

DERA ISMAIL KHAN - TRADITIONAL WOODWORK AND FURNITURE

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LOK VIRSA RESEARCH REPORT SERIES RE-4-82

LOK VIRSA RESEARCH CENTRE

First Published
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Price in Pakistan Rs. 22
Overseas US \$4.00

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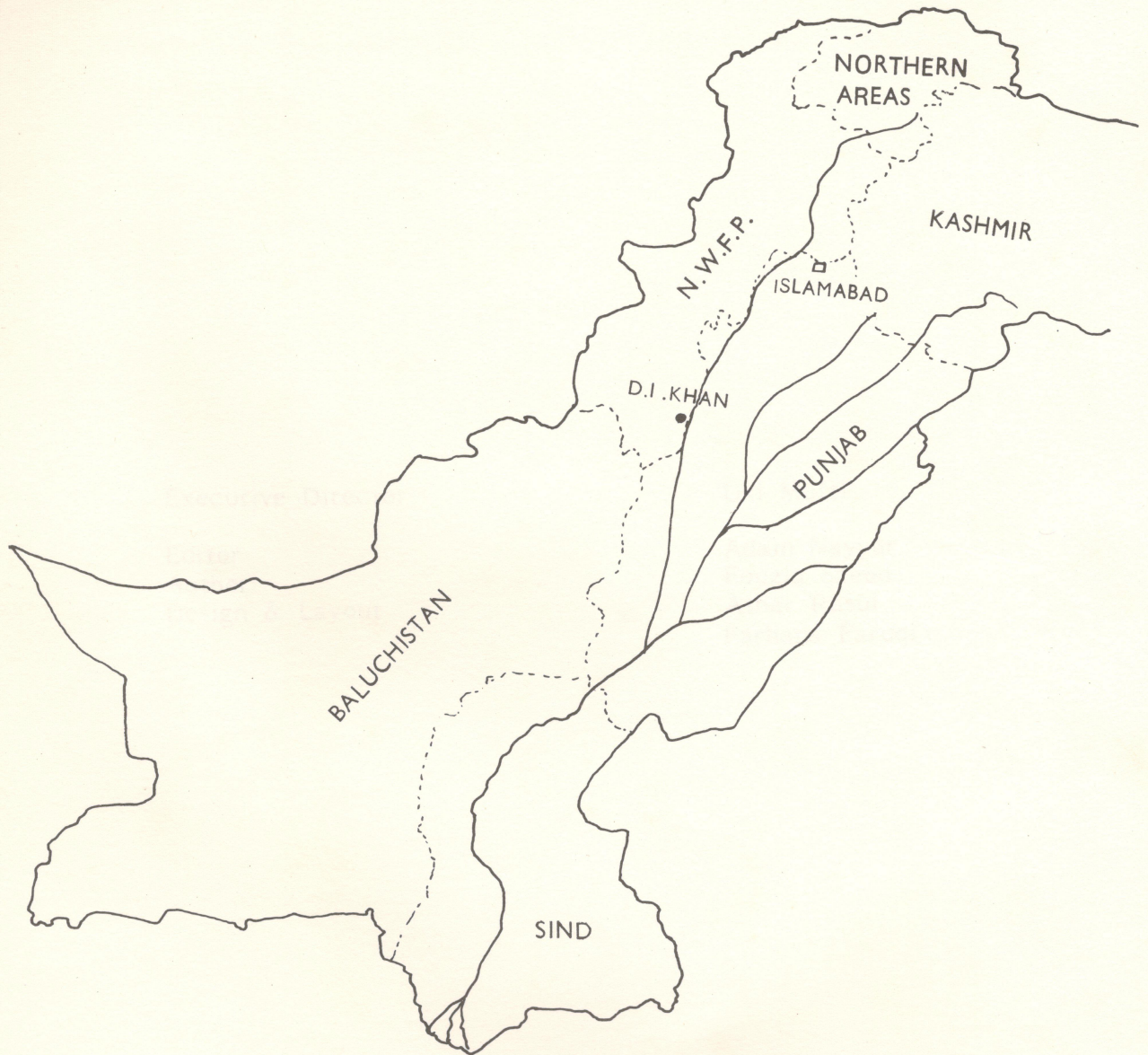
LOK VIRSA RESEARCH REPORT SERIES RP-4-88

First Published 1988

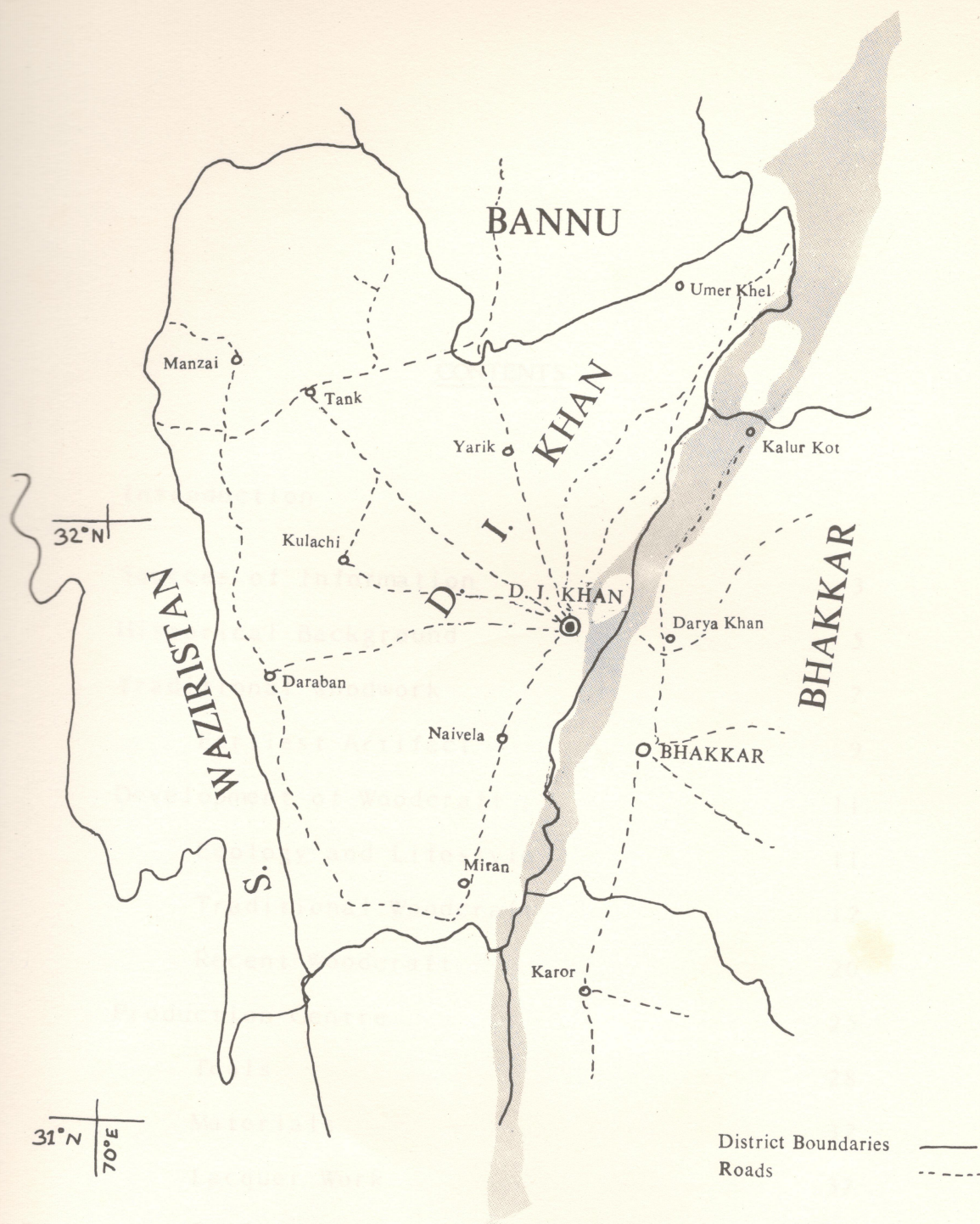
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MAP OF PAKISTAN



SKETCH MAP OF D. I. KHAN AND SURROUNDINGS

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PREFACE

Lok Virsa (the National Institute of Folk & Traditional Heritage) has the mandate of collecting, documenting, archiving and projecting all aspects of our cultural traditions. The Research Report series makes available pioneering work done on various aspects of traditional culture. The object is to ensure that a larger readership becomes aware of research that is normally archival and thus less accessible.

The tradition of woodwork and lacquerwork in Dera Ismail Khan dates back several centuries and is still being kept alive by families of master craftsmen. The use of modern technology in the processes of manufacture is limited to the motorization of the lathe, while the essence of design and motif have remained largely unchanged. Only recently, Master Craftsman Mohammad Ashraf was awarded the President's Pride of Performance Medal for excellence in the field of lacquerwork on wood.

This report is based on a paper submitted to the Design Department of the University of Minnesota, U.S.A. in 1984. The author traces the history of the craft and the processes involved in its manufacture. Lok Virsa hopes that this report will stimulate further research into this native craft now threatened with extinction. Lok Virsa does not necessarily share the views expressed in this report.

This report has been produced on Lok Virsa microcomputers and professional printers with a desktop publishing word processing programme. The resulting obviation of composing and repeated proofing has resulted in a more rapid access to results of research, apart from being more cost effective.

INTRODUCTION

This is a descriptive study of a furniture manufacturing centre in Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan. Topics covered in this study will include the development of the woodcraft, styles of furniture and methods of production.

There has been very limited research done on the history of Pakistani furniture, but this does not minimize its importance. Thus the field is open for researchers to document and analyze furniture styles.

Many manufacturing centres that had specific styles and were famous for their woodwork are losing their quality of work. The techniques and products are being changed according to the contemporary demands. There is a need to record their old heritage, the quality, techniques and design of woodcraft.

