

ŚIBIKĀ-VAKRAVAMŚA-LAKṢAṆAM :
**A Method to Grow Crooked Bamboos for
Palanquin Beams**

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The *Śibikā* (palanquin) has been popular in India from early times as a mode of conveyance for the royalty and the upper strata of the society. Its use in temple festivals as a *vāhana* (carrier) to take the image of the deity in procession along the outer corridors of shrines and through the city for public worship is also popularly known, especially in South India.¹ The *Mayamata*, is, perhaps, the earliest text on Indian architecture to give a detailed description of the *Śibikā* in its three types, viz., *Pūṭhi*, *Śikhari* and *Maundi*, and also enunciate the measurements for their construction.² There is a parallel description also in the *Paddhati* *Īśānaśivagurudeva*.³

The basic structure of the *Śibikā* is succinctly indicated thus in the *Viśvakarma-vāstuśāstra*, in the context of the description of *Vāhanas* to be used in temple festivals (ch. 8+ : *Kalpavyākṣādivāhanalakṣaṇakramakathanam*) :

शिविकां मानवैर्धर्या पेटिकाकारसंयुताम् ॥18॥

अथ पार्श्ववरणकैर्हीनां वेण्वादिदण्डकाम् ।

भूतेशो वा वृषो नानालङ्क्रियामण्डितो मतः ॥19॥

The commentary on this passage by Anantakṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭāraka is elucidative and might be extracted here :

अथ शिविकालक्षणमाह—शिविकामिति, विविधरूपं शिविकालक्षणं तु पुरोभागे पश्चाद्भागे दृढं संयोजितमाधारदण्डं मानवभटस्कन्धैर्धर्यां प्रकल्पयेत्, तादृशाधारदण्डस्तु वेणुकृतो वा वटकृतो वा सोकर्य-दायीति समयः । एवं मानवस्कन्धबाह्याधारदण्डसहितस्य शिविकाख्यस्य वाहनस्य निर्माणं तु पेटिकारूपं

1. For an account of the *Śibikā-vāhana* in Vaiṣṇavite temples, see the *Vimānārcana-Kalpa* of Marici, of the Vaikhāṇasa School (Madras, 1626), Sn, on *Śibikādi-yānotsavaḥ*, pp. 352-54
2. Cf. *Mayamata* of Mayamuni, ed. T. Ganapati Sastri, Trivandrum, 1919, Ch, 31, verses 1-29.
3. See *Īśānaśivagurudeva-Paddhati* of Īśānaśivagurudeva, ed. by T. Ganapati Sastri, pt, IV, Trivandrum, 1925, pp. 453-55 : Paṭala 40, *Nityotsāxa-yāna-śanādi-paṭala*, verses 39.64.

११८ : अगरचन्द नाहुटा अभिनन्दन-ग्रन्थ

पार्श्वयोः प्रवेशद्वारोपेतं कार्यम् । अयमेकः प्रकारः । प्रकारान्तरेण तु पार्श्वभागावरणहीनं मध्यमस्थदेवबेर-
स्थापनस्यकं देवबेरस्य मुखमण्डलस्फुरणार्थमग्रभागे मुकुरस्थानोपेतं विविधतचित्रपट्टिकावृतपार्श्वपट्टिकातलं
शिविकाकल्पनं प्रकल्पयेत् ॥१८॥

किञ्चात्र शिविकानिर्माणे वचिन्त पूर्वभागे भूतेशगणस्कन्धधारितपूर्वदण्डं वा नन्दिदेवधारितपूर्व-
दण्डं वा गन्धर्वकिन्नरादिदेवगणस्कन्धधारितदण्डं वा कार्यमिति विकल्पः । अतोऽत्र तु शिविकानिर्माणे
पुण्यशिविका-दर्पणशिविकेत्यादिभेदश्चोह्यः क्रियासौकर्यायं शिल्पिभिरिति ॥१९॥¹

The essential elements of a *Śibikā*, thus, consist of a closed box-like structure with doors or an open structure without doors, fixed on a long beam of bamboo or wood which extends on both sides of the box. The seat is placed inside the box and the whole structure is carried on the shoulders of one or more persons at each end.

Now, the palanquin with the arched beam rising majestically in a steep curve over the box and with the two extending ends too slightly inclined upwards is artistically superior to one with just a horizontal beam. It is difficult to prepare curved beams of wood or procure naturally curved beams of wood of sufficient length. In practice, the bamboo is used exclusively for the purpose. The required bends are often made in the bamboo by the application, at the appropriate places, of strong heat when the bamboo is yet green and has not become dry and stiff. Naturally, the bamboo gets charred and injured, to some extent, in the process. An ingenious method has been developed to solve the problem, viz., to grow bamboos with the necessary curves, of appropriate measures, at the required places. The short text, *Śibikā-vakravamśa-lakṣaṇam*, edited here enunciates a method to grow crooked bamboos. The method primarily consists of driving in appropriately curved iron structures on the sides of the bamboo planting and making the bamboo through the said structure. Directions are given towards controlling its growth, so that, ultimately, a bamboo with bends and curves at the right places and in the right measures is produced.

The work is preserved in a single manuscript, being No. 1133 belonging to the collection of Sanskrit manuscripts of the Palace Library, Trivandrum, now deposited in the Kerala University Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library, Trivandrum.² It is in palmleaf, in four folios, written in Malayalam script. The manuscript is well preserved and the writing is generally free from errors,

1. See *Viśvakarma-Vastuśāstram*, Ed. by Vasudeva Sastri and N. S. Gadre, Tanjore, 1958 (*Tanjore Sarasvati Mahal Series*, No. 8503, p. 197,
2. For full details see the *Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts of H. H. the Maharaja's Palace, Library*, Trivandrum, 1938, Vol. IV. pp. 1547-58. I am thankful to the authorities of the Library for supplying me, with a copy of this manuscript.

इतिहास और पुरातत्त्व : ११९