

JOHAN G. REINHARD, New Lenox, Ill.:

Film E 2194

Newar, Kumhale Caste (Nepal) – Pottery-Making

Author of the Publication: JOHAN G. REINHARD

With 1 Figure

Summary of the Film:

Newar, Kumhale Caste (Nepal) – Pottery-Making. A potter is shown collecting clay, mixing it, forming pots on the wheel, working on the formed pot, adding a decorative stamp and coloring to pots, firing and storing the pottery.

Inhalt des Films:

Newar, Kumhale-Kaste (Nepal) – Töpferei. Ein Töpfer holt Ton, bereitet ihn zu und formt Gefäße auf der Töpferscheibe. Anschließend bearbeitet er die Gefäße, drückt ein Muster ein, bemalt zwei Gefäße, brennt sie und hebt sie auf.

Résumé du Film:

Newar, Caste des Kumhale (Népal) – Poterie. Un potier recueille de la terre, malaxe l'argile et façonne des pots au tour. Ensuite il travaille l'ébauche, la décore par impression, colorie deux pots, les soumet à cuisson et les met de côté.

General Preliminary Remarks¹

Pottery making in the Katmandu Valley is traditionally the occupation of the Newars, a Tibeto-Burman speaking people who make up more than half the total population in the Valley. The Newar potter caste (Kumhale) is found especially concentrated in the town of Thimi, located about five miles east of Katmandu. There are two kinds of potters, those who make red pottery and those who specialize in black pottery. There was said to be no black pottery made in Thimi, but it

¹ The research upon which this article is based was supported by grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Film material was contributed by the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, Göttingen.

is made in the city of Bhaktapur. These groups may freely intermarry, share cooked rice, etc. It should be noted that the Kumhale only make pottery; bricks and tiles being made by others.

Potters must pay an annual tax of one load of pots to the government. In return for this they receive a paper granting them permission to take clay free from any fields they choose, except during periods when the fields are under cultivation. Previously they had to give each individual farmer a certain amount of pots depending upon the amount of clay taken from his fields.

Glazed pottery is not made by the Kumhale but is made by the Department of Cottage Industries in Katmandu. Although they use modern methods and machinery, they do not offer much competition to the Kumhale. They concentrate on making articles not made by the village potters, such as ink wells, paperweights, ash trays, etc.

There are four types of clay, two of which are used most frequently for the making of the majority of the pots, one which is used mainly for making wash basins, and one which is used in a diluted form as a sort of paint, which is yellow before firing and red after the pot has been fired. Grey clay is relatively plentiful, and does not require normally as much work to dig out being found at depths of from 6" to 3'. As with all of the clays actually utilized for the making of pots, the potter digs wherever there are small pieces laying loose on the surface. This is no indication that there will be sufficient clay underground, however, and in a year a potter may dig in more than 30 places before he can find sufficient clay. Once he has decided on a spot, he will mark out a circle around the area indicating that this is his area for the period during which he actually remains there. After leaving the spot anyone can use it. He will also try not to leave any clay on the surface as this is liable to be taken by another potter while he is gone. He will continue digging only so long as he sees that the quality of the clay gets better the deeper he digs, otherwise he will abandon the spot and move to a new location. He will return to the same place so long as the clay remains of good quality, which is usually not for more than a few days as other potters will have by this time also taken much of the clay. Grey clay is the most important from the standpoint of quantity used. It is mixed with black clay in a ratio of 12 parts to 1.

Black clay is more difficult to find, being often 6' underground. It is believed to add strength to grey clay, but is too heavy to be used alone (the walls would collapse during the process), and would turn to powder if fired. On the other hand grey clay would crack if used without black clay. These clays are both found in the fields near Thimi and form the basis for the vast majority of the pottery made there. The potter gathers the clay unassisted as he requires it, usually 5–6 times a year. If necessary, he can borrow clay from his friends.

Brownish clay is mainly used in the making of wash basins and basins in which pots are set to be worked upon.

Yellow clay is only used in a diluted liquid form as decorative paint for certain kinds of pots. It is found in small caves in the forest area of Godavari to the south of Thimi. The potter goes there usually once year and takes about 50 pounds. It is applied by hand with a cloth dipped in the solution.

The reddish color, which the pots have after firing, is probably due to the clays in the Thimi area being high in ferric oxide content. Black spots which occur on some pots after firing are thought to be caused by wet straw not being burned sufficiently. This will occasionally cause pots to crack.

Sand is obtained from a stream bed located outside of Thimi. Its basic use is to be worked into the clay after the clay has partially dried and while it is being beaten and reshaped. It serves to strengthen the pot by keeping the clay from being too plastic.

