Chapter - 2

Terracotta Art and Culture in West Bengal: A Review of Existing Literature
West Bengal is a lucrative region for studying terracottas as it has a long, rich and a continuous presence of terracotta art from ancient times up to present day. At present some communities, mostly kumors (by caste pot makers), from different parts of West Bengal are engaged in making terracotta objects.

Despite the profuse occurrence of terracotta art objects from several archaeological sites virtually overshadowing all other aspects of material culture in West Bengal, systematic attempts to catalogue and classify the findings have been limited (Sengupta, Roy Chowdhury and Chakraborty 2007). Sima Roy Chowdhury (2002) states, although terracotta must not be treated as a minor antiquity in Bengal, but even today along with ivory and wood carvings it is treated as such. Calcutta University’s Asutosh Museum felt a need of preserving rural art heritage under Rural Art Survey Scheme and collected several terracotta materials. In consequence it becomes “one of the greatest depositories of the Indian Folk-arts” (Bhattacharya 2002:175). Systematic cataloguing, analysis and presenting such a huge collection can bring new perspectives to the study of these materials (Bhattacharya 2002, Sengupta, Roy Chowdhury and Chakraborty 2007).

Gautam Sengupta (1995) argues that it is important to incorporate spatial dimension, historical context and a better method of content analysis to do justice to the rich terracotta tradition of West Bengal. In the following section an attempt is made to present the available literature related to terracotta art of West Bengal and other literatures which are found significant for the present work.

**Descriptive Studies with Possible Interpretations:**

Various scholars use different ways of clubbing up the terracotta materials reported from various sites. These studies are mostly description of the findings or categorisation or in some cases analysis with respect to a particular issue. Some are only isolated reports of particular terracotta forms found from a particular site in a descriptive manner. Among the descriptive studies one of the earliest studies was done by G. S. Dutt in 1938. He gave an exhaustive description of temple terracottas in Bengal and argued that one can divide terracotta art into two divisions, 1) figure sculpture and 2) sculpture in relation to temple
architecture. S. P. Ghosh (1986, 1987) worked on both artistic and architectural part of terracottas from Nadia district of West Bengal, which dealt with the history of the art, their antiquity, materials used, techniques of making and thematic range. S. S. Biswas’ (1981) *Terracotta art of Bengal* represents a culmination of different types and forms of artistic expressions on terracotta. He argues that several explorations and a few excavations in Bengal open a window of opportunity to study not only the forms and features of artistic expressions but also the social background of such expressions. Beginning with a brief description of the major terracotta yielding sites of Bengal he gives detailed description of different forms. P. K. Mandal (1987) in his *Interpretations of Terracottas from Tamralipta* provides detailed study on the terracotta specimens preserved in the Tamralipta Museum and Research Centre, Tamluk and also some of the private collections. Apart from discussing the manufacturing technique and themes he gives a detailed trait wise classification of the specimens in different cultural periods in tabular format. Sharmi Chakraborty (2000), in her doctoral thesis *Chandraketugarh: A Cultural and Archaeological Study*, gave a detailed description of the terracotta figurines and plaques yielded from Chandraketugarh and housed in different museums and private collections and also classified them. Arputha Rani Sengupta (2005) has dealt with the terracotta temples of Bishnupur in Bankura district of West Bengal. By tracing the origin of the terracotta temples she demonstrated the cult and religious value of the terracotta art in ancient times and in present context. She described various techniques of making terracotta plaques. By studying the contents of the terracotta reliefs from the temples she showed that the variations in the plaques covering the walls, vaults, domes and archways were meant to glorify the gods and the Malla kings of Bishnupur. More recently, Sengupta, Roy Chowdhury and Chakraborty in 2007 have published a comprehensive catalogue with detailed description and photographs of terracotta materials preserved in State Archaeological Museum, West Bengal, discovered mostly from the site of Chandraketugarh. Several specimens from Harinarayanpur, Mangalkot, Deulpota, Tamluk, Bangarh, Natsal, Pandu Rajar Dhibi, Farakka, Tilpi, etc. have also been covered in their book.
Description of Forms:

