



## Historical Introduction of Wood Carving Industry in Kashmir

Azad Rashid Shiekh

Research Scholar in History, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore (M.P)

Email: azadrashid40@gmail.com

### Abstract

Wood carving is amongst the best cottage industries of Kashmir. The intricately carved designs and the fine grain of walnut wood make its carved products among the most attractive to be found anywhere. Among the well-to-do, there is hardly a home anywhere in India which does not contain at least one or two pieces of Kashmiri wood-carving. This is all because of the hard work done by the artisans who makes this product such attractive.

**Keywords:** Kashmir, wood carving, cottage industries, designs, walnut wood, artisans

## **Introduction**

Kashmir has earned a world-wide reputation for its different handicrafts. But this reputation rests chiefly on the city of Srinagar which has from early times been an important centre of trade and industry.<sup>1</sup> Though we don't have any conclusive evidence regarding the origin of the existing arts and crafts of Kashmir, it appears that the great king Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin revived the industries which had either disappeared or declined, and at the same time introduced new ones.<sup>2</sup> That the famous arts and crafts of Kashmir owe their existence to Zain-ul-Abidin is evident from the glowing tributes paid to him by medieval historians of Kashmir, including Mirza Haidar Dughlat who ruled Kashmir for ten years.

## **Objectives**

- To analyze the historical background of Wood Carving in Kashmir.
- To study about the rich artisans of Wood Carving.

## **Methodology**

The data for the present study has been collected from secondary sources. Books, Journals, newspapers, published and unpublished research work various search engines.

## **Historical View of Wood Carving in Kashmir**

Wood-carving industry seems to have developed and flourished under the fostering care of Zain-ul-Abidin whose patronage attracted master artisans from Samarqand, Bukhara and Persia. According to the Sultan's court chronicle, Pandit Srivara, the great king, popularly known as Budshah, provided all amenities of life to these foreign craftsmen and they popularized their arts and crafts among the Kashmiris.<sup>3</sup>

The wood work of the 'Muslim period' bears an eloquent proof to the fact that this art received a great stimulus under the Sultans of Kashmir. While all Hindu buildings of Kashmir are of stone, the mosques of the medieval period are mostly of wood. Some of the

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<sup>1</sup> R.C Kak, Ancient Monuments of Kashmir, Sagar, New Delhi, 1971, p. 152

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, Baharistanshahi, Translated into English by Kashi Nath Pandit, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1991, p. 30

<sup>3</sup> Barrett, The Islamic Art of Persia in A. J. Arberry (ed.) The Legacy of Persia, Oxford: Clarendon Press, London, 1953, p.138-139

important religious places of Kashmir such as the Khanqah-i Mualla and the shrine of Sheikh Hamza Mukhdum Kashmiri are models of carpenter's craft.<sup>4</sup> A speciality in Kashmir wood work, known as khatamband, has been mentioned by Sir Walter Lawrence in these words "beautiful ceilings of perfect design, cheap and effective, are made by a few carpenters, who with marvelous skill piece together thin slices of pine-wood."<sup>5</sup> The result is a charming ceiling in which the various shades of the pine-slips blend together in perfect harmony."

A good specimen of modern Kashmiri wood work and Kashmiri ceilings may be seen in the shrine of Naqshband Saheb. The khatamband ceiling of Srinagar elicited such admiration that a few of them were even introduced into England during the Dogra rule in Kashmir. The modern type of wood-carving is the legacy of the Dogra rule. Carving was done in different articles of furniture of daily use during this period. Dr. A. Mitra, one of the famous ministers of Maharaja Pratap Singh is reported to have arranged an exhibition of all Kashmir arts and crafts in the Government Museum. This action of the able Minister gave an impetus to the wood-carving industry. Maharaja Pratap Singh presented a wood carved gate and frontage of the Kashmir camp to King George V on the eve of the Coronation Durbar held at Delhi. This monument of Kashmir art presented to the English king must have served to advertise the wood-carving of Kashmir among the British aristocracy. Besides, the visitors to Kashmir also patronized this art. Further, richer classes, both within the State and outside extended their patronage to wood-carving. As a result of this patronage, the famous Kashmiri artisans of the period like Ustad Sultan Muhammad Buda evolved new designs.<sup>6</sup> According to the Report on Economic Survey of the Wood-Carving Industry in Kashmir, the name of Ustad Sultan Muhammad Buda will be much remembered. The report says that Buda went out of Kashmir, and when he returned home he opened a workshop of carving. The first to purchase his goods among the dealers were Messrs Ahmed Khan and Habib joo. He engaged the services of other workers and paid them adequate wages.<sup>7</sup> But after some time some of the workers withdrew from his workshop, and set up their own independent concerns.

