

Historical orientation of craft and dissimilar regional styles of Lac-turnery in Pakistan

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Abstract

Lac-turnery is one of the most ancient and widely known skills of carving wood to style colourful and complicated wooden objects that are festooned with prolific designs. Pakistan with its thriving and assorted heritage has an in style craft dating back to the oldest civilization of Mehrgarh in Baluchistan, and the Indus Valley civilization in Sindh and Harappa in Punjab. As a craft, lac-work is as old as wood-turnery in Punjab but like all old-fashioned wooden crafts, most of the objects have decomposed with the course of time, leaving no records to help us restructure its history. Lac turnery is a craft that deals with such a skill in which diverse objects are first given desired shape on a lathe and later finished with coating of different overlying colours. These layers of colours are sometimes etched or scratched afterwards to produce striking designs on them. Delicate and vibrant geometrical and floral designs of lac-turned objects are conspicuous in character. There is a delusion about the lac-work of Jampur which at times is erroneously labeled as lacquer work. Lac work of Sillanwali which is generally known as *naqqāshī* is also wrongly called lacquer art. Consideration of right terminology to describe lac-work is important to understand restrained dissimilarity between lac-work and lacquered work. Lac and lacquer works are absolutely dissimilar from each other due to the variation of mediums that are applied to crafted objects. This study observes varied styles of lac-turnery in Pakistan and its adornment keeping in view dissimilarity in regional styles and terminologies that are used. Focus is also to explain materials, methods and a range of adornments that are incorporated in this centuries' old skill to create a range of striking craft works.

Keywords: Lathe, Lac-turnery, Assorted adornment, Regional styles.

Introduction

Crafts of Pakistan correspond to a priceless material legacy, which forms a substantial part of our historical and contemporary ethnicity. Unlike the west, most long-established crafts in Pakistan are neither professions nor a hobby but an essential component of the assorted artistic patterns, furthermore craft is product of the cultural and communal mind-set and practices. Crafts also have meanings and precise communal perception in customary society. However, the stabbing of the industrial period is wiping away this craft heritage, even in pastoral areas of Pakistan. There is a fresh trend towards the use of crafts as art objects in city homes. Historic forms and designs are being revitalized both by the escalating number of skilled craftsmen and by designers for the tourist and purpose-oriented export trade.

Consequently, the native expertise of Pakistani crafts has developed over centuries through common practice and thus makes up the most reliable representation of Pakistan's traditional art.

Craft is been considered as folk art which follows specific tradition. It is also known as such artistic practices of decorative arts that result in production of utilitarian or functional objects in various mediums. Crafts are practiced in groups, individuals or sometimes in form of communities. In Pakistan commonly education based careers are encouraged and practiced rather skill oriented professions and that is the reason craft are not enjoying the value that is been given to other professions like engineering, product designing, industrial designing.

Amongst all such materials that are used by man for his comfort and delight, wood is subject to maximum use. It is used for heating rooms, building houses, making furniture and cabinets. It is used in various other ways and additionally decorated wooden objects by carvings;

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inlaying, veneering, painting, etc.¹ Application of wood carving, wood engraving or wood turnery has always been accustomed with the accessibility of wood. Punjab has been fortunate in this regard due to a good number of perennial rivers. Sufficient growth of jungles makes wooden crafts easy to flourish but standards and productions for good income are not provided to skill persons due to which stature of crafts is always at stake.

Wood is a consumable material and for this reason we are not capable to find many ancient or early period specimen of wood, in its intrinsic or worked form but still we can assertively say that wood was used in the structures of houses at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Some wooden artifacts, very fine specimens are found from Taxila that are finished on lathe and covered with shiny metal sheets that goes back to a first few centuries of the Christian era. Regrettably, after the decline of Gandhara civilization we are again incapable to restructure the history of wood craft in the Punjab region.²

Lac-turnery is possibly one of the most primordial and extensively known methods of carving surface of wood to create colourful ornate designs. As a craft in Punjab, it is as old as wood turning (*lakrī par khrād kā kām*). But like all old-fashioned wood crafts, most of the objects have corroded, leaving nothing to help us restructure its history.³ Lac-turnery deals with such an activity in which diverse objects are first shaped on a lathe and then finished with coating of different colours that are etched or scratched afterwards to produce attractive designs on them. The craft of lac-turnery has its origin in South Asia but today its use has been turned down due to the introduction of plastic materials of petro chemical. In Pakistan almost every village has one or more wood turners, but many towns, predominantly in the Punjab has gained a special reputation for lac-work especially on manufactured article turned on lathe. These include D. I. Khan and Bannu in the N.W.F. Province, Hala in Sindh, Pakpattan, Kasur, Sahiwal, Shahpur, Jampur, D.G Khan, Khanewal, Sillanwali, and Bhera in Punjab.⁴ Lac work is mistakenly called lacquer work in Sillanwali and Jampur. The technique of lac-turnery all over Punjab is the same with only dissimilarity of local designs, and a few terminologies used for techniques and tools, due to the change of dialects of cultures in the region. Though, the change also occurred in the tools involved in this craft due to availability of more complicated tools and electricity that replaced conventional lathe (*burmi kamānchā*) with electrical lathe.

