

Design Resource

Woodcraft of Bastar

The Craft of Wood

by

Palash Vaswani

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/woodcraft-bastar>



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Introduction

Wood has played an important role in the architectural development of the Indian civilization. It was one of the most ancient building materials for public and stately structural designs, traces of which can be found in the remains of early empires. Since then, the craft has evolved into many forms, catering to the various social, religious and functional needs of the people. Woodcraft of Bastar is famous for its beautiful and intricate style. Some of the well-know products of the region are wooden sculptures, combs, tobacco pouches and masks.



Wooden sculptures by Pandi Ram Mandavi.



Wooden combs for males.

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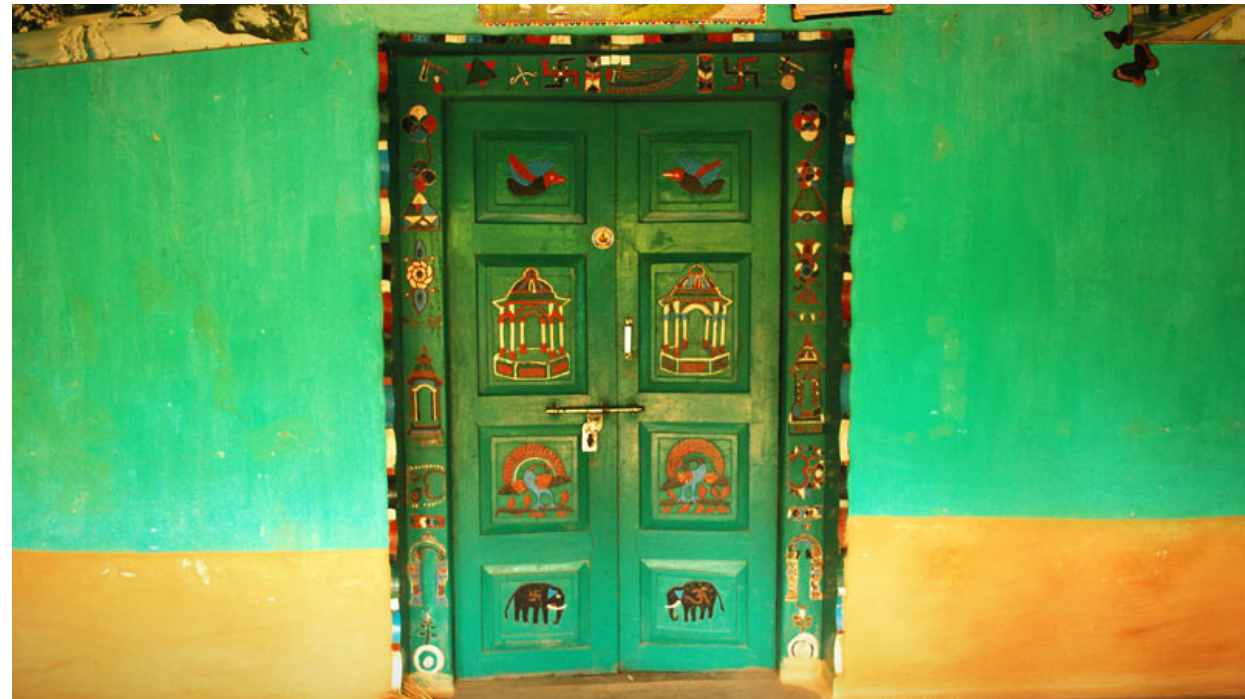
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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/woodcraft-bastar/history>

