APPENDIX III
STUDY OF TERRACOTTA ART MAKING AMONG THE PRESENT DAY ‘KUMBHARS’ (POTTERS) OF GONDIA DISTRICT, VIDARBHA REGION

Introduction

Terracotta is an Italian word which means ‘baked clay’ and the baked piece of clay art is called terracotta art. It was very famous during ancient time and abundantly found in the excavations. The use of terracotta is varied i.e. for domestic use, household decoration, playing objects, religious as well as ritualistic purposes and magical practices (Banerji 1994: 1). Right from the ancient time to present the terracotta art making continues and developed in various forms in different regions of the Indian subcontinent in general and Maharashtra in particular. Ethnographic study was carried out among Kumbhars (potters) of Gondia district of Maharashtra. Kumbhars specialize in making terracotta art objects resides in various villages nearly Sitepar (Amagaon taluka), Chulode (Gondia taluka) and Aapakari-tola (Sadak Arjuni taluka).

There are certain aims behind the ethnographic study and they are as following:

- To focus on potters method for choice of collecting clay and soil material, technique employed and stylistic preference for making terracotta animals.

- It also attempts to understand folk traditions, belief and custom in association with terracotta animal worships especially horse, elephant and tiger symbolizing strength which is widespread among the Gonds of Gondia district, Maharashtra.

The methodology adopted to ethnographic research work is as following:

- **Village to village survey**: Detailed survey was carried out in five talukas of Gondia district. More than fifty villages were explored to collect data related to terracotta art. As a result eleven villages were located where terracotta horse worship is
practiced; two villages are involved in both worship and making of terracotta horse figurines, and two villages only make horse figurines.

- **Interviews**: A series of interviews were conducted among the *kumbhars* in villages and through that important data regarding terracotta making was collected and recorded.

- **Photography**: Extensive and detailed photography was carried for documentation.

**Study Area**

The major part of Gondia district is covered by dense forest, located at easternmost part of Maharashtra, covering area 5641sq. km., with eight talukas: Aamgaon, Arjun (More), Devari, Gondia, Goregaon, Sadak-Arjun, Salekasa and Tiroda (Fig. 1). The densely forested region is inhabited by the Gonds (a forest tribe). During the medieval periods the territory was under their own native ancestors (Thusu 1980).

![Figure 1: Map of the Gondia district, Maharashtra](image)
Gonds

The original name of the Gonds is Koitor or Koi. They are now divided into sub-tribes such as the Koya, Koitor, Khond, Gond, and all the eight tribes of Bastar (i.e. Muria, Maria, Hill Maria, Bhatara, Dhurwa or Porja, dorla and Halba). Maria is also called Dandami Maria and Bison Horn Maria due to their special dancing headgear with bison horns. It is not yet clear about their origin or the original homeland. They are mainly agro-pastoral community practicing shifting cultivation (Sharma and Tiwari: 2002). Apart from Maharashtra they are also spread across the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, northern Telangana (earlier Andhra Pradesh), western Odisha the whole territory is popularly known as Gondwana (Yadav: 2009). The word Gondwana was coined by the Muslim invaders of 12th century CE (Mahawar 2011).

Process of making terracotta objects

The making of terracotta objects involves following steps;

A. Soil Procurement

Generally soil is a raw material for terracotta manufacturing and is procured either from river bed, lake, small stream, forest area, barren land, agricultural field or water logged areas. But the Gondia potters prefer procuring soil largely from barren lands, agricultural and forest area, which is conveniently accessible to them.

i. Barren land

Soil is collected from the place which is dried up after water logging during the rainy season. The humus layer is first removed; the layer underneath, which is full of moisture is found to be most suitable is removed (Figs. 2-3).
ii. Forest area

The potters collect truck load of soil once in a year from the forest lands and dump it in their courtyard, which can be used throughout the year (Fig. 4).
iii. Other accessible sources

They also procure soil from agricultural fields, lake, small stream and river beds.

2. Preparation of clay

The process of preparation of clay is done through two methods employed by the potters of Sitepar and Aapkari-Tola village.

Method –1 (Village name: Sitepar; Potters name: Raju Chitve)

The preparation of clay includes three following steps;

Step-I: Soil lumps are powdered by removing the coarser material by hand and beating it with wooden implement which takes one or two hours (Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Potter crushing/powdering the soil by hand, Sitepar village
**Step-II:** After removing the coarse material some amount of water is sprinkled over the clay and left untouched for two to three days, so that it absorbs the water (Fig. 6).

