Revisiting the Old Age Craft; Likhai: the Wood-Carving of Uttrakhand

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ABSTRACT
Numerous events showcase Uttarakhand’s culture and traditions. Traditional wood carving and architecture in Uttarakhand have decorative appeal. The craft of wood carving also depicts mythological tales and the gods and goddesses that ancient people believed in. Birds, animals, and flowers are precisely depicted in Likhai traditional painting, and these aspects serve as the main sources of inspiration for the painters' inventiveness. To satiate religious beliefs, Gods and Goddesses have taken human form. The style and method of carving in wooden doors demonstrate the skill of the craftsman. These antique doors are rapidly fading away and about to fall apart. In contrast, a modern door has fewer parts. In contrast, a modern door has fewer themes, elements, and decorations, which is also a sign of the threat that this form of art is currently under. Through an overview, the paper intends to emphasize the Likhai art in terms of method and application.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION
As per the history of wooden work, since ancient times, carving has played a significant role in Uttarakhand. Many locations and regions in Uttarakhand have Likhai art. It is one of the earliest types of traditional art and craft. Using a variety of tools, Likhai artists create their works on wood. Every home in Uttarakhand used to have a wooden entrance door or pillars, and earlier methods were employed to give the wood's surface a tactile feel. Entrance or traditional doors were entirely carved by hand. In the past, carving on the front door was seen as a prestige symbol. A person's riches and prosperity were denoted by the carvings above their doors. It was thought that a person's front wooden door would be larger the wealthier they were. In certain of the areas of Uttrakhand, the art of Likhai is a traditional kind of woodcarving. A distinctive form of Uttarakhhand culture known as Likhai art was used to decorate wooden doors, pillars, and occasionally even roofs in some of the state's traditional buildings. Almost all homes and places of worship used to be embellished with Likhai art in earlier times, but today only a select few locations still do. The hardwood doors were intricately carved throughout the course of a lengthy carving process. There are now very few artisans left, and the arts are in danger of dying out. If not conserved, this tangible treasure will soon be lost to history. The majority of the resources found in the foothills of Uttrakhand are connected to farming. The state provides its citizens with a variety of opportunities, and the bulk of the forest contributes to the maintenance of the way of life. One of the major resources is the large supply of

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wood. Since ancient times, humans have used wood in their Likhai artwork. There are numerous historical locations that provide as proof of the existence of this ancient art. Both the regions of Kumaun and Garhwal, a significant division in terms of the locations and cultures, exhibit the art of woodcarving. The work and spirit of former artisans are captured in the Likhai art. The history of wood carving may be traced back to the prehistoric era, when each wooden sculpture served a particular ritual purpose. Shigir Idol, for instance, is the oldest wooden sculpture and dates back roughly 11,000 years. Before stone sculpture was invented, the art of wood carving was widely used in this nation. Some of the woodwork dates back to before the Mauryan era. The Ashoka's Palace Monument and the particular temples at Bodh Gaya are the best examples of the woodcarving art. In ancient India, the wood carving used in temple architecture was regarded as the best. Some palace components were constructed of wood in earlier times, and the Silpa Sastras provide specific instructions and information about the types of wood that were utilized. There are various causes for this, but the largest ones are migration and industrialization, and as a result, the art is gradually vanishing. Understanding the importance of this art is crucial if it is to be preserved and revived for future generations. In addition to the revival, it is important to evaluate the earlier carvings in order to implement some unique restoration strategies. The Likhai art has a rich cultural past that ought to be preserved and shared as a treasure. Ganga Ram (Gustap and Jeroo Irani, 2017) and Dhani Raam are two artists who have already thoroughly explored this form of art. Beautiful wood carving may be seen in places like Almora, Pithoragrah, Champawat, Bageshwar, Kumaun, and Chamoli.

The wood is selected by the craftsman based on the size and shape of the pattern. The craftsman utilized knives to cut or spare a smaller piece of wood, and larger portions of the wood saw for
larger pieces. Craftsmen employed the wood’s grain either against or in favour of the carving. The craftsman employs a variety of tools after achieving a basic shape to create their wooden works of art. After finishing the last bit of work, craftsmen smoothed the hardwood surface using instruments like "rasps" tools. The "riffles" instrument, which resembles rasps, was used to create folds and crevasses. Sandpaper or an abrasive is used for the final polishing. The artist coloured the wood with a variety of natural oils after the carving was finished to protect it from moisture and dust. The final step is gloss varnishing the wood to produce a glossy surface.

The traditional door of Uttarakhand is distinguished by its distinctive shade of blue. The colour blue represents knowledge, tranquility, stability, tranquility, and spiritual or therapeutic virtues. The idea that it keeps evil spirits away from the house is a fiction. Cool colours are typically associated with serenity, calm, majesty, and love. Indigo growing was practiced at the time in the hills of Uttarakhand because people believed it to be both environmentally and economically advantageous. The doors and windows of homes were painted blue using indigo, the most exquisite and costly natural dye now in use. Additionally, it was thought to keep termites out of the wood.

