

JAINA WOOD CARVINGS

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Introduction

Jaina wood carvings form a unique chapter of Indian art history. Usually we do not speak of Hindu or Buddhist wood carving. Not because these religions did not patronise wood work but because of the fact that Jain wood carvings have survived in greater number. This may be because of their geographical situation in the dry climate of Gujarat and Rajasthan. It is not only the number which make them important but the richness of these carvings also warrant special attention. Fantastic creatures and fascinating forms abound in these carvings. This phenomenon in itself may sound like a paradox, in view of the austerities of the Jaina monks. But then we should not forget that the patrons of these carvings were rich merchants who vied with each other in embellishing temples dedicated by them to the Jaina faith.

How the domestic and religious art of Gujarat, including those belonging to Jaina community, come to use wood to such an extent is a matter of anybody's guess. Unlike many other parts of India, Gujarat lacks quality stone but abounds in forests full of good quality wood. Then the heat resistant quality of wood on the one hand provided incentive to its use and on the other hand helped preserve it for centuries. Perforated *jālī* work in wood provided fresh air. Lightness of wood's weight made it possible to use it more freely on first and second storeys thereby giving an elegant look to the houses.¹ But the unique peculiarity of the architectural wood work as developed in Gujarat is its application and acceptance by the common man, which has made of wood carving a real folk as well as classical art.

The reasons why the study of wood carvings has not received as much attention as it deserves are several. The foremost being the hazard that quite often different parts of the wooden structure, be it temple or home; came to be replaced as they decayed, making it difficult to assign it a firm date. The later artists, in all such cases, tried to match the earlier designs and motifs, thereby increasing the confusion for us to study them. Use of the age old tools and motifs even to this day is another factor. Yet another reason for the neglect of the study of these carvings is the general apathy of Indian scholars to anything originated during 16th to 19th century period, the period to which most of the surviving wooden examples belong. However, recently some publications, specially the census reports of 1961, have paid

attention to this medium of art.² Here we will try to survey the Jaina wood carvings on the basis of published articles and reports and personal survey of various museum collections in India and abroad.

Wood used in the carvings

A Gujarati saying says 'Sag sisam to sonu'.³ It means teak and black wood are like gold because they last long and can be shaped like gold. *Ravan* is used for the threshold which must be very tough, *mahuā* for beams, *sevan* for white decorative pieces. Naturally seasoned wood was selected for carvings. Teak wood is found in the Dangs and Gir forests of Gujarat. *Parimāṇa Mañjarī*, *Bṛhat-Saṃhitā*, etc. give elaborate description about woods and their uses.

Tools and techniques

The piece of wood on which carving was to be done was first cut off in the required size from the long and given proper shape. For this purpose straight lines were marked with the help of a string dipped in *ramzī*, *khādī* or *gerū*. This gave the carpenter the name of *Sūtradhāra* or holder of the string, later on corrupted into *suthār*, which became a caste name.⁴

Starting with large tools, the carpenter progressively uses finer chisels, smoothening surfaces, carving veins, giving light and shade, curves, relief, chipping off spaces in the recesses or decorating the background and thus proceeded from low to moderate and moderate to high relief. To provide it proper finish, dry coconut husk was rubbed. *Kuranj* or purple stony substance was also used.

Some of the Jaina carvings, specially *maṇḍapas*, were coloured, traces of colour can still be noticed on them.⁵ Let us examine some important examples.

Jaina Architecture

Before discussing the Jaina architecture an important point to be borne in mind is that the carpenters who worked for Jains were the same persons who also worked for the contemporary Hindu, Buddhists and Muslim patrons. No wonder many elements in all these contemporary architectures were common.