The National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage (now also known as Lok Virsa) in Islamabad is conducting research on many topics of folk art. However, the history of furniture does not have a high priority in the Institute's research programme. Nevertheless, the Museum Store does house some selected pieces of furniture from different centres.

There is a singular lack of teaching materials in the universities and other institutions of higher learning about

the folk art traditions of Pakistan. European and American art is taught in more detail than Islamic and Pakistani art, reflecting the colonial origin of these institutions. Books on Pakistani furniture do not exist. This preliminary study is an attempt to generate a teaching reference and to add to the sparse body of literature on the folk arts of Pakistan.

It is difficult to narrow down the scope of this study when there is lack of existing historical documentation. This paper is an overall description of the Dera Ismail Khan--commonly known as D.I. Khan - a furniture manufacturing centre.

Pakistan is divided into progressively smaller administrative units: the largest unit is a province, which is divided into divisions; these divisions are divided into districts, which are further subdivided into tehsils. The tehsil is split up into mauzas (tracts of agricultural land with settlements) or cities. D.I. Khan is the name of a district, a tehsil and a city. The city of D.I. Khan is the administrative headquarters of both the tehsil and the district and is still famous for its lacquered turnery.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The first source of information includes the author's own background and experiences. Being a citizen of Pakistan and having lived there for 20 years, the author has an awareness of the social and cultural importance of furniture in that society. She lived in Peshawar, which is a well-known furniture manufacturing centre. Her strong interest in art and interior design helped her observe the furniture styles of that city.

The author's academic work in the Design Department at the University of Minnesota helped her to distinguish and analyze furniture styles. Courses dealing with the history of furniture helped the author to identify the difference between colonial and folk furniture of Pakistan. It also made her aware of how other cultures have influenced design and technology of the crafts in Pakistan.

Pakistani people currently involved in the furniture industry have provided a primary source of information for the study.

SURVEY TECHNIQUES:

Interviews:

Twenty individuals in the woodcraft industry were interviewed, including shopkeepers, craftsmen and ustad (teachers).

In order to ensure maximum rapport, the interviews were intentionally kept very unstructured and informal. The purpose of this approach was to gather necessary information in an informal atmosphere, whereby a general discussion yielded the required data. Questionnaires and specific questions about income and so forth often arouse suspicions among the informants, thus resulting in a distortion of data.

Observation and documentation:

The whole process of woodcraft and lacquer was observed carefully at every stage. Questions were asked from the craftsmen on the spot about their work.

Authentic furniture and decorative art objectives of Dera Ismail Khan were studied and photographed.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Located on the right bank of the Indus River (see map), Dera Ismail Khan was well known for its lacquered turnery woodwork. The excellence of design of the craft has been mentioned by the Imperial Gazetteer of India (1883).

The Gazetteer of 1883 also mentions the "fine quality of woodcraft, bedstands and round boxes with domes lids were stated as the most popular articles made at Dera Ismail Khan."

Dera Ismail Khan participated in local trades. Commercially the district was important as it was located on the trade routes between India and Khorasan. Powindah (nomadic Pukhtun) merchants would buy souvenirs from Dera Ismail Khan on their way home. It is said that mirrors with turned wooden frames and wooden toys for children were their favorite articles.

The district was part of the Mughal Empire until 1738 AD. Thereafter, it continued to remain under Muslim control until the end of the eighteenth century. This period had a significant cultural influence on the design of Dera Ismail Khan woodcraft. By and large, the Mughals were patrons of the arts, attracting artists and craftsmen from all parts of Asia to their courts. With the decline of the Mughal Empire and

the resulting corresponding decline of patronage, the artists began to disperse throughout the region. It is said that some of the wood craftsmen came to Dera Ismail Khan, as wood was easily available here. This tradition is based on oral history; whatever the case, the influence of Islamic art can still be seen in the traditional patterns used by the craftsmen of Dera Ismail Khan.

In the beginning of the 19th century Dera Ismail Khan was taken over by the Sikhs. British influence began in 1847 and for the next hundred years, Dera Ismail Khan became part of the British Empire. The British influence could be seen in furniture styles of this period. The India elite, who were directly in contact with the British, decorated their drawing rooms in the British style to entertain and please their new foreign masters. Tea was further popularized in India by the British and soon furniture was developed for it. Many tables were added to the local interiors. D.I. Khan became best known for teapoys (a colonial name given to a low stand for supporting a tea tray).

The partitioning of British India saw the birth of a new independent nation in 1947. The entire lower Indus Valley and thus the area of Dera Ismail Khan became a part of this young nation.

TRADITIONAL WOODWORK

Excellent lacquered turnery of Dera Ismail Khan finds brief mention in history, though no photographs, sketches or detailed description of individual pieces could be found:

Lockwood Kipling (1883), ex-principal of Lahore School of Arts, provides a description of this craft. He noted that the most prominent industry of Dera Ismail Khan was lacquered turnery in wood. It differed in many respects from that of the other districts.

It is pertinent here to reproduce a description of the craft from the Imperial Gazetteer of India of 1908:

"The lac turnery, carried on at Dera Ismail Khan, is of considerable artistic merit, and is applied to larger articles than is usual in this class of work, the small round tables being well-known. The general tone of colour is subdued and almost sombre, red, black, and dark green, relieved by a little grey, being the principal colours, with ornaments in amalgam, which have the effect of dull silvery lines. The pattern is always inscribed with a style, and in certain parts the lines are filled with amalgam. Ivory and camel-bone ornaments in the shape of knobs, studs, and flowers are liberally

employed. The lac-ware of Bannu is bolder in design, and of some merit, though in technique it is inferior to that of Dera Ismail Khan. The charpai or beds of the Wazirs are so contrived that they can be used as chairs in the daytime."

(Imperial Gazetteer of India for the North-West Frontier Province 1908:52)

The colours typical for intricate etching were black and red. A similar design was used on the border with green and yellow.

The wood used was shisham (*Dalbergia Sissu*). Ivory and camel bone ornaments beautifully carved in the shape of knobs, studs and flowers were liberally applied to the ware. This practice originated from the need to cover the hole left in the wood by the iron lathe. Ivory or bone studs were used to conceal these holes. Excessive use of this decorative method by the craftsmen of Dera Ismail Khan led to the point where these projections and finials became a hindrance in the use. These finials were loosely fastened. It was difficult to carry this kind of furniture from one town to another without losing some of the decorative studs on the way.

The usual form of etched ornamentation was a maze of fernlike scrolls of microscopic fineness. Small circles were also characteristic of the craft.

The Earliest Artifact

The oldest piece (Fig.1) found in lacquer work of Dera Ismail Khan is owned by Ustad Karam Ali, who belongs to a well-known family of craftsmen. In 1958, he was honoured with an award by the President of Pakistan for his craftsmanship. This was one of the rare cases of state patronage to the crafts of Pakistan. The piece is a spherical container (Figs. 2 & 3) approximately 7" in diameter. It can be opened into two hollow hemispheres. One half has a lid with two parts. These parts fit into each other. The lid has a finial of ivory in the centre which is used like a handle. Colours used are mellow, not bright as are used today. The pattern is very intricate. Silvery grey is used with orange and black.

According to Ustad Karam Ali, this piece was used by princesses for keeping money and perfume. He claims that it is from the late 18th or early 19th century. This quality of the lacquer work is rarely found today. It closely matches Kipling's description of Dera Ismail Khan lacquer work: "it has fine etched ornamentation and silver grey circles."

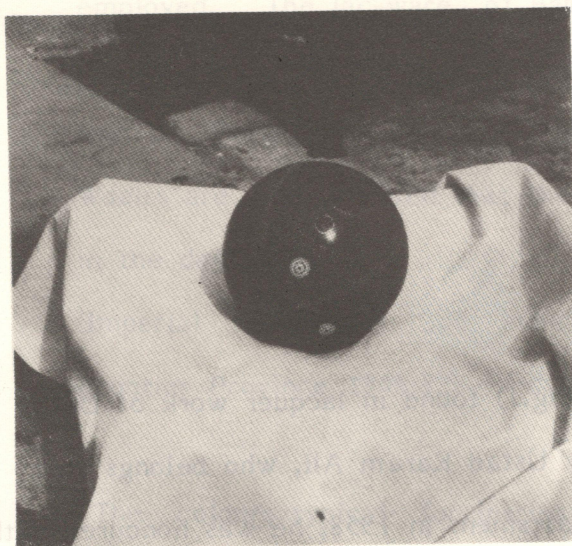


Fig. 1:
Spherical container
for keeping money
(Late 18th century)

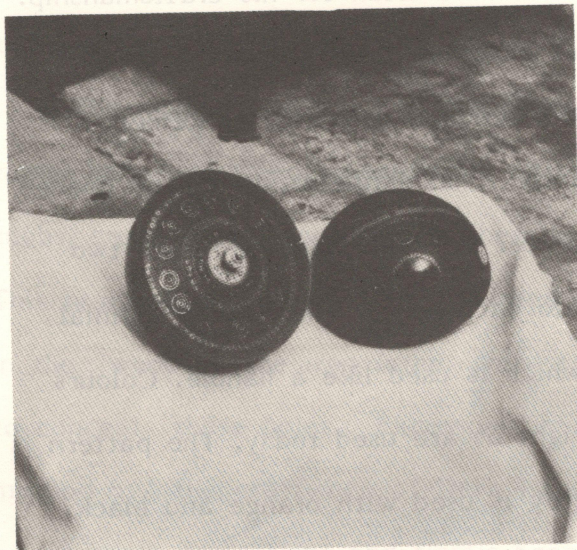


Fig. 2:
The container
opened into two
hollow parts

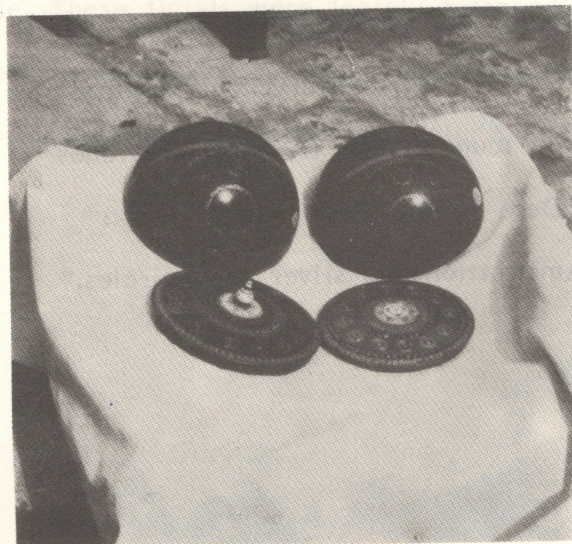


Fig. 3:
Four parts of the
container. A two
part lid fits in
one half of the
container

It is important to preserve this piece as not many examples of this fine craftsmanship survived. The piece has been passed down from generations and will continue its ownership in this tradition.

