

## **The Potters of Musazai, Peshawar and their Pottery Making Techniques**

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**Abstract:** Peshawar earthenware pottery is a popular craft of its own kind and has given us international recognition. Especially, the village of Musazai is the main pottery production centre in the district. The potters locally known as “kulal” work hard day and night. The adult male potters are mainly responsible for the production of large pots but they work with the support and full involvement of their other family members as well. These potters use pit wheels and traditional techniques of pottery making that have been passed down from generation to generation.

**Keywords:** Musazai pottery, kulal, potters, pit wheel.

### **Introduction**

Peshawar earthenware pottery has its own individuality and popularity. The local potters make pottery in a very impressive manner. These innocent hands have been serving the Pakistani culture and heritage for years, thus brought our pottery in focus within the international market of art & craft (The Tourists Information Catalogue, as cited in Adeel 2014).

The previous research by Knappett (1994) in Peshawar District and Thomas and Khan (2011) in Bannu District provide in-depth analysis of this traditional craft skill and the socio-economic status of the potters in the region. Their research also reveals the fact that the craft of pottery making is now declining. As Knappett (1994) stated that the future of this traditional craft is now threatened due to the increasing dissatisfaction level among the potters.

The previous research provides the record of the basic techniques used by the potters in context of their economic and social relations of craft production. However, the present study focuses on the pottery making techniques in Peshawar District with emphasis on the involvement of the whole family in this profession that passes down from generation to generation. The study reports the preliminary observations made in the rural masses in the Peshawar region particularly the

potting community of Musazai. The study was carried out in two months in February-March 2002 during a project, related to the training of the female potters of Peshawar, conducted by a local NGO (Paradise). The principal author was involved in the training of female potters in production and marketing of their clay pots, whereas the co-authors arranged field trips for students to the pottery making centers at selected site.

### **Objectives**

This paper reviews pottery making techniques used by the potters of Musazai that is learned and adopted from their forefathers. The paper examines techniques of making pots on pit wheel in relation to the hand and finger-movements patterns of the potters. This paper also aims to put emphasize on the working relationship of members within the potter families as the potters of Musazai do not work alone and believe on large family size to increase the number of their pottery production. The study and analysis is based mainly on observation of 16 potters (5 males and 11 females) during their pottery work. Some of the information is also provided by other potters too.

### **Research Site**

Being a big pottery making centre, the village of

Musazi in Peshawar District was selected for research purpose. It is located about 11 km south of the city of Peshawar (Knappett, 1994:99).

### **General Background**

The products of Musazai potters (locally called as *kulal*) of Peshawar, are the best symbols of their craftsmanship and artistry. They know very well how to deal with nature, when they convert a lump of clay into a utilitarian object as well as a craft piece with the magic of their hands and fingers (Figures 1 & 2). They supply their pots to the local market as well as to the markets in other districts.

### **The Musazai Potters**

The potters of Musazai make clay pottery whole year except the rainy season. They work whole day from dawn to dusk. Their children are inducted into this profession at a very young age and keep working till old age. They work in an open yard in their homes, fixed with three to four pit wheels in their verandas. During several field visits made by the authors, most of the time the potters' yards were found filled with clay pots set to dry.

### **Working Relationship of the Family Members of Potters:**

The Musazai potters work with the support and involvement of their other family members. It saves their time and increases the number of production. According to the potters' information the number of family members of potters play an important role in their pottery production. They need a big family to increase their income, believing in 'the larger the family, the higher the earning'. Thus the pottery work is divided among the young and adults members. For example, the clay is prepared by the young boys. They break the large clay lumps into small pieces, soak it in water and knead the clay with their legs. The women wedge and prepare clay doughs and slabs of desired sizes, while the men produce large clay

pots on the pit wheel.

Their working procedure can be divided into 5-6 stages: digging out clay at a local site, preparation of clay, making pots, sun drying, firing of pots in the kiln and distribution into the markets.

### **The Pots**

The potters of Musazai mainly produce flower pots and cooking pots. Such as *gumla* (flower pots), *chatti* (water storing vessel), *cutwaey* (cooking pot), *candole* (glass), *thaaly* (plate), *niaz khanak* (used for charity food) and large baking ovens locally known as *tandoor*. Money savers locally known as *khazany* are also produced by the female potters and young boys. All the pots are made from locally available clay. Among all of these, flower pots are the most popular and are in great demand by the local as well as national and international market.

### **Pottery Making Stages**

Throwing clay on the wheel and turning out a big utilitarian vessel within a few minutes is a scene of astonishment. For producing big vessels and flower pots, the potters use clay lumps and thick clay coils. At first, a potter throws the clay lump on the wheel to form the base.

