

## Observations on carpentry by Axel Weller

There are no carpenters as a separate profession among the Magar. Rather, those who practice the craft are farmers who followed a personal inclination or were under pressure to raise cash through craft activities.

Almost every adult man can handle an ax or a chisel, a saw and an adze. Nevertheless there is Skilled craftsmen who continually build new houses together with other farmers who are experienced in working with stones. The most important role in this process is played by the builder, who is responsible for procuring the building materials and, together with the other members of the household, assists the craftsmen in every phase of construction.

The traditional construction method that was common until a generation ago only required unhewn beams for the roof structure. The beams were covered with bamboo fiber and the roof was covered with grass. The new construction method, which only became established a generation ago and is already shaping the village today, integrates a stable roof structure made of hewn and sawn wood, which is covered with strong stone slabs. In both structures the ceiling beams break through the wall so that the timber is ventilated and rot is prevented. Since there is no smoke outlet, a layer of soot prevents rot and insect infestation. The posts on the open sides of the ground floor rests on foundation stones so that rising moisture is avoided. Window lintels sometimes protrude to ,to ensure further rain protection.

Until a few years ago, axes and chisels were the only tools. Roof stiles, windows, doors and household appliances such as chests were made exclusively with these tools. Only in the last few years have locally made tools with Chinese iron, drills, adzes and saws been used. The adzes differ only slightly from field hoes; saws were first brought from India about thirty years ago. In the Kathmandu Valley, on the other hand, wood has been sawn crosswise and lengthwise (to make boards) for several generations.

In Doba, almost all of the door panels and shutters are still off split and hewn wood, as they are reused in demolition and new construction. Today no one can remember this type of production anymore. You can no longer imagine how boards can be made without a saw boards.

Small sticks are used to measure, but recently feet and tape measures have also been used. When the school was being built, an "engineer" appeared in the village to instruct the craftsmen to maintain a clear dimension of 120 cm for the window openings and a clear dimension of 190 cm for the doors.

These were the only distances that were measured during the construction process.

The required wood is usually felled in the village's forest, with the village board specifying where this has to be done. The users have to pay 20 rupees per cubic foot (approx. 60 cent). Trees are cut down whenever they are needed. Crooked trees are used as firewood, twisted trees are not sawn but rather hewn. A trestle is set up in the forest for sawing the boards. If the cross section allows it, boards are made when producing beams, otherwise

rough hewn it's enough. Beams and boards are carried to the construction site and stacked in the shade to dry there. Long, heavy timbers are pulled from the forest using lianas and weighted down with stones at the construction site to reduce warping.

Pine wood (*pinus roxburghii*) provides the usual lumber. It is a fast-growing tree that has been planted for several decades as part of reforestation programs. Kitis (*alnus nepalensis*) and rakuli (*fraxinus floribunda*) are also used. Ceiling beams and supports, on the other hand, are made from the more durable Dob-Dobe (*cedrus deodar*). Chilaune (*schima wallichii*) is used for plows, handles and implements. Carvings on windows, blind windows, door frames and roof struts are often very old, as decorated wooden elements are reused. Above all, the continuous latticework on the fixed blind windows and the struts with lizards, fertility symbols and hermaphrodite creatures wearing masks are greatly simplified and gives the village a peculiar charm.