

5.2.4. Bamboo Work

Tsharzo, the age-old tradition of working with bamboo and cane is a popular art, spread and practiced throughout Bhutan. The availability of numerous species of bamboo and cane has enabled the Bhutanese to master the skill of weaving these raw materials into a variety of articles for various uses. Throughout Bhutan, the use of bamboo and cane products has always complemented the use of wooden items, forming an integral part of the lifestyle and economy of the people.

Bhutanese farmers weave a variety of functional bamboo and cane articles used for a variety of domestic, agricultural and commercial purposes. Bamboo (*Neomicrocalamus andropogonifolius*), is locally named *ringshu* in Dzongkha and as *yula* in Khengkha. Cane (*Calamus acanthospathus*) is locally known as *munzi* in Sharchopkha, and as *krath* or *gren* in Khengkha. These are the two common species used in the production of a variety of articles. Bamboo and cane strips are used in their natural colour or dyed into yellow, black, red, green, maroon and brown, to weave colourful articles with geometric designs.



5.2.4.1. Bamboo

Ba (*N.andropogonifolius*) or bamboo is a tall perennial grass found in areas ranging from subtropical to warm temperate zones. Cylindrically jointed hard stems, arising from the dense clumps of bamboo reach about 12m in height that taper at the apex. The tough, shiny and smooth cylindrical hollow internodes of the stems render this plant its tensile strength, durability and lightness. Maximum growth and the regeneration of new shoots of bamboo plants take place during the monsoon. Bamboo is harvested throughout the year except during the monsoon season, to prevent damage to the tender shoots.



Musical instruments like *lim* (flute), *kongthag* (mouth harp), *zhu* (traditional bow), *dha* (arrow), *sonay palang* (quiver), *tsar mog* (helmet), *drale* (shield), *beykbur* (containers to store yarn and dried food snacks), *palang* (cylindrical water or liquor container), *si pa* (traditional butter and cheese containers), ropes, *poe palang* (incense containers), *chang sho* (*bangchang* filter), *shoma, rede* (grain-drying container), *bechab* (rice winnowers), *ja tsa* (sieves), *tse zem* (luggage basket), *tsew* (carrying basket), *ze ko* (pot-stand) and *boelo* (conical hats) are crafted, among many others.

Bamboos are also cut, split and dried to weave mats that are used as fences and as roofing, and to build temporary sheds. Bamboo mats are used for drying grains in the sun. People of Merak and Sakten weave a bamboo article known as *tshala* that is used to serve rice. Large bamboo baskets are used for storing household goods, while *bangchung* are used for eating purposes and for transporting food.

5.2.4.2. Cane

Cane (*C.acanthospathus*) or *tshar* is a unique climber plant, used in conjunction with bamboo, to produce bamboo and cane products. Cane is found growing in the warm and moist regions of central and southern





regions of Bhutan. Canes are typically cylindrical, yellow to brown in colour when mature, and uniform in thickness with spiny leaf sheaths and dense spines. Canes are hard, smooth and shiny while the stem cores are soft and spongy. Because of its strength and tensile qualities cane is used for a variety of purposes. Cane shoots are tender and used for making special curry along with the leaves of another vegetable grown wild in the same areas. The curry is called *patsha damru* (*pa tshab dam ru*). People harvest cane on a need basis every two to three years.

Flexible and strong cane strips are used in making ropes, as a cable for suspension bridges, wickerwork, containers, walking sticks, baskets, *bangchung* rims, furniture frames, umbrella handles, mats, and also for tying and stitching purposes in the construction of roof and fences along with bamboo strips.

Patsha dromchu (cane box) is made from cane strips and used for storing jewellery and other valuable personal effects. Cane stems are dried and split to standard lengths, and is often, treated by smoking over fire, or fumigated in sulphur to prevent insect and fungal attacks. To obtain fine creamy colour, cane is often polished with coconut oil.

5.2.4.3. Process of Bangchung Making

Bangchung, one of the most popular articles of tsharzo, is a traditional spherical shaped bamboo plate, which is used to carry cooked food, and as plates and containers to serve food and snacks. Bangchung, consisting of two pieces, the smaller *chishab* (outer lid) fit into the bigger *nangshab* (inner receptacle), airtight enough to carry even liquids. Bamboo and cane are the raw materials used to weave various patterns and sizes of bangchung like *baikor*, *bathra*, *dagama*, *nyi kyelma* and *tangkama*.

Bamboo has to be split into outer and the inner layer. Both of these layers are used in making bamboo

products. The inner layers of the bamboo are used to weave sieves and other products, while bangchung is woven using the outer layers of the bamboo.

Bangchung weaving takes place after the harvest of bamboo. Strips of bamboo can also be stored for use in the future by keeping in water to keep it soft and pliable

To weave bangchung, good quality bamboo culms are split into very fine strips and boiled in turmeric solution for an hour. These yellow strips are then soaked into black, green and red solutions, and dried. *Chishab* or the outer lid of the bangchung is woven using the dried coloured strips, and colourless strips are used to weave *nangshab* or the inner receptacle. The strips are woven into a spherical shape using an arched circular cane strip. Rims of both the inner and outer pieces are tied together with finely split cane strips. A thin piece of leather is appended on the *chishab* to assist in opening.

Takthra bangchung are woven using white and red coloured bamboo strips, imitating the pattern of a tiger, while the natural plain bamboo colour is used to weave *Khoche bangchung*. White, red, yellow, green and dark green are the five colours generally used to weave other bangchung styles.

Apart from being used in Bhutan for various purposes, a wide variety of fine bamboo and cane articles are popular with tourists as decorative items and souvenirs. These products are also a source of cash income for the artisans that facilitates in keeping this age-old tradition of bamboo and cane work vibrant.

5.2.5. Silver Smithing

Troezo or metal carving or gold and silver-smithy had flourished in the country for a long time as evident from the ornaments worn by women and religious artefacts found in the monasteries and temples. This art is still being practised and transmitted.