The 92-year-old Ganga Ram is the final practitioner of the rapidly disappearing traditional woodwork style known as Likhai. In one of the articles (Ganga Ram, 2017), the man who resides in Kumaon's Diyari village (Nainital) claims, "I don't have the strength to hew and chisel wood any longer." His village is where most of his work is visible. "Birds, forests, and mountains all inspire me. My guru used to reside across from me on a hill," (Ganga Ram, 2017). He was inspired by nature when he carved the wooden window frames, doors, and pillars, adding geometric and floral themes to them.

Murli Dhar, one of the artisans, exploited the talent in a unique way. He is Srinagar-born (Uttarakhand). He also created miniature versions of temples and residences. He picked up the method from his father, who was a skilled artisan. He created more than 500 copies, with the duplicate of the Badrinath Temple being one of the works done on wood. In one of his interviews, he described the steps involved in creating a replica of the Badrinath Temple. First, he chooses wood, which is then cut into the necessary-sized blocks, with the correct measurements being taken in accordance with the Badrinath Temple’s structure. He constructs the model using pieces of wood of various sizes before joining them together to form one. Detail work takes great levels of focus.
after the entire process since if even the smallest error is made, the entire structure or part of the wood must be redone. When creating an artwork, one must keep in mind that the details and elements should be in the right proportion (Murli Dhar, 2018) there are some copies and models in homes, businesses, and government buildings. The craftsman Murli Dhar is working on Project FUEL and creating several copies of old temples and monuments. The artist Muril Dhar made a small replica of a massive structure. If the artist makes a mistake with the pattern, he must start over with the entire design. The ancient methods of carving doors, walls, and floors are slowly going extinct, but these small forms are also in demand. The motifs and patterns are a crucial component of Likhai, and research can help identify its symbolic meaning.

The artist's other preferred material was walnut wood, and we may still find some of the same type of wooden objects in some communities. According to a Voice of Rural India article, "Akhrot (Walnut) tree wood is preferred for carving because it is thick and has a fine texture that is suitable for crafting intricate designs. When it dries, it becomes a gorgeous, black colour (2020). Apart from wood carving, the utility items have also been designed to hold things. The use of plants and animals along with ornamental patterns is the essence of Likhai art. However, the unique location or structure has certain specific motifs, such as the exquisite carvings that used to adorn temple entrances and interior rooms. In contrast to that, houses used to have fewer ornate patterns on their doors.

The inhabitants of Uttrakhand believe that when carving is done at homes, it also conveys information about a person's position. The process requires long hours working with an expensive wood that can only be obtained through payment. The group of artisans referred to as Shilpakaars or a person adept in manual labour. The carver used to be known as "Doms, the famous drummers of Shiva" and the "original inhabitant of Kumaun," and there used to be a lot of villages known as Shilpakaar villages (Kak 1999).

**Conclusion**

There are several contemporary indications of class distinctions, and artisans continue to come from extremely disadvantaged populations. If the channelization of this art is done properly, the status of such communities and classes can be changed. The entryway of the mowra/dwar (door), in the region known as Kholi, has deities like Ganesh applied. Numerous mythical ties exist between the Lord Ganesh and human life. The deities play a very important part in Vastu Shastra, the science of construction, and they are occasionally positioned at the entrance of the house as a protector or savior. Due to the Lord Ganesh’s frequent associations with riches and prosperity, his adaption as a motif is typically found on the entrance to doorways. The Lord Vishnu, who is also known as the portent of joy and prosperity, is also visible at the same time. According to myths and beliefs, people always wish to embrace happiness, which is why deities are placed at the door to the home. Positive forces or bad should not be allowed to enter the home through the door. The people in ancient times were quite particular about this notion, thus the style may be common in this sort of art. The idea has been carried through in the state of Uttrakhand itself since the construction of religious and residential structures was specifically based on the science of construction, described in the ancient texts. These mythical beliefs are very important to the inhabitants of Uttrakhand because it is also known as Dev-Bhoomi or the land of the Gods. The Likhai art has promise, thus
it's critical to revive it as quickly as possible to prevent modernization from destroying it. People today don't place as much value on these sentiments as they once did. Ancient people were highly meticulous about their beliefs and meaning. In addition to introducing rules to help the craftspeople, a platform should be created to raise awareness of this art. To encourage and restore this craft for the benefit of the heritage and culture, some audio-video documentation is also required. It is important to organize a cultural exhibition and craft fair so that this art can receive the same exposure and attention as other crafts. The process of revitalization can integrate technological advances, but the organic value or identity of Likhai should come first.

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