It is a frequent observe, people talking about good old days when craft was used by a large number of people as for either their own use or for giving gifts. The craftsman

was well paid due to the market and demand of such objects which were produced for effective or well-designed purposes. Industrialization and the use of plastic materials weakened the status of crafts which later resulted in deterioration of crafts. Commercialization compromised the quality of craft products. Demand of time made craftsman to experimenting with new mediums and transform crafts into more contemporary application rather traditional. This caused neglect towards the exclusiveness of craft items where experimentation of medium could not work. Though, this modification or transformation sometimes provided an opportunity to craftsman to bring changes that evolve new objects of inspiration.

In progressive societies arts and crafts are incessantly encouraged but in Pakistan unfavourable circumstances are the cause of decline of many crafts. Punjab has rich tradition of varied crafts which are identified with their colour, design and making. Regrettably, nowadays due to transformation of society these crafts are given less importance and on the other hand the cost of craft items due to the use of traditional materials makes it unaffordable for a number of low income people.

Such circumstances have made this complicated for craftsman to make both ends meet with the limited sale of these items. Several crafts have died out and most others are at the margin of death. The act needed is to educate craft persons about the need of new materials for modification in such a way that does not ruin the real flavor of craft and get shaped according to contemporary needs. Crafts of Pakistan not only reflect culture or traditions but also prove aesthetics of the artisans. Crafts are distinguished from other products due to the line drawn between things that involve mastery and skill of hand for limited production rather mass production with machines. This exclusive production of craft items grabs attention due to applied skill and endeavors of artisans himself.

Aesthetic appeal towards a craft depends upon the skillful making of articles of various materials, glimpse of culture and touch of art. Crafts in Pakistan have been admired since ages and represent a wealth of timeless Pakistani culture. These crafts fully promise style, form and beauty in their production and exhibit heredity and skill that involve painstaking craftsmanship.

Historical orientation of craft and dissimilar regional styles of Lac-Turnery in Pakistan

The tendency of customary arts and crafts has been tumbled down in the course of generations, starting from as early as the Indus Valley Civilization (5000 BC). Who were the first ones who made clay pots and diverse other work of arts in Indian Subcontinent. Modification, transformation and developments in the crafts have a priceless story to enlighten about the social formation, its shifting patterns and the history of the country and its people.

¹ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur" Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries) 2009, 224.

² Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts and Crafts of Punjab, Craft of Sargodha" Vol. VII (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2010, 112.

³ Ibid., 117.

⁴ Ibid., 165.

After Arab invasion during 8th century AD we come across recorded geometric patterns from the Islamic world. From varied crafts such as gold jewelry, wool carpets, various craft products bear the stamp of Islamic art and architecture intermingled with free-flowing asymmetric compositions and rich forms of native South Asian art. In turn the impact of British colonialism left its mark, mortifying the flavour of the urban population who has a propensity for years to support European design for residence and carried to the damage of indigenous crafts. The change in taste reflected the aspiration of the urban rich and the newly growing to confirm their education and subsequent 'westernization' which had become tantamount with conception of modernity and sensation. The Industrial Revolution and the growing mechanization of manufacturing processes steadily abridged or eradicated many of the roles of professional craftspeople, and today "crafts" are most commonly seen as a type of leisure quest or art.

The craft as a term also refers to the products of artistic manufacture or conception that entails a high degree of knowledge which is unspoken and is highly technical. It requires particular apparatus that facilities to fabricate, involve labour or sometimes a blue-collar work ethic. Accessible to the general public and are built or manufactured from materials with histories that go beyond the boundaries of art history, such as a variety of ceramics, glass, textiles, metals and woods. These products are produced within an explicit group of skilled people. While these products are at variance from the products produced within the communities of art and design. The boundaries of such objects are often superimposed resulting in blended objects produced in fusion. Furthermore, as the elucidation and justification of art is frequently a matter of situation, an audience may perceive crafted objects as art objects when these objects are viewed within an art context, such as in a museum or in a position of distinction in one's personal space or home.

The ornamental or decorative arts are those arts that were left after the fine arts were eminent. Everything from weaving textile, lace making, embellishments and blacksmithing to calligraphy, upholstery, wood carving is included in fine arts. As various arts have been recognized as fine arts at various times, architecture is also one that slips in and out as does sculpture and pottery but making useful, functional items for business or aesthetical appreciation. This matter is debatable because of its status that the fine arts have higher status and works are sold for higher prices. Since last three decades the innovative contemporary end of the craft world has tried to address this situation on various platforms and gained recognition as art form though still it has never achieved the status of the fine arts.

Pakistan with its rich and varied heritage has a popular craft tradition of more than 9,000 years, dating back to the oldest Mehrgarh civilization in Baluchistan that

reveals the earliest substantiation for pottery production. The Indus Valley civilization of Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh and Harappa in Punjab (5,000 B.C.) points towards impressions of woven cloth production from wool and cotton. Prevailing historical influences are to be seen, in these artifacts that indicate variation of form, design and colour to prove their regional identities. Pakistani handicrafts is fundamentally Islamic, a combination of Turkish, Arab, Persian and the indigenous Mughal ethnicity.