History

It is believed that some of the early structures like temporary shelters for humans; were made out of tree branches and leaves. Forest and its by products have always played a pivotal role in tribal culture. From the decorated wooden pillars in house, to the comb full of beautifully inscribed motifs, wood has shown its presence in the tribal society since ages. In Ghotuls, the youth dormitory of the tribals, girls and boys used to dance around carved wooden pillar. Musical instruments, wooden headrests, drums and dancing stilts were also made of wood. Boys used to gifts gorgeously carved wooden combs as tokens of love to the girls of their choice. Many old temples of the region display highly decorative woodwork. Skillfully crafted designs of various animals and humans can be seen on its door panel and frames, pillars, roofs and inside the shrine. Some tribes of the region build wooden and stone pillars in the memory of dead. These pillars are decorated with detailed motifs describing the life of the deceased. The best example of existence of the craft in tribal culture can be seen during the festival of Dussehra, which is the main festival of Bastar region. The chariot carrying Danteshwari mata is the largest single piece of woodcraft, measuring approximately 11 x 11 meters in dimensions. Wooden axes and spears play a pivotal role in the rituals of the tribes.



Decorated wooden door.

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Decorated wooden door.



Wooden combs for tribal girls.

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Comb for tribal boys in the making.



Pandi Ram displaying the comb.

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Replica of Ghotul at Manav Sanghralay, Bhopal.



Musical instruments at Ghotul.



Interiors of a Ghotul.



Carved wooden pillars.

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Interiors of a Ghotul.



Wooden stilts.



Wooden stilts.

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Replica of a memory pillar at Manav Sanghralay, Bhopal.



Replica of a memory pillar at Manav Sanghralay, Bhopal.



Replica of Dussehra chariot at Manav Sanghralay, Bhopal.

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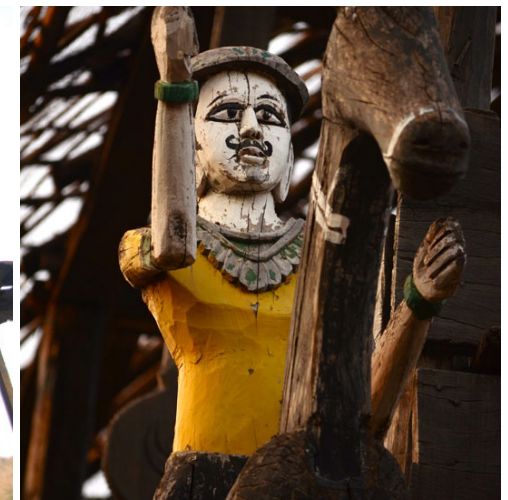
Replica of Dussehra chariot at Manav Sanghralay, Bhopal.



Wooden sculptures on the chariot.



Replica of Dussehra chariot at Manav Sanghralay, Bhopal.



Wooden sculptures on the chariot.

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Place

Bastar, a land of tribals, is the largest district in the state of Chhattisgarh. Endowed with rich minerals deposits and precious stones, it forms the southern part of Chattisgarh. The total forest area of the district is roughly 7112 sq km, which is more than 75 per cent of the total area. Tribes consist of 31.8% of the total Chattisgarh population, with 66.3% of concentration in Bastar. The main tribes of Bastar are Gonds, Kamars, Biagas, halbas and Bhatras. This region is also famous for some distinctive and equally beautiful craft forms. Gadhbengal is a small village in Narayanpur tehsil with majority of Muria tribe (sub tribe of Gonds) living in the area. Surrounded by the lush green forest full of trees like teak, shisham and sal, woodcraft is widely practiced here. The community of wood craftsmen is also known as badais. Pandi Ram Mandavi, who is a wood carver, is one of the living legends of the region.



Crop fields.



Crop fields.

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Crop fields.



Crop fields.



Crop fields.



Crop fields.

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Pandi Ram's workshop.



Unfinished sculptures at the workshop.



Ghotul near gadhbengal.



Ghotul near gadhbengal.

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Musical drum at Ghotul.



Wooden stilts at Ghotul.



Pandi Ram at Ghotul.



Pond in Narayanpur.