Domestic architecture

A Jaina domestic house usually has either a Tīrthāṅkara image or *maṅgala ciṅha* (fourteen dreams, etc.) carved on its door-lintel or window frame to give it an auspicious aspect (fig. 1). A wooden facade is a quite common characteristic of a Jaina house. Any person of some means would have some carving at least either on the pillar or on the door or window frames of his house, the extent of the elaboration increasing with the financial status of the builder. Doors, windows, pillars, beams and brackets were the main parts on which the wood carvers lavished their skill. The door is divided either into square or rectangular panels enclosed by thick wooden frame running vertically and cross wise. The windows are either built in or projecting and those on first floor were carved profusely. Windows with *jālī* or

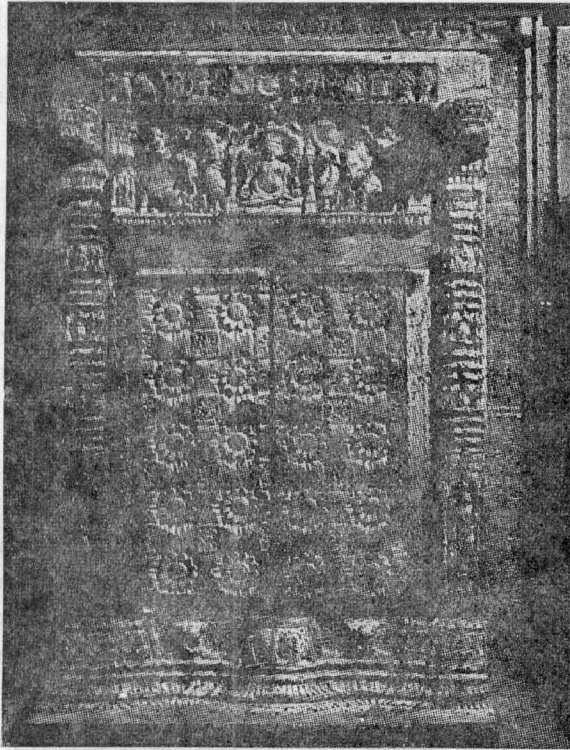


Fig. 1 Door of a wooden house-shrine with *mangala cinha*, 18th. Cent. A. D.

screen were quite popular in and around Patan. Inner courtyards often had pillar-
ed verandah around it. Window shutters were highly artistic in Kutch region.
Quite often they consisted of a perforated tracery of wood placed overlooking
glasses. The carving is bold twisted and profusely flowering. The struts supporting
the upper balcony are deeply under cut, the design being richly interwoven with
animal subjects and folier elaborations. On the inside the ceilings often display a
variety of geometrical designs.

It is very difficult to quote dated examples of Jain residential houses having
wood carvings. Census of India' (1961) Part V:I-A (2) describing wood carvings
of Gujarat gives a statement at its end which mentions dwelling houses with wood
carvings.⁶

Temple architecture

Once the famous Jain temples on the Holy Mount Śatruñjaya were of wood
is attested by the story of Uda Mehta.⁷ It is said that when he was performing
worship he saw a mouse carrying away a burning wick. Realising its danger to the
wooden temples, he resolved to rebuild the temples in stone, a wish which was
ultimately fulfilled by his son,

Jaina temples can be divided into two distinct categories.

(i) *ghar derāsar* or home shrines and (ii) Stone and wooden temples. The former is a special feature of the Jaina community and almost every house of any means has a shrine of its own, which are embellished with minute carvings, which varied with the richness of the family.

The general iconography of the *maṇḍapa* in Jaina temple consists of frieze panels either in narrative or representative. Life scenes of the Tīrthaṅkaras are the most popular theme. The story of the renunciation of Lord Neminath, who returned from the wedding pavilion when he saw a large herd of cattle waiting to be slaughtered for feasting the wedding party is the most popular theme.⁸ Another scene is preaching by a Jaina āchārya surrounded by his devotees. *Dikpālas*, *sursundarīs*, *apsarās*, *kinnarīs*, etc. are usually carved on brackets.⁹

One of the earliest dated *derāsar* is the Śāntinātha *derāsara* in Haja Patel's Pol, Kalupur, Ahmedabad (A. D. 1390).¹⁰ The entire temple is a wooden structure with a *maṇḍapa* enclosed by a dome, 3.35 m. square, which has a seventeen concentric layers of carvings, made of two hundred and forty eight pieces. Another *derāsar*, Sri Parsvanatha, in Srisamita Sikharaji's Pol, also in Ahmedabad, is said to belong to 17th century. Ahmedabad, being the hub of the Jaina community, has several noteworthy *derāsars* : Sri Ajitanātha *derāsar* in Vaghan Pol. Zavarivad, Cintāmaṇi