![Figure 6: Potter sprinkling water on powdered clay, Sitepar village](image1)

**Step-III:** Moist clay is then kneaded by hands and legs. The kneading process is continued till it reaches plasticity. Later it is dried in the sun and covered by plastic bag to retain its moisture (Figs. 7-8).
Method-II (Village name: Aapakari-Tola; Potters name: Baliramji Borsare)

Step-I: The powdered soil is collected in a deep pit and completely soaked in water for two to three days. With a wooden stick, the material is stirred well for a long time, so that the coarser particles get accumulated at the bottom and the fine materials floats on top which is collected and removed by hand (Fig. 9).

Step-II: A flat and completely closed circle is made in the potter’s courtyard, in which river sand is spread. Then the moistured clay (Step 1) is spread over river sand layer; so that the river sand absorbs the moisture. This whole process results in cracking of fine clay which is most suitable for turning it into any art object (Fig. 10).
3. Technique employed for making clay animal figurine

There are two methods employed for making clay animal figurines, they are as following:

A. Handmade Technique

The handmade technique is a primary old technique which is in vogue since time memorial. Semi-cylindrical shapes are given to the body and legs through hands and were anatomically joined by hand-pressing technique. Making of terracotta horse is discussed here as an example. First, a lump of clay is separately shaped into long thick cylinder to form the body, legs and head. The head is then turned into tubular form. One end is crafted little pointed and less thick, whereas the other end is thick which is joined to the body. The one half of the ends has slight bend so that it can take a curve. With the help of hand, muzzle portion is formed and the mouth is depicted through an incised line. The neck is shown prominently. The standing long ears and neck chain are made by appliqué method. The eyes are achieved through incised technique and a circular lump is fixed into as eye ball. The head is attached to the body (Fig. 11). After that the long thick roles are made separately, one end is fixed below the muzzle portion and another end is fixed to the front portion of the body or above the neck chain which is called lagam (rein). Some time chains are made above the head, around the ears, nose
and mouth. Chains are plain as well as decorated (incised marks made by finger nail). On the back of horse a different type of decorated seat/saddle is placed. The tail is also separately made to be affixed in appropriate place. The tail is depicted either being downward or raised up (decorated with applique chain, achieved by fingers).

Another interesting feature of handmade techniques is that it is decorated by chain around the joint of the four limbs. Sometime a hole is maintained near the joints for air to pass through the hollow body. Finally a slip is applied to give final touches, wet fingers are used to make porous surface very smooth.

Figure 11: Horse figurine made by handmade technique, Jhilmili village

B. Partly handmade and partly wheel made technique

This is another method followed by potters to make clay horses or some other animal figurines. In this technique body, legs and head part are made on wheels and they all are anatomically joined together and later decorated by hand. The wheel is operated by hands instead of a stick; the lump of clay is turned to give desired shape of legs, head and body. They are detached from the wheel surface by a thread and once all parts are dry they are all attached to form a body and an artistic decoration is given. A proper
shaping is carried out through fingers. All facial details i.e. eye are made beautifully by incising with the help of finger tip, and in the centre of it fixed a handmade eye ball. The nose is shown through nostril holes made by hand pressing. Mouth is made through horizontal incised finger tip. The mane is shown prominently with incised vertical line from top of the head and going down till neck. Ears are made through luting process. There is appliqué neck chain with big centre bell but sometime whole chain is decorated with bell design. There are two thick lagam which are attached to the mouth and front body. On the rear side of the horse a seat with a big raised out-turn ridge at the front and back is made in various sizes and designs. Some time effect of cloth with decorated border is given. Generally, decoration is done by incised marks made with finger tip. The tail which is inclined downwards or some time rise upwards is crafted through applique technique. Appliqué decoration of chain is made around the joint of legs. The hoof of the horse leg is circular in shape (Figs. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19).

Figure 12: Body portion of horse figurine made on the wheel, Sitepar village

Figure 13: Body portion of horse figurine, Sitepar village
Figure 14: Head portion of horse figurine made on the wheel, Sitepar village

Figure 15: Head portion of horse figurine is slightly bend, Sitepar village

Figure 16: Leg portion of horse figurine made on the wheel, Sitepar village

Figure 17: Leg portion of horse figurine, Sitepar village
Figure 18: Joining the wheel made parts of the horse figurine, Sitepar village

Figure 19: Applique decoration done on the horse figurine, Sitepar village
Firing Technique

Once the object is sun dried to an extent, potter takes it to the kiln for baking. The desired colour of the object, black or red depends on the types of kiln; Open kiln is used for red effect and closed kiln for black effect.