A review of available literature focusing on description shows that several scholars have given thick descriptions of certain forms with the aim to aid to the identification of the forms. One of such descriptive studies was done by P. C. Dasgupta (1958). With an exhaustive description of some of the important figures from Tamluk he argued for the analogies in art forms of the site with other terracotta yielding sites of Bengal. He also noted the relatedness of Sunga style with stone depictions of Bharut, Sanchi, Bodh Gaya and Bhaja. Graeco-Roman influences on terracotta art forms were also clearly noted. Similar kind of work on terracotta materials of Chandraketugarh was done by the same scholar in 1959. He illustrated several Early Historic terracotta forms from Chandraketugarh and also compared certain forms with corresponding north Indian terracotta art forms (Das Gupta 1959). Several scholars have attempted to describe the terracotta forms found from different sites. Toy-carts, being important findings from Chandraketugarh, Bautze (1989) focused on various seated figurines in the toy-cart and argued that it is difficult to correlate with exact gods and goddesses of Hindu mythology. With a descriptive study of such toy-carts he argued that the paucity of archaeological records made it difficult to identify the actual use of such carts. Mukherji (1991) gave a detailed description of 18 terracotta forms found from different important terracotta yielding sites of West Bengal, housed in State Archaeological Museum, West Bengal. Gautam Sengupta (1992) reported the presence of Pala period terracotta plaques from two sites viz. Bairhatta in South Dinajpur and Jagjivanpur in Malda districts of West Bengal. Enamul Haque (2001) provided a detailed illustrative description of 963 terracotta specimens from Chandraketugarh. Jana (2002) gave a description of terracotta specimens from the site of Mangalkot.

One of the most concentrated areas of descriptive studies is that of erotic terracotta and concept of fertility. Erotic terracottas especially the Mithuna figures occupy an important place in the study of history of art forms in India (see Dasgupta 1961). With the descriptive study of major forms of erotic expressions found in Bengal terracotta during
Sunga to Gupta period, housed in Asutosh Museum and Indian Museum, Kolkata. Chakrabarti and Glantz (1971-72) argued that:

(a) Due to the absence of erotic forms of terracotta from middle and upper Ganga basin, it may be suggested that the core area of distribution of these forms is located in lower Ganga basin.

(b) The variety of *Mithuna* pose indicates that systematic body of erotic knowledge was prevalent in lower Ganga valley which is an important socio-historical issue.

(c) The similarity in art forms between Khajuraho reliefs and Bengal terracottas signifies continuity of Indian erotic iconography.

(d) The continuity of erotic art forms demands causation, which requires iconographic data.

As Briffault (1927) and Bhattacharya (1971) showed fertility rites in agriculture have sex as an important component, one may say Lower Bengal had similar agriculture related fertility rites. With the beginning of civilization this knowledge got systematized and incorporated within the fabric of the civilized society in a sophisticated form.

Therefore these forms represent linear continuity of erotic forms for more than thousand years. Rita Dutta (2006-2007) studied several erotic plaques from Chandraketugarh in the collection of Indian Museum and concluded that these plaques were associated with the conceptions of *Siva* and *Sakti*, *Purush* and *Prakriti*. She noted that “this branch of knowledge was quite well known in the Lower Bengal several centuries before the emergence of Vatsayana” (Dutta 2006-2007: 179). Sengupta (1993-1994) gave a descriptive account of a unique plaque with two heavily ornamented female figures in round from Mangalkot. He tried to situate the position of the plaque in reference to Bharhut and Mathura. However, he argued that the form represented was “ultimately rooted to Central Indian Deccanese idiom, transmitted through the Mathura tradition” (Sengupta, 1993-94: 214). Sarkar (2008) in reference to the stylistically grouping of terracotta materials on the basis of iconography and regional distinctions focused on the various forms of fertility representation. This descriptive study presented a list of different fertility forms such as mother and child, lady with parrot, *panchachuda Yakshi*
etc. to strengthen the argument that the archaic forms of human fertility continued through ages and the fertility right related performances were quite ancient.

Since, a variety of winged figures occupy an important position in Chandraketugarh’s findings several scholars have given descriptive account of such figures. Haque (1997) gave a description of 24 such figurines. Other studies on winged figures placed these figures in association with solar ideas and prosperity (Mukherjee 1981-82), Surya and Sri (Saraswati 1962), Mayadevi and Lakshmi (Coomaraswamy 1927), Moon God (Pal 1986). Gourisankar De (2008-2009) by citing several examples of winged figures from Harinarayanpur, Chandraketugarh and Tamluk argued that Indian artists were exposed to foreign impact most commonly with that of Greece and Mesopotemia. The presence of a male winged figure with embroidered turban, necklace, armlet, bangle and ornament encircling the neck according to him “most probably represent Kamadevta – the God of Love” (De 2008-2009: 62).