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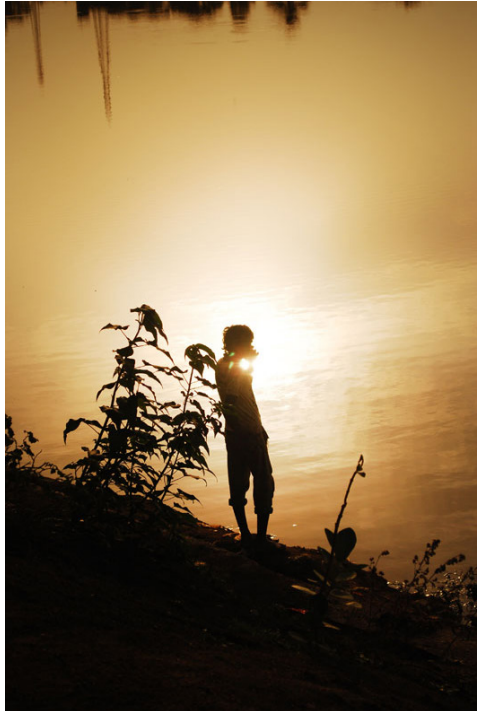
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Pond in Narayanpur.



Pond in Narayanpur.

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People

Pandi Ram Mandavi is a wood carver and belongs to the Muriya tribe. He is also known for the present commercial form of Bastar flute. At the age of 12, he learnt the art of carving wood from his forefathers. An encounter with a tourist, who showed interest in the wooden combs, made Pandi Ram realize that even these are saleable items. His exposure to the country began when Adivasi Lok kala Parishad started frequently calling Pandi to Bhopal. He became famous in 1960s and has traveled all around the world with his art works. His works include relief sculptures in wooden panels, standing sculptures, bamboo flutes, wooden combs and tobacco pouches. He is a popular figure and one of the legends of Bastar. People know him as Pandi Ram.



Pandi Ram's kids.



Pandi Ram Mandavi's family.

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Pichadu Ram, Pandi's father-in-law.



Pichadu Ram, Pandi's father-in-law.

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Pichadu Ram, Pandi's father-in-law.



Pandi Ram Mandavi.



Pandi Ram Mandavi.



Pandi Ram Mandavi.

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Process

The large sized wooden sculptures take 2-3 months in the making. It requires a big wooden log as material and hacksaw, chisel, file, knife and hammer as tools.

Combs are made using the same tools. Once the appropriate wooden piece is picked, it is cut by a hacksaw to bring it to the required shape. Adze is then used to make it smooth. Measurements of teeth of the comb are measured by bamboo stick and then marked with a pencil. Hacksaw is then used to make teeth in a wooden piece, which is made smooth by a chisel. The craftsman draws the motif on the top part of the comb and cut the remaining unused part. Motif is then carved and ornamented with knife and other tools. Bigger combs are used by males and smaller ones by females of the tribe.

Tobacco pouches are carved out of a smaller wooden piece. First, it is brought into a rough shape by various tools. The inner part is made hollow using thin chisel. File and chisel are then used to give it smooth exteriors. Intricate carvings on the pouches are given by knife and small chisel. In some pouches, the top lid is attached later using adhesive, which makes the opening extremely narrow.

Bastar flute is famous for its unique sound when swung in the air. It is made out of bamboo stick. First it is cleared from inside and made hollow with the hot rod. Exteriors are made smooth using various tools.

Then the patterns are made on it with the hot knife. This process burns the surface and makes the etching permanent. Three washers with a little distance in between are fixed on the top inside part of the flute. Wax is used as an adhesive here.