A. Open kiln

A platform made of woods like babul and palas (Butea monosperma) tree or any other locally available wood mixed with a layer of charcoal is placed. Above the charcoal layer finished clay horse figurines are placed (standing) along with a mixture of grass, broken pot sherds and other material around it. The broken pot sherd helps in maintaining the heat. It is fired openly so that the kiln gets abundant circulation of oxygen for figurines to turn into red colour (Fig. 20).

Figure 20: Open kiln in the courtyard, Sitepar village
B. Closed kiln

As the name specify, the kiln is closed on all the three sides keeping the front portion open for firing and placing objects. The layering of fuel is same as in open kiln but the slow burning process is maintained to get figurines in desired black colour, this happens when the oxygen level is maintained low for the burning process as kiln is closed on all the sides (Fig. 21).

![Figure 21: Closed kiln in the courtyard, Aapakari-Tola village](image)

5. Colouring

Colour decorations are usually done after the objects are fired. First a layer of lime (lime wash) is applied on the object and is then decorated with the desired artificial colours. This process is largely done by the women folk.
Belief pattern associated with terracotta objects/figurines

During the process of human evolution, man certainly have adopted many important survival strategies such as observation and response (observing the nature and responded accordingly). Over the time they have split into groups and formed one’s own beliefs and customs. These beliefs and customs have gradually transformed into the form of oral tradition, folk-lore and folk culture. India is one of the rich countries involved in folk-lore, folk-culture and folk-religion (Sontheimer 1995). The Gonds have a tradition and custom of animal worship through terracotta figurines. Gonds believe in Marai or Matamaai forms of Kali who protects against small-pox, cholera, madhura, gowar, cattle-disease and other illness. They also believe that any negligence in her worship will invite trouble. On the full moon day in Ashadh (July), each family propitiates her to secure protection from all calamities and seeking immunity for their cattle from the diseases occurring due to rain. Goats, sheep and fowls are sacrificed to her, blood is sprinkled across the fields and rice soaked in blood is sown, believing that they will get a good crop yield. Curd or neem (Azardicta indica) leaves are also offered, being indispensable in her worship as they are wish full-filling substances in the native pharmacopoeia (there traditional knowledge of medicine used and their effects) and diseases sent by Marai are generally hot (District Gazetteers: 1909).

Gonds believe if any of their wish comes true, symbolic offering in the form of horse figurine is to be offered to Matamai (Village Goddess). They pray for good health, prosperous agriculture yield, protection from evil, for child, for job and other wishes. Gonds as well as villagers also offer the figurines of tiger and elephant with flags, iron trident, iron chain, iron cradle and glass bangles of various colours (mainly green). The Gonds have a mythology/oral tradition, that iron as a metal plays an important role in their life and it is well-regarded by them. Bara Deo is the most ancient God amongst the Gonds of Central India and they believe that he resides in iron. Due to the growing Hindu influence on Gonds in recent years Bara Deo is being identified as Mahadeo or Shiva (Mahawar 2011).
Hence, there are a large numbers of potters engaged in making different terracotta animal objects, predominantly horse figurines, whereas elephants and tigers are offered rarely. The societies other than Gonds also obtain terracotta animal figurines from Kumbhars as they also believe in animal worship.

**Deities and animal worship of Gonds**

Horse worship is an important part of belief system among the Gonds. They make horse figurine majorly from out of clay and rarely iron, cement and grass/cloth. They call the horse as *Ghora Deo* which is considered divine, symbolizing strength and speed. They believe that their gods and goddess ride on the horse. They worship horse figurine to be blessed with fertility and protection from the evil eye and black magic. Terracotta horse figurine is worshiped in the form of totem (symbols) and offered as votive objects at the shrines of their magical and unseen power. It is interesting that these totemic motifs are not housed rather they are kept in open (District Gazetteers: 1909; Mahawar 2011). The horse figurine are known by various names such as *Ghooddevta* (Tumkhera-Khurd) and *Pujari Baba* (Koyalari); in Chandrapur and Gadchiroli district it is called as *Balakideva* or *Bullockman’s*. Gonds believe that horse protects their cattle from attack of the wild animals and promptly rides off (District Gazetteers: 1909). The animal like horse is given a great deal of decoration, either by paintings or by mounting specially designed ornaments on them.