Citing examples of inscriptions found in pots, pitchers and lamps from Chandraketugarh, De (1996) with a descriptive study showed that there was migration of communities from north-west India to Lower Bengal. He further stated that pottery and terracotta items represented a) lifeways of people, b) popular myths, especially epic, churning of the ocean, aquatic and marine life and motifs. These indicate high level of artistic activities in ancient Bengal.

Rita Datta (1991) gave a descriptive account of certain female and also male figures from Farakka which are housed in State Archaeological Museum, Kolkata. She concluded that fan-shaped headdress of these figures with vertical scratches were typical to that of Kushana period and the associated finds from the habitational deposit also confirmed a Kushana affiliation. These figures also showed similarity with two figures found from Period III of Pandu Rajar Dhibi. Similar attempt has also been made by Banerjee (1993-1994).

Religious affinity of the terracotta materials have been done by Mukherjee (1996). He studied several figurines, plaques and seals from different sites of West Bengal to show
Bengal’s association with Buddhism. Taking material evidences from sites like Tamluk, Tilda, Chandraketugarh, and Karnasuvarna, he argued that evidences such as Vihara, Stupa, Buddha head, Jataka scenes, Bodhisattava figures and heads, Torana, seated Buddha, suggested a strong influence of Buddhism in West Bengal. King Ashoka, Fa-Hien, and Hiuen-Tsang were also influential over Bengal culture. P. C. Dasgupta (1958) also mentioned about the similar influences through the study of terracotta art forms and plaques from Tamluk.

**Narrative Descriptions:**

Narratives or organization of language into a structure is an important source for understanding events, time sequence and historical context (Sedgwick 2004). As narratives are important source of information, these are studied with much care. Gourisankar De (2001) argued that stories and narratives represented one of the major forms of entertainment available to human beings. Writing down such stories and visual representations form integrated part of the material culture. He found Chandraketugarh as one of the most important examples of terracotta art depicting narratives from Ramayana, Hitopodesha, Jataka, Panchatantra, etc. He divided the stories into a) flood myth, b) Ramayana scenes, c) Jataka tales, d) scenes from drama, e) current legends and f) scenes from daily life.

S.S. Biswas (1981) mentioned many of such scenes found in terracotta items. Subhradeep De (1999) gave emphasis on the terracotta depiction of daily life of the ancient people. There are examples of plaques indicating rural life, farming culture, processions, etc., there by showing images of daily life. Evidences such as terracotta figurines and plaques depicting male and female dancers, musicians and musical instruments from Chandraketugarh reflect contemporary life in palace, village, forest or garden and street (De and De 2000).
Iconic and Secular Terracottas:

With some elaborations of the history of terracotta and ceramics in India, Ray (1996) gave a descriptive account of the ceramics and particularly terracottas found from the six identifiable phases of the site of Mangalkot, located in Bardhaman district of West Bengal. She argued that the terracotta artists of Mangalkot began to produce secular and artistic figurines along with so-called ‘ageless’ types.

For Ray (1996: 32), Kushana period terracotta represented a new category of “demand-patronage complex”. The dresses, draperies and physical feature showed the influence of foreign art. The use of moulds and hand-modelling together generated a new kind of art idiom creating imageries in accordance with the changing pattern of life. The two types, first, generalized style and second, more concerned with precision of particular details, occurred hand in hand. The period also showed the dominance of the iconic (images of gods and goddesses) over the aniconic representations. She notes that the changes in imaginative conception in iconic and secular traditions indicate historical-social-cultural changes in India during Kushana period.

Classification Issues, Categorisation, Time Dimensions and Stylistic Analogy:

Early Historic terracotta plaques and figurines are considered as time signifier. Art Historians depended primarily on stylistic analogy – “a method where an object’s temporal position is determined by comparing it with stylistically similar objects recovered from excavated sites in various parts of India” (Roy Chowdhury 2002: 13). Perhaps one of the most exhaustive attempts to understand terracotta in terms of historical development was by Arundhati Banerji (1994) which began with pre-Harappa continued through Harappa, Post Harappa upto early NBPW phase.