A wooden staff (*nol*) is used and from it are attached nets, baskets, etc. It is set horizontally across the shoulders and forms a balance for goods to be carried. It is used in gathering clay, taking pots to sell and barter, etc.

The wheel (*chakka*) is constructed of wood about 125 cm in diameter and ca. 8 cm thick. A circular piece of wood 25 cm in diameter and 5 cm thick is set in the center of the wheel. It is used to keep the lump of clay which is being worked raised up from the wheel itself. A pointed piece of iron serves as the pivot for the wheel and this fits into a small socket in a mound of clay which keeps the wheel above the ground. A small hole is made in the outer edge of the wheel in which a stick can be placed and turned to start the wheel revolving.

Various stamps (*palang*) are used as decoration on some pots. These are made by the potter and are of his own design (although similar to those made by other potters). They have no significance other than that of decorative effect. A chalk powder is used in connection with the stamps. The stamp is first dipped in the powder before being applied to the wet clay. This is supposed to keep the stamp from sticking to the clay and to make the mark more distinct.

Background to the Film

The clay is gathered only a few minutes walk from Thimi. A hoe (*kuwa*) is used to dig it out. When the clay is brought back from the fields, it is stored in separate piles according to the clay type, dampened if necessary, and compressed into one solid mass. The piles are kept to the sides so as to leave an open space for other work.

Some clay is always kept ready mixed in a separate pile. The potter will mix the clays (i.e. the grey and black clays) when he has free time and as the need calls for it. This is done by first spreading sand on the floor so that the clay won't stick to it, and then placing the desired quantity of black clay on it in a wide, flat lump. On top of this is placed the grey clay. It is pressed down by vigorously driving one leg into the mass. This will be done until it has been flattened and then it will be rolled up, more sand spread out, and same process will be gone through again. The clay is also broken up with the hands and slammed together, and with his fingers the potter will try to find any small stones, etc., that might be in the clay. It takes usually about a half to one hour's work before the two clays are thoroughly mixed. They are then broken into small lumps ready to be used on the wheel or are rolled into larger lumps and stored. The small stones will cause the pot to break during the drying or the firing process. If this happened during the drying process, the potter would simply soak the pot in water and use the clay to make another pot. If the pot breaks

during the firing, he has no choice but to throw it away or make use of the piece in some way.

The potter will generally bring out several lumps of clay and set them near the wheel. He will then set the wheel revolving at a high speed. Taking a lump, he first takes off any sand that might have adhered to the bottom and then sets it on the raised center piece. He will wet the clay with water and begin to work up the lump, press in the top with his thumbs to form the rim, and place one hand inside and hold one hand on the outside to finish the basic shaping of the pot. He may in some cases use a piece of wood to smooth the side of the pot and to etch in the fine lines around the neck of certain pots. The basic shaping completed, he then takes a string and sets it part way around the pot, it slicing through the clay with the potter lifting it off the wheel immediately. This process is used for the majority of the pots (see REINHARD [1]).

The pot will then be set in the sun for about three hours if the sun is bright and turned every half an hour. After that it will be set in the shade to dry for a period of one to one-and-a-half days before further work will be undertaken. If the pot cracks for some reason during this period, the potter will dampen one side and press the other side of the crack over it and smoothe it out. The time to be dried is the same for almost all pots.

After the pot has been partially dried for this period, the potter will take it and begin to work on the sides and bottom of the pot. He will do this by applying sand to the inside and pressing it in with a pestle (*dadonga*). A flat wooden paddle (*phanda*) is used for beating the outside. The pot is usually set in a bowl into which sand is thrown occasionally, and which adheres to the bottom of the pot. During this process, the potter will also be feeling for any small pebbles which he may have missed when he mixed the clays. He will use the *dadonga* as a counterforce to the beating of the *phanda* besides using it to press sand into the clay on the bottom. He will add clay to the bottom at this time. The pot will then be smoothed over by using a piece of pottery such as an old rim, by using a piece bamboo, or by using his hands. The pot will be set aside in the sun for an hour while the potter works on other pots and will then be taken into the storehouse (*jasa*) where it must remain to dry for a period of at least 14-16 days before it can be fired. If the climate is moist, pots may be brought out in the sun.

If a stamp is to be applied to a pot it is put on at this time. This is done by rolling a circular length of mixed clay and pressing it on to the pot. The stamp will then be covered with chalk and pressed into the fresh clay.