Craft is such an occupation that involves a pertinent kind of skill and is frequently adopted now a day as a part time. With the course of time due to apparitional value of crafts now craftsmen are called artisans and craftspeople. In old times, craftsmen were inclined to work preferably in urban centers in form of communities/guilds and were in better economical status than other professions. An understanding and knowledge with clarity of a high level is required for the production and marketing of crafts. Mostly craftspeople when learned skill from his master (*ustād*), he preferred establishing his own set up to earn his living and produced his work to market independently. This process of learning a craft first and setting personal set up after acquired needed skill is such an approach that involves a certain type of learning to gain mastery in specific craft, and this is still followed. Since a few decades, crafts are facing unfathomable structural modifications due to industrial revolution. Crafts have been recognized as limited production in market and are choice of a specific community of buyers who do not get satisfied with the mass production of industry items. Though craftspeople is also affected with semi finished mechanism and materials and adopting them to meet with their customers' demand. In this way they keep a connection with contemporary applications and production of exclusive items. Today crafts in Pakistan clearly symbolize Pakistan's culture from jewelry, wood carving and metal works to a variety of objects like hats and rugs. The design itself is the insignia of the rich and proud heritage of times.

Wood carving is known as one of the oldest craft in Indian Subcontinent. The ancient man carved wood before he learnt carving in stone. History reveals that carved wood structures came into existence before early temples were carved in stone. The earlier wooden structures were later copied in stone with all details and delicacies. These were the foundations that lead scholars to consider that, in Indian Subcontinent at least, both the wood carvers and stone carvers essentially belonged to the same area and community. Since times immemorial Punjab has been the cradle of civilizations. The ruins of Harappa show complicated and stylish urban ethnicity that flourished over 8000 years ago. Taxila, another significant historic landmark also stands out as an authentication of the achievements of the area in learning arts and crafts. Confirmations of wood carving in Punjab, goes as far back as 5000 years. A terracotta plaque from Harappa reveals that the houses in the city

had delicately carved door panels. From Texila, another city of the Punjab, we have a set of wooden legs of a large bed (*palang*) belonging to the first/second century AD. These have been skillfully turned on lathe and further inflated with embellishment of veneering of copper sheet with attractive Corinthian leaves. These legs are, now preserved in Texila.⁵

Woodwork, carving, engraving or carpentry is measured as one of the oldest craft of the world. In the areas such as Punjab, carpenter or an artisan in wood work is considered as the most important person in a village. Pakistan is no doubt suffering from hasty shortage of forests and trees, but still a large variety of woods are available in most of the areas of this country. Trees and forests are the only source to get wood, so naturally wood craft is expected to flourish in those areas where the forests and trees are relatively in large quantity.⁶

The lac-ware industry began as a domestic craft that supplied to the local tourist market of Karnataka. Many artisans sold their wares on the roadside at Channapatna. Wood and lac-turnery craft of Channapatna is known to be nearly two centuries old. The products from here were carefully manufactured by hand using their age-old tradition of lac-turnery. Channapatna craftsmen are referred to the cast of *acharya* and belonged to the community of Chitragars. Customarily, they made wooden masks, human and animal figures, and painted the temples around Channapatna. The craft thrived in the region due to royal patronage. Gradually, the artisans developed to work on a simple hand lathe and the wooden items were lacquered by to give them a bright and colourful appearance. They were finally, buffed with leaves of talegari tree to give a glossy finish. Later the advent of power lathes enabled greater output combined with economy in the cost of production and human labour.

In the earlier times, the *tarkhān* (carpenter), *rāj* (mason), and *lauhār* (ironsmith) in Punjab all belonged to the same caste of ancient Hindu society.⁷ Nonetheless, Muslim wood workers also emigrated at Partition from Kashmir and made their homes in Swat, Peshawar, Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. They were predominantly incredible for their inlay work with metal, buffalo-horns and ivory. Other crafts like Lac Turnery were known as a form of decoration in all parts of what is now Pakistan and even in India and Bangladesh. Historically it has essentially been the work of Muslims. The wood-workers of Dera Ismail Khan and Chiniot are highly respected for their wood and brass inlaid products, principally for their intrepid freehand designs, explicitly those incorporating scrolls. A number of towns are there which have gained a special status for lac-turnery. These

consist of D. I. Khan and Bannu in N.W.F.P, Hala in Sindh, Pakpattan, Kasur, Jampur, D.G. Khan, Khanewal, Bhera, Shahpur, Sillanwali, and Sahiwal in the Punjab.⁸

The craft of lac-turnery does not entail many resources and capital investment. A few tools and materials are required. It has four requisites including wood, lathe, lac sticks and *chitran* (long sharp tool for carving). The high price charged for the products is not due to the materials that are used to make such artifacts but as this art acquire high level of skill and labour and a great deal of time which is spent in creating such master pieces. Therefore large scale production of these products is not commercially viable and this work is reserved for connoisseur and art lovers.

