

Terracotta Art: Past and Present

Dr Shubhra Sinha*

Abstract:

This article has tried to examine briefly the trajectory of terracotta art form- from the pre historic period to present in the region of Indian sub-continent. The modest clay has been used by human beings since earliest time as means of creating utility objects, fulfilling aesthetic aspirations, rituals and beliefs. Terracotta pieces consist of both religious and non-religious object. Terracotta panels, temples reflect another dimension of this art form associated with ornamentation. Its important to note that this art form is practiced in different regions of India toady. Regional variation is reflected in the terracotta art in context to material, colour, skill, etc. One of the aspects that has been discussed in this article is interpretation of terracotta horses beyond the regime of simplistic art object. Terracotta horses of Bankura and Tamil Nadu are linked to the religious practices of the region. The Bankura terracotta horses are associated with the ritual worship of folk sun deity Dharma Thakur whereas the terracotta horses in the Tamil area and beyond is associated with the traditional votive offering to the gram-devata Lord Ayyanar.

Key words: Terracotta, urbanization, folk art, potteries, figurines, seals, terracotta horses, Bankura, Lord Ayyanar

Terracotta art is an art of creating glazed and unglazed earthen wares, figurines, etc.¹ It means baked earth in Latin. This form of art has been used across the world for many centuries. In terracotta art modest clay is used which is perishable as well as renewable. Traditionally it has been seen as a mystical material combining five main elements of nature: ether, air, earth, fire and water. Regarding the origin of terracotta art, art historian Devangana Desai is of the opinion that it came into its own with process of urbanization and trade. Even SP Gupta have highlighted this link in his study. It is

1 The medium of terracotta is clay which is fired in kiln (at 600-750 degree) to make it hard. Terracotta objects are not easily breakable.

*Associate Professor Department of History Kamala Nehru College (University of Delhi),
shubhra_sinha123@yahoo.com