

# ACKNOWLEDGMENT, APPRECIATION CREATION

**By Madur Sen (India)**

Clay probably is the most important gift given to the human by mother earth. Sensitive, malleable and recyclable clay had been with us forever. No civilization can be judged or understood without studying the history of its clay work.

The known origin of Indian pottery dates back to more than 5,000 years. Wheel-made fragments and vessels have been found in the historical of Indus valley civilization. Some argue that the earliest forms of pottery were mostly utilitarian therefore, purely created for practical use. These include vessels for food storage and religious purpose. Some ceremonial sculptures have also been uncovered at the Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro sites dating back to 3300 B.C.

Since my childhood I had been fascinated by the earthenware flower pots (Gamlas) they are everywhere in India. In our gardens, balconies of our neighbor's, lined up on the roadside and public places they always beautify our daily mundane life. No religious ceremony is complete without earthenware utensils, not to forget some idols of worship are made of clay too. One of our main festivals Diwali is incomplete without the oil lamps of earthenware. Another fond memory of my childhood is going to railway stations and drinking tea from terracotta clay mugs called (Khullar) thrown and made by Indian traditional potters. Ask any Indian they will tell you the tea in these mugs impart a unique flavor unlike any other.

My visits to these traditional potters, who live in a cluster right in the center of our city Delhi, have been a great learning experience. The way they handled the earthenware clay and fired in a simple clay brick kiln, fascinated me. I would sit with them for hours and they would often indulge me with clay for modeling and would also fire the pieces for me. Over time, this connection grew deeper and eventually influenced my decision to choose clay (sculpture) as my medium to pursue at Art College. Later when I started to work and teach this family of traditional potters would support me with the supply of materials and pit firings till we acquired a gas cylinder. I loved the organic materials they would use to fire the clay. Be it cow dung, dry leaves or saw dust, the ease and spontaneity with which traditional potters carry out their activities is a lesson to learn.

In most part of India, the traditional potter's family women do not sit on the potter's wheel to make clay ware. They prepare the clay and do most of the decorations. Except in Manipur where women play active role in all the stages of clayware making.

Another great influence on my work is from my childhood holiday travels to my home town Calcutta in West Bengal. West Bengal is famed for the terracotta objects produced in the Bankura District. The Bankura horse is very famous. For centuries the craftsmen of this district have been making figurines of religious idols and objects of ritualistic connotations. The Terracotta Temple of Vishnupur (West Bengal) is world famous. As this region did not have much supply of stone for building, but had a very good soil, the craftsmen worked out the solution by using clay brick. These terracotta temples flourished under the patronage of Malla king which can be dated back to 694 AD.

I also had the advantage of living close to Khurja the pottery center. In local language the Khurja means the waste land. A two hour's drive from New Delhi, the history of Khurja pottery goes back to about 600 years ago when some of traditional potter families moved from Delhi to

Khurja during the reign of Sultan Mohammed Bin Tughlak. Having started with red pottery they introduced blue glaze on red clay articles. An obvious Turkish influence as Sultan Tughlak was of Turkish lineage.

A great contributory factor towards the setting up of the concentration of small scale ceramic industries in Khurja is the positive attitude of the government of Uttar Pradesh. In 1942, the U.P Government decided to set up a ceramic factory at Khurja. At that time the factory was equipped with three small kilns, two chimneys, and three ball mills. In 1949, Govt. made thoughtful consideration of the utilization of the machinery and other capital goods and converted it into a Government Pottery Development Centre, which has promoted the development of the industry.

Development of Khurja pottery brought a great change in the clay industry and in common people's household. They were produced in large quantity and were decorated with bright colours and made affordable.

Because of India's diverse geography and topography the clay varies from region to region here and manifests in different styles of terracotta sculptures and forms unique to the regions with their culture and tradition. Even the colour of the clay varies from place to place.

Tamilnadu (a southern state in India) is famous for the huge terracotta figures of the Aiyandar Deity. They are found standing guard at the entrances of villages protecting the insiders from evil spirits.

Orissa (East of India) and Madhya Pradesh (central India) too have charming traditions of decorative roof top tiles, made partly by hand modeling and partly on the wheel. These tiles, shaped like half tubes are perched on roof tops of the houses are adorned with the figures of elephants, monkeys, bears, reptiles, gods and goddesses etc. They are symbolic of one's status among the rural people of these regions.

Terracotta panels and storage jars painted white and decorated with tiny mirrors are very common in states of Gujarat and Rajasthan.

The Earthen ware has evolved over time and space in India and its unique nature makes it so mystical yet so flexible.

Earthenware, pottery that has not been fired to the point of vitrification is thus slightly porous and coarser than stoneware and porcelain. The body can be covered completely or decorated with slip (a liquid clay mixture applied before firing), or it can be glazed. For both practical and decorative reasons, earthenware is usually glazed. To overcome its porosity (which makes it impracticable for storing liquids in its unglazed state, for example), the fired object is covered with finely ground glass powder suspended in water and is then fired a second time. During the firing, the fine particles covering the surface fuse into an amorphous, glasslike layer, sealing the pores of the clay body. There are two main types of glazed earthenware. One is covered with a transparent lead glaze; when the earthenware body to which this glaze is applied has a cream colour, the product is called greenware... Crude, soft earthenware, excavated at a Neolithic settlement on the Anatolian Plateau of Turkey, and thought to be about 9,000 years old, is the earliest known pottery. Earthenware is still widely used in the 21st century, much of the commercially produced ware being heatproof and cold proof and thus practicable for cooking and freezing as well as for serving.

To conclude I would say I am just a speck in this vast universe and consider myself lucky to be part of mother earth and touch clay every day of my life. This has become my religion.