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Tools and Materials



Comb



Chunoti



Bansuri

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Tools and Materials



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Comb



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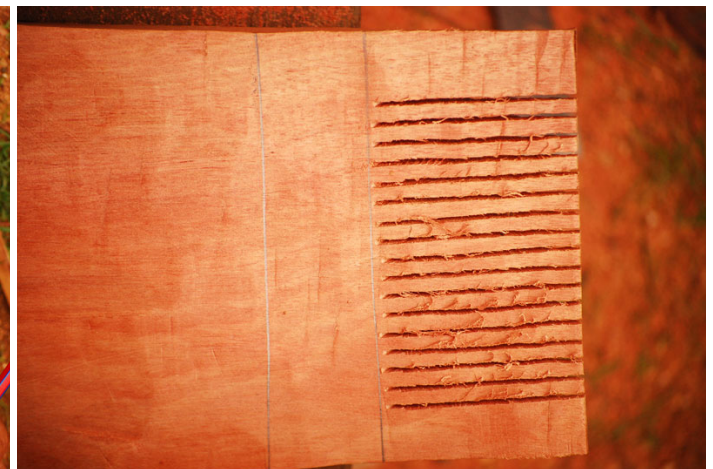
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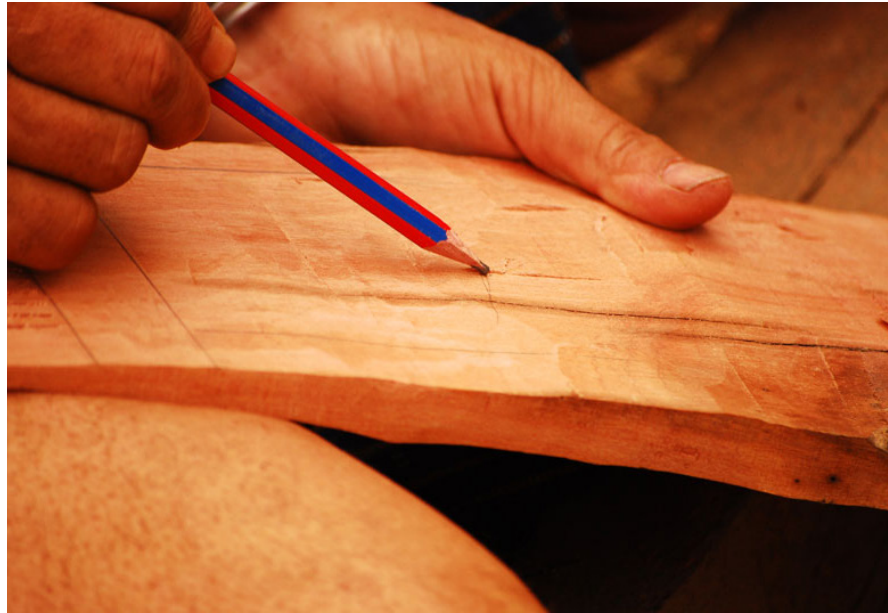
