

JOHAN G. REINHARD, New Lenox, Ill.:

Film E 2193

Newar, Udhas Caste (Nepal) – Construction of a Water Pipe

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With 2 Figures

Summary of the Film:

Newar, Udhas Caste (Nepal) – Construction of a Water Pipe. A coconut shell is shown being shaved, then the stem and pipe are formed on the lathe. A hole is drilled in the coconut shell and the various parts of the water pipe are assembled.

Inhalt des Films:

Newar, Udhas-Kaste (Nepal) – Herstellen einer Wasserpfeife. Eine Kokosnußschale wird geglättet, anschließend werden Pfeifenstiel und Pfeifenkopf auf dem Drehstuhl gedreht. Ein Loch wird in die Kokosnußschale gebohrt, und die verschiedenen Teile der Wasserpfeife werden zusammengesetzt.

Résumé du Film:

Newar, Caste des Udhas (Népal) – Fabrication d'un narguilé. Une coquille de noix de coco est tondue, puis le tuyau et le fourneau sont façonnés au tour. Un trou est percé dans la coquille et les différents éléments du narguilé sont assemblés.

General Preliminary Remarks¹

The Newars are one of the largest Tibeto-Burman speaking ethnic groups of Nepal and are renowned for their work in most fields of the arts and crafts. Newar wood carvers (*sikarmi*) are found spread throughout the Katmandu Valley, but are especially concentrated in the city of Patan. One may distinguish basically between two kinds of carpenters, those who work on sculpture using hand tools and those who work with a lathe. In Patan there were said to be seven families using the lathe, all of whom make the water pipe (*bukka*) as their principle product. Other items

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which are frequently constructed include candle holders and stands, bread rollers, prayer wheel handles, and wooden bars used for balances and windows. Although water pipes can be elaborately constructed, the average *bukka* is simply constructed of wood which has been worked on a lathe. It consists of four basic parts; the pipe, the coconut bowl which contains the water, the clay tobacco bowl, and the stem.



Fig. 1. A carpenter's shop in the city of Patan

All parts except the clay bowl are worked upon by the carpenter, the clay bowl being made by a pottery maker. Only the stem and the pipe are actually made with the lathe, but the stem is, from the standpoint of labor and decorativeness, the most interesting and impressive part of the *bukka*. Stems are made in several sizes, the largest usually being made for use with a brass water container, but the majority are used with coconut bowls which range in size to correspond to the differently sized stems.

The *bukka* can be smoked in various ways. The pipe may be used either with the mouthpiece put to the mouth or with the hand folded to make a funnel and the thumb end put to the mouth with the hand only coming in contact with the pipe. One can also smoke by using only the opening of the coconut water container without the pipe.

The bowl (*chilim*) contains tobacco which is usually mixed with a syrup and placed on a concave piece of hardened clay (*pata*) which is about 4.5 cm in diameter. This is then turned over on the hole in the bowl leading to the stem, and burning coals

or pieces of wood are placed on top of it. Thus the tobacco does not come in direct contact with the coals. The bottom of the bowl fits snugly over the stem. The water container usually is a hollowed out coconut shell (*nariwal*) which has been shaved smooth and stained brown. These are bought from Shresta Newars who



Fig. 2. Smoking a water pipe

will buy them from Indians or bring them back from India themselves. In 1968 small unworked shells cost about .5 Nepali Rupee (about \$.05) and medium-large ones cost about 1 R. It takes from three to four hours to smooth down and stain a medium sized coconut shell, and a carpenter will sometimes pay a friend to do this for him as it is too time consuming. The shells are usually sold undecorated, but they may also be carved (often cross hatched) and have small flat metal pieces glued on the container in various patterns. If there are not enough metal pieces then polished pieces of sea shells may be substituted. A small shell which has been shaved and stained (but undecorated) will then sell for about 1.5 Rs. and a decorated one will sell for about 4 Rs. Medium sized finished, undecorated shells sell for about 3 Rs. and for 6–8 Rs. if decorated. A hole is cut in the top in order to remove the insides of the coconut and this is widened later by the *sikarni* for the bottom part of the stem to fit firmly. A small hole is drilled in the side near the top of the coconut

for the smoke hole in which the pipe is set. A medium sized shell will be about 8–9 cm in diameter at the widest part and about 12–13 cm long. The hole at the top for the stem is about 2.5 cm in diameter. Water fills the shell to about 7 cm.

