

Design Resource

Tibetan Wood Carving - Himachal Pradesh

Empowering Culture through Motifs based on
Nature

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Divyadarshan C. S. and

Lija M. G.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/tibetan-wood-carving-himachal-pradesh>



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Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is one of the states of India covered with mountains and forests in the vernacular built forms. Generally in this place people travel from one place to another penetrating through the great divides of the mountain ranges. Villages are in between the plateaus, dense forest and the stepped sides of the mountains. Spiritual elements and the cosmic interchange between the wood and stone suggest the people living here places themselves closer to Gods. The appeals of the Himachal houses are basically cuboid which is arranged in two to three layers. Near examinations shows that interior spaces reveals half levels and intermediate spaces. The clans that had migrated from central Tibet to northern steppes (grasslands) brought their own mythology and rituals with them. Nomadic clans settled among people who were already tending the land in the valleys who had their own rituals and customs. The ceremonies of Tibetan culture are accompanied with poetic recitations of telling the story behind the rituals. This is one of the way or part of passing down the wisdom and morality from one generation to the next from the cultures followed.

Norbulingka is a place in old Tibet and Norbulingka institute is located in northern Himachal Pradesh considered to be the traditional summer dwelling to Dalai Lamas success which serves as administrative and also as a religious center. This institute provides a great support for teaching and training of the carving in wood with Tibetan motifs and inspirations. These carvings of the Tibetan is said to be developed from their masters and are transferred only to the students of this institute through a long training of about 13 years under the guidance of their teacher to transfer the art of this type of carving to them. Woodcarving is a practice of folk art that empowers the local people to direct their culture through the motifs or abstractions which are usually based on nature, spiritual awareness or replication of patterns found in native flora and fauna. As per the craftsmen, the art of wood carving is done in four stages, the first stage is with basic carving with tools fabricated by the local blacksmith. In the second stage, master craftsmen draws the pattern on the wood with pencil or pen which is one of the critical part where the images of the story is created on to the wood. Third stage is creating the ornamentation part of images on wood. Followed by fourth stage of the wood carving which is the final, where coating is done on the wood surface for luster and protection.

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A wood plank carved with floral designs.



An electric lamp carved in wood with Tibetan motifs.

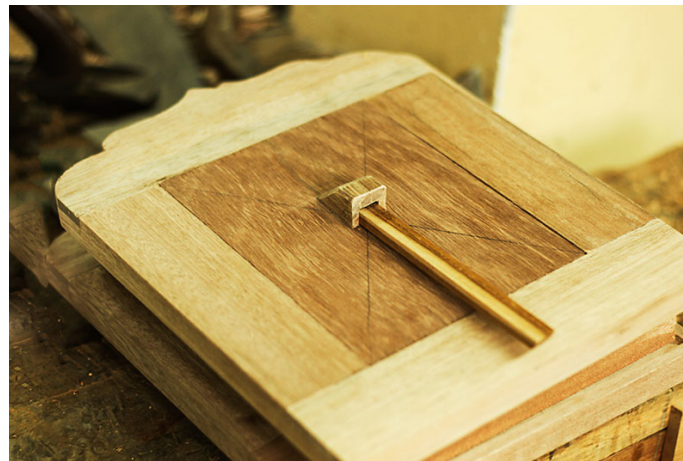
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Wooden photo frame.



Trained and experienced craftsmen are involved in wood carving process.

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Wooden replica of a Buddha temple.



A wooden art piece depicting one of the forms of Buddha.



Wooden jewelry box.



A shrine carved out of wood.

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Vertical lamp frame.



The art of carving is passed down by generations from teachers to students.

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Tools and Raw Materials

Simple and basic tools are generally used for Tibetan wood carving. Usually Pine (for frame) and Teak wood are preferred for making the carvings on the products as it is highly durable. The wooden planks are purchased from Gagal village and brought to Norbulingka.