In various parts of Punjab craft of lac-turnery was like a small industry but now manufacturing units have been not only neglected but are decreasing in number due to skyrocketing price of wood and other materials. Though, crafts persons are in continuous effort to raise the demand of lac-turned objects. They are opting different manners and resources to market these products. Materials are modified to bring these articles in range of a large number of buyers and to make it possible for community to use these items in daily life. One should not forget the fact that closing of such craft industries means loss of countless individual's livelihood that is resulting negative impact on families that relied on such skills. The people who worked in such craft industries learned the skill from earlier generations of craftsmen, and are not qualified for other work. Edifying industries in other parts of the country are facing a comparable upshot.

Traditional arts, including embroidery, leatherwork, wood carvings and handcrafted objects in wood and metal, are dying out because of the lack of situational support. In the same way many other traditional professions are also neglected. What is required is fundamental government involvement to institute a system of financial support and state support to endorse traditional arts and crafts in region and outside. If they become extinct, Pakistani ethnicity will be dealt with an unalterable blow. At present many heritage conservation societies and clubs are active for the preservation of Pakistani heritage and politicians who are so frequently up in arms over the call to protect Pakistani culture. The intimidation posed by distant influences is changing the folk flavor of these crafts. Though, state can do well to preserve the individuality of crafts by looking for every solution into the current circumstances of the country's cultural industries and the manner in which they are being devastated.

Craft of lac-turnery is fundamentally South Asian in derivation. Lac (resin) was being used in its variety of forms, in almost every craft industry in Subcontinent until as lately as fifty years ago. In our country as in others, lac is comprehensively employed as a decorative and filler

⁵ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of the Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur" Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2009, 224.

⁶ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts and Crafts of the Punjab, Craft of Sargodha", Vol. VII (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2010, 112.

⁷ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of the Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur" Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries) 2009, 224.

⁸ "Crafts of the Punjab, Bhera", Vol.III, (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 1993, 64.

material in metal, ivory crafts as well as in wood turning but lac-turnery's adjoining link is basically with wood turning, and wherever there are wood craftsmen turning wooden products there are customarily lac turners as well.⁹

Some of the Hindu traders supplied these articles too far off cities like Agra and Mumbai in the pre partition days. These products soon achieved reputation. Expectant by their demand and popularity the craftsmen extended the variety of these products, and as a result, items of furniture like sofa sets, center table and chairs and other utilitarian objects were also made and marketed.¹⁰ It was not of relatively great duration that lac-turned bracelets were extremely appreciated by a big number of the entire population of the country. In both towns and villages lathe-turned cot legs decorated with colourful patterns were indispensable household objects. Lathe-turned and lac painted walkers for children and spinning tops (*lattū*) for boys were regular in production, as well as hand fans' sticks, mirror stands, milk churners, walking sticks and four legged seats (*pīrhā*).¹¹ (Plate.1, 2)



Plate.1 Lac-turned spinning top *lattū*.



Plate.2 Lac-turned bracelets.

Process of wood carving, wood engravings or wood turnery all starts with seasoning of wood (sundried). Seasoning is an expensive and time consuming procedure and would not be engaged except in special cases unless there were convincing reasons why it is required. A few of the more imperative reasons are that seasoning

diminishes gross weight and thereby consequent shipping and handling costs. It also conveys dimensional solidity, increases most strength properties, increases fastening and holding power and thereby improves joint strength. It increases electrical resistance, improves paint ability and glue ability, and finally, develops the thermal properties of wood. (Plate. 3)



Plate.3 Seasoned wood.

In a turner's craft the focal point is his lathe known as *addā*. It consists of two iron bars (*killā*) one fixed in the ground and the other unfixed. On the inner side of each bar is a spike to which the block of wood (*mocha*) to be turned is attached. Between this block and the regulating bar and over the spike is fixed a cylindrical peg, round which the thong of the bow (*kamān*) is passed. The bow is worked backwards and forwards in a momentum and this creates the necessary rotary motion. After the initiation of electricity, machine belts have taken place of the thong and bow.¹² Manual lathe, popularly known as *barmi kamānchā* is rarely used now a days, (Plate.4) mostly artisans use electric lathe machines that are easier and quicker to work due to fast speed and give better results and production. (Plate.5)



Plate.4 Manual Lathe (*Barmi Kamānchā*)

⁹ "Crafts of the Punjab, Bhera", Vol. III (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 1993, 64.

¹⁰ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of the Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur" Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries) 2009, 236.

¹¹ "Crafts of the Punjab, Bhera" Vol. III (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 1993, 64.

¹² "Crafts of the Punjab, Bhera" Vol. III (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 1993, 66.



Plate.5 Electric Lathe (*jandrī*)

Source: Dar, *Crafts of Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur*, 223.

Major centers of Pakistan including Kashmore, Jampur, Hala, D.G. Khan, D. I. Khan, Sillanwali, Kasur, Pattoki etc local craft is confined to lac turnery. In good old days lac was broadly employed as a decorative material on metal, ivory and wood crafts as well as wood turnery and the concluding is locally called *jandrī kā kām*, *Khrād kā kām*, and wood turnery.¹³

Lac-works now a day's popularly though mistakenly are called Lacquer Work. It is also called *lākh kā kām* because several layers of *lākh* (resin) of different colours are applied on the surface of wood. Mostly after turning objects on lathe and applying layers of coloured *lākh*, assorted designs by manual applications are created with the help of different tools either when the object is still on lathe or after it is taken off. (Plate.6)



Plate.6 Lac application

Source: Dar, *Crafts of Sargodha*, 169.