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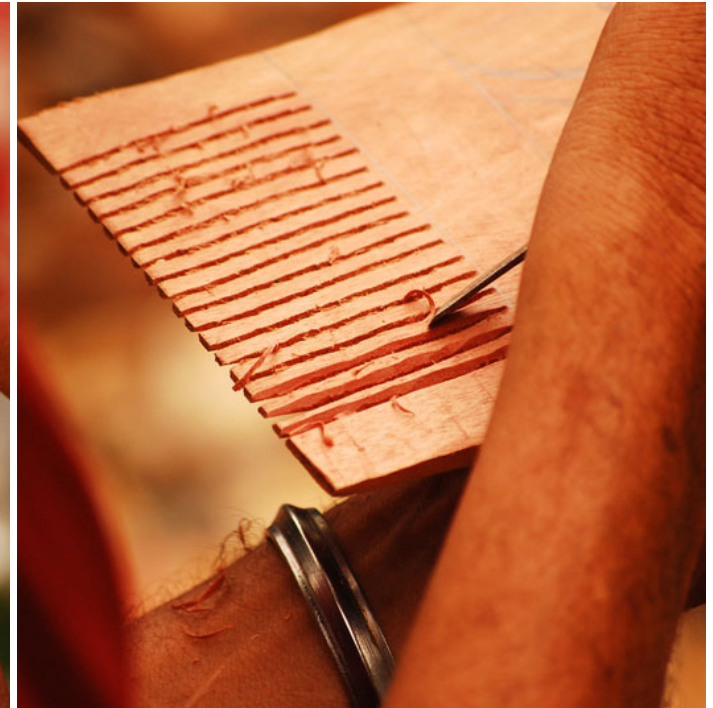
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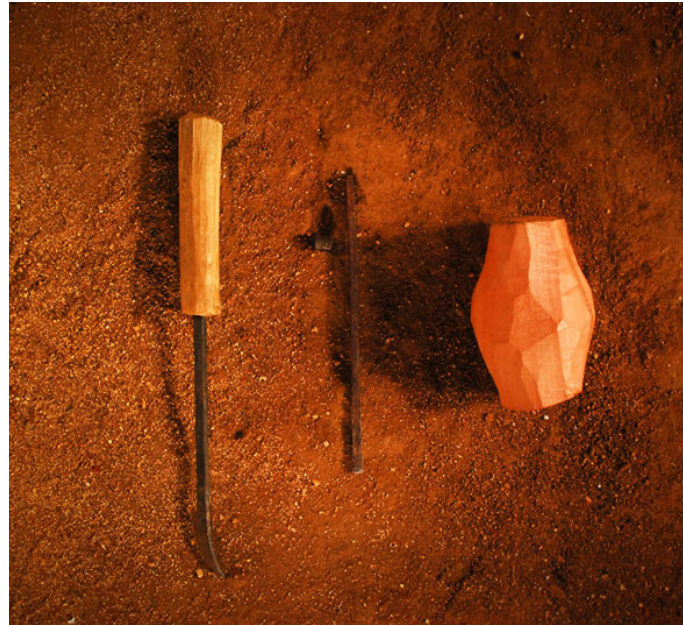
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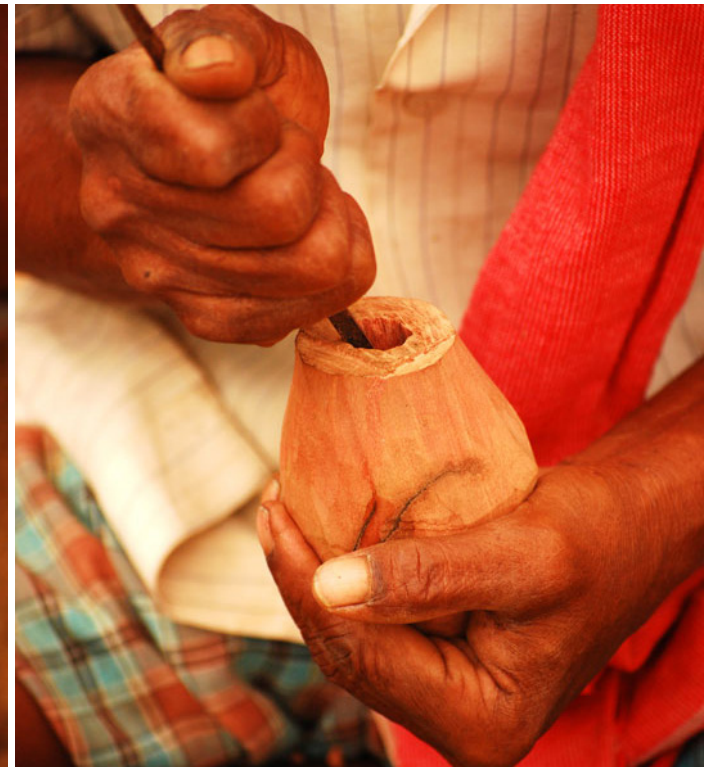
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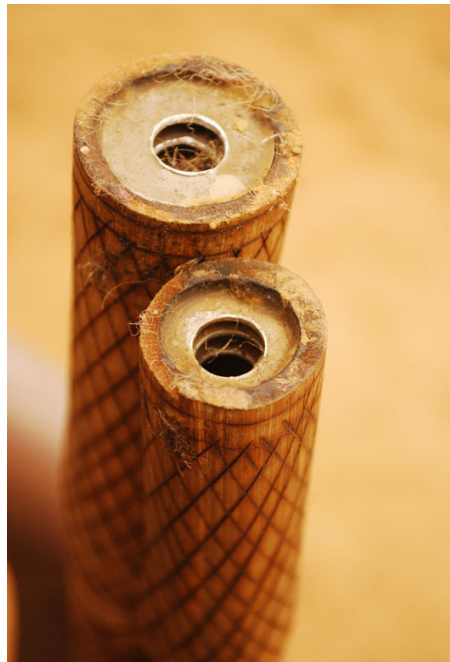
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Products