Several scholars have worked on the time dimensions, stylistic analysis and classification related issues of terracotta art. One of the earliest classifications was given by Kramrisch in 1939. She placed Indian terracottas into two major divisions, first, the timeless or
ageless types and second, timed variations. Through her study of contemporary and historical terracottas of Bengal and Bihar she argued that there were certain terracotta forms, mostly used for ritualistic purpose, have almost remained unchanged over time and space. There were other forms which have changed through time in consequence of local adaptations. She stressed on the functional attributes of the terracotta in a particular social context. She argued that the ageless or timeless types were generally handmade where as timed variations were essentially mould made. These two types occurred parallel both in past and in recent times (Kramrisch 1939). Later on, Coomaraswamy in 1956 classified the art forms into a) Popular art and b) High art. He argued that in India there was an existence of two kinds of artistic expression, marga or highway on the one hand and desi or byway on the other. More recently Bhattacharya (2002) argued for the importance of combining Kramrisch’s and Coomarawamy’s approaches. He found that ageless type suggested by Kramrisch in 1939 had something to do with the popular art forms which were still continuing today and were mostly desi or popular form. The high art form changed over time. Citing examples of Krishnanagar clay toys, which were realist in form and influenced by Europe, Bhattacharya (2002) suggested that they represented the high end forms of contemporary Bengal art and hence it was the timed variation.

There is a general absence of scientific dating of terracottas of Bengal (Saraswati 1962). Saraswati (1962) argued for a possible use of two methods of dating, first, stylistic analogy with stone sculpture and second, dating on the basis of evolution of terracotta technology. Based on an assumption that style progressed in a unilinear manner, N. R. Ray (1975) argued that stylistic analogy could be used as a method of dating. Harley (1986) on stylistic ground argued that terracotta stylistically followed the patterns in stone. However, for Roy Chowdhury (2002:16) “it is further assumed that terracotta would follow the same pattern of stylistic evolution as seen in stone sculpture, thereby, completely disregarding its independent existence.” Furthermore, she stated that although there are instances of similar stylistic evolution of terracotta and stone sculpture, but these two media had different attributes, problems and functions in the society. Associated inscribed antiquities and architectural remains played an important role in
dating terracotta artifacts (Dasgupta 1961). Earlier studies were style centric evolutionary or chronological work based on analogical framework with contemporary stone sculptures. Terracottas have been dated on the basis of stylistic analogy, comparing them with contemporary terracottas from other Ganga valley sites, like Kausambi, Pataliputra, Vaisali and Mathura.

An important attempt to classify the terracotta findings from the site of Chandraketugarh was made by Roy Chowdhury (1995-96). She classified the terracotta findings on the basis of themes and motifs. She saw themes as a more abstract concept than motifs which were generally specific, repeated and concrete forms of manifestation. She classified Chandraketugarh’s terracottas into seven categories on the basis of themes and with each category there could be several motifs. For example, within the thematic category of ‘Divine and Semi Divine Creatures’ there were motifs like Sri Laksmi, the lady with weapons as hair pins and her variations, Aditi Uttanapad or Lajja-Gauri, Winged figurines, etc.

S.S. Biswas (1981) divided the ancient terracotta forms of Bengal into seven categories, viz. Divinities, Toys and animal figurines, Narrative Plaques, Erotic motifs, Bird and plants on plaques, Seals and sealings, Decorations and motifs on pottery. Within these broad categories several sub-types were also described. Sharmi Chakraborthy (2000) classified the Chandraketugarh terracotta into three main categories: i) Terracotta plaques which she again divided into eight sub-categories on the basis of their thematic depiction, ii) Double moulded male and female figurines and iii) A variety of animal figurines and plaques depicting various animals. Enamul Haque (2001) in a more recent study of terracotta materials from Chandraketugarh categorised the materials into 123 types which indicated bewildering variety of the terracotta art forms of the site.

