

“Folk Traditional Terracotta Pottery: An Aesthetic and Archaeological Exploration”

Dr. Shamshad Chowdhury

Associate Professor, Department of Fashion Design and Technology, Shanto-Mariam University of Technology.

Date of Submission: 01-03-2023

Date of Acceptance: 10-03-2023

ABSTRACT:

The role of terracotta clay art in “Bengali Folk Art Tradition” is extraordinary. A kind of aesthetic beauty has been added to it in the tradition of folk Terracotta Pottery. Much of the character and folklore of the terracotta art has been revealed today through archaeological research, excavations, and discoveries. Two forms of it unfold before us: a) International Forms b) Spatial Forms. Terracotta has witnessed the history of civilization as an aesthetic material in archaeological and art objects spanning thousands of years from ancient times. The terracotta art represents the folk art of ancient times. It is generally said that terra-cotta art was a folk art and the product of illiterate village folks which is often considered as the art of common people and poor man. Some of them have religious beliefs behind them, some are purely artistic creations and some have practical needs.

Keywords: Terra-cotta Pottery, Spatial Forms, Ritual Pottery, Secular Pottery.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The hardness that we see in terracotta art or practical terracotta materials and the variety of colours that emerge in them is due to the temperature control and firing method of the kiln where it is fired. It is through this special technique that colour variations such as light yellow to dark red, brown and black shades emerge in terracotta work (field study).¹ There are three types of terracotta can be seen in folk art of Bengal. These are:

a) Terracotta toys or dolls, b) Terracotta art in temple decoration which is seen in the form of plaques on religious monuments or buildings, and c) Coloured burnt earthenware or painted terracotta pottery.² The word terra-cotta originated from Italian origine² which means-baking of clay to make hard and compact. Terra and cotta mean earth or clay and fired respectively. This terracotta has been used since ancient times. Round shapes, carved clay plaques and clay materials have been

used in architectural decoration. So, by terracotta today we mean toys and dolls, idols of various gods and goddesses, sculptures, earthenware, pots etc., these are fired in a special way.

Resources of Study-previous works of scholars:

Bangladesh its artistic and aesthetic elements, historical, archaeological, ethnological findings arouse an interesting study with most important facts and matters, as it is embracing especially this art from different sites and places of this region in different aspects especially the Potter’ contributions in this regard. And here, there emphasizes on the contributions of the traditional artisans to this artifact which has traditionally flourished and bloomed in this region with an especial trend in artistic merit and quality often which is associated. It is an attempt to explore the past artistic values of the creation of traditional artisans to this artwork in this region of those old golden days, through their social, art and cultural activities, importance and background, religious practices, beliefs and its admiration. Decorated potteries and terracotta articles which has remote glorious traditional, cultural and historical background and also be worth mentioning to the terracotta traditional painted pottery which is popularly known as Shauker-handi all over Bangladesh and some other decorated potteries. H.D. Sankalia and M.K. Dhavalikar say ‘since remotest past man has loved to make figures of clay and the art of clay can be said to be as old as man himself’ (*Marg vol XXIII No. 1, Dec.1969*, edited by Ananda, Mulk Raj, P-33), *Folk Art of Bangladesh: through Ethno-Archaeological Perspective* (by Talukder, Shahariar, Dr., Dhaka, 2001), p. 34, in referring through his book. Let us consider the mythological theme and briefs on the ancient people of the world about bull Dr. Wakil Ahmed in referring through the volume *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology & Legends’ (SDFML) vol. 1, p. 256-157* writes that, Europa, the goddess of cow and Juice is the god of

Agriculture according to Greek mythology. An example of this is found in the seventeenth century poet Muhammad Rafiuddin's poem about the use of mangal-ghat in ancient Muslim society. In the first half of 1713, the reformation of Muslim society ended the use of Mangal-ghat. However, Mangal-ghat is still used in a different way in Muslim society in Chittagong. Hence the terracotta media is valued and regarded as the highest medium of art expression among the other mediums to the Artists of all times in the Universal indigenous impact.