Forests constitute more than 75% of the total area of Bastar region. It is full of trees like shisham, sal and teak. Initially the wooden carved products used to cater to the personal and social needs of tribes. It gradually made its way to the local bazaars and then to the bigger craft markets. Large-scale wooden sculptures and relief carvings in wooden panels have become identity of the woodwork of Bastar. Beautifully ornamented combs, which are made by the tribal boys to woo a girl, are also known for its exclusivity. The big combs, worn by the males and smaller ones used by the females are rare these days. These are now being replaced with plastic and rubber combs. Tobacco pouches are called 'chunoti' in local language. Tobacco chewers usually powder its leaves and mix it with lime. This powder is then filled into these wooden pouches, which are always carried by the elderly villagers. These pouches too display intricate carvings on it.



Wood Carvings



Comb



Chunoti



Bansuri



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Design Resource

Woodcraft of Bastar

The Craft of Wood

by

Palash Vaswani

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/woodcraft-bastar/products/wood-carvings>

Wood Carvings



Pandi Ram's sculptures.



Pandi Ram's sculptures.



Pandi Ram's sculptures.



Pandi Ram's sculptures.

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Unfinished sculpture.



Wood sculptures at Shilpgram Sevagram.

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Wood sculptures at Shilpgram Sevagram.



Wood sculptures at Shilpgram Sevagram.

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Wood sculptures at Shilpgram Sevagram.



Wood sculptures at Shilpgram Sevagram.



Wood sculptures at Shilpgram Sevagram.



Wood sculptures at Shilpgram Sevagram.



Wood sculptures at Shilpgram Sevagram.

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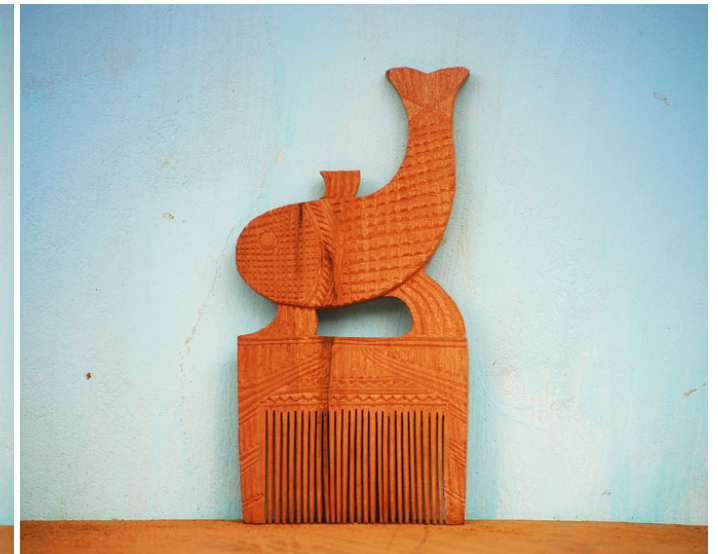
Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/woodcraft-bastar/products/comb>

Comb



Comb made by Pandi Ram.



Comb made by Pandi Ram.



Pandi Ram displaying comb.



Smaller combs are for tribal girls.