S. K. Mukherjee (2002) carried out a descriptive work stating the history of terracotta art of West Bengal from Chalcolithic up to post-Gupta period. His study was based on stylistic comparison with the stone sculptures of recognized periods and analogy with known or published terracotta findings from different recognized sites. In few cases he also made comparison with contemporary forms. In this work he tried to describe the
distinguished stylistic features of terracottas of different periods and also the continuity of certain features. His study aimed at to determine the chronology and typology of the terracotta art of West Bengal.

Bautze (1995) gave a different way of classifying north Indian terracotta materials in terms of locations. Adopting an open-ended methodology based on visual traits which essentially took iconographic reference and a comparison with stone sculpture which assigned materials to three major sites, viz. Mathura, Kausambi and Chandraketugarh.

More recently Roy Chowdhury (2002) argued that stone and terracotta followed two different patterns of stylistic evolution in Mathura. Therefore it was important to ask how accurate would it be if we date terracotta from southern Bengal on the basis of formal affinity to stone sculptures of another site. Citing numerous examples from sites like Vaisali, Sonpur, Champa having comparable styles with Chandraketugarh complex, Roy Chowdhury suggested that similar styles might occur in different time periods. She further showed inconsistencies in stratigraphic evidences at different sites like Chandraketugarh and Hadipur. Clubbing these evidences she argued that it was difficult to determine a unidirectional path for evolution of style in a society. Therefore it was unwise to date any terracotta material on the basis of stylistic analogy.

One of the major cataloguing in recent times was done by Sengupta, Roy Chowdhury and Chakraborty (2007). They classified the early historical terracottas housed in State Archaeological Museum, West Bengal, in to six categories, viz. a) Divine and Semi-Divine, b) Mithuna and Mithuna Plaques, c) Animal Riders, d) Plaques with Narrative Content, e) Plaques and Figurines of Animals and f) Miscellaneous, which facilitated their descriptive work.

**History, Society and Terracotta: Ethnographic and Ethnoarchaeological Works**

The classification issues are far from being resolved. However, scholars recognized the immense possibility of using terracotta materials for reconstructing the lifeways of
ancient people. Perhaps one of the earliest mentions of the possibility of using terracotta materials for explaining dimensions of past society was by Nihar Ranjan Ray. Ray (1980) in his *Chandraketugarh, A Port City in Ancient Bengal, its Art and Archaeology*, asked for the possible functional relations of terracotta plaques and social system. Whether these were manifestations of Urbanism? Whether we could link these plaques with cult? Although these questions have remained unanswered, nevertheless these have left several puzzles that were yet to be solved. S.S. Biswas (1981: 111) argued “…In the perspective of an ancient tradition and changing style through epochs these terracottas eloquently compliment the culture… They indeed provide a valuable source of material needed for reconstructing some of the forgotten chapters of the socio-cultural history of the country. The ethnic groups, their daily life, their costumes, jewellery, headdress, etc., the architectural designs, the mode of conveyance and other aspects as revealed in this art are manifestly important.” There are ranges of studies in this area.

An extensive ethnographic documentation of the terracotta craft tradition of Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh was carried out by Jayaswal (1984, 1989); Jayaswal and Krishna (1986); Jayaswal, Krishna and Pant (1986). In their exhaustive work they examined the distribution of terracotta forms and styles, geographical factors, and location of the centres. They described the manufacturing technique of these terracottas produced by the contemporary potter communities from the middle Ganga valley in detail. They also classified the terracotta figurines from the area into three categories: ritualistic, decorative and toys for children. Elephant, horse and tiger are the predominant animal figurines produced in that area. These were offered in different ritual ceremonies though the use of tiger was limited to the small area of Gorakhpur. They referred to the terracotta of ‘Nauranga style’ which is represented by stylized horse, elephant, tiger, camel and rhinoceros. Jayaswal (1989) found continuity in technique of manufacture, stylisation and ritual use. She pointed to the difficulties in tracing the continuity of supply chain of terracotta materials and argued for possibilities in tracing the continuities of ritual use of terracotta materials as manifested in different thans (sacred groves). Later on Vidula Jayaswal (1990) argued that Indian terracotta art has been studied with an attempt to identify and classify. Comparatively little attempt has been made to understand issues
like manufacturing process, mechanics of dispersal and origin and spread of new styles. She suggested for a possibility of the use ethnographic materials to study such issues. Using ethnographic references from 150 pottery/terracotta making centres she argued that morphological parallels between the ancient clay figurines and ethnographic forms could help understanding the skills and the motivations behind the stylistic change. In a more recent paper Jayaswal (2002) gave a detailed description of the ritual use of contemporary terracotta art forms exchanged through jajmani system. She found that elephants with a variety of art forms were attached with various rituals in Bihar. The variation in art form was so prominent that she classified art forms into several divisions based on their place of origin. At the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, north of River Ganga cluster of terracotta elephants in sacred groves are notable.