Objects, expected output and target beneficiaries:

The people of Bangladesh have aroused their interest to be explored in details of the finding of such factors of the Folk Traditional Terracotta Pottery: Its Aesthetic and Archaeological exploration, where so many finest and prolific religious and secular ornamented potteries etc. were built by the local potter. It may remarkably be observed that most of the religious and secular potteries were built at Bangladesh region. This is the especial edition and contribution of potter in sense of natural aesthetic sense of beauty to bring and focus a worth noting artistic view and value. This also brings an indigenous impact over to the natural beauty.

There are so many finest prolific and beautifully ornamented religious potteries are found in Bangladesh region with wonderful creation of this artwork of the traditional artisans of those old golden days.

Some scholars have written on ornamentations of these potteries. But these are very fragmentary. These have been raised an interest and curiously in my mind, hence this impelled me with a great influence and eagerness to undertake and carry out the fundamental research on the Folk Traditional Terracotta Pottery: Its Aesthetic and Archaeological exploration ornamentation-works of the religious and secular traditional terracotta pottery in Bangladesh in all aspects and phases viz. especially the elements of significant motifs, forms and patterns, its trends and tradition and other elements which are associated within the perspective of decorative element, work of the previous scholars and writers has been described by: writer Ibne Golam Samad (coated from Banglar Loka Shilpos, p.51– 55) and from some different books and journals it has been learnt this regards. Terracotta decoration of Late Medieval period Bengal Portrayal of a Society, (p.19), The archaeologist Dr. Enamul Haque has given

descriptions regarding ornamentations with creeper device on the terracotta pottery.

The rural Bangladesh, India and Pakistan possessed a very rich, varied remote and glorious heritage in the socio cultural events especially within the unique creations of the painted and decorating pottery in the terracotta media in both, the secular and the ritual pottery. Ritual pottery such as Manasha-Ghat, Mangal-Ghat, Poncho-mukhi-Ghat, Kartiker-Ghat. Lakshmir-Ghat, etc. secular pottery like Sokher-Hari, Dhubbani, Pradipdani different kinds of small and tiny sized coloured children's playing items all are wonderful creative creations of the productions with the Significant & Symbolic artifacts.

The excavation carried out at the most important folk cultural centres and archaeological sites in the districts of Rajshahi, Chittagong, Barisal, Comilla, Dhaka of Bangladesh a large number of above articles come out in light with excellent relative works and significant and symbolic symbols.

Scope and Importance of Folk Traditional Painted Terracotta Pottery of Bengal:

Terracotta painted pottery is an important part of the world, not only in Bengal or Bangladesh, but also in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh or the Indian subcontinent. Said pottery has been found with human remains in the social spheres of ancient civilizations. For example, in the excavations at Wari-Bateshwar, we have seen clay bones and other artifacts in women's graves. Moreover, many terracotta plaques have also been found in Mahasthan-garh. How many of them were painted and how many were unpainted. They are probably: Used in ancient societies to accompany the corpse as an offering vessel for the afterlife or appeasement of the spirits of the deceased. The decoration in them can be seen as an attempt to increase the beauty or create a mere art form.

Painted Pottery Excavated, archaeological remains of ancient civilizations from around the world including the Indo-Pak-Bangladesh subcontinent, Iran, Egypt, China, Mexico have also been found among the artifacts.⁵ The pottery industry of Bengal is incomparable in terms of colour, ornamentation, design, beauty and durability, shape and structure. On it there is an addition of artist's craft, motifs, and patterns drawn for various purposes including ritual, secular and aesthetic beauty. When it is burned or combusted, a sound new colour appears in it.

Source of Ancient Pottery Artifacts:

Folk Traditional Painted Terracotta Pottery of Bengal English phrase is of great importance in Bengali, this object has been found all over the Indian subcontinent i.e., India, Pakistan, Bangladesh as archaeological artefacts. Although there are not enough examples of ancient painted terracotta pottery found in Bangladesh, painted terracotta pottery from the Copper Age or Chalcolithic period has been found at the Pandu Raja Mound near Calcutta. According to SS Biswas, Pandu raja's dhibi on the banks of the Ajay River in Burdwan district in Bengal is an important site for obtaining copper age artefacts. Diverse archaeological artefacts including potteries of various shapes and designs have been excavated from there.