DEVELOPMENT OF WOODCRAFT

Furniture and other woodcraft was developed here to fulfill local needs. Later the forms changed as the result of changes in the lifestyle. In order to see the development of the form and style of woodcraft, it is important to find out the wood artifacts used by people in the past, their emergence from local lifestyle, the factors that had influenced them and how they have changed.

ECOLOGY & LIFESTYLE

The traditional lifestyle of the people of Dera Ismail Khan dictated simple and practical forms of furniture. People developed ways to deal with the long hot summers and the harsh winters. In a typical mud house, there are two to three rooms, a veranda and a courtyard. In winter, the courtyard was used for daytime household activities to make the best use of the winter sun. In summer, daytime household activities were inside, as the days were long and hot. The

nights were spent outside in the courtyard or on the roofs of houses as the nights were cool.

Furniture was developed to suit people's lifestyle. It was light and could be easily carried to different parts of the house or courtyard. There were few furniture pieces as the work and living areas were not sharply divided or defined for specific activities. The simplicity of furniture pieces is a reflection of the simple lifestyle of people.

TRADITIONAL WOODCRAFT

The following list has been prepared to describe the traditional items of woodcraft used in a typical household. Most of these items are still used today:

Charpai (Bed) Fig. 4): is the most important piece of furniture, as it is a must in every household. The number of charpai in a house is dependent on the need and the amount a family can afford.

The charpai consists of a light wooden frame supported on four lathe-turned wooden legs. The central part is woven with grass rope. Over four-fifths of the frame is covered with thick grass cord woven in a geometrical pattern. The

remaining area has a grass rope run over the end and the edge of the woven part to tension the bed. Called the powandi,



Fig. 4: Charpai (string bed)

this rope is tightened daily to ensure a well-tensioned bed that does not sag. These charpai are used for sleeping and sitting. They are easily moved around wherever they are needed. They can be used in the rooms, in the courtyard or even outdoors in the fields.

Palang (Bed): is a bed more elaborate than the charpai. It has four turned and carefully lacquered legs and a headboard. It is usually brightly coloured and has mirrors in the

headboard. The high cost of the palang makes it an object affordable only by the wealthy, such as the landlords of the village; it is sometimes prepared for the dowry of a daughter. The palang is too heavy to be mobile and is usually left in a room.



Fig. 5: Pirah (low armless chair)

Pirah (Fig. 5): can be best described as a very low armless chair. It was especially made for the wedding day of a bride to sit on. The pirah's seat consists of a woven grass cord on a wooden frame similar to that of a charpai.

Pirhi (Fig. 6): is a very low stool used for sitting in front of the stove or doing other household chores. The legs are turned and the seat woven with grass rope. These stools and charpai are the most common furniture pieces for seating.

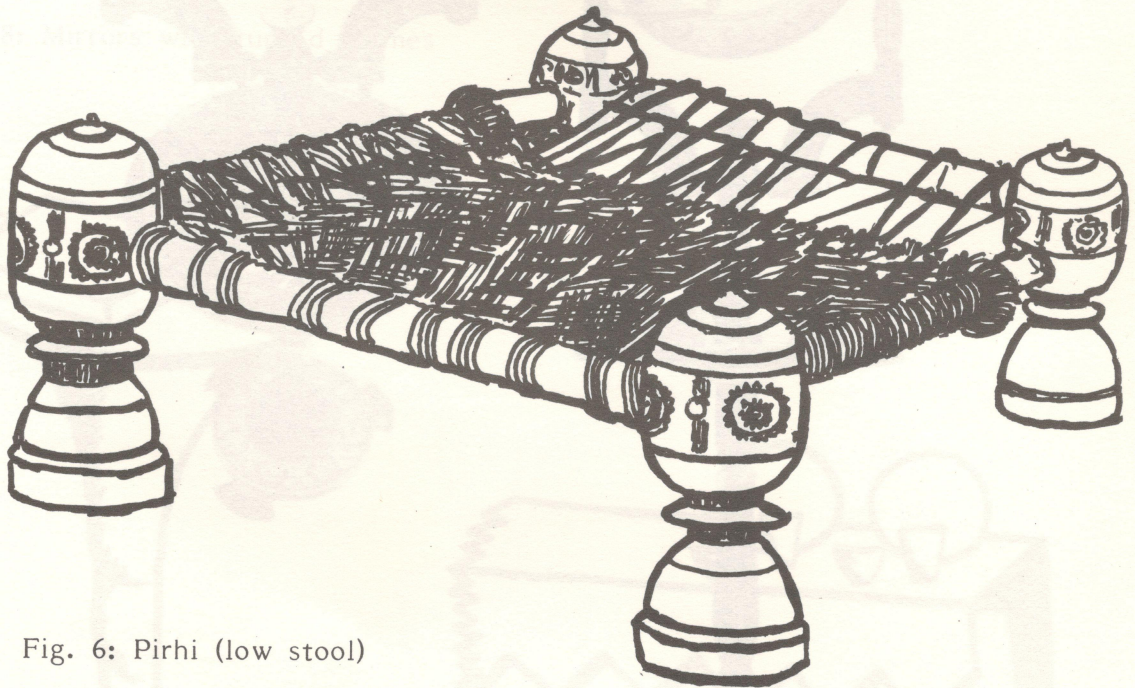


Fig. 6: Pirhi (low stool)

Singhar Maiz (Dressing Table) Fig. 7: is a small round table for putting make-up items. This piece of furniture is more common in affluent households.

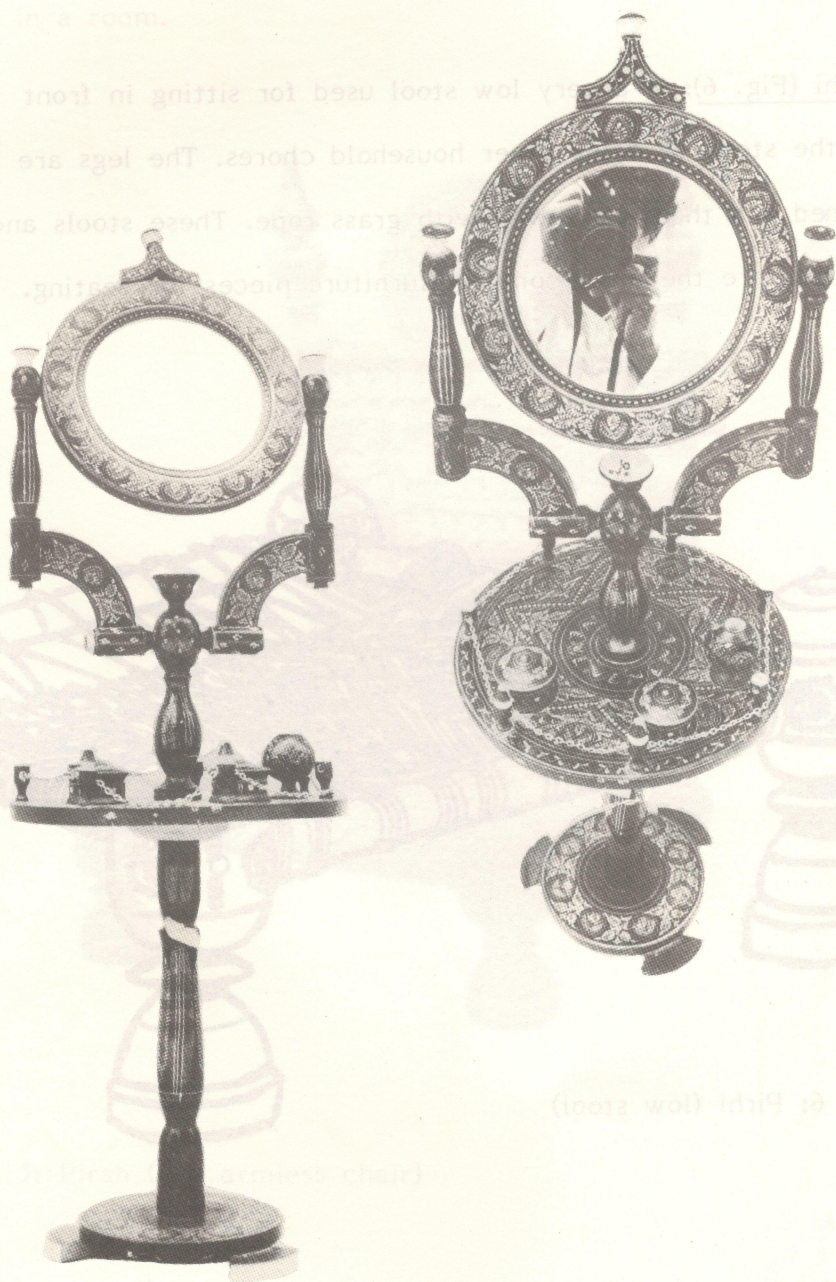


Fig. 7: Singhar Maiz (Dressing Table)

