

Name of the Element: Sampan Boats Building of Chittagong

Name of Inventory: Test Inventory (T1)

Serial No: D5-00002

Brief Description

In riverine Bangladesh, boats are the key means of transportation and large numbers of people are reliant on boats to catch fish to earn their daily bread. The industry at the bank of the Karnaphuli river in Chittagong still produces boats, called Sampan, mostly in the traditional way. Sea-faring boats include the *shampan* of Chittagong, *shuluk* of Kutubdia and *chand nouka*, still commonly seen around Teknaf and Cox's Bazar.

Sampan is a fat bottomed wooden boat built on an easy curved keel line having a prominent sharp rising head, called anni. Its stern is shaped almost like the English alphabet U, and introduced devotedly as Canda Devi (moon goddess) by the master carpenter. It is propelled by a pair of halish (sculls) by a single sculler - who can also simultaneously steer the rudder. In favourable wind, it runs with a hoisted sar (sail) spread with the help of one vertical and another horizontal pole known as dole. Power driven Sampans are also seen now a day on the river calling itself 'Tempo'.

Sampan is a Cantonese word, which literally means 'three planks', and originated from the words sam (three) and pan (plank). The hull of a Chinese sampan consists of a flat bottom made from a single plank joined with two side planks. But a Chittagonian sampan does not have three whole planks; instead narrow wood straps are used in its construction. Some elements of Chittagonian are similar in design to that of a Chinese Sampan, specifically, the hull, the stern and the thatched shelter. The distinctive Chittagonian features are: the rising head (anni), the sculls (halish) and the triangular sail (sar). The rural residents of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, China and Japan particularly use sampans. As a means of mass-transportation Sampan has a profound association with the folklore of Chittagong. The basic shape of the monogram of University of Chittagong is drawn from a sampan seen from the back.

Sampan can be made from various kind of woods, viz., Pitraj, Gamari, Jam, Garjan, Phool Karai and Hinyari. Local carpenters of some riverside villages are associated with the trade of making Sampan. The known sites on the bank of Karnafully river are: Char Pathar Ghata, Old Bridge Ghat, Totar Ba'r Hat, Char Isa Hat, Sikalbaha, Dighir Para and Kalar Para. Various sizes of Sampan play on the rivers and canals of Chittagong dictated by its use. Little Sampans carry short distance passengers and these are usually 3.66 to 4.27m long. A large sampan (8.53 to 9.14m long) can carry 20 to 25 people or 120 maunds of goods on board. According to a master carpenter an ideal sampan must be 6.09m long, 1.61m in breadth and 0.85m in height.

Region: Karnafuli, Halda, Sangu, Matamuhuri Rivers of Chittagong

Photographs: Video: Consent:

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