



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.







It is a highly specialized form of art. A special class of craftsmen called *troeko* makes jewellery from gold and silver and other objects such as swords, boxes, teapots and various ornaments in silver that are often thinly plated with gold. Traditional hand-beaten methods are used in the production of jewellery and other objects. The metal is backed with lac, and the pattern hammered out with blunt chisels after the manner of old alto-relievo work. Traditional symbols like the dragon other beautiful designs are embossed on the object. Silver work can also be found on the pillars of the temples, altar tables, jewellery and other religious objects. Using precious stones and metals such as corals, turquoise, silver and gold, these craftsmen create brooches, necklaces, bangles, earrings, rings, amulets containing religious substance, traditional containers (*chaka* and *trimi*) to carry the much chewed beetle nut, ritual objects and much more.

#### 5.2.5.1. Ornaments

**5.2.5.1.1. Women's Brooches:** Bhutanese women use *Koma* or the brooches to fasten their dress at the shoulders and a chain (*Jabtha*) that is left suspended on the chest joining the two brooches.

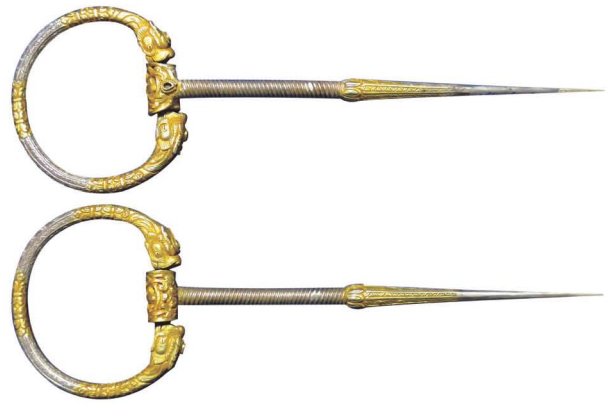


**5.2.5.1.2. Chain:** The *jabtha* is a chain that holds together a pair of brooches worn on the women's shoulder. It is handcrafted in copper and silver often with a gold finish.



#### 5.2.5.1.3. Fibulas:

Fibulas or *thinkhabs* were mostly made of silver and used in the former times to fasten a woman's dress at the shoulders but it could also be used as a weapon, if the need arose. Today it is no more in use and has been replaced by ornamented silver brooches (*Koma*) which are in various shapes and sizes with different designs.



**5.2.5.1.4. Bracelets or Bangles:** Bracelets/Bangles called *dopchu* were worn by Bhutanese women in the olden days and today only the lighter versions of the bracelets are worn. It is handcrafted in both gold and silver and are either engraved or embossed with special designs.



**5.2.5.1.5. Earring:** Earrings or *sinchu* and rings are usually made of silver and gold and studded with turquoise or any precious stones.

#### 5.2.5.2. Domestic Items

**5.2.5.2.1. Sword and Sheath:** A sword is worn fastened to a leather belt adorned with silver buckles. Previously worn as a symbol of nobility and prestige, today only officials who are knighted as *Dasbo* (a Distinguished Officer) by the King are allowed to wear them. Swords were popularly produced in the west, south and east of the country (Punakha, Dungsamkha and Khaling). Further details on swords are presented later in this chapter.

**5.2.5.2.2. Kochab (Men's Ceremonial Belt):** Traditionally made of thick felt, the belt is ornamented by six fine buckles made of silver plated with gold, is used to fasten the sword worn by senior officials and noblemen. These belts are found in various designs and sizes depending on the users.



**5.2.5.2.3. Betal Leaf/nut Container:** This rectangular box called *chag kar* is a personal item used by both men and women to keep betel leaves and areca nuts and carried wherever they go. It is handcrafted on silver with gold finish and is often elaborately decorated with the eight auspicious signs, lotus, dragon and other designs.

**5.2.5.2.4. Round Betal Leaf/nut Container:** Bathra is handmade from silver with gold finish and decorated with the eight auspicious signs, this large round box was used solely by nobility and high level clergy for traditional offerings of betel leaves and areca nuts during special occasions and ceremonies.

**5.2.5.2.5. Lime Container:** This round container called *trimi* is used for keeping lime and is always carried along with chakar or bathra. It is hand crafted from silver with a gold finish and dragon designs.

**5.2.5.3. Religious Objects:** Handcrafted silver religious objects called *choe chas* are often engraved or plated with gold in various pattern. *Dung* (horn), *Choe-ting* (water offering bowls), *Dorje* and *Drilbu* (vajra and brass bell), *Bumpa* (vase), etc. are some of the religious objects.

## 5.2.6. Black Smithing

The art of ironwork is known as *Gar-zo*. Although it is difficult to trace the origin of blacksmithing in Bhutan, recent records tell us that the art can be dated back to the fourteenth century. People engaged in this craft are known as *Gaw*. When Mahasidha Thangtong Gyalpo (1385-1464), came to Bhutan in 14th century, it is said that there were as many as 18 sheds of blacksmiths in Paro. With the help of those blacksmiths, the saint had built 8 iron cast suspension bridges in the eastern and western parts of the country. Few of these bridges are still seen today. As the iron industry evolved over the time,

blacksmithing became a specialized trade. Today, this craft is lagging behind as many of the culinary tools and other equipment are imported from the neighbouring countries.

Iron smelters were small furnaces built from rock that could withstand extreme and repeated heating. These furnaces looked like beehives with an opening at the top and an entrance on the side. The furnace was filled with iron-ore and charcoal and then set to fire. With the rising temperature, the iron flows and forms balls. And these are consequently hammered and shaped into numerous useful tools.

**5.2.6.1. Agricultural Tools:** The blacksmiths crafted numerous agricultural tools that were essential in an agrarian society and almost every household would have a set of such useful tools. They are tools such as sickles, spades, pickaxes, axes, knives, crowbars, etc. However, today many of the tools are imported from the neighbouring countries, which in turn contribute to the gradual death of the craft.

**5.2.6.2. Carpentry Tools:** The blacksmiths produced many important tools that are required by a carpenter such hammers, axes, saws, *zongchu*. *Zongchu* is a sharp chisel that is used to carve and chisel the edges of wood.

**5.2.6.3. Household Items:** Bhutanese blacksmiths have also made aluminium items like utensils, ladles, bowls and plates used at homes. They made ladles of different shapes, sizes and designs. Ladles are cast out of aluminium while the plates are made out of both aluminium and copper. One of the most important household tools is a knife. It finds its use in so many ways within the households. Knives come in different shapes and sizes ranging from a kitchen dagger to bigger knives.

**5.2.6.4. Armours:** In the past the Bhutanese blacksmiths were known to have designed and crafted arms and armours required by men in times of war. Today, colourfully designed shields and iron helmets are retained only in the museums.