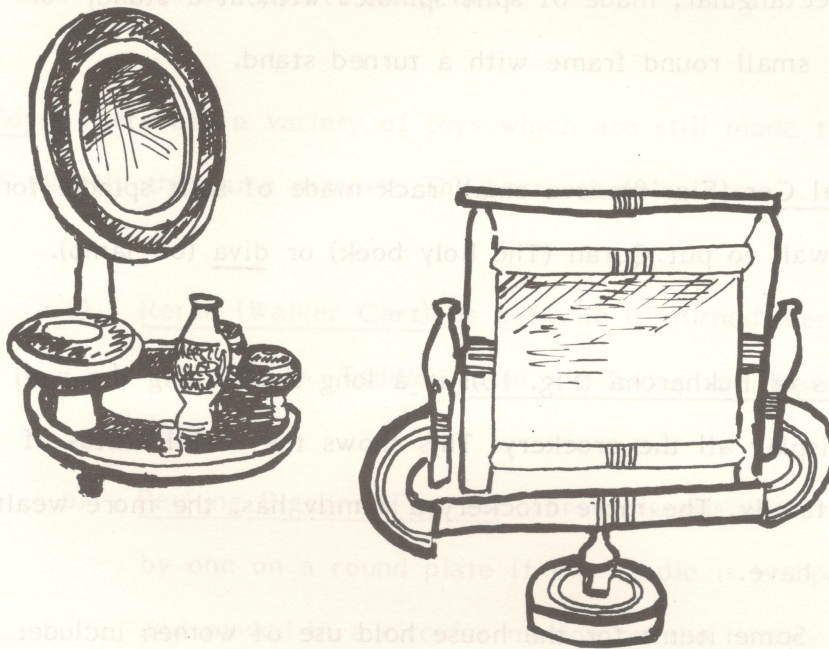


Fig. 8: Mirrors with turned frames

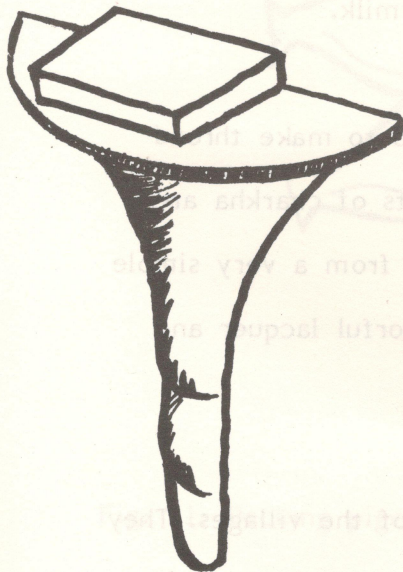


Fig. 9: Dēwal Ger
(Lamp Niche)

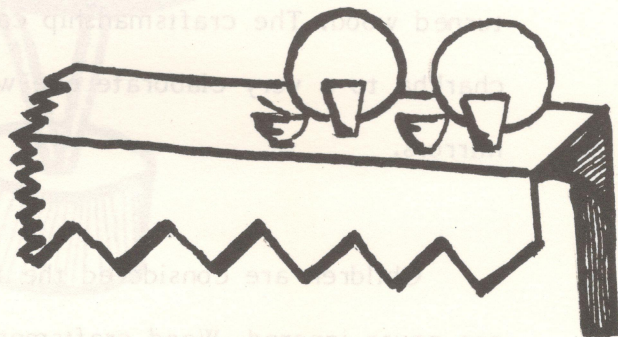


Fig.10: Bukharcha
(Shelf for crockery display)

Mirrors (Fig. 8): Two kinds of mirror frames are common.

- (1) rectangular, made of split spindles without a stand, or
- (2) a small round frame with a turned stand.

Diwal Ger (Fig. 9): is a small rack made of split spindle for the wall to put Quran (The holy book) or diva (oil lamp).

Kanis or Bukharcha (Fig. 10): is a long shelf along the wall to display all the crockery. This shows the social status of the family. The more crockery a family has, the more wealth they have.

Some items for the house hold use of women include:

Madhani: is a wooden shaft with four blades used to churn milk or yogurt to make butter and buttermilk.

Charkha: a traditional spinning wheel used to make thread from ginned raw cotton. Most of the parts of charkha are turned wood. The craftsmanship can vary from a very simple charkha to a very elaborate one with colorful lacquer and mirrors.

Children are considered the future of the villages. They are never ignored. Wood craftsmen did not forget to make things for children. The following items are a few examples:

Jhula (Swinging Bed): is a small swinging bed, hung on a stand. Infants are put to sleep in it.

Toys: There are a variety of toys which are still made today in exactly the same manner. The best examples are:

- a) Rerah (Walker Cart): is a frame of turned members with wheels. Toddlers hold the frame and learn to walk.
- b) Pecking Pigeons (Fig. 11): Three pigeons peck one by one on a round plate if the handle is grasped and moved in a circular motion on the horizontal plane.

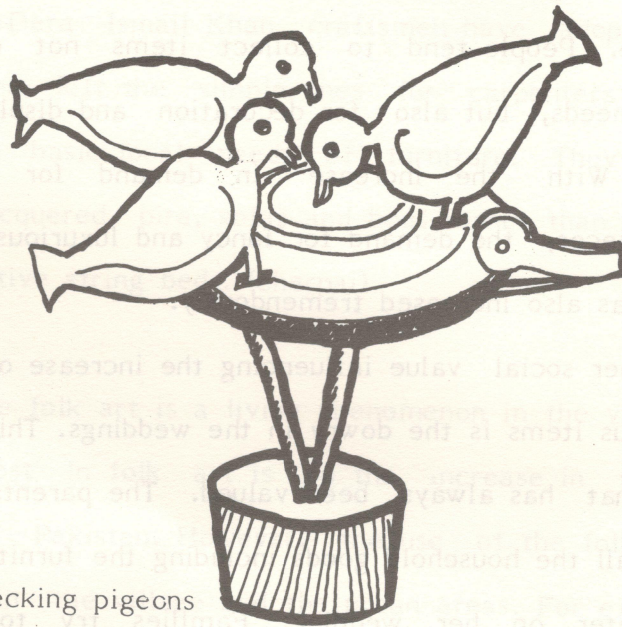


Fig. 11: Pecking pigeons

PRESENT WOODCRAFT

The woodcraft of Dera Ismail Khan has gone through many changes. Changes in the culture, society and households are reflected in the furniture. In Dera Ismail Khan many social and political factors have influenced the design, quality and style of furniture.

Social Values: The value of accumulating goods have developed recently. More people are beginning to rate this value higher in their priorities. Furniture, crockery and other household goods have begun to be more indicative of social status than ever before. People tend to collect items not only for utilitarian needs, but also for decoration and display of affluence. With the increase in demand for different furniture pieces, the demand for fancy and luxurious-looking furniture has also increased tremendously.

Another social value influencing the increase of demand for luxurious items is the dowry in the weddings. This is one tradition that has always been valued. The parents of the bride buy all the household goods including the furniture for their daughter on her wedding. Families try to provide luxurious furniture items to display their wealth

British Influence: Western influence on our culture has accentuated the social values we have borrowed from the British. With British influence, tables and chairs were added to the household furniture. A good example of this influence on the traditional furniture would be the development of the pira or low chair. The low seat of the pira has become higher and arms have been added. Currently, it looks more and more like a western chair.

In the Victorian era, sets of furniture pieces were preferred over single pieces. This preference reflects in the living rooms sets made at Dera Ismail Khan. Sofas and settees are made to match the pira. Bedroom sets of the similar design are also made.

The Dera Ismail Khan craftsmen have adopted elaborate designs and left the simple ones for carpenters who can fulfill the basic local needs of furniture. They prefer making lacquered pira, sofas and beds rather than simple and less lucrative string beds. (charpai)

While folk art is a living phenomenon in the villages, a new interest in folk art is on the increase in the urban centres of Pakistan. However, the use of the folk craft is different in the village and the urban areas. For example, a hand-woven straw changer (platter) is used to serve bread in

the village whereas the same changer might be used to decorate a wall to give a folk look in lavish urban interiors.

Madhani (wooden device to make buttermilk) and Charkha (spinning wheel) were once made for household use. Today in the urban areas, models of these pieces are used as decorative items. These models are usually reduced to a fifth or a fourth of their original size.

The trend among upper and upper middle class is to have period European furniture. Many manufacturing centres of folk furniture are losing their traditional designs by copying European furniture.

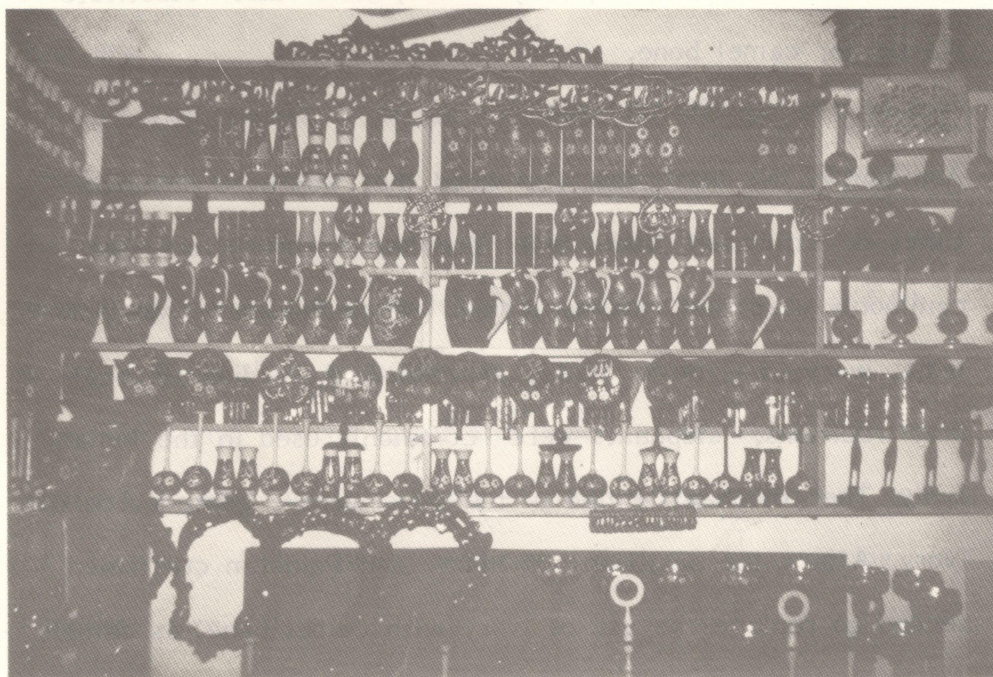
Folk furniture still has its place in luxurious settings of urban areas. However the style of Dera Ismail Khan lacquerwork is being reproduced in other cities. This reduces the demand for furniture of Dera Ismail Khan, since similar kind of furniture is more easily (and sometimes more cheaply) accessible from other areas.

