

5.3. CRAFTS OUTSIDE THE CLASSIFICATION

5.3.1. Wood Turning

Shagzo or the traditional art of woodturning is an ancient art that has been passed down for generations. *Shagzo* is vibrantly practised in Bhutan and the master artisans are known as *Shagzopa*. Bhutan's abundant and wide range of woods like *tashing* (*Juglans regia*), *hashing* (*Taxus baccata*), *baashing* (*Picea spinulosa*), *tsenden shing* (*Cupressus corneyana*), *sermaling shing* (*Acer campbellii*) and *etometo* (*Rhododendron arboretum*) have enabled the Bhutanese *Shagzopa* to create a variety of exquisite functional and decorative products like turned wooden bowls, cups, plates, and containers of various shapes, sizes and colours unique to Bhutan.

Shagzopa are known for producing a variety of highly prized utilitarian wooden articles, turned with expertise from special wood burls and roots of trees. Most of these wooden articles, which come in different shapes, sizes and colours, are actually made to be used in daily life, apart from being good showpieces and souvenirs. Specially turned wooden articles are saved as family heirlooms. The prices of these articles are measured in terms of the quality of wood used, the quality of lacquer finish, uniqueness, size and colour. Traditional turned wooden articles are not only popular with the Bhutanese, but also with foreigners.



5.3.1.1. Dza Phob

Bhutanese legend has it that when *Lha Tshangpa* (Vishnu) and *Norlhai Gyelpo Namthoe Sae* descended from the heavens to reward and gift those on earth, the human beings were not fortunate enough to receive this gift. Even precious and valuable trees were unable to receive this gift, but the small invaluable shrubs like *khenpa shing* (*Artemisia spp.*) were endowed with the gift of *dza*.

Although the stems of *Artemisia* cannot be used in woodwork, the real and best *dza* is found shaped like a pot, protruding (goitre shaped) from its trunks and on maple trees locally called *challam shing* (*Acer species*). These abnormal outgrowths or special wooden knots, found on the trunks of these plants are known as *dza* or *bou*. A plant bearing this protruding *dza* is known as *dzashing*.

Dza can be classified according to the quality of the stripes, and the spaces between the stripes or lines known as *gob* (doors). *Phodza* (male) has bigger and thicker stripes while *Modza* (female) has finer stripes. *Modza* is preferred over *Phodza*. *Wugdza* has stripes and lines similar to that of a *wugpa* (owl), while *dzadram* has inferior stripes. The best and the most valuable *dza*, known as *dza ling choem*, are believed to emit rays of light during the night, and special light rays (*tak tshen gi yoed*) during the daylight.

Various sizes of *dza phob* and wooden plates are made, according to the quality of stripes of the *dza*. *Dza phob* is reputed to have the power to purify poison in curry and drinks by making the poison boil and flow out. During *yang kuk* (religious ceremony to accumulate wealth and money), *dza phob* without silver embellishment are used to gather more wealth and money symbolically. During special occasions and religious ceremonies, *dza phob* with silver embellishments are used to serve drinks.

Traditional cups like *boephor*, *ga phor* and *japhob* are also made from wood. Wrapped in a cloth, *boephor* is carried by most people to save their host from having to provide cups when serving liquid refreshments. *Ga phor* is another type of cup but with a lid, used for serving tea and soup. *La phor* is another type of wooden cup with a lid that is traditionally used by monks and lamas for serving tea, curry and soup. After using, these cups are wiped with the cloth or washed with lukewarm water.





5.3.1.2. Traditional Wooden Bowls

Apart from being a beautiful and practical souvenir, *dapa* or the traditional wooden bowls are used for serving food. The two halves of the bowl fit tightly together to serve as cookie or salad bowls. This round wooden bowl with a lid such as *Bou dapa* and *Dum chem dapa* are traditionally used to serve rice. *Bou dapa* is used by the monastic communities and dignitaries. *Tsam deg*, a serving bowl with a lid, was originally used in the north-eastern part of Bhutan to contain roasted wheat and barley flour. *Tho ke*, a traditional wooden bowl is used to contain fruits during special occasions and religious ceremonies, while *Samden* is used for serving snacks.

Another container for serving wine called *jandom*, has already been described in an earlier section.



The prices of these wooden articles depend on the presence of silver mounting. Cups inlaid with silver are more attractive and durable, and are used only for serving alcohol, soups or tea. Bowls and cups were also made of ivory inlaid with silver, but with more awareness about wild life conservation, this fashion has made a rapid farewell.

5.3.1.3. Process of Wood Turning

In the month of February or March, roughly curved pieces of the wood is soaked in cold water for three months to rid the smell and to strengthen. The crude shaped wood pieces are, then dried over fire and left in the sun for about a month. These pieces are then boiled in water until they are straightened. The pieces are then left to dry completely in shade. The crude pieces of hardwood are then spun on the manual pedal lathe or the electrically operated motor lathe to craft. Electric motors enable a *Shagzopa* to power the tools to craft and produce three times as much as the pedal lathes.

