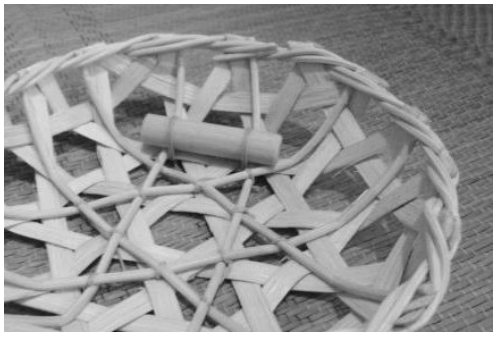
The outer three way woven mat has inherent strengths from its construction. The ultimate pattern is decorative, making it pleasing to the eye and a perfect complement to the round form of the boat. The materials for this outer weave of the model would not yield to scale or miniaturization, but the larger size of the weave still offers a conceptual example of the outer weave. The inner and outer weaves are connected with a randing of cane to form a gunwale. The following picture shows the inner and outer weaves of the model joined in this way.

Fig 4.



In completing the basic form of the boat, the block of wood to form the seat is installed by tying in with a waxed lacing cord normally used for lashings and the whippings of ship and yacht rigging, see Fig, 5.

Fig 5.



The outer skin of the model is achieved by using Chamois leather and is used to replicate the buffalo and ox hides of the prototypes. The skin of the prototypes finishes either at the level of, or just below the level of the gunwale weave, on the outside. The outer kin of the model is finished towards the inside of the boat to cover most of the enlarged make of the gunwale caused by using materials not in the scale of the model, whilst still showing some of the randing that forms this type of gunwale.

Fig 6.

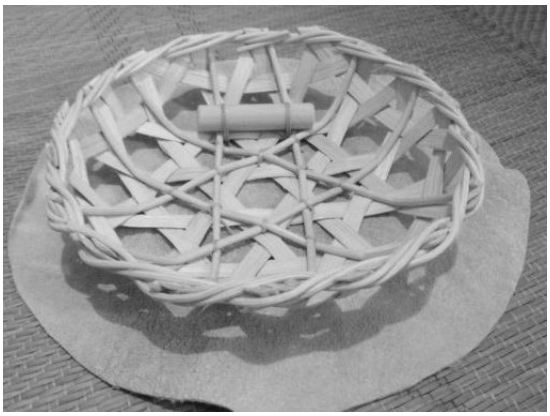


Fig 6 shows the frame centred upon a disc of chamois leather.

Fig 7.

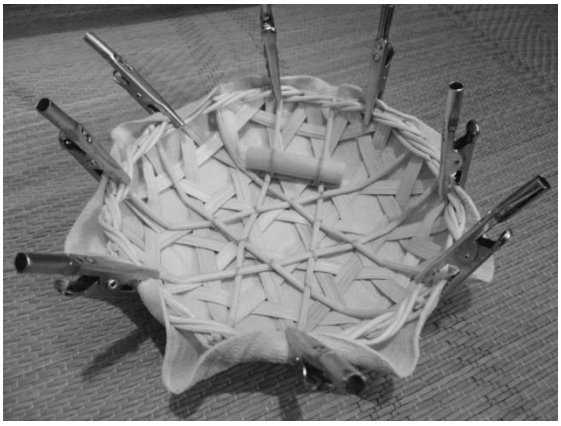


Fig 7, shows the chamois leather pegged to the gunwale of the boat at eight equal spacing holding all in place prior to being sewn onto the gunwale using a waxed lacing.

Fig 8.

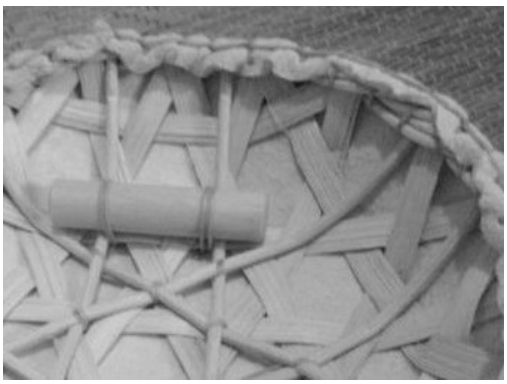


Fig 8, shows the outer skin attached to the boat frame using the common blanket stitch. The chamois leather complements the other raw materials of the model, where the miniaturisation and or scale cannot be fairly represented but the concept can.

The above are pictures from within the National Coracle Museum of Cenarth, Wales.

Fig 9.

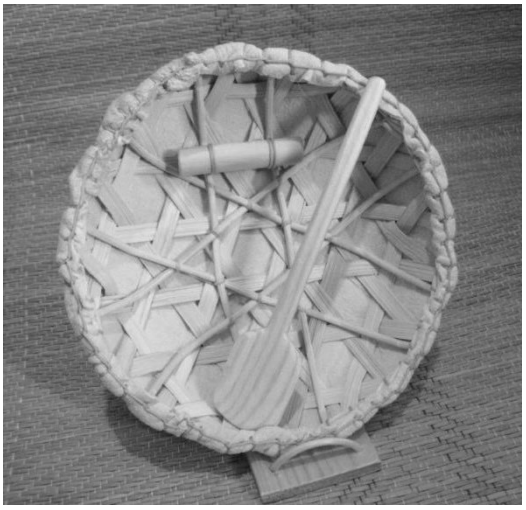


Fig 9 shows the Model Parisal Boat complete with its paddle, and supported by a stand for display.