Once the base of the pot is formed, the potter joins thick coils one after another while running the wheel with his foot and the magic of his fingers heave the coils into the vessel's rim. It was observed that for making big vessels such as *gumlas*, all the potters adopt the same procedure. Although their finger movement patterns may vary from potter to potter but the stages of forming *gumla* of 4-5 inch in length are the same. For example, for making *gumla*, potters first place *tabai* (mould) on the wheel and throw the clay lump on it to form *tapal*, the base. Then they form a shallow whole in the centre of the lump by pressing their both thumbs inward while resting their fingers at the exterior wall of the shallow. With slight pressure of their thumbs inside and

fingers outside the potters gradually raise the clay walls in upward position. These basic finger patterns turn the clay into a glass shape pot. Once the *tapal* is formed which is almost half foot high, the rest of the *gumla* is formed with stacking and joining *maincha*, the coils. Gradually moving the wheel, the potter joins the first *maincha* on the surface edge of *tapal* with the slight pressure of his right hand till one coil is raised enough to the desired thickness and height. The thickness of the pot varies from potter to potter depending on their hands and “finger-movement patterns” (Kaneko, 2009). The potter removes it from the wheel and set aside for approximately half an hour to get it leather hard before fixing the next coil otherwise it can ruin the pot. The four feet high *gumla* is made by joining almost 4 to 5 coils. After reaching to a desired length the potter then makes its *ghara*, the rim which is formed by the special finger patterns. He shapes the rim while resting his first two fingers of left hand inside the edge of the pot and his thumb outside it and placing the two other fingers of the right hand on the edge in upward position to gradually form the rim. He then smoothens the rim by rubbing a piece of a fabric on it. After finishing, the *gumla* is ready to set aside in the yard for sun drying.

For making other cooking utensils, such as *cutwaey*, a cooking pot, the same procedure is followed except that the base is prepared by the female potters. They place a desired size slab in a mould and the male potters directly stack and join coils with same procedure while gradually moving the wheel. It was observed that the adult male members are responsible for the major pottery production. Whereas, the female potters usually produce small or medium sized *gumla*, vases, jugs and other art objects. During numerous visits to this village the authors have to see the young female potters making money savers locally known as *khazane* (resembling the typical shape of a pitcher) in clay moulds. Young female potters sell *khazane* ranged from 10 to 25

rupees each depending on their size. They produce a wide range of ornamental and utilitarian pottery in earthen color.

### ***Firing of Pottery***

The earthenware pottery is being fired in a traditional kiln. When the potters operate their kilns locally known as *Daashht*, it takes approximately two hours for these pots to be placed properly in the kiln. The placement requires a special skill. The potters stack pots on the top of other, starting from large size pots to the smaller ones. Nowadays, the potters use brick kilns. They gradually heat up their kilns with cow dung (which their females have already dried in a traditional way) and wood powder. Afterward, the fire is made up with wood powder. The kiln preparation also varies from potter to potter. Some of them use wood instead of cow dung and wood powder depending on the affordability as cow dung is a cheap material and easily available in these villages. It takes approximately 24 hours to fully bake the pots. After firing, they let the kiln cool down. Musazai Potters are aware of the basic technicalities of kiln firing and the amount of fuel needed for it and they pass down this art from one generation to the next.

### ***Distribution to the Markets***

The potters of Musazai supply these clay articles to the local market as well as to other cities such as Pubi (Noshehra), Abbottabad, Haripur and Galiyat in Hazara, Lahore, Qassor and Murree in Punjab. A few potters not only supply their pots to the local market but also abroad such as London, England and New Zealand. Some potters only produce baking oven, *tandoor* which is in great demand by the restaurants of Australia, Germany and Dubai.

### ***Pottery Training Centers***

During the field work, the authors also visited three pottery training centers established for female potters by non-profitable organizations,

such as Paradise Environmental and Community Welfare Society. The two centers were located in *Surazai* and one in *Musazai*. The basic aim of the centers was to enhance the pottery making skills of the female potters which they have adopted from the past several centuries and enable them to achieve new techniques and methodologies. The training was based on the creation of innovative pots rescued from the monotony of their familiar shapes. The potters of *Musazai* retain their pottery work in earthen color. So, the female potters were also introduced to hand-painted techniques. These potters were also introduced to coil and slab methods of pottery making to adorn the surface of the wheel pieces and to create other art objects. The authors themselves were involved in their training and gained valuable experience of working with these female potters. The said project was an initiative to lay down a proper framework for the development of the neglected pottery community of Peshawar. However, Government and other organizations need to take more initiatives in carrying out and maintaining such fruitful activities which could raise socio-economic status of the potters' families in the community.

### Conclusion

Four major findings came forth from this body of research: 1) the number of production depends on the working relationship of the all the young and adult family members of the *Musazai* potters. The potters of *Musazai* are aware of the new challenges they and their families are facing. Similarly, their females are also partners in the daily struggle for earning a livelihood and they know very well that the harder the struggle, the greater is the importance of all the family members as a partner in the work. 2) Though all the potters follow same basic

procedure of making pots such as building base and lifting the pot up to the rim but the number of hands and finger-movement patterns vary per the personal experiences and mastery of the potters.

3) Similarly, the procedure of firing the pots also depends on the number of production and the socio-economic status of the potter families.

4) Further, the potters of *Musazai* have access to the local, national and international market as they distribute their pots from Pabi to Germany and London as well, specially their *tandoor* are in great demand abroad. Thus, they are contributing to the revenue generation yet their skills and efforts are not officially acknowledged at national level. The craft of *Musazai* potters should be recognized as the cultural and creative industry in the country and valued for the handsome revenue generation.

To bring them at par with other craftsmen in the country and to revive this dying art, they need a continuous support of the governmental and non-governmental organizations regarding raising their socio-economic conditions; providing them marketing advisory services and projecting their pottery productions at vast scale.

The documentation of Peshawar earthenware pottery being a traditional craft can play an important role to have a sound record of this historic craftsmanship and to highlight its value as one of the cultural and creative industry of Pakistan. Further it would also be a significant step towards the new research in this area.

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Figure 1. Musazai Potter using coiling technique for making gumla



Figure 2. Musazai Pottery before baking