During the Dogra rule in Kashmir the wood-carving industry received a fillip. This is testified to by the Census of 1921 which speaks of about 50 factories of wood-work in Kashmir. These factories were of three kinds namely,

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<sup>4</sup> G.M.D Sufi, ., *Kashir: Being A History of Kashmir From the Earliest Times to Our Own*, II, p. 508-10

<sup>5</sup> *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, p. 428

<sup>6</sup> D. N. Saraf, *Arts and Crafts of Jammu and Kashmir*, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> Dewan Chand Sharma, "Kashmir Under The Sikhs", Seema Publications Delhi, 1983, p. 205

(1) Carving, mostly of walnut wood

(2) Pinjara or latic work

(3) Panelling in various designs.

The following are some of the important innovations in designs during the Dogra period. These were copied from foreign catalogues on articles produced in European countries.

1. German, Egyptian and Swiss designs.

2. Sculpture, elephants, dogs, horses etc.

3. Trays like chinar leaf and other leaves

Most of these designs continued to be popular with the artists. These important innovations point to the secular outlook of the wood-carvers of Kashmir, all of whom are Muslims. It can be argued that the carving of sculpture, elephants, dogs and horses is not warranted from a strict religious standpoint.

The wood-carving work in Kashmir is carried on as cottage industry. The unit of production is the workshop run by a master craftsman who supplies raw Materials and tools. He maintains the workshop in his own house or hired by him. The orders are obtained by him from the middle-men i.e. firms of sellers, and executes them. The firms make cash advances to the workers.<sup>8</sup> The workshops, supervised by the master craftsman himself, have been the training ground for all apprentices since early times.

True, from the 1930s some workers in wood-carving industry began to invest their own capital; but the limited re-sources of the workers have generally prevented them from bringing about an expansion of their business on these lines. Being things of luxury, the wood-carving goods have to be kept in stock for a considerable time. Capital investment is there-fore large. The manufacturers have to invest capital in raw materials, tools, and implements and unsold goods produced according to their own choice. This also accounts for the inability of the workers to produce goods directly for sale on a large scale.

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<sup>8</sup> Bernier, *Travels*, p. 402.

A large variety of wood-carving goods manufactured in Kashmir since the Dogra rule decorative purpose or as articles of daily use points to the never-ceasing growing demand strength and popularity of this industry. Carving is done on small tables, writing desks, trays, cigarette boxes, cigar boxes, jewel cases, photo frames, chairs and various other articles.<sup>9</sup> It is no wonder, T.R. Swinburne in his travelogue (The Holiday in the Happy Valley, London, 1907) describes the wood-carving industry of Kashmir as quite modern. He was, indeed, struck by the great excellence and ingenuity of the artisans. Sir Francis Younghusband in his well-known work (Kashmir, Edinburgh, 1909) also pays glowing tributes to the artisans of the wood-carving industry of Kashmir.

## Conclusion

There is a requirement to enhance the quality and quantity of the production to get more income and give a positive impact to the economy. There is no doubt that wood carving industry is doing well and is significantly affecting our economy if we want to boost our economy more there will be a requirement of least machines and new technology for running this industry. As part of improvement in the production, it will help to create more employment opportunities for persons looking for job directly or indirectly. And also there is requirement of assistance from government. The government needs to be liberal administratively and financially, so that artisans feel easy to produce better quality and can able to compete with the mill made goods.

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<sup>9</sup> Vigne, *Travels*, II, p. 122.

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