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Woodcraft of Bastar

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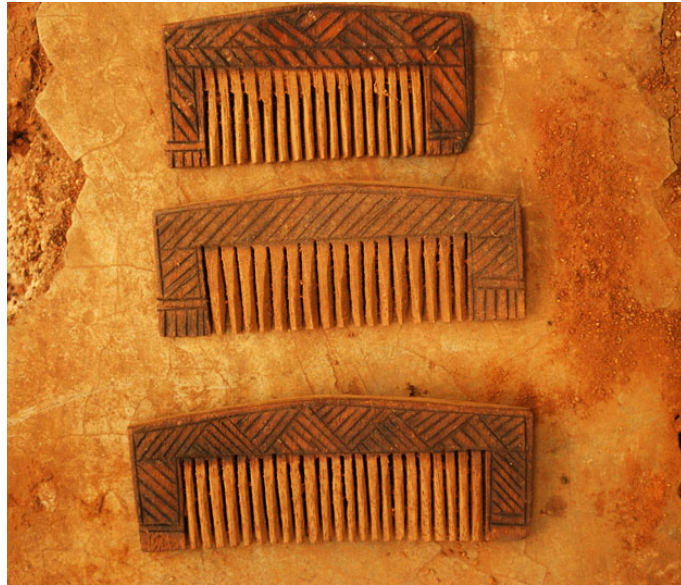
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Source:

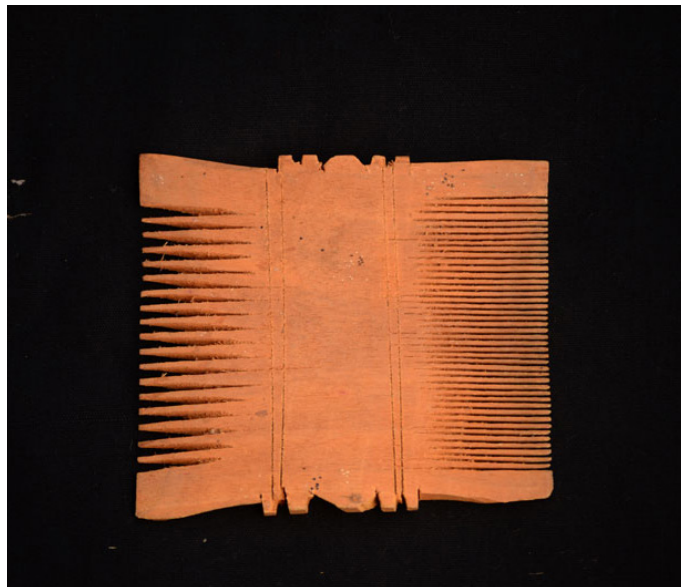
<http://www.dsource.in/resource/woodcraft-bastar/products/comb>



Smaller combs are for tribal girls.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.

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Ornamented combs of Bastar.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.

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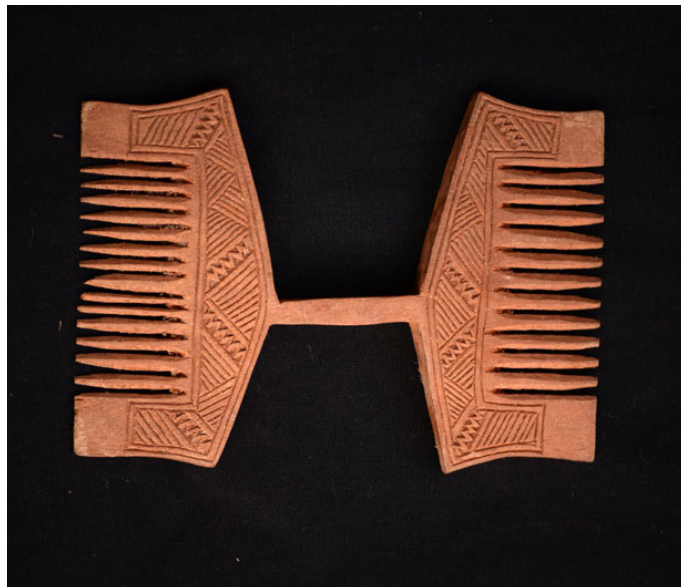
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Ornamented combs of Bastar.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.



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Ornamented combs of Bastar.



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Ornamented combs of Bastar.



Ornamented combs of Bastar.

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Source:

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Chunoti



Decorated tobacco pouch.



Decorated tobacco pouch.



Decorated tobacco pouch.