The coarse leaves of *sogsogm* (*Tsuga dumosa*) shrub, which is a good substitute for sandpaper, are used to make the cup smooth. For the final touch, *Shagzopa* use an indigenous substance known as 'sey' to lacquer black or red. Sey is applied only in the sun; and should be protected from the wind, since it dries out in the wind. If applied in the darkness or shade, the *sey* does not stick on the surface. Sey, extracted from the *se-shing* (*Rhus succedanea*) is considered as the soul of the turned wood articles. Bhutanese lacquering is applied by the thumb. High-quality articles have at least seven coats of lacquering and a medium-quality finish has four applications. Three coats of lacquering are applied for articles that are not particularly of good quality which soon wane away, and are damaged by insects. There are four types of sey viz; *zhosey*, *tsisey*, *tsag sey* and *dzasey*. *Zhosey* is known to be the best varnish. *Tsisey* is obtained from the seeds of *seyshing* while *tsag sey* is obtained from the bark of *seshing*.

Apart from the articles mentioned above, skilled wood turners also craft a range of contemporary wooden articles like plates, soup bowls, spoons, wine cups, gift pieces, dinner sets, ladles and traditional hand drums that are beaten during religious ceremonies.

5.3.1.4. Drum and Drum Stick

Since Bhutanese tradition is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, use of drums and drum sticks are a part of the rituals performed everywhere.

Used in all religious ceremonies and rituals, the Bhutanese traditional drum known as *nga*, and the *ngayog* (drumstick) are indispensable articles found in every temple, monastery and home. An ancient instrument of musical offering, the beatings of the *nga* symbolizes the subjugation of evil, indicates the fluctuation of tunes and wordings, and regulates the pace of other instruments during rituals and propitiation ceremonies.

There is a Bhutanese saying, "do not beat the drum empty-handed (i.e. do not beat the drum for fun); and do not propitiate gods empty-mouthed" (i.e. do not propitiate gods without making any recitations). Therefore, drumming in Bhutanese cultural and religious context is sacrosanct.

Choe nga are those drums that are used in rituals and *cham nga* are the small drums that are used by mask dancers. Also used in religious rituals, drums like *choedrum* (large pellet drum) and *trangti* do not have handles and are smaller. Sometime they use hand drums



made of skull called *thoedrum*. Bigger cylindrical drums like *bangna* are used for communication and to dictate ceremonial processions. There is also the *nga chen* (large-sized), *nga chung* (small-sized), *ser nga* (gold), *tshoen nga* (color-decked), and *thoed drum* (skull drum).

5.3.1.5. Process of Drum Making

Traditional Bhutanese drum making involves a number of artisans skilled in woodturning, woodcarving, leather and painting. Drum making involves the curving of the wood into a cylindrical shape, carving of the wooden rims, fixing the handles, painting and attaching skins.

Wood from *sengmaling shing* (*Acer campbellii*) or *rawa shing* (*Toona ciliata* or *Cedrela toona*) is cut into cylindrical shape. Wood from *sengmaling shing* is soaked in water, boiled and then rolled into a round shape in heated sand. A drum made from *sengmaling shing* is known as *pangoo*. Drum makers find it easier to work with *rawa shing* since it can be used without soaking or boiling. Drums made from *rawa shing* wood are known as *brungoo*, which has a slight bulge on its surface. Rims are carved on the cylindrical wood and painted with various prescribed mystic charms like dragon motifs, flowers and traditional symbols. The two sides of the drum are usually covered with goat, sheep or calf skin. The cylindrical wood is then attached to a handle with metallic embellishment. The handle represents a *vajra* bolt or *vajra* dagger (*dorje*) and fits into a lotus-shaped stand. Shaped somewhat like a question mark, the *nge tob* or the stick used for beating the drum is made from *rawa shing* or cane.

5.3.2. Pottery

Dzazo or the tradition of pot making might have preceded many of the other arts, as earthen pots were most widely used in the country as household utensils

in olden days in absence of metallic utensils as found today. This craft is believed to have propagated on a large scale during the time of Drubchen Thangthong Gyalpo (1385–1464) and Tertön Pema Lingpa (1450–1521). It had reached its height of development in the 17th century when Bhutanese people had the privilege of learning various arts and crafts including pot making during the time of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel and the fourth Desi Tenzin Rabgye.

It is believed that pottery was first practiced in Rinpung in Paro, Wangbama in Thimphu, Shar Goenkha in Wangdiphodrang, and Gangzur in Lhuentse district. Pot making is traditionally practised mostly by women, and the skills and knowledge are passed from mother to daughter. Although pot making is not as popular as other crafts in Bhutan, it is still vibrant in some pockets of the country like Gangzur. The community has a strong sense of identity and is proud to be practicing this heritage.

5.3.2.1. Process of Making Pots

The basic raw materials in pottery are red and white clay. Red soil and white clay are mixed in the ratio of 3:1. The process requires a huge amount of firewood for burning pots. A single burning requires almost seven men's load of firewood.

There seems to be hardly any change in the method of pottery. Red and white soils are pounded with a huge *thow* (wooden hammer) after drying them in the sun for two to three days. The pounded soil is then sieved using a bamboo sieve with fine holes. The sieved red and white soils are mixed in the ratio of 3:1 in water, and moulded by placing on a stone slab until the mixture turns into a fine pulp. Pots are made in the traditional manner using only hands. Pots are then shaped from the pulp, and water is applied in the shaping process with a *tukpun* (a piece of wet cloth). Pots are then kept in the sun for drying for a day. Next day, the bases of the pots are shaped. These pots are kept in the pottery house for a week for complete drying.

Heating the Pots

The burning of the pots is the most important component in pot making process. Pots are kept around a small fire and are allowed to be heated gently. The pots are then moved into the centre of the fire, and kept until they turn black in colour. When the pots turn dark in colour, the pots are then removed from the fire.

This process of gently heating the pots prevents the pots from cracking. Around 150-180 pots are heated at a time.