In West Bengal ethnographic work on terracotta craft has been extensively done by Dipankar Ghosh (2002a) which focused on the variety of art forms, documentation of the technique of manufacture and distribution of terracotta manufacturing centres throughout the state. Scholars like Mukherjee (1971) studied the terracotta craft of Panchmura a famous terracotta manufacturing centre in Bankura. Ghosh (2002b) studied the aspects of terracotta Tulsi mancha in Medinipur. Mukhopadhyay (1999) studied the dialectics of folk art and high art in West Bengal. Shaw (2011) gave a detailed study of the manufacturing technique of terracotta horses in Bankura. Satpathi (2011) probed on the problems faced by the terracotta craft makers of Panchmura in Bankura.

Kakoli Sinha (2008) in her Genesis of dolls and toys focused on a) a brief history of the continuation of dolls and toys in West Bengal, b) contemporary status of dolls and toys in rural and urban context and c) life of the doll and toy makers. She argued that apart from the classical divisions of the dolls and toys as timeless and timed variations and religious or secular usage, one could focus on the rural and urban differences as well. While clay toys in urban centres were un-burnt, glossy and represented realist forms such as Rabindranath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Adam and Eve, clearly aspects of urban life, rural clay toys were burnt, thereby, increasing their longevity. Citing examples of regions like Krishnanagar and Kalighat producing materials for urban folks and Bankura that of
rural people she indicated the difference in form has a demand base. Hence, the Krishnanagar and Kalighat artists making dolls and toys for urban life focused on realist forms matching urban needs. However, she also mentioned the possibility of change in taste as burnt terracotta ornaments were becoming increasingly popular among urban ladies. In an ethnographic description of the life of the doll makers she represented the supply chain of raw materials through river ways and argued that the lack of proper marketing and canvassing were the reasons for distressed status of the artists who made these items.

D. K. Bhattacharya (1989) carried out ethnographic study on the use of terracotta objects in Manasa cult among the Bauris who lived in Bankura district of West Bengal close to Bengal-Bihar border. Besides the main object of veneration made on terracotta known as Manasa ghat they used stylized terracotta horse and elephant figurines as part of the ritual. He pointed out the historical reasons for the choice of these particular animal figurines by the Bauris. He argued that the present day terracotta worship among them was purely a historical development and a result of political, socio-economic changes in the society. Therefore, these symbols should not merely be treated as a symbol of power but one should also look into their historical background and trace why these symbolic images were chosen for a particular cult. Bidhan Biswas (2002) studied Manasa cult and the use of terracotta materials in pleasing the deity in several places of West Bengal. Sacred groves being an important space of terracotta use have been studied thoroughly by Malhotra et al. (2001).

Gangopadhyay (2002) argued that archaeologists emphasized more on terracotta materials for their form to be used for making time brackets. As the studies over emphasized on forms, it resulted in the absence of studies contextualizing terracotta materials in their social process especially the space. He argues that many excavations did not speak for the context. Instead forms were taken to be the main clue for interpreting their meaning. This tendency, according to him was dangerous as this approach especially in archaeology where we saw these objects at their final stage of deposition could not look into the processes by which these have gone through. These
processes were culturally significant and carried meaning without which we would be unable to get a complete understanding of these objects. Gangopadhyay argued that here laid the importance of ethnoarchaeology. Through his ethnographic study of the use of terracotta in villages of Bishnupur in Bankura, he carried out a detailed study of the location of the village shrines and patterns of terracotta use. He showed that:

a) Terracotta objects were patterned according to the patterns of human behaviour

b) Symbolic association of pitchers with womb as these were offered only to the female deities, hence, patterns of terracotta use were gendered.

c) Terracotta materials were not always cult specific, but at times they were gender specific.

d) Offering votive objects was not a ritual per se rather their deposition in shrines marked that a ritual had taken place and also marked the space.

e) The location of shrines was also culturally important in marking village boundary.