Lac is insect resin applied both in the dry state and distributed by the heat which is generated by friction, or in the form of a spirit varnish in diluted manner.¹⁴ The lac insect is commonly found more or less over the whole of the Punjab. There are two trees which are the main sources of lac that are *Ficus religiosa* (*pīpal*), and *Zizyphus jujuba* (*bairī*).

Ficus religiosa (*pīpal*) is cultivated in the tropical regions of country and is host tree for lac insects (*Laccifer lacca*). Whereas, with shiny green leaves *Zizyphus jujuba* (*bairī*) is extensively cultivated in many parts of Pakistan and is most favoured host for lac insects. Lac from the *Zizyphus jujuba* (*bairī*) is the commonest and is produced in Jhang and many other districts, where tracts of waste land are covered with wild *bairī* trees and shrubs usually with thorny leaves. There are six local names for lac, but the name *lākh* or *lakshā* is derived from the words in Urdu and Hindi, meaning a hundred thousand. This is because the lac is produced by hundreds of thousands of insects brimming over the tree and puncturing its bark to produce resin. This resin that results after puncturing bark is brought from the tree and hammered into small pieces. At this stage it can also be used for polishing furniture by mixing it with spirit. (Plate.7, 8) In order to use the lac for turning, in a small cotton bag a mixture of lac and a resin locally called *gandā birozāh* is poured and heated on a coal stove on moderate heat. The mixture melts and dribbles out of the bag's pours. This melted layer is removed from the surface of the bag with a knife and transferred on to a piece of stone to dry and form. Craftsmen buy these dry pan cakes of lac popularly known as *chaprā* and use it for lac turning by mixing it with coloured dye pigments. Metallic effect of lac craft was produced by mixing lac with powdered mica which is a glitter like substance, powdered tin foil and imitation or real gold leaf, or with mixture of mercury, lead and tin.¹⁵ About the use of wood in various crafts, George Watt's states that the art commencement in woodwork have been seen significantly influenced by the granule of the timber employed, such as the deep under-cutting to sculpt which is possible with 'teak', red-wood and walnut, and low relief of *shīsham* and *diodār*. The inside designs of ebony which is a dense black wood, the intricate and minute detail of sandal, and the barbaric boldness of *rohira*, *sāl*, and *babūl* or *kīkar* and the course grained and hard woods is all due to the natural properties of these woods.¹⁶



Plate.7 Insect producing lac on the branch of tree

¹³ Saifur Rahman Dar, *"Crafts of the Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur"* Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2009, 230.

¹⁴ Ibid., 227.

¹⁵ *"Crafts of the Punjab, Bhera"* Vol. III, (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 1993, 65.

¹⁶ Ibid., 225.



Plate.8 Lac production.

The lac-turned object is commonly turned from hard wood, usually dalbergia (*shisham*). After being smoothed and cleaned it is again fixed in the turners' frame (a kind of lathe worked by hand), and made to rotate for turning. *Lākh* is coated over the surface of a selected piece of wood by two ways. The wood selected is frequently round in shape and can be fixed on *khṛād* and turned easily into required shape. Later outer surface is smoothed with sand paper (*raigmāl*). Finished object is fixed again on *khṛād* and colours are applied by rubbing sticks of coloured *lākh* known as *battī*. Heat generated with friction melts the coloured *lākh* and transfer it on the surface of object. After completing a coat the surface is leveled with a palm stick called *rangāthā* that helps to spread *lākh* consistently on the surface of the turned object. Each time a new colour is applied and *rangāthā* is rubbed uniformly to fix the new colour on fundamental layers of colours and also brighten up its surface.¹⁷ (Plate.9)



Plate.9 Coloured lac sticks (*battī*).

In the class of lac-turnery the object is coated first with one colour, then on the top second colour is applied, then a third or a fourth, evenly or as many required. The coloured lac sticks (*battīs*) employed are for the most part

soft that make the application of colour coating easy and consistent. Colours are applied from light to dark. The first colour yellow, the next red, followed by green and last of all by black; but, of course, any range or number of colours may be imparted but in the manner of layer upon layer, one on the top of the other. Jampur and D. G. Khan are well known for lac-turnery. The geographic and climatic conditions of Jampur are not good for the growth of jangles due to barren hills as well as sandy planes. Nonetheless, wherever water is available there is ample quantity of *shisham* trees. So frequently found trees in this area are *farāsh*, *lāi*, *kīkar*, *jand*, *bhan jal*, *jhit*, *siris*, *bairī*, *khjūr* and *tahlī* popularly known as *shisham*. The most imperative and fine-looking craft of Dera Ghazi Khan and Jampur region is the work of turnery (*khṛād*) which is distinguished for its finish with coloured lac work in two or three different techniques such as *chitraī* (scratch work), *bharāī* and *jandri kā kām*. Additionally in north of Jampur, the two cities of Dera Ghazi Khan and Dera Ismail Khan have been, till lately, prominent centers of this work. Along with these, the lac-work of Jampur has been more celebrated than comparable work from any other centre, and was highly liked all over Punjab.¹⁸

The lac-work of Jampur at time is wrongly tagged as lacquer work. Lac-work of Sillanwali is also wrongly called lacquer art, generally known as *naqqāshī*. Before lac-turnery is discussed it is important to understand restrained distinction between lac-work and lacquered work. Lac and lacquer works are utterly different from each other. (Plate.10)



Plate.10 Lac-work of Sillanwali.