Economy of Craftsmen: Craftsmen of Dera Ismail Khan are forced to compete with furniture manufacturing in other cities so it is necessary to have competitive low prices. It is thus difficult for craftsmen to make a profit with rising cost of materials. They sometimes substitute cheap material

for the original ones to keep the cost low. For example, they sometimes use inferior quality wood, and also substitute plastic for camel bone.

Availability of Materials: The wood that was used in earlier times is still used today. In previous years ivory was commonly used for ornamentation. When Pakistan was part of India, ivory was more readily available. According to local oral traditions, elephants were commonly used in the Indian army. The elephants killed in the wars were a good source of ivory. After the partition of India and Pakistan craftsmen tended to replace the use of ivory with camel bone, as camels are commonly found in Pakistan. In reality, camel bone was the rule and ivory inlay was only done on commission for a wealthy notable.

Development of Tourism: Tourism has been the most influential factor on the woodcraft of D.I Khan. Local and foreign tourists have influenced the demand and style of woodcraft items. The shops selling these woodcraft items have become like souvenir stores. Since the tourist trade provides a large part of the craftsmen's business, decorative items tend to be more popular because they bring in more money. These



Figs. 12 and 13: Dera Ismail Khan woodcraft shops displaying wares of lacquered and decoratively carved objects.

items are small in size so that it is easier for tourists to transport them.

Decorative lacquered and carved items fill most of the shelves now (Fig. 11,12). Examples include: bowls, water sets, mirrors, animal figures, candle stands, vases, dry fruit containers, lacquered plates and wooden boxes. The colours used are bright as compared to the subtle colours used in past. The patterns are not as intricate and sophisticated as seen in the spherical container of late 18th century.

PRODUCTION CENTRE

There are no formal training centres in Dera Ismail Khan. The art has been passed from generation to generation. Usually it stays within the same family. Boys in their childhood start working in the workshops as apprentices. Basic skills are mastered before they can learn the more complicated techniques.

Craftsmen cluster together in communities called mohalla. All workshops are close together. This atmosphere is quite encouraging for the young craftsmen. They take pride in carrying on the family tradition. Young craftsmen compete with each other to excel in the skills and intricacies of

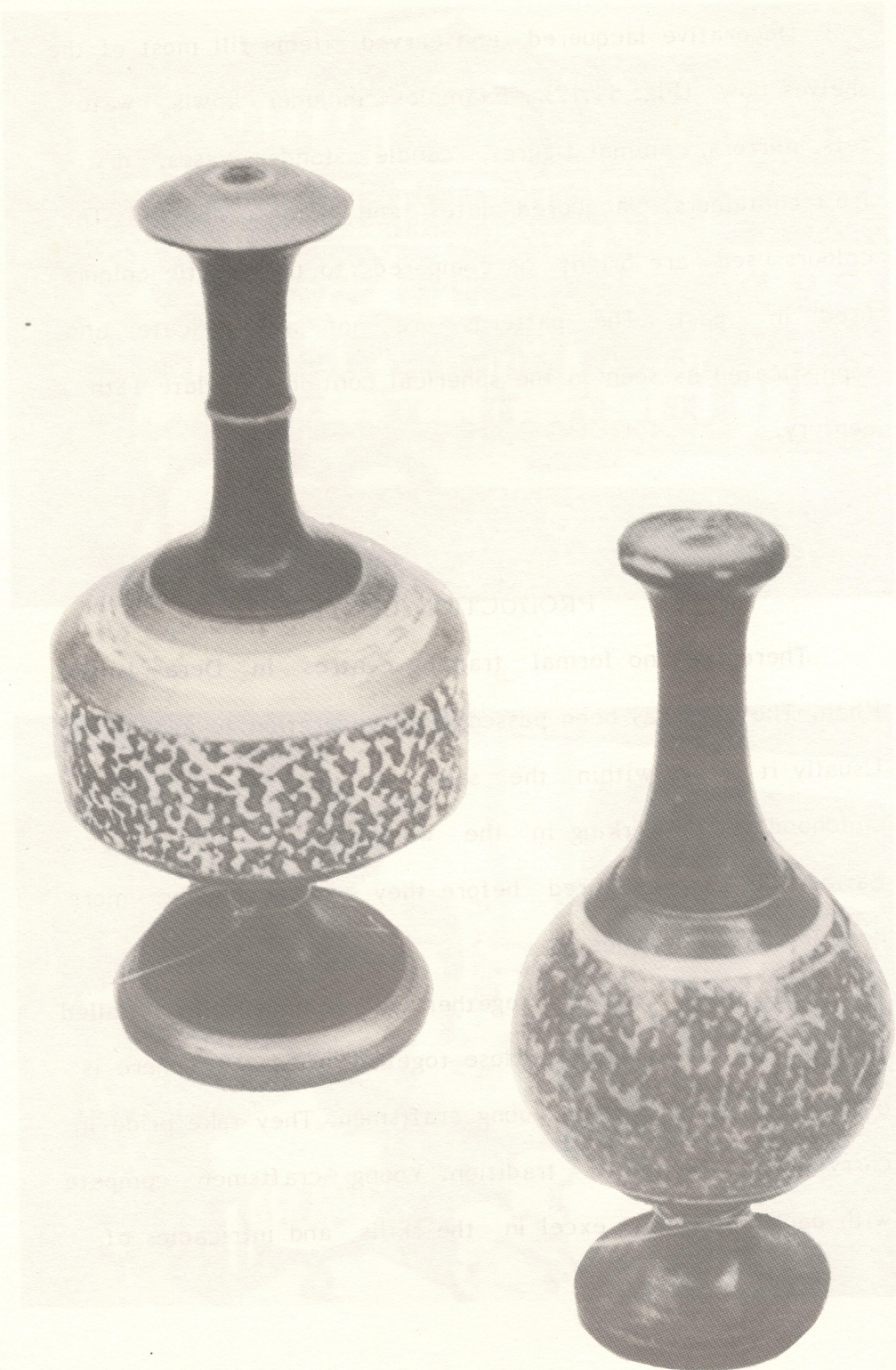


Fig. 14: Turned vases decorated with etching

design. This excellence makes the older generation proud of their children.

In the past, women in the families were trained to do the lacquer work. With their finer fingers, they could etch intricate patterns. Currently, women are involved in the craft of embroidery. This field has been recently developed and pays well.

There are small handicraft shops in the town accessible to common people. Most of these shops are clustered around the craftsmen community, which excludes the problem of transportation. This market specializes in furniture and woodcraft.

There are large shops of furniture located in the general shopping centres, closer to the main stream of shoppers.

Shopkeepers sometimes take their wares to display and sell in furniture shops of other cities. The shopkeepers take order for custom-made furniture and decorative woodcraft. Since there are no catalogues, customers usually verbally describe the objects or explain the variations in an already finished furniture piece. They can also specify the colours and ornamentation. Large pieces of furniture like beds and sofa sets are usually custom-made, as it is not very practical to keep them in small shops.

Shopkeepers pass on these orders to the craftsmen. Craftsmen are responsible for the whole process of production, from getting the raw materials to the finishing of the final piece. Finished pieces are then sold to the shopkeepers.

Most craftsmen work independently in their workshops. However, craftsmen have access to a vertical saw and other machines shared by the community.

Tools and techniques of furniture manufacturing have rarely changed in Dera Ismail Khan during the last few decades. The use of any machines is minimum. Hand tools are still predominantly used. Every workshop has certain essential tools.

The development of tools usually affects the technique and design of craftwork. In Dera Ismail Khan, this development has made some stages of the craft easier for the craftsperson, but has had little effect on the overall process of woodwork.

TOOLS

The following is a limited list of some important tools used for turnery.

Lathe (Ada) (Fig. 15a): is a tool used for turning wood, which has two parts. The wood piece rests on protruding ends of both the parts.