1. Pine wood (Kail) – It is used because it's affordable and easy to carve.
2. Teak (Rai) – It is largely preferred as it contains natural oil content and is highly flexible, durable.

Below listed are some of the tools and raw materials used for Tibetan wood carving:

- **Table Saw:** These are wood working equipment which supports to cut the wood into required shape.
- **Hand Saw:** The extra edges of the wood are removed using hand saw.
- **Carbon Sheet:** It is used to trace the designs on the wood.
- **Pencil:** It is used to draw (trace) the designs on the wood.
- **Measuring Tape:** It is used to measure and mark the designs on the wood.
- **Scissors:** These are used to cut the papers.
- **Adhesive:** It is used to stick the designed paper sheets on the wood.
- **Drilling Machine:** It is used to create holes.
- **Bah (Traditional tool):** It is used to cut the wooden part which is not required in the motif of design.
- **Bench Vice:** These are used to hold the wood that is bolted to carve.
- **Hand Chisels:** These are used to carve out the wood which is struck with wooden mallet.
- **Semi Curved Chisels:** These are used to cut the wood in semicircular shape.
- **Wooden Mallet:** It is used to strike the chisels according to the required shape.

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- **Files:** These are used to soften and even the surface of wood.
- **Planer:** It is used make the surface of the wood flat.
- **Screw Drivers:** These are used to insert the screw heads to wood.
- **Hammer:** It is used to fit-in the two parts of the wood tightly.
- **Tri Square:** It is used for measuring and marking the designs on the wood.
- **Cutting Plier:** It is used for cutting and pulling the wires.
- **Nails:** These are used to join the different parts of the wood.
- **Sand Paper:** It is used to soften the surface of the wood.
- **Buffing Machine:** It is used as an equipment to buff the top surface of the wood.
- **Tooth Brush:** It is used to remove the fine dust on the wood surface.
- **Varnish:** Its transparent, protective finish applied on the wood as a coat.
- **Natural Paintings:** These are preferred to paint the wood surface on requirement.



Motorized coping saw is used to cut and extract the wood between the patterns.

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Sand paper is used to smoothen the surface of the wood.



Different types of chisels are used to carve as per the design.



Tri square is used for measuring and marking on the wood.

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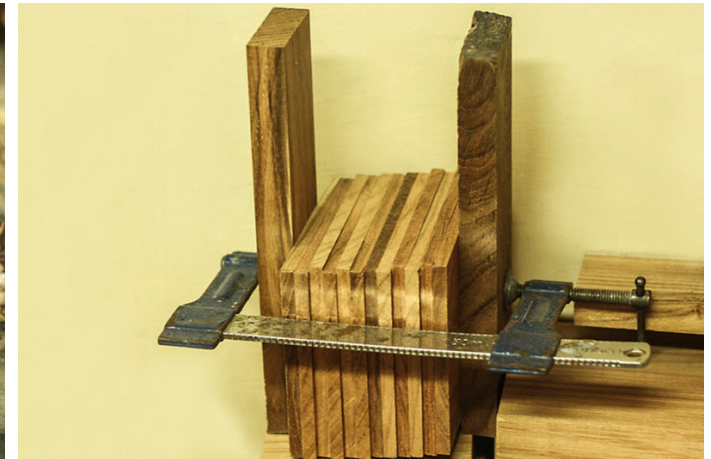
Hand saw is used to cut the wood to the required shape.



Chisels are hammered using wooden mallet.



Wood (carpenter) scrapper is used to level the surface of the wood plank.



L-clamp is used to fasten a number wood together while cutting.

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Orbital sander is used to smoothen the wood surface.