Lac is natural insect's resin while lacquer is vegetable oleo resin which physically exists in liquid form and is unswervingly applied with brush or sometimes it is thickened by adding some plastic material that may be moulded, so further can be applied to the surface of the objects mostly in base-relief ornamentations. Lac is an indigenous material used in various local industries including lac-turnery. Though, lacquer work initiated in Burma which bear a resemblance to Japanese lacquer work rather than Indian and Pakistani lac-work. Only

¹⁷ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of the Punjab, Crafts of Chiniot" Vol. VI (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2010,131.

¹⁸ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of the Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur" Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2009, 227.

similarity in both works is the pigments used in them are metallic oxides with exception of indigo. Customary colours used include orpiment (a mineral) which is used as yellow dye, as well as white lead, red mercury, Prussian blue, lamp-black and indigo. Aniline dyes are also used nowadays, but they promptly fade and designs are discolored.

Three types of lac-works are produced in Jampur that are known as *jandrī kā kām*, *bharāī kā kām*, and *naqqāshī kā kām*.¹⁹ The quality of wood available in Jampur is not suitable for other products. Lac application gives durability and additional native designs for beautifying the article led the local craftsmen to produce such goods that satisfy the aesthetic aspiration of people. Only *jandrī kā kām* was done in Jampur till the end of 19th century. Limited ranges of some bright colours were used. Trendy colours were red, yellow, and green and mauve, later golden and silver were also introduced in 20th century. Craftsmen make their own colours by developing local and traditional materials, available locally or brought from some other areas.

In the range of produced items, Colour formulation, Designs, selection of colours and techniques in lac-turnery is comparable by all craftsmen. On the other hand, now the craftsmen are using electrical motors to drive the wooden lathe (*khārad/jandrī*) instead of operating manually. (Plate.11)



Plate.11 Lac-turnery on electrical lathe.

Source: Dar, *Crafts of Sargodha*, 168.

Customarily, all over the subcontinent, lac-work is mainly alienated into six categories that are plain, *naqqāshī* (etched and scratched varieties), tin foil (*qalaī kā kām*), *ātishī* or fire, *abrī* or cloud, painted lac-work.

Jandrī kā kām

Wood turnery, Lathe work, *khārad kā kām* or *jandrī kā kām* is also known as *lakkay kā kām*. Terminologies used to describe types of lac-works also vary with the change in regional dialect. To initiate with, an item is generally

formed from a wooden log by manual tools. After giving it the preferred rough shape the article is fixed on *jandrī* (simple wooden lathe) for bringing into its final required shape. The article is revolved and the wood is peeled with the help of a variety of cutting tools. (Plate.12)

Other tools with which turners work on lathe are, *nayha* (used for rough turning), *maththan* (flat chisel), *nihān* (used for smooth turning), *addī* (the rest for the chisel), *Raitī* (files), *varmā* (the adze), *sathrā* (narrow edged chisel), *ārī* (saw), *rangāthā* (a palm stick to burnish the object) and *battī* (lac stick).



Plate.12 Article is being given final shape.

Source: *Lacquer art, Sillanwali*, Punjab Small Industries, Pakistan.

When the article is turned into the desired shape, it is burnished to remove saw dust and impart a smooth finish to the surface. Lastly the article is coloured by applying coloured lac. When the lac stick is pressed against the rotating lathe it creates friction and the lac stick melts. To produce a pattern of two or more shades, more than two colours of lac are needed to be applied on the surface of the article. The order of colour application is mostly from lighter to darker. After completion of over layering of colours unwanted colour is removed by rubbing the article with sand or *rangāthā* which is palm stick and then finally rubbed with a cloth dipped in oil mostly mustard oil (*sarsaun kā tail*) which brightens up lac/*lākh* applied surface. (Plate.13)



Plate.13 Last coat of coloured lac, colour application from light to dark.

Source: *Lacquer art, Sillanwali*, Punjab Small Industries.

¹⁹ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of the Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur" Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2009, 230.

Chitra'ī ka kam or Naqqāshī

Naqqāshī or *chitra'ī kā kām*, is also known as *chitarkārī*. After completion of the colour application process different designs are engraved in multi-colours by scraping the layers by layer once was applied on the surface of turned object. By scraping the upper layers different attractive shades of the lower surface are obtained. This technique is called *chitra'ī kā kām*. In Sillanwali, *chitra'ī kā kām* is known as *naqqāshī* whereas in D. G. Khan and D. I. Khan it is called *jandrī kā kām* but locally it is also called “Lacquer Work” which is a wrong terminology. The known engraving or carving work on the metallic objects by using different tools is also called *chitra'ī kā kām*.²⁰ (Plate.14)



Plate.14 *Chitra'ī kā kām*.

Source: *Lacquer art, Sillanwali*. Punjab Small Industries, Pakistan.