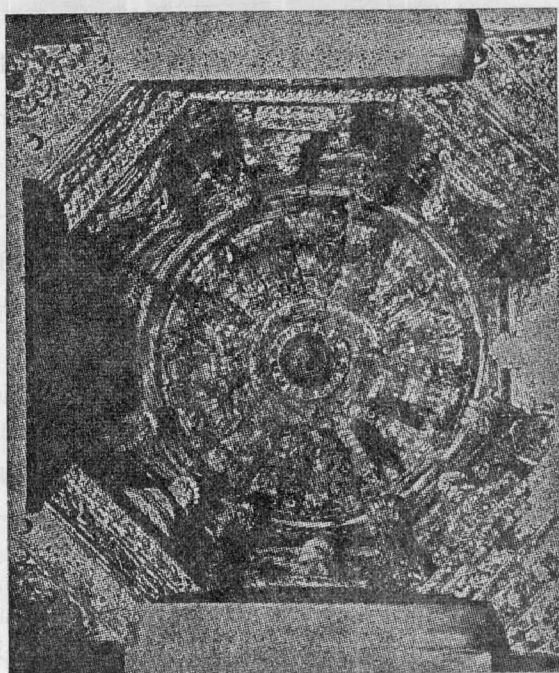


Fig. 2 Filing of the wooden *maṇḍapa*, C. 16th—17th cent. A. D. (Courtesy : Nattonal Museum, N. Delhi).

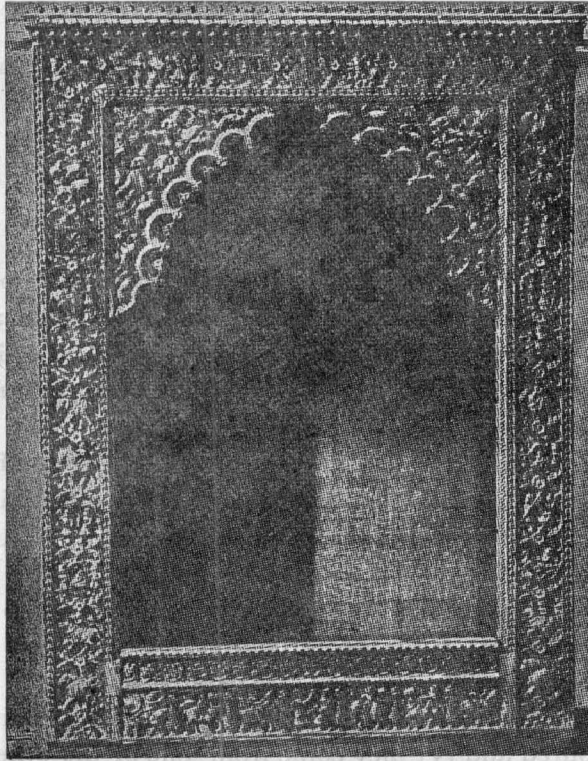


Fig. 3. Wooden window-frame, Early 19th cent. A. D.
(Courtesy National Museum, New Delhi)

Pārśvanātha and Sahasra phaṇa Pārśvanātha *derāsars* in Nisha Pol, Sri Vasupūjya Svāmī and Sri Satalanatha-prabhu *devāsars* in Shekhapada, Zaverivad; Sri Supārśvanātha *derāsar* in Sri Ramji's Pol, and Haja Patel's Pol.

Ghar-derāsars are known from other parts of Gujarat as well. Pathan, Palitana, Ratanpur, Cambay and other cities, too, have several home shrines of importance.

Many Jaina carvings have found houses in various museums. The National Museum, New Delhi has an exquisite example of late sixteenth or early seventeenth century *maṇḍapa* of a homeshrine. Sixteen *apearās* adorn its dome and remind the viewer of the Mt. Abu temples in stone (fig. 2). The museum also has a door-frame (*caukhat*) of a Jaina house (evident from Jaina Tīrthaṅkara image)¹¹ (fig. 3) a small door of a home shrine¹² (carved with fourteen dreams) and a window frame¹³ identified by Tīrthaṅkara figure), etc.

The Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay also has a wooden *maṇḍapa* of a home shrine of c. 1600 A. D.¹⁴

The Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery, Baroda has several examples of Jains wood carvings.¹⁵

One of the most exquisite examples of wooden Jaina temple is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, built in 1594. It was in Patan's Zavevivad locality when Burgess and Cousens carried out their survey in 1890. Some other museums also have stray examples.¹⁶

Sculptures

The Jainas believe that a sandal wood portrait sculpture of Vardhamāna was carved in his life time when he was meditating in his palace about a year prior to his renunciation.¹⁷ In spite of the tradition, no wood carving in the round depicting Tirthankaras have been found so far. At what time the transformation from wood to bronze or stone took place it is difficult to say. But the ritual of daily washing the image with milk and water and the application of sandal paste etc. were perhaps responsible for this. However, subsidiary and allied carvings as part of architecture have a better continuity in wood and quite a few of these can be seen in museum and private collections. All such examples have the following common features : (i) they are smaller in size when compared to their counterparts in stone, (ii) once detached from the structure, most of these look as if carved separately and independently; (iii) they are carved in such a way that one side, which was earlier attached to the architectural piece, is not finished properly; (iv) usually they are coloured and (v) they come from one or the other parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan, thus inheriting the characteristic features of the region.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion shows the wide range and variety of Jaina wood carvings. They not only help us to reconstruct the social history of the period but also fill up the lacunae of art history. All these carvings though small in size, reflect the taste of their rich Jaina patrons who believed in embellishing every inch of space available on their houseshrines or temples. Though mostly religious these carvings provide us with interesting social gleanings of the contemporary life. In wood carvings, the Jaina patrons took a lead over their Hindu or Buddhist counterparts.

References

1. Trivedi, R. K., *Wood Carving of Gujarat*, Census of India 1961, Vol, V, Part VII-A (2), Delhi, 1965, pl. XI.
2. *Ibid*,
3. *Ibid*, page 9.
4. *Ibid*, p. 28.
5. Dwivedi, V. P., Wood Carvings, chapter 32 in Ghose, A., (Edited) *Jaina art and architecture*, Vol, III, New Delhi, 1975, pls. 290-291,

6. Trivedi, R. K., *op. cit.* Statement I, pp. 5-101.
7. *Ibid*, p. 4.
8. National Museum has a *mandap* (60.148) and a window frame (60.1152) showing Neminath's marriage procession, Sri Haridasa Swali collection of Bombay also has a panel showing the theme.
9. Dwivedi, V. P., *op. cit.*, plate 295 B.
10. Trivedi, R. K., *op. cit.*, p. 45.
11. Museum Acc. No. 60.1153.
12. Museum Acc. No. 47. 111/1.
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14. Andhare, S. K. 'Painted Wooden mandap from Gujarat' *Bulletin of the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India*, Vol.7, Bombay, 1959-62, pp, 41-45 and plates 29 to 33c.
15. Goetz, H., 'A monument of old Gujarati wood sculpture', *Bulletin of the Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery*, VI, Part I-II, Baroda, 1950, p. 2.
16. Burgess, James and Cousens, Henry, *The architectural antiquities of Northern Gujarat*, Archaeological Survey of India, New Imperial series, IX, London 1903, p. 49.
17. Shah, U. P., *Studies in Jaina Art*, Banares, 1955, pp. 4-5. The Buddhists, too, have a similar tradition.