Bangladesh Mahasthan-garh (Pundranagar, Bogra, CA. 4th century BC to 14th century BC) Mainamati (Devaparvat, Lohitgiri, Comilla 7th century to 13th century BC) Paharpur (Sompur Mahavihar, Naogaon CA. 775 to 810).⁶

Source: (Department of Archaeology Ministry of Cultural Affairs Bangladesh) these ancient pottery was found.

Pottery of various shapes and colours has been excavated at Mahasthan-garh, the important two being:

1. Gray and red smooth pottery with imprint design

2. Very bright black polish Pottery or Northern black polish.

Which has been found in most of the excavations along the banks of the Ganga. Most of these are of the Mauryan period but also pre-Maurya period. Northern Black Polish is found along the banks of the Narmada and the banks of the Ganges in central India. The colour of pottery obtained from Mainamati is white, light red, medium thick weave, soft and fire fired. Fishbones or criss-cross designs are drawn on the upper rim of the pottery, sometimes carving the core of the pottery. Water lotus flowers are more prominent in those designs. The design is also seen on later pots, gamlas, which were mainly grey. The grey pottery is of medium thickness well fired and advanced type.

Paharpur potteries are of late 10th century or between 10th and 12th century and are well fired. Which is light yellow or butter coloured. On which a smooth red coating is applied. Red smooth paint is sometimes applied to the entire Marques or around the narrow curves of the pottery. But except for the bottom. The large potteries here are hugely significant.

Sometime in the Neolithic period, the use of wheels began to be used in pottery making. His earlier pottery shows the use of hands. Even though the pre-Mughal, Mughal, British, European, Chinese pottery industry came to this country, there was no disruption in the continuity of Bengal's traditional folk terracotta painted pottery tradition and other traditions. It survives with its own traditions. There is a common tradition in the design, texture, shape of the pottery of Bangladesh. In the subcontinent we see a continuation of the applique design on prehistoric Harappan or Copper Age pottery. It is a special method of making small mother goddess idols, crocodile monkeys or human idols around the middle or lower part of big dhama or earthen pot for grain storage. Such appliques have been seen in various places including central India and eastern India. He has also met in Bangladesh. Such applique folk traditional terracotta pottery is called Yao Sara Mangal-ghat in Bangladesh.

Folk traditional painted terracotta pottery unique, beautiful and aesthetic features of Bengal and Bangladesh have evolved over thousands of years and its full research is still ongoing. Through anthropological excavations and explorations, an immense potential of this soil and a deeper traditional history remain to be discovered by the researchers. Recently, the ethnographic identity of a Kumbhakar community has been discovered in Kulalpara of Hathazari Upazila of Chittagong District, Bangladesh. The potters are predominantly Hindus. The people related to pottery, known as Kumbhakar, most of them bear the same surname-Pal. And there has been a significant advance in this research through the discovery of more novel ritual pottery. The Pancha-hari, Mansa-ghat and Kartiker-ghat, among other pottery creations discovered there, have left the researchers all over the place. Because these pots have not yet been seen anywhere else in this subcontinent except Kulal Para.⁷

Different categories of Pottery:

The folk traditional painted pottery of Bangladesh can be divided into two parts in terms of use, decoration, material, design and style. For example:

1. Ritual Pottery: Ritual pottery includes manasa-ghat, lakshmir-sara and some other small potteries. Recently, Chittagong censer and Kartik Ghat have been added to it. Above these are drawn ritual symbols or religious symbols, motifs and designs. They are used in worship and worship.

2. Secular Pottery: Secular pottery includes Sakher-Hari, Sakher-Kalas, betel plate, nut pot and

painted terracotta lamp stand and lamp, small painted pottery, bank pottery etc. recently found in Chittagong. Mangal-ghats in this painted terracotta pottery are used for both ritual and secular purposes. This type of pottery used is truly unique in its social and aesthetic uses and sometimes in aesthetic representations.