Naqqāshī or patterned work of Sillanwali is engaged with variations of design treatments. It is sometimes also called as *bārīk naqqāshī* or refined patterned work as compared to motif *naqqāshī* or ordinary patterned work. Pakpattan Sharif, Dera Ghazi Khan, Jampur, Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu were once used to be the core areas of this variety of lac-work. Hoshiarpur, Ferozpur and Kaithal in Indian Punjab were also well known centers of lac-turnery. Since the skill persons or workers in lac-work (more specially the *naqqāshī* form) in Punjab have always been Muslims. Majority of them from three last named stations of India migrated to the Punjab in Pakistan and re-energized their work here but out of all most flourishing of them are those who settled in Sillanwali. Here they charged better then they had been doing when they were in Kaithal before partition.²¹(Plate.15-16)



Plate.15 *Naqqāshī kā kām*.

Source: Dar, *Crafts of Sargodha*, 160.



Plate.16 *Chitarkār* engraving his design, Jampur

Source: Dar, *Crafts of Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur*. 245.

Naqqāshī work can be formed on lathe or manual but after giving a shape either round, rectangle or square, it must be covered with three or four layers of lac in different colours. To finish, it is completed with designs that are created with the help of dissimilar tools and by exposing different layers of colours one by one design is exposed and come to its final shape.

The lac-work of Rajanpur and Dera Ghazi Khan include *jandrī kā kām* (plain lac-turnery), *chitra'ī kā kām* (etched lac-work), *qala'ī kā kām* (filled up or scraped lac-work). Compare to Rajanpur and D. G. Khan, at Sillanwali, the varieties of lac-works that have been observed are lac-turnery, *abri*, *naqqāshī* (etched variety or also known as *chitra'ī kā kām*), *naqqāshī* (scraped variety or *bharā'ī kā kām*).²²

Qala'ī kā kām, tin foil, or ātishī lac-work

Qala'ī kā kām or tin work is another exclusive decorative wood-work application which is frequently experienced in Jampur. A wonderful characteristic of this technique is that a metal in such a way is applied on to the surface of a

²⁰ Saifur Rahman Dar, “*Crafts of Punjab, Crafts of Chiniot*” Vol.VI (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2010, 131.

²¹ Saifur Rahman Dar, “*Crafts and Crafts of Punjab, Craft of Sargodha*” Vol VII (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2010, 171.

²² Saifur Rahman Dar, “*Crafts and Crafts of Punjab, Craft of Sargodha*” Vol. VII (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2010, 170.

wooden article which is a simple but effective manner without employing any of the costly mechanical gadgets or any of the highly mechanical complicated modern chemical method. In *qala'ī* work the object is given a base or ground coating of beaten tin metal. When the tin-coating gets dried it is polished by abrasion. Subsequently, the rest of the work is comparable to that of *jandrī* work.

The technique lies in representing the regular tin metal strips into fine granulated tin-flakes, easily dispersible in water. As common tin metal is not emulsified in water it cannot be coated on wood. For this purpose the tin strips are persistently beaten with the hammer in a particular way. A little gum water is applied during the beating process regularly to the tin surface to attain the preferred texture. It is a very painstaking work. It takes 5 to 6 hours of unremitting pounding to transfer the ordinary tin strips to fine grained hydrophilic tin flakes that readily follow a tendency of absorbing or dissolving in water. These tin flakes then form a sort of emulsion by mixing with water. This prepared emulsion is applied to the wooden objects with brush and the freshly tin coated piece is kept in the open air to dry. After drying, the tinned surface is burnished to a sparkling shine. After this, the desired colours are applied on to the surface of the article. The tin applied articles have an unusual allure that cannot be expressed in words.²³ *Mohrā* (a form of agate) is used to rub the surface to bring it to shining look. The layer of tin under the surface of transparent thinly applied colours gives a very striking and bright look. This practice is also known as *ātishī* or fiery lac-work due to its dazzling quality.

Pārāh kā kām

First of all a special paste is made by mixing *pārāh* (mercury) and *qala'ī* (tin) for this work. Primarily, piece of *qala'ī* (tin), silver like metal is transformed into thin small pieces by grinding them in a pan or on a thick iron plate beaten with an iron hammer for this purpose. This process is repeated so many times till the small pieces of tin are changed into a form of thick powder. Then *pārāh* is mixed in this thick powder of tin in a porcelain china-ware or mortar and pestle (*chattū*). The mixture is grinded further with the help of a tool called pestle (*dastā*) and the whole mixture is converted into a form of paste. The wooden object on which *pārāh* is desired to be applied as an ornamentation, is once again fixed in *khṛād* after lac-work it has already been completed. Now deep furrows are drawn on the outer surface of the object with the help of an iron tool named *sathrī*. In these furrows paste of *pārāh* or lead and tin, as explained above is filled in between the gaps with the help of finger. The outer sides of those furrows are cleaned with a piece of a cotton cloth. After sometime lead or *pārāh* of the paste is

ionized by reacting with air and there is left only *qala'ī*. When paste gets dried the tin starts sparkling brightly like stars in the sky.²⁴