The yellow diluted clay will also be applied to certain pots at this time. In some cases it will not be applied until immediately before firing, and this will give a deep red color which is much darker than the light red color which results if it is applied long before hand. It is usually applied only to a certain area of the pot.

If a potter has no one to help him, it may take him a month or more before he has accumulated enough pots to make it worth while for him to fire them. It should be noted that much depends on outside factors such as festivals, kinds of pots required at the time, etc., as to the amount which can be made during a specific period of time. The potter usually makes a few of one kind of pot, then works on pots which

have already dried sufficiently, mixes clay, and so on, during the course of a normal working day. One potter estimated that he made about 4-5 finished pots a day (normal size) on the average. This would be a total of about 200 pots for a single firing, but he may also combine his pots with a friend's and the total may amount to as many as 400 pots.

The open place (*livi*) where the pots are fired is usually located near the storehouse. If the *livi* is owned by a friend, the potter would probably not have to pay anything for the use of it. Several friends may use a *livi* and they try to coordinate their activities so that no one need be kept waiting.

Two to three hours before the pots are to be fired, they will be set in the sun so as to be completely dried. Women may also help at this time. No woman can actually participate in the making of the pot, but they will often help with the firing of the pots, carrying pots out of the storehouse, piling them up, and carrying them back inside after firing. The pots will be turned in the sun about every half hour so that all parts will be dried.

The best material used for firing is thought to be rice or wheat straw, but if this can not be found in sufficient quantity or they do not have enough money to buy it, pine needles or even leaves can be used. They burn quickly, however, and straw is much preferred, but they may even be combined, the quick burning material being placed at the bottom and the straw placed around and on top of it to serve as a covering. If the straw is bought, it probably will cost from 25-30 Nepali rupees (about \$ 2.50 in 1968). One potter estimated that about 150 rupees (\$ 15) would be earned from an average firing of about 200 pots, and about half of that would not be paid in cash but would be obtained in foodstuffs, etc., such as maize, rice, lentils. Straw constitutes one of the potter's greatest expenses, therefore, and he occasionally will be forced to go to the forest to the south of Thimi to collect pine needles and leaves, which he will mix with the straw. About 100 bundles of straw (approximately 4' long and 6" thick) are considered necessary for an average firing.

The firing usually begins at around midday. The pots are piled basically according to size. The largest pots will form the bottom row, with pots piled on top and in rows to the side of them. Straw is placed between every row. The pots are usually placed with the necks facing out as it is thought that the smoke would stay inside them and not escape through the holes, and that the pots might slip out if all were placed with the necks facing in.

The smaller pots will often be placed near the outside of the pile and set into crevices between larger pots. Pots set furthest out will often be turned facing in so that the stick used for poking air holes will not lodge inside them and perhaps break. The potter is careful to insure that the pots come in as little contact as possible, so that there will be less chance of breakage. Straw is finally placed vertically around the entire pile and laid horizontally across the top, and straw at the bottom is pushed in by foot. It is thought that this will cause the fire to burn better, but not everyone will do this.

Ashes from previous firings are then brought out in baskets from the storehouse and thrown on to the pile and spread out evenly to a thickness of about 5-8 cm with sticks and pressed down firmly.

Then holes will be made along the bottom of the pile to enable the fire to be started. There are normally four holes made for the four sides of the pile, but there is no set number. Burning straw is placed into them to start the fire going. After the fire has been burning well the holes are covered, and the work is considered finished for the day. It is usually late in the afternoon by the time everything has been completed.



Carrying pots to the market place
Photography J.G. REINHARDT

The pile is left undisturbed during the night, but in the early morning holes will be poked into the pile to enable smoke to escape and air in to assist in the burning. These holes are approximately 35 cm apart and are usually placed along the bottom, about 250 cm high up, and along the top ridge itself. The size of the piles vary from 3' high to 6' high, and from 6' long to 12' long, with the width from 4' to 7' wide. The holes are repoked about every three hours until the sun has set in the evening. Before the sun rises the following morning, work is begun dismantling the pile, as the ashes are somewhat cooler at that time. The ashes are scooped into baskets and taken back to the storehouse. The hotter ashes are displaced with a stick and pots will also be handled in this way. After they have been cooled for a period, the normal sized and small pots are tapped to see if they sound sturdy. A dull ring indicates a weak pot and it will be discarded. The pots are then taken inside to be stored until they are to be sold.