Mansa-ghat: Mansa-ghat is a popular ritual subject in rural Bangladesh and West Bengal. Manasa means snake goddess. Terracotta pots or painted terracotta pots with small symbols are used for worshiping Goddess Mansa. The purpose is to avoid snake bites. According to Hinduism Goddess Mansa is the giver of fertility. It is placed in Mansa temple in Hindu house. Apart from terracotta pottery, there is no specific idol or image of Goddess Mansa. There is no description of Mansa-devi's form in the Puranas, but Ashta-nag, nag meaning a veiled serpent, is painted on the round body of a terracotta urn to be worshiped as an idol, a wonderful folk aesthetic feature. These are made by village potters. The painters put the image of Mansa on the pottery. The head, face, throat and neck or neck of the serpent goddess are painted on the upper part of the Mansa-ghat. The lower part refers to the chest and abdomen. At the same time, the lower part takes the form of the goddess's excretory body. An eye is painted on the forehead of the goddess, called Trinayana. Through which the Goddess Mansa of the Hindu worshipers takes full form. Pottery with the face of one or more snakes is called Nag-ghat in West Bengal. The bamboo cylinder shaped Nag Ghat is called Kaituri Ghat. In the vast region of West Bengal, this type of Mansa-ghat is called Bara. Mansa Puja festival is held in the month of July to August of the year. Mindfulness can again be divided into three main categories:

1. Pot with head and face of Mansa-devi.
2. Head with cobra motif and snake hood attached to the rim of the pot.
3. Only the body of Mansa-devi is depicted on the path, except for the cobra figure with the hooded head of a snake or the head and face of Mansa Devi. Mansa-ghat is 10 inches to 20 inches and 20 inches to 25 inches in height. Recently in the research of Dr. Shahriar Talukdar in Kulalpara of Hathazari area of Chittagong district, a type of Ritual Mansa Ghat named Panchmukhi Mansa Ghat has been discovered. Characteristic of this object is that in addition to the original face, four other faces were found near the neck of the object, mostly in applique style. Hence it is known as Panchmukhi Mansa-ghat. It has designs in colours like red-green blue yellow etc. The designs are painted on white or light-yellow coating. Mansa

Puja or Nag-panchami Puja is performed with Panchmukhi Mansa-ghat. Mansa Puja festival is held in July to August in other parts of the country and also in Chittagong. Apart from this, Mansa Puja with traditional Mansa-ghat of the country was seen in Barisal, Sylhet, Faridpur, Mymensingh, Chittagong districts of Bangladesh. Mansa-ghat is also seen in Comilla district, which is truly spectacular and beautiful.⁸

Ritual Pottery:

Lakshi Sara: Lakshi Sara is a round painted terracotta earthen pot lid. Various motifs or goddess Lakshmi, Radha Krishna, Durga Devi and other ritual figures are painted on it. It literally means cover. Various subjects of worship or rituals are painted on the back in artistic poses with very beautiful and beautiful expressions. The Hindus of Bangladesh place Lakshmi's sara on the altar or for worship. It is especially seen in rural Bengal. Lakshi Sara: Lakshi Sara is a round painted terracotta earthen pot lid. Various motifs or goddess Lakshmi, Radha Krishna, Durga Devi and other ritual figures are painted on it. It literally means cover. Various subjects of worship or rituals are painted on the back in artistic poses with very beautiful and beautiful expressions. The Hindus of Bangladesh place Lakshmi's sara on the altar or for worship. It is especially seen in rural Bengal. These Lakshmi Saras are of various sizes including small, medium, large. Water colour brushes are used to paint idols in Lakshmi-sara. Artists draw the figure of the goddess on the surface with a pointed or pointed brush with artistic skill. The artists created Lakshmi Devi's eyes, lips, nose, fingers, clothes, ornaments, crowns with very fine needlepoint strokes. The artistes of Lakshmi- Sarar perform the Tuli very quickly and with perfect measure. Through which folk artistic skills emerge. Primary colours red, blue, yellow are specially used in this drawing. Sometimes green, orange and purple are used. In most cases colours are used in implant style or flat style to bring out the unique features. Their work avoids three-dimensionality, transparency and tonal variation, which are characteristic of folk art. Generally yellow colour is used for the body of deities. However, dark blue colour is used for Krishna's body, as described in Hindu scriptures. Lakshmi-sare divided into two parts through line drawing. The edge of the sara is drawn with a red line, one to one and a half inches wide. Two circles are drawn, the larger one at the top and the smaller one at the bottom. Sometimes the sara is divided into four or five parts by a vertical line. In such pots, folk artists attempt to depict Lakshmi Devi embracing Radha Krishna or