लेखसार

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हिन्दू और बौद्धों की तुलना में जैन वास्तुकला भारतीय इतिहास में अपना महत्वपूर्ण स्थान रखती है। इसके नमूने आज तक भी बड़ी संख्या में उपलब्ध होते हैं। संभवतः यह गुजरात और राजस्थान के शुष्क जलवायु के कारण ही सुरक्षित रह सके हों। संख्या के अतिरिक्त इनकी उत्कीर्ण कला की विविधता भी महत्वपूर्ण है। यह कला धार्मिक और घरेलू दोनों क्षेत्रों में फैली है। गुजरात में काष्ठकला का विकास संभवतः वहाँ अच्छे उत्कीर्ण योग्य पत्थरों के अभाव के कारण हुआ होगा। लकड़ी का हलकापन, सख्खिद्रणसामर्थ्य, ऊष्मासहता आदि गुणों ने काष्ठकला को सामान्य एवं विशिष्ट दोनों क्षेत्रों में विकसित होने में प्रेरणा दी।

इस विषय में संभवतः अध्ययन इसलिए नहीं किया गया क्योंकि इनमें ज्वलनशीलता के कारण स्थायित्व कम माना गया। साथ ही भारतीय विद्वान् 16-19 वीं सदी के सम्बन्ध में सदैव उपेक्षित रहे और दुर्भाग्य से इसी बीच यह कला पनपी है।

काष्ठकला के लिये सागौन और काली लकड़ी मुख्यतः काम आती है। इन लकड़ियों को 'सोना' कहा जाता है। लकड़ियों के विषय में परिमाणमंजरी तथा बृहद्संहिता में अच्छे विवरण मिलते हैं। इस कला के विकास में अनेक प्रकार के पदार्थ और उपकरण काम आते हैं।

काष्ठकला के उदाहरण के रूप में मन्दिर सर्व प्रथम आते हैं। ये दो प्रकार के होते हैं—घरेलू देरसरा और मन्दिर। घरेलू देरसरों का रूप घर में बने हुए एक लघुकाय पूजास्थल के रूप में होता है। मन्दिरों में यह कला उनके मंडपों में उत्कीर्णन के रूप में पाई जाती है जहाँ पौराणिक या प्रतीकात्मक कथायें काष्ठ में उत्कीर्णित की जाती हैं। नेमनाथ का वैराग्य, तीर्थंकरों का चरित्र तथा दिक्पाल, सुरसुन्दरी, किन्नरी आदि देवियों का उत्कीर्णन पर्याप्त मात्रा में पाया गया है। अहमदाबाद के हज पटेल पोल का शान्तिनाथ देरसरा (1390 ई०) काष्ठकला की दृष्टि से एक उत्तम उदाहरण है। इसी प्रकार के अनेक देरसरे इस नगर में और भी पाये जाते हैं।

पाटन, पालीताणा, रतनपुर आदि में घर-देरसरे पाये जाते हैं। इसका एक नमूना राष्ट्रीय संग्रहालय, दिल्ली में रखा है जो 16-17 वीं सदी का है। इसके मण्डप में सोलह अप्सरायें उत्कीर्णित हैं। प्रिंस आफ वेल्स संग्रहालय, बम्बई तथा बड़ौदा के संग्रहालय में भी अनेक काष्ठकला के नमूने पाये जाते हैं। न्यूयार्क के मेट्रोपोलिटन म्यूजियम में 1594 ई० में बने एक जैन मन्दिर का भव्य नमूना प्रदर्शित है जिसे भारत से 1890 ई० में ले जाया गया।

काष्ठकला का दूसरा रूप मूर्तियों के निर्माण के रूप में पाया जाता है। यह कहा जाता है कि भगवान् महावीर के जीवन काल में ही उनकी चन्दन की मूर्ति बनाई गई थी। लेकिन लकड़ी की मूर्तियों का बहुत प्रचलन नहीं हो सका, ऐसा लगता है। इसके अनेक कारण संभावित हैं। लेकिन काष्ठीय स्थापत्य के अनेक नमूने संग्रहालयों में मिलते हैं। इनकी निम्न विशेषतायें पाई गई हैं

- (i) इन कृतियों का आकार व विस्तार, पत्थर की तुलना में, लघुत्तर होता है।
- (ii) इनका उत्कीर्णन इस प्रकार होता है कि कृति का दूसरा (पृष्ठ) पार्श्व अग्रपार्श्व के समान नहीं हो पाता।
- (iii) ये कृतियाँ प्रायः समीप होती हैं।
- (iv) ये प्रायः गुजरात और राजस्थान में ही पाई जाती हैं।