Therefore Gangopadhyay concluded that forms were not the only criteria for understanding the symbolic realm of a society. One should note the entire social process through ethnographic study and archaeological interpretations required horizontal excavations. In a more recent continuation of his previous work with detailed study of the scripts associated with Manasa, its symbolic meaning and associated terracotta objects from past and present, Gangopadhyay (2006) argues that there are evidences to show the use of terracotta figurines in the ritual observance of serpent-goddess.

**Existing Gaps in Literature and the Present Concern:**

The earlier studies are mostly limited to documentations, descriptions and classifications of terracotta items which fail to see the presence of non-material aspects of human society and culture linked to the apparent material presence of terracotta. The review of the works indicates the potential of ethnographic data in amplifying archaeological interpretations. More such works are needed for deeper understanding of the rich terracotta traditions of West Bengal. The review indicates first, that most of the studies
focus on the site of Chandraketugarh (Sengupta, Roy Chowdury and Chakraborty 2007), second, there is no consensus in the possible methods of classification so far, third, most of the scholars opt for descriptive approach of various kinds, and finally, studies of explanatory or analytical potential are less and lack specificity. These indicate an existing problem in approaching terracotta in its socio-cultural context.

Present work ethnographically explores terracotta manufacturing techniques, patterns of marketing and usage. While studying the patterns of terracotta use the study focuses on the hitherto understudied spatial and gender dimension associated with the ritual use of terracotta in West Bengal.

The Dimension of Space and Gender and the Present Concern:

Kroll and Price (1991) argue that spatial analysis of archaeological remains is as old as the discipline itself. The argument gains support primarily from the spatial concern during different excavations of archaeological sites since the beginning of so called modern archaeology and at a more substantive level from the approaches of Scandinavian traditions where the spatial arrangements of artifacts, features and architectures were documented within a functional framework. This in turn gives rise to the increasing focus on systematic analysis of artifacts in spatial context which is the cornerstone of Processual era in archaeology (Trigger 1989).

The explicit use of spatial analysis in archaeology calls for a conjunction of functional approach with archaeology pioneered by scholar like Clark (1954) in Europe and Willey (1948) in North America. Meanwhile Walter Taylor (1948) with his conjunctive approach in archaeology seeks a detailed study of material as well as ecological evidences recovered from archaeological sites. Studying the spatial patterning of artifacts as systems to understand past societies’ systems has been the prime mover. Willey (1953) explores the settlement, environment and socio-cultural systems over time in Viru Valley in Peru. Willey and Sabloff (1993) examine the relationship between the spatial patterning of settlements in particular ecological background. Along with the space
studies there is a significant rise in approaching cross cultural generalizations in terms of understanding of past behaviours and modern ethnographic observations.

Lewis Binford’s (1968:27) “laws of cultural dynamics” which includes ethnoarchaeological observations about the spatial patterning of artefacts, throws light on the regularities between past and present societies. In his famous *Willow smoke and dog’s tails: Hunter-gather settlement systems and archaeological site formation* (Binford 1980) he collects data based on ethnographic observations of various hunter-gatherer groups to explain spatial patterning in the archaeological records. Scholars like Carol Kramer (1979), Nicolas David (1971) and Susan Kent (1983) worked on similar issues of spatial organization of present societies and their archaeological relevance. Flannery’s (1976) edited volume *The Early Mesoamerican Village* represents a complete devotion to the analysis of settlement patterns and systems and organizations of households. Throughout the Processual era settlement studies increasingly become ecologically driven. Sanders et al. (1979) for example in *The Basin of Mexico: Ecological Processes in the Evolution of a Civilization*, stress the symbiosis between ecological process, cultural evolution and settlement study. One of the more enduring emphases of Processual archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s on space study is that of household archaeology. With Flannery’s influence Steadman (1996) notes that early work in household archaeology has a Mesoamerican association. 1970s see a spur of quantitative approach in spatial analysis advocated principally by David Clarke (1977) and his students including Hodder and Orton (1976).