Apart from these they also worship tiger and elephant known from their shrines at Lenditola village. They call tiger as *Vaghadevta*, because they believe that tiger is a powerful wild animal and worshipping it will seek prey of their domesticated animals while grazing them in forest. These animal depictions are more stylized in form and are more or less uniform across the district. Similar tradition of horse and elephant worship is evident among the *Bauris* (low caste group) of West Bengal (Bhattacharya: 1989).
There have been intensive exploration and enquiries carried out at Aamgaon, Gondia, Goregaon, Sadak-Arjuni and Salekasa talukas of Gondia district. On the basis of such observations and explanations obtained, it can be said that the horse worship is associated with Marai (which is village goddess) with or without involving any specific iconic form for the deity. Along with Marai they also worship Bhimsen, god of agriculture, which are erected in the outskirts of the village. It is smeared with sindhoor (vermilion) and offered by fruits and incense. During every drought a goat is sacrificed to him, and immersed in water to induce him to send rain for their agriculture. He is worshipped in Ashadh (July) at the beginning of agricultural operations and again when the grain is threshed in the autumn (District Gazetteers: 1909). The other common offerings are rice, vermilion, turmeric, water and cloths.

**Customs of horse worship**

Horse worship is an important aspect of their ritual life. During the festival like Dussehra, Diwali, Chaitra (A first month of Marathi calendar) people gather in village and offer horse figurine to the Matamai and commemorate the celebration. On the other days the individual families offer horse figurines to the temples during pre and post crop cultivation and sacrifice goat or chicken. They follow a systematic process in making the horse figurines which is to be offered to the deities. It is mainly made of unbaked and baked clay (Figs. 22-23) and also in other materials like cement (Figs. 24-25), metal (Figs. 26-27) and grass/cloth (Figs. 28-29). Devotees select the horse figurines of a particular material as per their choice. The horse figurine is not carried by hands from the potters place to the shrine; rather it is carried in a kavad (bamboo basket) which is carried by two people on their shoulders. Due to modernization, some of them carry horse figurines by any locally available medium of transportation. The horse figurines are made of various materials which are illustrated as following;
Figure 22: Decorated unbaked clay horse figurines, Tumkhera (Khurd) village

Figure 23: Baked clay horse figurines, Lenditola village
Figures 24: Painted horse figurines made of cement, Janwa village (Courtesy: V. Sontakke)

Figure 25: Painted horse figurines made of cement, Jhilmili village

Figure 26: Horse made of metal (iron), Jambhali village

Figure 27: Horse made of metal (iron), Tumkhera (Khurd) village
Rituals Performed by Tumkhera-Khurd Villagers

i. Devotees, especially in this case the newly married couples come to perform their votive rituals Oti (filled with rice) at open air horse shrine. They perform pooja by offering coconut and incense, and chant mantras. Later the male head of the family fills the Oti of a bride with rice and prays to God for fertility (Figs. 30-31).
Figure 30: Man chanting mantras, Tumkhera (Khurd) village

Figure 31: Man filling *Oti* of a bride with rice, Tumkhera (Khurd) village
Family performing rituals by lighting terracotta lamp, incense stick, offering coconut, vermillion (*kumkum*), lemon and flower or flower garlands. The last part of the ritual is when devotee passes through the four legs of the horse, with a belief “who is guilty should not escape from the god’s punishment” (Figs. 32-33).
Figure 33: Devotee passes through the four legs of the horse, Tumkhera (Khurd) village

Shrine Types

There are two types of shrine like open shrine (open to sky) (Figs. 34-35) and closed shrine (closed to sky) (Figs. 36-37).
Conclusion

The potters of Vidarbha region are engaged in various processes, right from procurement of soil, preparation of clay, crafting, baking till the final decoration of the animal figurines. As compared to production of pottery, making the terracotta animals making is limited. The terracotta animal especially horse figurines are made on demand, as it is a part of their ritual which is worshiped throughout the year and on special occasions. Hence, these products are not sent to markets, but are directly exchanged by the devotee who place orders to the Kumbhars. Presently, the minimum cost of such figurines is Rs. 50, though the maximum cost varies depending on its size.

The earlier mentioned traditions are still in practice among the Gonds. Worshiping marai and terracotta horse is an integral part of their daily life along with the occasional worship of tiger and elephant. They make horse objects out of terracotta and iron; and believe that their gods exist in iron. Because of the influence of modernization; the horses are also made of grass/cloth and cement. There is cultural influence as seen in the tradition of horse worship where earlier only Gonds used to worship, now other communities like Powar, Lodi, Dhanger, Gujarati, Marwadi and other Hindu communities are also engaged in such rituals. On the other hand Gonds are getting
adapted to idol worship because of outer influences. Such parallel evidences of horse worship are very much evident in the parts of west Bengal, Central Indian States and Tamil Nadu.

The potter makes traditional clay, terracotta figurines and cement horse figurines also. The iron horse figurines are supplied by iron smiths. Since horse worshiping is integral to the Gonds, the potter has a favorable economic opportunities in supplying his crafts. Therefore, the economy of the whole community can be said as depended on agro-pastoralism and crafts.