Durga Devi and her consort in the upper part of the sara. In such pottery, folk artists attempt to depict Lakshmi Devi embracing Radha Krishna or Durga Devi and her consort in the upper part of the sara. As an exception, Lakshmi-Narayana is seen as the main figure of the elephant in the middle upper part. Sometimes two female figures are painted on either side of the main figure, they may represent Lakshmi or the two friends of Ankit Devi, while in some paintings, Lakshmi Devi and her friends in a peacock boat or Radha Krishna are seen in some reliefs of Lakshmi. Another type of Lakshmi Saran is called Acharya Lakshmi-sara which is made and painted only by Acharya Brahmins of Bangladesh. In Rajshahi district it is seen in Jessore, Kushtia, Khulna. Faridpur Madaripur and Rayer Bazaar of Dhaka district are famous for making and marketing Lakshmi-sara. Many of the folk artist families associated with making Lakshmi-sara in Faridpur and Madaripur went to British period or West Bengal. As a result, this art is seen there as well.

Pottery used for two purposes: Secular and Ritual:

Mangal Ghat: Terracotta pot called small shaped coloured terracotta pottery, Mangal-Ghat is made from this. Mangal-ghat means one in whose house divine favours can be obtained by placing a sacred ritual ghat. This smooth and beautiful painting on various religious and social issues has become a popular ritual and religious instrument for various purposes in the public life of Bangladesh. It also has a long tradition of folk traditions. Mangal-ghat is generally: placed in front of the house or in front of the door of the house for auspicious work. These auspicious acts include religious rituals or social events: weddings, birthdays, naming, homestead construction or auspicious entry into a new homestead, harvest and cultural events. Even Mangal-ghat is kept in puja ceremonies or puja pandals. Mangal-ghat is used like this in most rural towns of Bangladesh. The simple rural people believe that Mangal-ghat is an auspicious urn which if placed anywhere, the evil energy is removed and good deeds can be solved beautifully. By painting, the terracotta kalsi was gradually transformed into mangal-ghat. In most cases women do the work of drawing designs in Mangal-ghat. The motifs of mangal-ghat colourful designs include geometric and abstract forms, flowers, foliage designs, fish, birds etc. motifs are very simply painted on mangal-ghat. Blue, yellow, black, green etc colours are used in it. Mangal-ghat is specially coated with vermilion to express auspiciousness and auspiciousness in Hindu

ceremonies. Generally black colour is not used in folk ceremonies of Bangladesh. But many times, black colour is used in Mangal-ghat because of the belief that this colour will play a special role in removing evil energy. On auspicious religious or social occasions, two small banana plants are brought and buried in the ground in front of the door of the house. Below these are placed two beautifully designed terracotta water-filled pots or pitchers. Some amm-patas are placed on the mangal-ghat or kalsi. Two green coconuts are also kept respectively. Mangal-ghat is made full of aesthetic aroma of folk-art beliefs and rituals. According to folk tradition green banana or mango leaf symbolizes long life, water symbolizes life, green coconut symbolizes reproductive power or producer. After the ritual ceremony is over, the Mangal-ghat is moved to the room. It is a folk belief of the people of rural Bengal that this beautifully designed pot enhances the beauty of the house and keeps the house clean and safe from evil forces.