Bharā'ī kā kām

Filling work is locally spoken as *bharā'ī kā kām*. It is to some extent similar to wood inlay work. In this work, the wooden article is prepared like *qala'ī* work and then is fixed on a wooden lathe to apply a layer of colour over shiny tin layer. After finishing with the base, the article is detached from the lathe. Then, with the help of a sharp *qalam* (a kind of iron style/chisel), flowers and leaves are carved on the article. After carving the article, it is again fixed on the lathe and the carved sections are re-filled with the desired colours. After applying a color the article is again detached from the lathe and the extra colour, on places other than the intended coloured portion, is removed by rubbing with sand. The article is then washed in water and dried. It is once again placed on the lathe and the third colour is filled on the carved sections. After filling the colour the whole exercise is repeated again to remove the extra colour, in fact this exercise is repeated for fixing each and every colour. When all the colours are filled, the article is finally cleaned with sand and left for a short time after applying a little oil on it. This work is highly laborious and time consuming. This work is so painstaking but on the opposite, financial returns are quite unsatisfactory. For this reason, these days lesser craftsmen are willing to go on with this work in this profession for making their source of income.²⁵ (Plate.17)



Plate.17 *Bharā'ī kā kām*.

A strange and distinct thing in lac-work is that that designs are engraved on objects without taking any help from books, tracings or any other means of transferring the designs. No records of these designs are kept and it is purely a freehand creative work. Designs are etched or engraved directly from imagination. Designing technique is inherited in character, transferred and transformed from generation to generation. Designs are drawn by hand, cannot be done on lathe except carving furrows for filling.

²³ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur" Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2009, 243.

²⁴ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of Punjab, Crafts of Chiniot" Vol. VI (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2010, 144.

²⁵ Saifur Rahman Dar, "Crafts of Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur" Vol. IV (Lahore: Punjab Small Industries), 2009, 244.

The range of articles produced on lathe with their local names are *pāwā* (bed posts) (Plate.18), *maddhānī* (churner), *charkhā* (spinning wheel) (Plate.19), *bailnā* (crusher), *pātrian* (basin for kneading floor), *p̄ropī* (wooden ladle), *pātrōtā* (tray or basket for keeping bread), *glass*, *kanwar* (milk bucket), *dolī* (water container), *dongā* (mug), *aukhlī/mohlī* (mortar and pestle) (Plate.20), *dabbī naswār* (snuff box), *pīrhā* (short-legged chair) (Plate.21), *Surmāh dānī* (antimony holder), and *palang* (bed). All the craftsmen do almost similar works. Mostly craftsmen make their own colours and make free hand designs that are inherited not copied. Objects are mostly made of coursed grained and hard wood and decorated with lac-work or *naqqāshī*.



Plate.18 *Pāwā*.



Plate.19 *Charkhā*.



Plate.20 *Aukhlī*.

Source: Dar, *Crafts of Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur*, 233.



Plate.21 *Pīrhā*

Arts and crafts movement of 19th century generated a wider understanding about the importance of traditional crafts. This movement brought a revolt of material and style. The strength of this concept came from an assertion that arts and crafts can change people's lives. The impact of this movement strongly generated an aesthetical appreciation towards various crafts. Crafts well-built social and moral function has guaranteed its continuing importance. This idea buoyant the interest of students as well as professionals through the organizations that are working for heritage preservation and some technical institutes where craft oriented skills are taught for the development of various crafts. Crafts correspond to love of countryside and folk tradition.

Element of romanticism of rural life and to preserve its heritage is a foremost effort of the artisan who are still concerned about the development of lac-turnery in the

region. In lac-turned articles the roughness and simplicity of design and shape happens sometimes due to the lack of desired material supply. Though, craft persons are concerned about the quality, finish and perfection of lac-turned object to increase such items' demand in the market. Many centers of lac-turnery are focusing on quality of products with the demand and appreciation that urban community, though very limited, has transferred for such items.

Conclusion

Pakistan with its prosperous and diverse heritage has an admired craft dating back to the oldest Mehrgarh civilization in Baluchistan, the Indus Valley civilization of Mohenjo-Daro in Sindh and Harappa in Punjab. Customary chronological manipulations are to be seen, in wood turned artifacts found from regions that indicate disparity of form, design and colour to demonstrate their regional distinctiveness. Probably, lac-turnery is one of the most primeval and comprehensively known practices of carving surface of wood to fashion colourful complex designs. Handicrafts of Pakistan are fundamentally Islamic, and represent an amalgamation of Turkish, Arab, Persian and the indigenous Mughal traditions. Intricate decorative design work on lac-turned objects show dissimilar influences of historic regional eras but are transformed in local styles with a limited colour palette. These objects look appealing but quite similar in all regions. Craft persons are always concerned to opt all possible ways to increase demand and appreciation for their turned objects in the region by marketing in different ways.

Lac-turnery has been such a craft in region that is capable of sustaining lives of craftsmen. Presently, low income issues, inflation and expensive materials more specifically availability of appropriate quality wood in affordable price have made many craftsmen to switch to other professions after abandoning their units they carried since long. In a robot century it is significant question that how will such crafts survive if not paid attention to current alarming situation. Raise in demand of these locally produced craft works require promotion on every relative forum to subsist this craft and government support is mandatory in export for the growth and sustainability of this valuable and centuries' old craft.

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