Wood used for the making of the stem (*sumeru*) is brought usually by Tamangs from the forests to the south of the valley near the village of Pharping. A carpenter pays about .50–.75 R. for a piece of wood large enough for one medium sized stem. Wood is usually bought in large quantities and stored to dry. Neither the design of the stem nor the colors have any special significance. The stem is normally stained after the colors have been applied with a dark brown dye. A small stem sells for about 1.5 Rs. and a medium sized stem sells for about 4 Rs. A medium sized stem measures approximately 30–31 cm long and 5 cm in diameter at its widest point.

A small pipe (*nali*) will cost about .5 R. and a medium-large pipe costs about 2 Rs. The pipe is normally stained dark brown. A medium sized pipe measures 59 cm in length, and 2 cm in diameter.

Red, yellow, green, and orange crayons (*chau*) are applied. Green and orange are used the most frequently. The crayons are made in India and bought for about 4–5 Rs. a piece. A leaf from the *chova* tree is used to smooth over the colors when they have been applied.

The stain (*capara*) is made in India or the carpenter makes his own. This is done by placing a piece of old leather in boiling water for about an hour and then putting in a black dye which is then allowed to cool and harden. When it is to be applied, it must again be placed in hot water in order to soften it.

The carpenter uses several chisels, pliers, a drawing compass, a vice, and several types of drills in making various objects on the lathe. A large hand pumped drill is used for drilling the hole in the coconut. A cutting tool is used for shaving the coconut. The lathe consists of a pulley arrangement set in motion by the feet.

Aside from the *hukka*, there are several objects made which together also add up to a major part of the income of a carpenter. The bread roller (*bialan*) sells for 1.5 Rs. and a flat plate used with the roller (*cakki*) sells for 5 Rs. The prayer wheel handle (*manetchu*) sells for about .4 R. The bars used for balances and for windows sell for 1 R. Candle holders (*tvariwa*) sell for about 8 Rs. A small *hukka* sells for about 5 Rs. and a large one sells for between 11–15 Rs. It is difficult to state the relative proportions of the income which the different objects make up as occasionally a large order will be placed, e.g. the government may place a large order for window bars. One carpenter estimated that his average yearly income was about 2,500 Rs. (ca. \$ 250) a year, but the actual amount made after expenses was only about one half of that, and this did not include expenses for food, etc. He also paid a yearly rent of 50 Rs. for his shop. He worked six days a week, and had no other income. He had friends or dealers who took his objects to town to sell. He also sold items directly from his shop, besides filling orders.

Notes on Making of the Film

The film was made on April 17, 1968 in the city of Patan, located in the Katmandu Valley. PADMA RAJ UDHAS (age 24) is the only character appearing in the film. Udhas is the name of a Newar caste traditionally followers of the Buddhist religion

and known as merchants and craftsmen. PADMA RAJ learned his trade from his father and never attended school. Normally the steps in the construction of a water pipe take place in a series, e.g. several stems will be formed before beginning work on another object. The main elements missing in the film are the various substitutions of drills and the blocks to hold the stem and pipe. Since the steps in the making of a water pipe are detailed fairly well in the description of the film itself, they will not be included here.

Technical data: camera: Bell and Howell Model 70-D; lenses: Switar 16 mm, Bausch and Lomb 25 mm, Yvar 75 mm; camera speed: 24 f/s; film material: Kodak Plus X, black and white negative film type 7231.

Description of Film

The film first shows the shop from the outside. Then a scene follows in which the coconut is shaved and set aside and a piece of wood is trimmed with an adze. The wood is set in the lathe (*koradz*) between a block of wood held in place with a vice and the revolving nozzle attached to the pulley. The carpenter then begins to trim the wood with a chisel as it revolves, until completing the basic form of the stem. Oil is occasionally applied to the fingers as they become hot. Sand paper is used to smooth down rough places. Crayons are then applied, a leaf being used to smooth them over. The lathe is reset to drill a hole through the stem, first with a short drill and then with a longer one. The stem being completed, it is set aside and work is begun on the pipe. It is set in the lathe as was the stem, carved and sanded, and then the lathe is reset and the pipe drilled. The stem is placed in the hole at the top of the coconut to see if it fits, and the coconut hole is widened with a file. The smoke hole is then made with a drill and the different pieces are placed together to show how the parts are assembled for smoking.

Sources of the Figures

Fig. 1 and 2: photography J. G. REINHARD.

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