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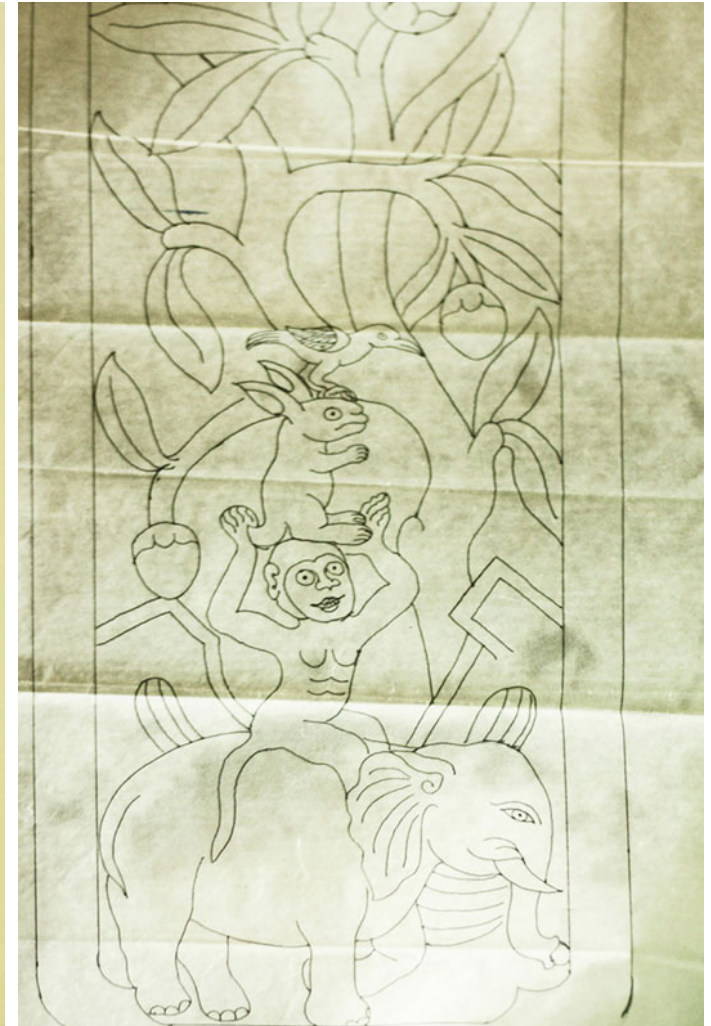
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Traditional hand saw tool made by craftsmen.



Pattern is used as reference by tracing on the wood and carved accordingly.

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Different sizes of drill bits are used to create holes to fasten wooden article.

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Band saw is used to cut wood into desired size and shape.



Teak (Rai) and Pine (Kail) wood is used to make the wood articles.

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Drum sander used to clean and maintain the thickness of the wood planks.



Cello tape is used to fix the design sheet on the wooden plank for tracing.

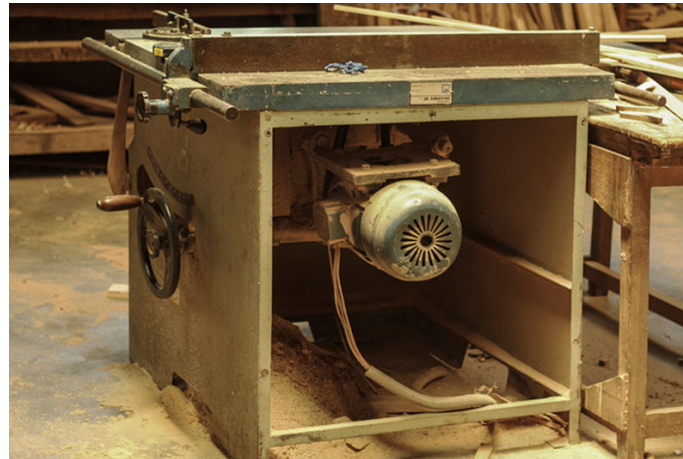


Table saw used to cut the wood planks into equal measurements.



Bah (Traditional tool, Hacksaw)- used to cut the unwanted wooden part.

