

WOOD ART IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The art of any particular place cannot remain without stirring the heartfelt emotions of the people there. In fact, only a true artist, in moments of inner inspiration, gives concrete form to the expression of his subtle feelings and joy in art. Influenced by the dazzle of the environment around him, he captures the immense beauty of nature in his point of view and gives immortality of his life to the mortal things of this ephemeral world. This is his art accomplishment. From ancient times to the present, Indian artists have presented the expression of their heartfelt emotions through various arts such as painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, and craftsmanship. Among all the arts, craftsmanship has a special place, the development of which is seen in different states of a great country like India with their local characteristics, where they have their own special significance. The craftsmen there have imbibed eternal truths and made their art immortal forever. Woodcraft has had a special significance in the category of crafts since ancient times.

Keywords: Wood, Woodcutters, Crafts, Ancient, India, Vedas, Temple, Pillar, Doors.

Introduction

The cave paintings of the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Copper-lithic period of about 15 thousand to 5 thousand years ago provide definite evidence of sticks, spears, arrows, bows, baskets, ropes, nets, Kaanvad and huts. From these, it is known that many new areas of wood work had been discovered in these times. While the invention of the wheel gave birth to vehicles like bullock carts and chariots, the way for water transport was also opened by making boats by digging trunks. In fact, the possibility of a trunk boat can be imagined even forty thousand years ago, when man entered Australia for the first time crossing the islands of the Pacific Ocean.

While farming and animal husbandry in the Neolithic period must have forced man to settle down permanently through rural life, the area of use of wood also expanded. Now the dependence on trees for agricultural tools, means of transport, daily use items and fuel increased, and the profession of carpenter became necessary. With the practice of cremation, wood became necessary for the dead as well. In religious rituals, the use of trees like Peepal, Gular, Banyan, Bel, Mango, Plas, Dhak, Khair, Shami, Padam and Deodar was considered sacred. Wood was used extensively in the urban civilization of the Indus period.

Ample evidence of the practice of woodcraft in the Vedic, post-Vedic, Ramayana and Mahabharata periods is available in the literature of those eras.

“प्रणाम है कंचुकियों और भंडारियों को।
नमस्कार है बड़ईयों और रथकारों को।।
नमन है कुम्हारों और धातुशिल्पियों को।
सांघांग है बहेलियों और शिकारियों को।।
नमस्ते धनुषबाण निर्माताओं को और
शिकारी कुत्तों वाले आखेटकों को”।।

The grateful sage of Yajurveda greets the craftsmen and basic workers of the society with these respectful words, who were considered untouchable and of a lower class in later times. In fact, in the craftsman society of the Vedic period, every type of craftsman was looked upon with great respect. Vedic sages have also worshipped the Creator in the form of Tvashta (carpenter). In the 30th chapter of Yajurveda, 52 types of industrial workers have been described. These include not only carpenters, potters, masons, but also those working with leather, cotton, bamboo, fiber, but also those who cut straw, dyers, fishers, milkmen, shepherds, coachmen, mahouts, woodcutters and liquor makers. It is known from the Rigveda that members of a single family could do various types of industries. "I am a craftsman, my father is a doctor and my mother is a Bhadbhujani who makes Sattu." Wood craftsmen had a unique place in all these industries because the Vedic Aryans needed carpenters for both household and war-related goods. That is why wood craftsmen have been referred to by various names like Kari, Rathkar, Takshaan, Peshit, etc.

In the early historical era, wood was the main building material in palaces, buildings and temples. Initially, wood was used in chaityas, viharas, arches and main gates, but later stone gained prominence over wood, but the details of carving on stone were kept at par with wood. The two thousand year old beam of wood is still safe in the stone chaitya of Karle. Although ancient heritages of wood art cannot be expected in the humid and hot climate of India, but there is ample evidence of ancient Indian wood art in the literature of the last 3500 years. The world's oldest book Rigveda not only describes wooden equipment, utensils, chariots, boats and yajna equipment, but also discusses carpenters and carvers. Shukla Yajurveda gives evidence of Drona Kalash, decorated yajna yupa and mats. Scholars have identified the Peshitri described in it as a carver. In the Brihadaranya Upanishad,

the example of a chariot and a boat has been given in the conversation between sage Yagyavalkya and king Janak. The soul has also been explained with the help of Veena and chariot wheel. In Chandokyopanishad, the wise Raikya with a chariot has been described. The example of a chariot has also been given in Kathopanishad, Prashna Upanishad and Mundaka Upanishad. In Sankhya Shastra, Chakra, in Vaisheshik, pestle and in many sutra texts, yagya equipments and other wooden utensils have been mentioned. Panini refers to Taksh (carpenter).