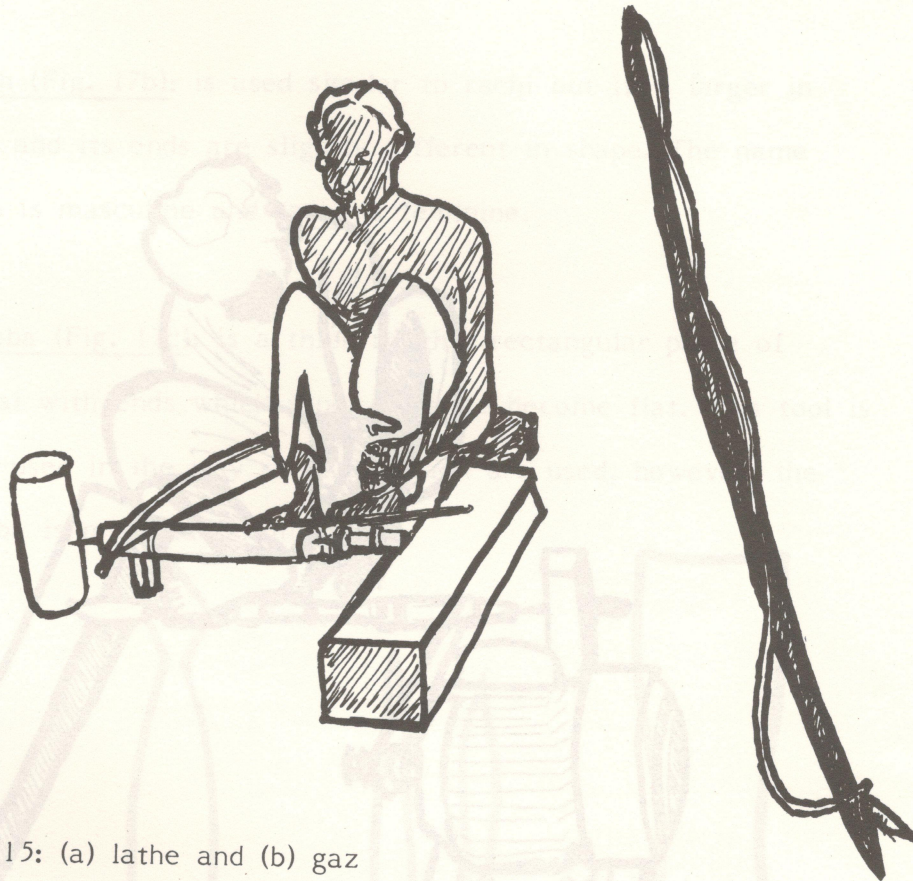


Fig. 15: (a) lathe and (b) gaz

Gaz (Fig. 15b): is a lathe bow. It has a thin soft arched piece of wood which is tied from both ends with a string of dried goat's gut. This is used to turn the piece of wood on the lathe in a to-and-fro motion.

Electric Motor (Fig. 16): Today in some workshops the gaz has been replaced by electric motors. The advantage of this modern technology is that the craftsman has both hands free to control the work.

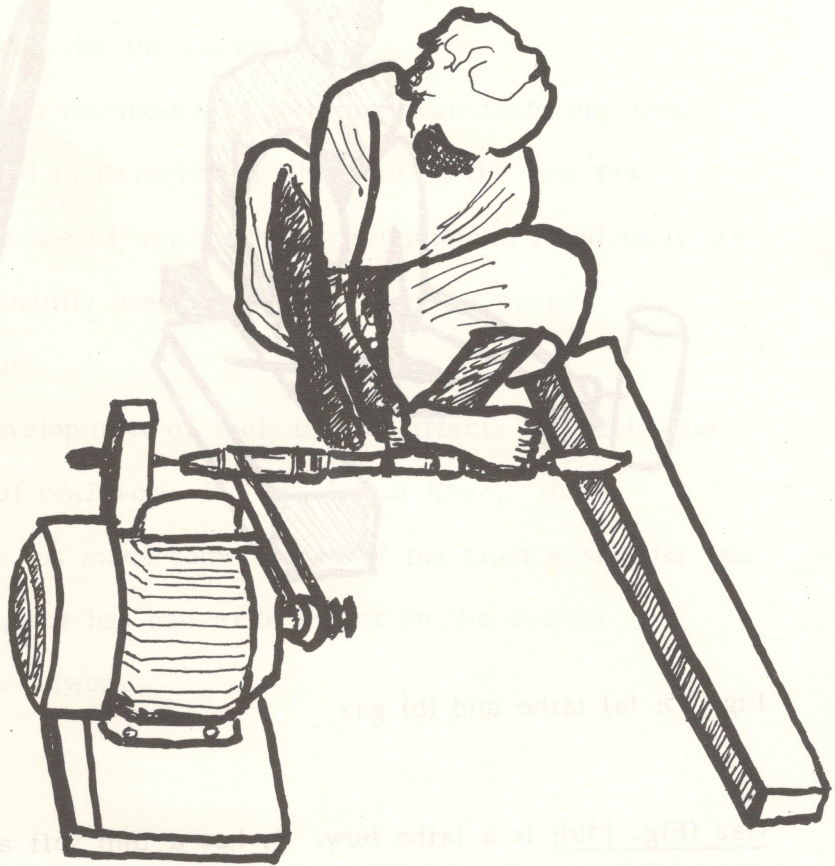


Fig. 16: Lathe driven by an electric motor

Rachi (fig.17a): is thin strip of iron which is large enough to hold in one's hand. The ends are flat and squarish or pointed. When the wood is turned on the ada or lathe, different kinds of grooves and curves are made.

Rach (Fig. 17b): is used similar to rachi but it is larger in size and its ends are slightly different in shape. The name rach is masculine and rachi is feminine.

Ramba (Fig. 17c): is a thick roughly rectangular piece of metal with ends which taper down to become flat. This tool is also used in the way rachi and rach are used, however, the ramba is much larger in size.

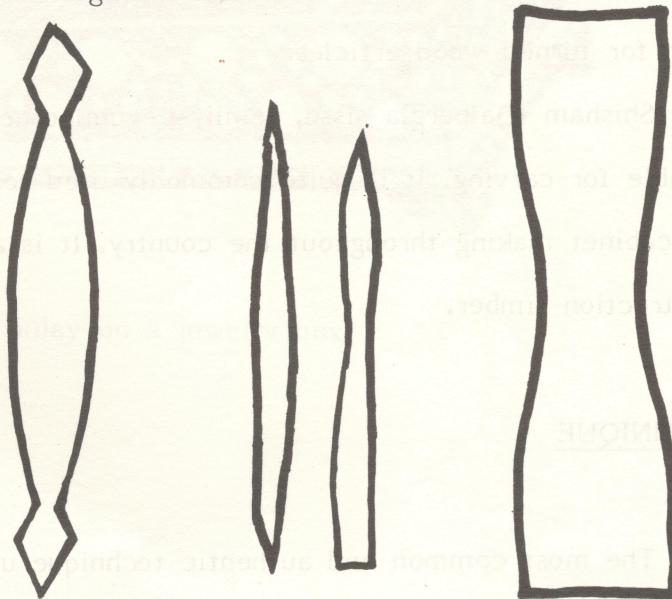


Fig. 17: Tools for turning:

(a) rachi, (b) rach and (c) ramba

MATERIALS

The basic material used for furniture is wood. One of the local woods most commonly used is farash or gaz (Tamarin aphylla, genus - Tamaricaceae). It is a hard, close grained wood which is used for turned wood articles, agricultural implements, carts, firewood and charcoal. As lacquer covers the wood surface, the beauty of the wood is not the primary consideration. The suitability of the wood to the technique used is more important.

Another wood found in the irrigated areas of Punjab is bhan (botanical name - Populus euphratica, family-Salicaceae). This wood is extensively used in Dera Ismail Khan for turned wood articles.

Shisham (*Dalbergia sisso*, family-Leguminosae) is suitable for carving. It is quite commonly used for furniture and cabinet making throughout the country. It is also used as construction timber.

TECHNIQUE

The most common and authentic technique used in Dera Ismail Khan is turning. The wood items are turned on a lathe and lacquered in bright colours.

Carving is another technique used by Dera Ismail Khan craftsmen. They are skilled and experienced to carve out intricate patterns on tables, tea trollies and vases.

Beautiful inlay of camel bone is done on tea trays, table tops and boxes (Figs. 18, 19, 20).

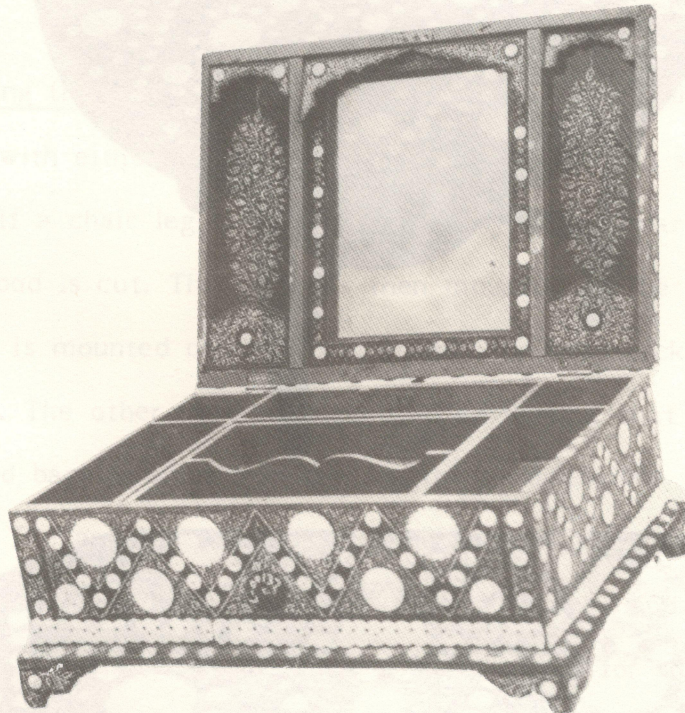
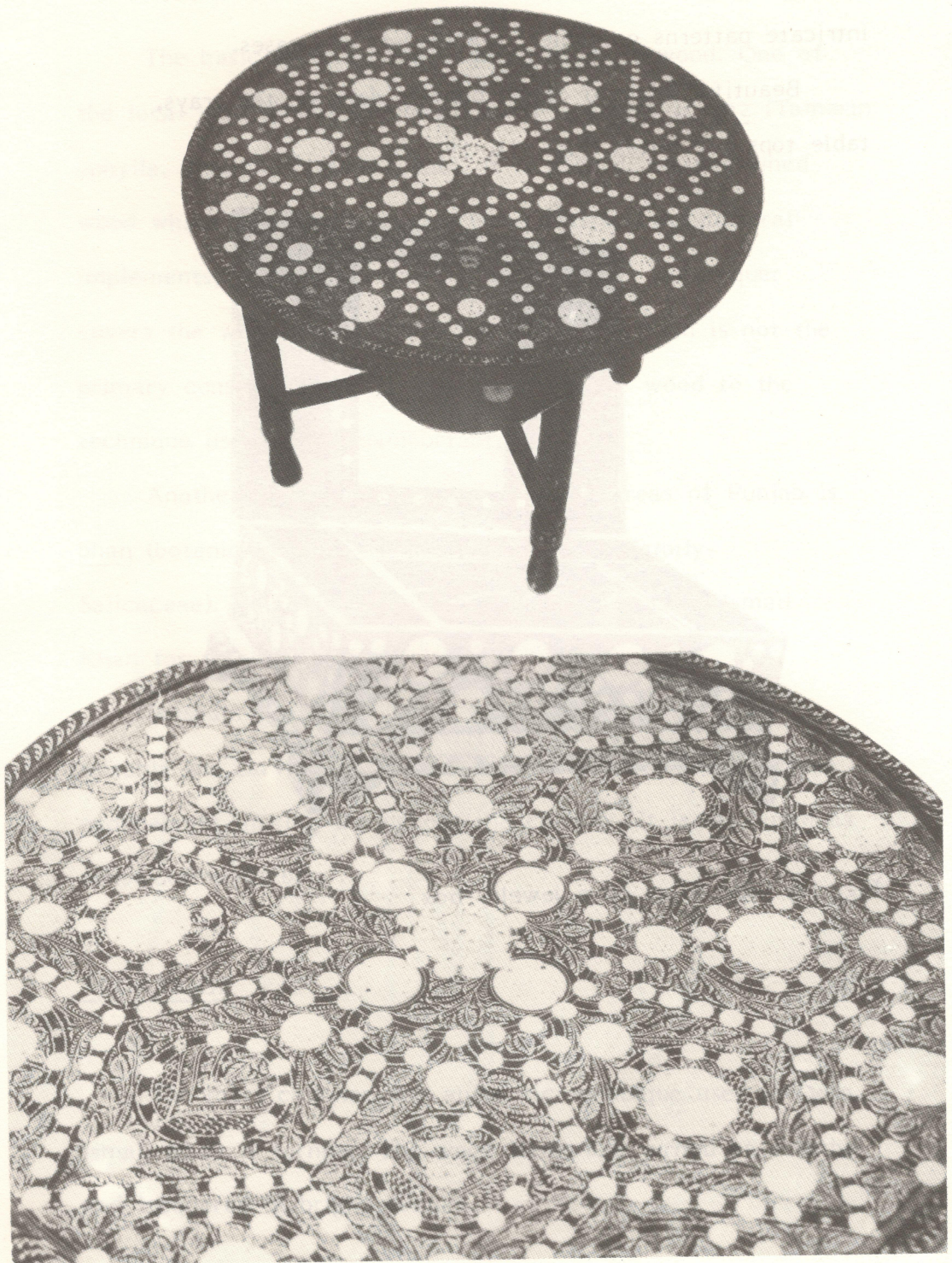