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Making Process

Pine wood or teak wood is generally preferred for Tibetan wood carving. The planks of wood are stored on the shelves after seasoning. Based on orders, wooden planks are cut with the table saw to the required shapes and sizes, on which the new designs are traced with the help of a carbon sheet, butter paper and pencil to the wood surface. In case of the bulk requirement the designs are photocopied and pasted with the adhesive on the surface of wood.

Holes are drilled to the part of the design to distinguish the wooden parts of the design to be cut. Unwanted wooden parts of the designs are cut with traditional cutters called Bah or cutters. This wood is fixed firmly to the table vice so that the craftsmen can remove the outer portion of the design with different types of chisels to get the outline of the design. After carving the outlines, intricate carving is done on it by experienced craftsmen (artisan), where certain parts are highlighted to uplift the motif of the designs.

As the intricate portions of the design are carved and sanded with the sandpaper to obtain a smooth finish. With the help of tooth brush the fine dust is removed from the wooden parts. The carved -wooden portions are fixed to each other to form frames which are locked firmly to make it to frames and stands of the products. Varnish is applied on the wood to make the surface more lustrous and further painted with different colors on requirement.



A wood plank carved with floral designs.

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Sized wooden planks.



The reference design sheet is attached to the wooden plank using cello tape.



Carbon sheet is placed below the sheet to trace the motifs on the wooden plank.



The motif traced on the wooden surface.

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Wood adhesive is applied on the wood plank to paste the reference design sheet directly.

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This is done as alternate to tracing the design.



Through the drilled holes, coping saw wire is passed.



Unwanted areas on plank are removed using hand driller.

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Thin wire is used to cut the unwanted areas of the wood according to drawn motifs.



With curved chisel, the edges of the wood is carved.



Flat chisel is used to carve and remove small chunks of unwanted wood.



Product is finalized by carving fine details.

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To make wooden boxes the wood is first measured and marked using tri-square.



Marked wood is cut with hand saw.



Wood surface is leveled with the help of a wood scraper.



The parts of the wood are joined with the help of wood adhesive.

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Butt hinge is fixed to attach top and bottom half of the box.



Handles are fasten with help of screw.



To fix the handle, exact position is marked and holes are drilled.

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With the same technique latch is fixed to lock the box.

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Surface of the article is leveled by scraping as a final process.



Surface of the box is smoothen using an orbital sander as final process.



Final product.

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Products

Wood carving contains different varieties of products that are mainly done by the Tibetan community. The products are vended in Norbulinghka, McLeod Ganj, also in abroad like Japan and China. The design carved on the wood are usually of Tibetan culture and of Tibetan motifs.

Listed below are some of the products made in Norbulinghka Institute:

1. Wooden frame - Small size
2. Box
3. Lamps
4. Chair
5. Almira (Wooden cupboard) - is made in the size of 3, 4 and 5 feet.
6. Wooden treasure box
7. Pencil box
8. Wooden stairs

The Tibetan Wood carving are usually done with Tibetan motifs like below:

- Tashi Takgye - Tibetan symbols of good fortune.
- Dhungkar (conch shell)
- Bhumpa (treasure vase)
- Pema (lotus flower)
- Chepaks (Nepali symbol)
- Dragon
- Sirinambi design (six long legs)
- Kajar design
- Cynol (lion design)
- Garuta (Huncha)
- Ziba
- Toyunama
- Tasta
- Terzykarithkala design
- Tumbabersheli
- Syngamdupi
- Shipirama

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Wooden table carved with flora and fauna design.



Table and photo frames carved with Tibetan motifs.



Incense burner made of wood and colored by oil based colors.

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Wooden dragon's head.



Set of wooden jewelry and pencil box painted with crouching tiger motif.



Wall hanging carved in wood depicting a saint in his habitat.

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Incense burner carved with floral designs.



Wooden table carved with Chinese dragon motif.



Wall decorative depicting Chinese dragon.



Small wooden table with window pattern design.

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