Notes on Making of the Film

The main body of the film was made in the town of Thimi during the month of April, 1968. Scenes of the application of the stamp and mixing of the clays were filmed in August, 1968. The wheel was set up outside for the film. The mixing of clays normally takes place inside the potter's workshop, and therefore had to be performed outside to enable filming it. The film was taken near the workshop of TEJ BAHADUR PRAJAPATI, the principle character appearing in the film. He was 53 years and had learned pottery making from his father. Aside from pottery making, he also works as a tenant on about one quarter of an acre of land. The workshop is shared by TEJ and his deceased brother's two sons. They do not, however, normally help one another or share profits.

Technical data: camera: Bell and Howell Model 70-D; lenses: Switar 16 mm, Bausch and Lomb 25 mm, Yvar 75 mm; camera speed: 24 f/s; film material: Kodak Plus X, black and white negative film type 7231.

Description of Film

The potter walks to the fields, digs out clay from two locations, and returns to his workshop. He brings clay out, mixes it, and removes small stones. Small lumps are made, beaten together, rolled, and then taken into the workshop. The potter brings out a roll of clay and beats it on a stone. He wets the center of the wheel, and places the clay roll on it. He spins the wheel, wets his hands, and forms a pot. After cutting through the bottom of the pot with a string, he lifts it from the wheel and makes a pattern on its rim with his fingers. He forms another pot, using a stick to smoothe the outside of it. He next works on the pot with a pestle. A decorative stamp is applied on a larger pot. Diluted clay is applied to small pots. The potter then emerges with large pots to form the center of a pile of pottery to be fired. Straw is thrown down from a storehouse and placed around the pots. Ashes are placed over the entire pile and patted down firm with a pole. A hole for a fire is made, straw ignited and fanned, then the hole is covered. Next the potter pokes holes around the pile. It is then uncovered with the ashes scooped into baskets. Pots are handed up into a room for storage. A woman taps the pots to test for cracks. The potter next emerges from the storehouse carrying a load of pots to take to the market place.

Bibliography

- [1] REINHARD, J.: Preliminary Report on Pottery Making in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. *Anz. der phil.-hist. Kl. der Österr. Akad. der. Wiss.* 106 (1969), 115–130.

ISSN 0341-5910

PUBLIKATIONEN ZU WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILMEN

SEKTION
ETHNOLOGIE

SERIE 7 · NUMMER 38 · 1977

FILM E 2194



INSTITUT FÜR DEN WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILM · GÖTTINGEN

Film Data:

Silent film, 16 mm, black and white, 306 m, 28 min (24 f/s). Produced 1968/69, published 1976.

The film is a research document and has been issued for use in research and higher education. The film was shot by Dr. J. G. REINHARD, New Lenox, Ill., Institut für Völkerkunde, Wien. Supported, edited, and published by the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, Göttingen, Dr. A. M. DAUER; cutting: M. SCHORSCH.

Form of Citation:

REINHARD, J. G.: Newar, Kumhale Caste (Nepal) – Pottery-Making. Film E 2194 of the IWF, Göttingen 1976. Publication by J. G. REINHARD, Publ. Wiss. Film., Sekt. Ethnol., Ser. 7, No. 38/E 2194 (1977), 9 pp.

Address of the Author of the Publication:

Dr. J. G. REINHARD, 155 Fir Street, New Lenox, Ill. 60451, USA.

PUBLIKATIONEN ZU WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILMEN

Sektion BIOLOGIE

Sektion MEDIZIN

Sektion ETHNOLOGIE

Sektion TECHNISCHE WISSENSCHAFTEN

NATURWISSENSCHAFTEN

Sektion GESCHICHTE · PUBLIZISTIK

Herausgeber: H.-K. GALLE · Schriftleitung: E. BETZ, I. SIMON

PUBLIKATIONEN ZU WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILMEN sind die schriftlichen Ergänzungen zu den Filmen des Instituts für den Wissenschaftlichen Film und der Encyclopaedia Cinematographica. Sie enthalten jeweils eine Einführung in das im Film behandelte Thema und die Begleitumstände des Films sowie eine genaue Beschreibung des Filminhalts. Film und Publikation zusammen stellen die wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung dar.

PUBLIKATIONEN ZU WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILMEN werden in deutscher, englischer oder französischer Sprache herausgegeben. Sie erscheinen als Einzelhefte, die in den fachlichen Sektionen zu Serien von etwa 500 Seiten zusammengefaßt und im Abonnement bezogen werden können. Jede Serie besteht aus 4 Lieferungen mit einer entsprechenden Zahl von Einzelheften; jährlich erscheinen 1–4 Lieferungen in jeder Sektion.

Bestellungen und Anfragen an: Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film
Nonnenstieg 72 · D-3400 Göttingen
Tel. (05 51) 2 10 34