Fig. 18: Bone inlay on a jewelry box



Figs. 19 and 20: Table inlaid with camel bone and decorated with turned bone studs

Recently, Dera Ismail Khan craftsmen have begun to use the techniques of carving and inlay more, to achieve a variety in the items produced. However, lacquered turnery is still their favorite technique. A brief description of this technique is given here.

Turning (Fig. 21): The wood is cut in the desired shape and size with either a hand saw, ari or a big electric saw called ara. If a chair leg is desired, a roughly rectangular piece of wood is cut. This piece is then mounted on the ada. One point is mounted on the fixed upright, or headstock, of the lathe. The other point is placed on an upright that could be moved back and forth in the lengthwise direction.

The wood is rotated with the help of a '°gaz', a wooden bow, which is moved back and forth with one hand. With the other hand and both the feet, tools are used for shaping the wood, as the craftsmen sits on a cushion in front of the lathe. The tools like '°rach' and '°rachi' are used with a certain pressure to shape the rotating wood.

Now that some lathes have electric motors the craftsmen can use both their hands for shaping the wood.

After the turned piece is finished by sanding it is ready to be lacquered.



Fig. 21: A chair leg being turned on a lathe

LACQUER WORK

The word lack, lac lacca or laksha in different languages is possibly derived from the Persian word lac or Hindi lakh, meaning a hundred thousand. It indicates the multitudes of insects required to produce lac. The females of these insects (Laccifer lacca) exude a gummy substance which forms the basis for true lacquer. The material is imported, as these insects are not commercially exploited in Pakistan.

Lac is the key ingredient in lacquer work. It is heated to its melting point. It is then poured on a flat stone, where a powdered dye is added as it cools (Fig.20). The dye is mixed with the help of a ramba or any flat iron piece. As the lac gradually hardens, strips are made for the convenience of use.

The ware is mounted on the lathe again. It is covered with putty which is called the base coat. Different colours of lakh are applied in successive layers (Fig. 22). The lighter colours are applied before the darker ones. Black, if used, is always the last coat.

After all the layers are applied, the piece is rubbed with a soft bark of a date tree ghosa. It is finished by rubbing sesame oil with a piece of gauze, to give the ware a shine.



Fig. 22: Powdered dye being mixed with lac



Fig. 23: After the base coat, the coloured lacquer is being applied

Etching (Fig. 24): Etching is done carefully with the help of a small needle. Bands of colours are etched while the ware is on the lathe. The pressure on the needle depends on the desire colour. For lighter colours it is pressed harder.

Flowers and other patterns are etched after the piece is taken off from the lathe.



Fig. 24: A bed post being etched with a border design

SURFACE DECORATION

Not much is known about the development of patterns. The most common pattern is circular strips on the turned pieces. it is easy to achieve this on a lathe. On these strips geometrical or floral patterns are etched.

As quoted earlier, Lockwood Kipling (1883) described the pattern as fernlike scrolls of microscopic fineness. The motif he mentioned was small circles. These circles can still be seen in a form of a border etched on the colored strips.

One can see the influence of Islamic art very clearly, as there are no human figures represented in the patterns.

Decorative plates are often etched with overall floral patterns (Figs. 25, 26). Symmetric balance is preferred. Circles are used extensively on the plates. Circular border go well with the circular shape of the plate. Motifs of flowers enclosed in circles are also common.

Fig. 25: After the base coat, the coloured lacquer is being applied.

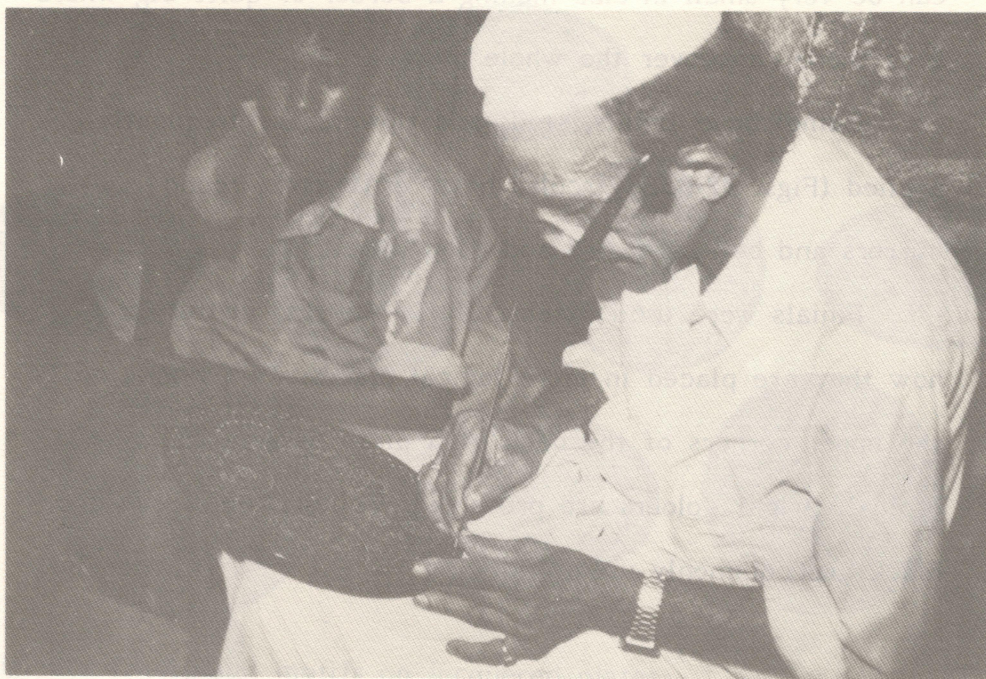


Fig. 25: Etching on a lacquered plate



Fig. 26: Examples of patterns on lacquered plates depicting use of symmetry and balance

Ambli or kayri is a common motif (Figs. 27 to 31). This can be very small in size making a border or quite big where 2 of these can cover the whole plate.

Camel bone finials, studs and flowers are frequently applied (Figs. 32-33). Circular brass ornaments, round mirrors and bells are also added on (Figs. 34).

Finials were used extensively in the last century but now they are placed in more logical places. Two finials on the upper corners of the back of a pirah or sofa are very typical. Bright colours are preferred. Yellow, red, green and black are commonly used.