Ancient Buddhist literature is full of material on wood art. An Acharya of Takshila makes his life-size statue from the wood of Udumbara. Royal chariots were decorated with figures and designs of animals and birds. On reaching Kaushambi, Hiuen Tsang saw a statue of Buddha made on red sandalwood. In the Valmiki Ramayana, there is a description of skilled *vtashtas* who made carved chariots, fake mountains and large boxes. The palanquin in which Bali's dead body was carried was decorated with trees, birds, foot soldiers and nets. In the Parashara and Baudhayana Smritis, a Brahmin without qualities is called a wooden elephant. In the *Natyashastra* of Bharat Muni, the method of making a stage is described that the stage should be decorated with *salabhanjikas*, snakes and drawings. In *Kamasutra*, woodcraft is also included in the 64 arts, while out of the list of 64 arts in *Shukranitisara*, three arts can be linked to woodcraft. There are 86 arts in the art list of *Lalit Vistar*. Out of these, the arts of *Chedyam* and *Rupam* can be considered related to wood. Similarly, out of the 72 arts of *Prabandhak Kosh*, *Kashthaghatam* can be known as woodcraft. According to *Mudrarakshasa*, Chanakya sends wood craftsmen from *Kusumpur* to decorate the royal gates and the palace to welcome *Chandragupta* at midnight in *Nanda's* palace. A carpenter named *Daruvarma* constructs a golden arch on the main gate even before Chanakya's permission is received. In the *Mitrabhed* section of *Panchtantra*, there is a story of a carpenter and a weaver. The cunning weaver, enamoured by the beauty of the princess, requests his friend the carpenter to help him meet the princess. Then the carpenter conspires to send the weaver to the royal palace at night in the guise of Lord Vishnu by attaching two artificial hands to him and making a flying eagle (made of wood). The weaver also succeeds in his plan. In the *Chitrasutra* section of *Vishnudharmottar Purana*, it is advised to adopt the pattern of painting in stone, wood and metal idols. In the *Bhagavat Mahapurana*, wooden idols are also included in the eight types of idols. *Amar Kosh*, *Yukti Kalpataru* and *Rajtarangini* give sufficient information about medieval wooden equipment. *Bhoj Prabandh* describes the wooden horse of King *Bhoj* whose speed was 11 *Kos* in a *gaadi*. In *Samarangan Sutrardhar*, a house made entirely of wood is called *Hamrya* and in *Vishwakarma Prakash*, it is called *Manastha*.

There was a tradition of building wooden houses in India since the Vedic period. In the beginning, temples were made entirely of wood. The third temple of *Somnath*, which was believed to have been built by Lord Krishna, was made entirely of wood. The pillars and floor of the temple which was looted by

Mahmud Ghaznavi were made of pure sandalwood. The looter had taken away the decorated doors of the temple with him. The wooden temples of *Himachal Pradesh* of the post-Gupta period are incomparable examples of Indian woodcraft. In the Indian subcontinent, wood has been used to build royal palaces, houses and temples from *Ladakh Himalayas* to *Nepal*, *Sikkim*, *Bhutan* and *Nagaland*. In the Himalayan regions of *Uttarakhand*, some temples themselves are giving evidence that not only the *chhatra* (umbrella) but the entire temple was made of wood.

The door and pillars of *Katarmal Sun Temple* still show the craftsmanship and beauty of the medieval woodcraft of *Uttarakhand*. These rare specimens are still preserved in the *National Museum, Delhi*.

The life-size wooden statue of *Venugopal* kept in the *Ashutosh Museum of Calcutta University* was found floating in the *Kansat* river. This wooden statue is said to be of the 15th century. Great poet *Tulsidas ji* has also given examples of wooden dolls at two places in *Ramcharit Manas*. Woodcraft from the 14th to the 19th century in *Gujarat* has been particularly associated with the Jain tradition. Jain architecture can still be seen in *Ahmedabad*, *Surat*, *Patan*, *Combe* and *Palanpur*. Apart from buildings, this craft can also be identified in chariots, vehicles, boats, pigeon houses and everyday objects. Indian woodcraft flourished a lot in the palaces and temples in South India. This art could get proper development at centers like *Padmanabhapuram*, *Tanjore*, *Chidambaram*, *Kanchipuram*, *Madurai* and *Mysore*. The ceiling of the royal palace of *Mysore Maharaja* and the door panels adorned with ivory are worth seeing. Even today, polished sandalwood statues are made in the south. The *Maratha* building crafts of *Maharashtra* have their own identity. In eastern India, *Bengal*, *Orissa* and *Assam* have local specialties of carving (wood art). The folk wood craft art of human and elephant models in the villages of *Bengal* is very attractive. In northern India, woodcraft is mainly seen in buildings in *Kashmir* and *Punjab*. The decorated latticed doors studded with brass plates of these buildings look very attractive.

In *Kashmir*, roofs, *shikaras*, houses and mosques decorated with patterns of concentric circles, triangles, stars and quadrilaterals can be seen. Apart from these, items made of walnut wood such as *jaalis*, tables, boxes, lampstands and book stands are made for sale. *Amritsar*, *Batala*, *Chinnihat*, *Hoshiarpur* and *Hisar* have been the main centres of woodcraft in *Punjab*. Apart from ancient temples in *Himachal Pradesh*, the doors and windows of houses in *Kullu valley* are decorated with geometric designs. There is a

royal style in the architecture of *Rajasthan*. There, houses are also found decorated with pillars and arched balconies, doors and gatekeepers, elephants, horses, trees and other geometric patterns like in royal palaces. There is a centuries-old tradition of decoration on the wood of *Sheesham*, *Sal* and *Tendu* in many cities, towns and villages of *Uttar Pradesh*.

Conclusion

In the early historical era, wood was the main building material in palaces, buildings and temples. Initially, wood was used in chaityas, viharas, arches and main gates, but later stone gained prominence over wood, but the details of carving on stone were kept at par with wood. The two thousand year old beam of wood is still safe in the stone chaitya of Karle. Although ancient heritages of wood art cannot be expected in the humid and hot climate of India, but there is ample evidence of ancient Indian wood art in the literature of the last 3500 years. The world's oldest book Rigveda not only describes wooden equipment, utensils, chariots, boats and yajna equipment, but also discusses carpenters and carvers. There was a tradition of building wooden houses in India since the Vedic period. In the beginning, temples were made entirely of wood. The third temple of Somnath, which was believed to have been built by Lord Krishna, was made entirely of wood. The pillars and floor of the temple which was looted by Mahmud Ghaznavi were made of pure sandalwood.

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