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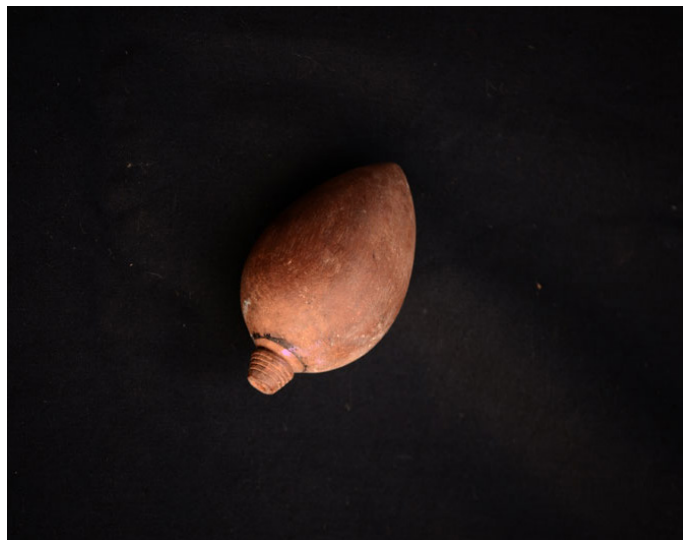
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Decorated tobacco pouch.



Decorated tobacco pouch.



Decorated tobacco pouch.



Decorated tobacco pouch.

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Source:

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Bansuri



Bastar flute.



Flute displaying illustrations of fishes.



Bastar flute.



Bastar flute.

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Decoration on flute.



Decoration on flute.



Pichadu Ram showing how to create sounds from a Bastar flute.

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/woodcraft-bastar/products/miscellaneous>

Miscellaneous



Relief carvings in wooden panels.



Relief carvings in wooden panels.



Relief carvings in wooden panels.



Relief carvings in wooden panels.

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Source:

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Wooden box with sliding top cover



Wooden earrings.



Mask.



Mask.

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Shilpgram Sevagram

Shilpgram Sevagram Narayanpur was setup by Chattisgarh Handicrafts Development Board in 1993. The purpose of setting it up was to boost the local crafts of the culturally rich region of Narayanpur. It also aimed at rehabilitating the locals from the naxal hit zones and give them a source of livelihood. Currently five hundred craftsmen work for shilpgram and 41 families stay at the campus. Apart from specializing itself in Bamboo craft, it also focuses on wrought iron, stonework, terracotta and seeshal craft. The campus runs training programs for the locals. Many craftsmen from different states are called to teach the locals. Around 3500 people from Abhujmadh region alone have been trained in bamboo craft. The centre has installed new machines like bamboo treatment plant, furnace etc. to help the craftsmen. Mr B. K. Sahu is the current officer in charge of Chattisgarh Handicrafts Development Board in Bastar region.



Shilpgram Sevagram Narayanpur.

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Shilpgram Sevagram Narayanpur.



Bastar elephants in front of Shilpgram Sevagram, Narayanpur.

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Terracotta furnace.



Clay pots at the terracotta workshop.

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Wrought iron workshop.



Wrought iron craft in making.

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Craft store room.



Craft store room.

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Giant wood sculptures in storeroom.



Giant wood sculptures in storeroom.

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Bamboo workshop.



Bamboo workshop.

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Bamboo workshop.



Bamboo workshop.

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Bamboo treatment plant.



Locals from naxal hit areas learning the craft.

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Wood workshop.



Wood carvings at workshop.

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Craftsman working in the workshop.



Design Centre, shilpgram.

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Bastar flute.



Mask.

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Newly built cottages for craftsmen.



Local temple.

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Guest room.



Shilpgram Office.



Shilpgram Office.



Tribal women living in the centre.

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Mr. B.K. Sahu, current officer in charge of Chattisgarh Handicrafts Development Board in Bastar region.



Traditional tribal painting of Bastar.

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Design Resource

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Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/woodcraft-bastar/contact-details>

Contact Details

This documentation was done by Palash Vaswani, Design Associate at **IDC, IIT Bombay**

You can get in touch with Palash Vaswani at [palsonline\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:palsonline[at]gmail.com)

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