Mangal-ghat was used as a symbol of magical beliefs in ancient finance and tribal societies. According to researcher Abdul Haque Chowdhury, Mangal-ghat was prevalent in the ancient Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist societies of Chittagong district. At present, the use of Mangal-ghat is a continuation of that.⁹

Yao Sara Mangal-ghat: Yao Sara Mangal-ghat Sarra Mangal-ghat is an exquisitely designed mangal-ghat with a lid. It is used in marriage ceremony in Hindu society. It is not placed on the door or gate. It is used as a ritual pot in bliss work of wedding ceremonies. Inside it are kept sacred objects such as vermilion, conch, coins, some grains, terracotta lamps and cosmetics. They are usually two to three and a half feet tall, sometimes three to four feet. Yao means Married woman the woman whose husband is alive, and sara means cover. But here the entire occurrence expresses the abstract meaning. "Yao Sara Mars occurs at the bottom or in the middle in most cases small female figurines are added circularly in the form of appliques. Red, green, bright yellow and some other bright colours are used in designing it".¹⁰ Married women (Sadhava) or virgin girls also take part in various activities including arranging wedding decorations centered around Yao Sara Mangal-ghat. Participation of widows in these activities is prohibited. Such pots create a very pleasing artistic beauty. This pot is divided into two parts, one is the lid or the lid, and the other is the main body of the pot. In West Bengal of Bangladesh, India, these types of Mangal-ghat

patterns have been collected in different mediums (field survey).¹¹

Origin and Antiquity:

Thousands of years of human civilization passed and the ravages of time have vanished many things but terracotta art still continues and blooms in different ways. The terracotta art is nearly more than 20,000 years old. There are some places in Europe where the earliest Artwork of the people of those old good days come in light from the pre-historic caves in France, Austria etc. Very early period terracotta-art in the Indo-Pak-Subcontinent does not go back to upper-palaeolithic period i.e., 40,000 thousand years B.P. as it done in Europe. Many things have been destroyed and lost in the thousands of years of human history, but the terracotta industry in its own right has survived to this day, still evolving in various branches. Pottery is the ceramic act of making pottery wares, which major types include earthenware. The origin of pottery in Bangladesh dates back to the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa civilization after the earthenware were found after the excavation of Mahasthan-ghar of Bogra. Pottery also refers to the art or craft of a potter or the manufacture of pottery and inexpensive households are made of clay. Potters were popularized during the zamindars. They used to be patronized for making statues of goddesses, plates and other aesthetical items. Sometimes they were made to sculpt statues of the zamindar themselves. But after the end of the zamindar, they started making everyday household items for sale in the local markets to earn for living. Hindu gods and dolls, toys, and decoration pieces are also made by potter. S.D. sankalia and M.K. Dhavalkar write, the evidence shows that the earliest artistic expression of men in clay god back to 15000 years before.

II. CONCLUSION:

The art of terracotta is a comprehensive subject. Archaeologically and aesthetically, it is more appealing and widely used than other mediums including wood, metal, stone. Terracotta has become a universally important form of pottery industry. From the ancient period of history to contemporary folk and social life which is still used today. One of the reasons is the availability of soil as a medium. It has the advantage of easily shaping the soil into different shapes and sizes. Moreover, as soil is easily available, this medium is still active and ongoing in folk art and tribal community life (field study).¹²

REFERENCE:

- [1]. Talucder, Shahariar, Dr., "Folk Art of Bangladesh Through Ethno-Archaeological Perspective" Page: 150-174.
- [2]. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (in 30 Volumes). Micropaedia Volume IX. Page-901.
- [3]. A field base research at December 2007.
- [4]. Ibid, Page: 34
- [5]. Ibid, Page: 150.
- [6]. CatLog: Archaeology Bangladesh, Department of Archaeology, Cultural Affairs of Bangladesh.
- [7]. A field base research at October 2009.
- [8]. Ibid
- [9]. Chowdhury, Abdul Haque, "The Society and Culture of Chittagong" Page: 139
- [10]. A field base research at October 2009.
- [11]. Talucder, Shahariar, Dr., "Folk Art of Bangladesh Through Ethno-Archaeological Perspective" Page:173.
- [12]. A field base research at December 2007.