Fig. 27: Lacquered bowls with lids

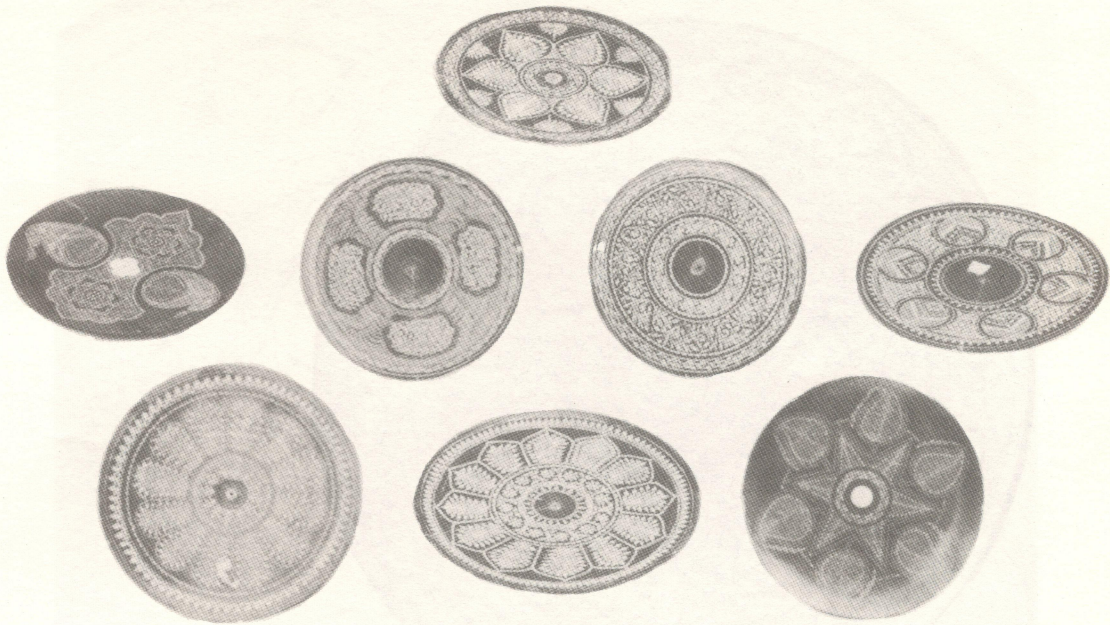


Fig. 28: Traditional motifs on lacquered plates

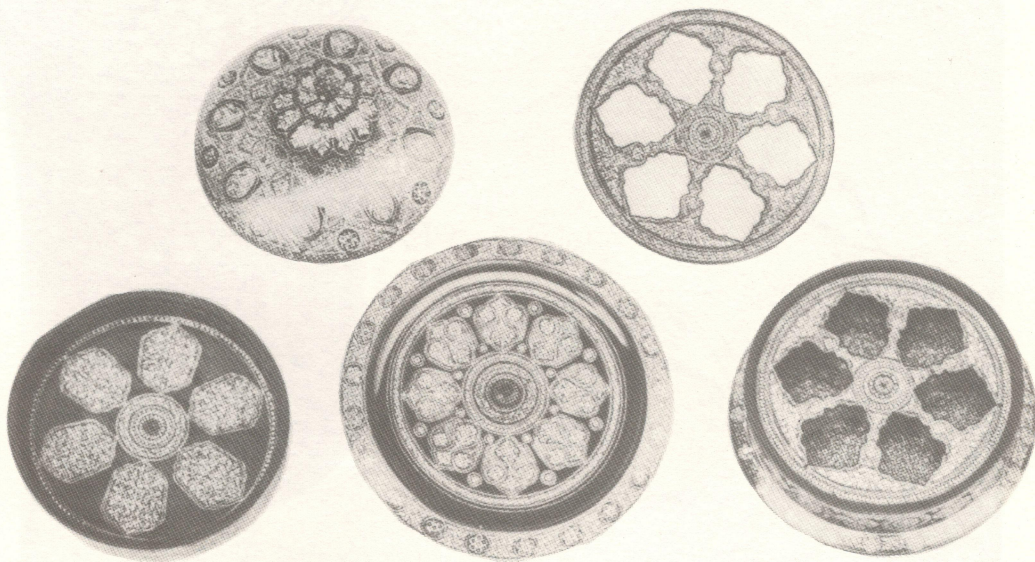


Fig. 29: Intricate etching on a round box with a lid and a decorative plate



Fig. 30: Use of traditional motif ("keri") on a decorative plate and a cylindrical box

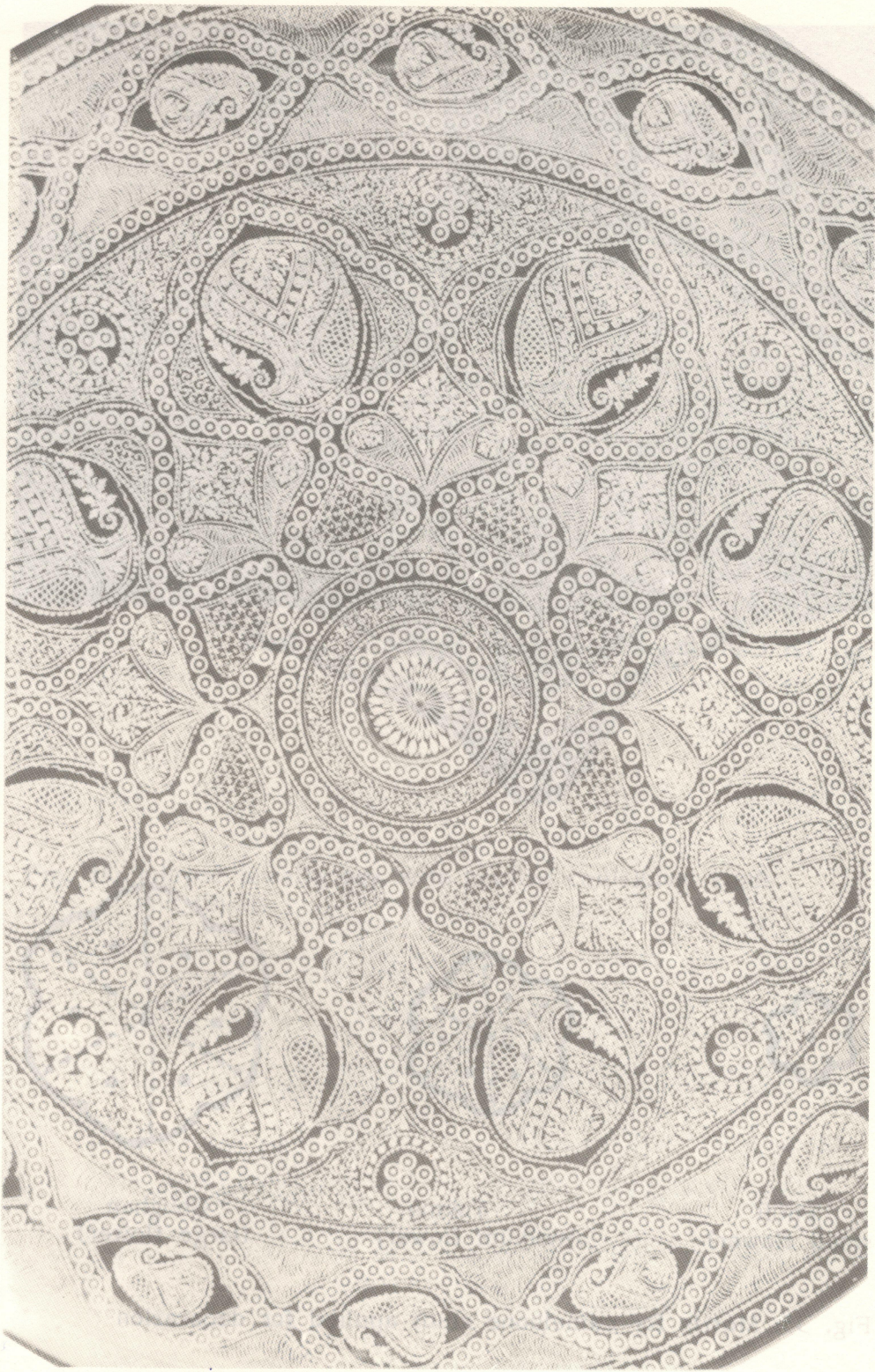


Fig. 31: Closeup of an etched decorative plate

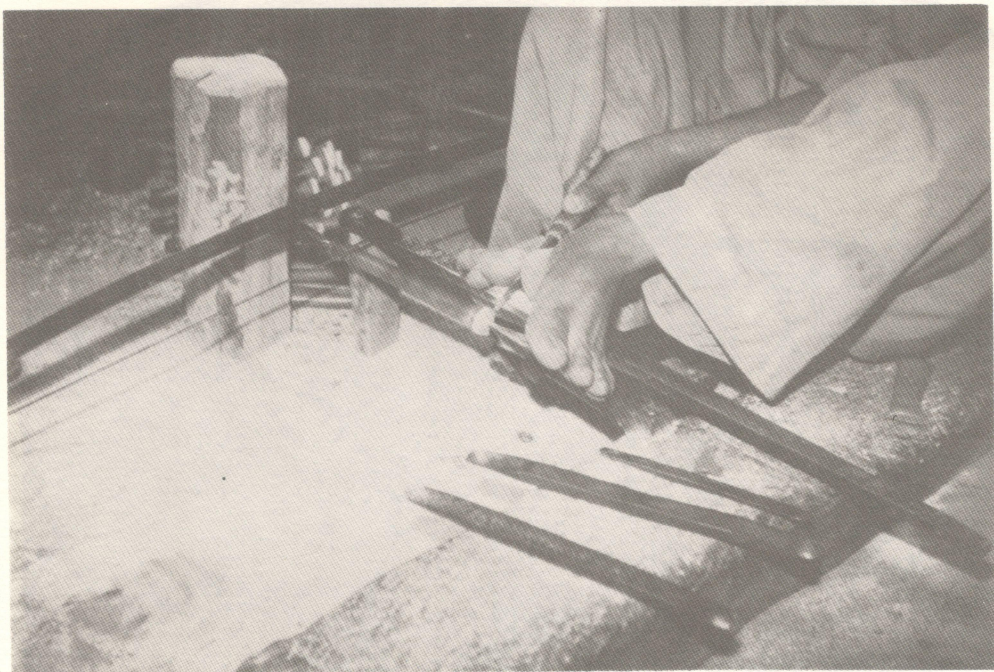
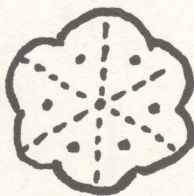


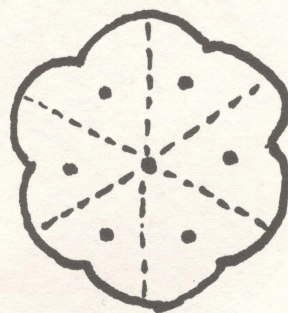
Fig. 32: Camelbone floral studs turned on a lathe



Phuli
(small flower)



Tukma
(medium flower)



Chughan
(large flower)

Fig. 33: Motifs for camelbone studs applied for decoration