With the rise of Post-processual archaeology scholars like Ashmore (2002) argue the relevance of such an approach in analyzing past cultures. Patterson (1986) questioned the normative assumptions made by the Processualists and began to examine aspects of human behaviour in a less deterministic way. Scholars begin to focus on intangible aspects of human culture including ideology, power relations and social structures in past societies (Hodder 1984, Leone 1986, Shanks and Tilley 1987a, 1987b). These studies tend to focus on the socio-cultural implications of spatial relations in past societies. With
the development of Post-processual archaeology the intangible aspects gained central stage in archaeological analysis of space.

With the philosophical and methodological background provided by Henri Lefebvre especially in his *The Production of Space* (1991) space is now seen as the site of ongoing interactions of social relations which is a process of production. His triad spatial model a) the conceived dimension which is the material manifestation of ideas associated with designing of a space, b) perceived dimension – the functional association of space or the patterns of space use and c) lived space – symbolic values associated with spatial practice, becomes an important source of inspirations. For Elden (2004) lived space is Lefebvrian middle range between absolute idealism, i.e. the conceived space and absolute materialism, i.e. perceived space. Similarly several anthropological literature is increasingly devoted to ethnographic location of voice (Appadurai 1988), politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple socially constructive nature of space (Rodman 1992), self and body in space (Richardson 1982), gendered space (Ardener 1993, Bourdieu 1973, Humphrey 1974, Massey 1994, Rosaldo 1974, 1980).

Soja’s (1996) third space echoing Lefebvre’s lived space can be used as a tool to understand the constructs, symbols and cognition of contemporary people. A hint of archaeological work along this line is provided by Shanks and Tilley (1987a) in their substantial (experiential) and abstract (measured) time which sees incorporation of space into the body of time.

As Post-processual archaeology tends to focus more on the intangible aspects and space is considered to be one of the tangible site to read them, several scholars sought to analyse the built environment constructed by past people in order to reveal social, cultural and ideological aspects of past buildings and cities. Scholars like Blanton (1994), Hodder (1984), Martin (2001), and Trigger (1990) inspired by anthropologists and cultural geographers such as Amos Rapoport (1968, 1982, 1990), Lawrence and Low (1990), Hiller (1996), Hanson (1998) exemplify the tradition. Bruce Trigger (2003) analyses urban landscapes of cities in early civilizations and monumental architectures to focus on the nature of power in early civilizations. The very nature of power continues to maintain
urban landscapes till date. Similarly Smith (2003) discusses the idealization and realization of power through urban landscapes of ancient Mesopotamian cities. Similar works by Wendy Ashmore (1991, 1992) echoes the archaeological study of intangibles which in turn is a way of studying space advocated by scholars like Lefebvre. Hodder (1982b), Shanks and Tilley (1987a) note through their ethnoarchaeological studies that material culture is meaningfully constituted by social cultural factors and in turn influences culture as well (David and Kramer 2001). David and Kramer’s (2001) ethnoarchaeological discussion on the gendered spaces exemplify these new ways of incorporating Post-processual approaches to spatial organization.

The concept of gender and its possible implication in analysing archaeological materials, especially the spatial aspect has been understudied. Early in the development of landscape archaeology, historical archaeologists have analyzed how vernacular landscapes were shaped by class or race, but failed to consider gender (Kelso 1995, Zierden 1996). Few others use archaeological concept of landscape to include culturally shaped lands and what was previously called settlement patterns – the arrangement and cultural relationships among buildings constructed on or into landscapes such as cityscapes (Mrozowski and Beaudry 1990, Sandweiss 1996). However, only one of these cityscape studies analyzed gender power dynamics (Spencer-Wood 1987). One of the principal issues for the archaeological discipline, more broadly, is the gender-marking of activities that once took place in the material conditions, now represented by the archaeological record (Allison 2006). Much work has been carried out in different branches of archaeology to engender the past. However, there are criticisms on the direct use of feminist theory in archaeology (Engelstad 1999). Although Shelby Brown (1997:14) notes that “classical archaeologists continue to avoid feminist theory” a growing concern for the use of concept of gender is noted in current archaeological practices (e.g., Bacus et al. 1993; Gilchrist 1999).

While ancient terracotta materials are studied from the perspective of forms, classifications and a few ethnoarchaeological endeavours, this leaves the important Post-processual issues of intangible aspects of terracotta in the broader perspective of cultural
significance and their possible continuity. With these newer insights on gender and space there is an opening of studying terracotta not only from the perspective of its forms, techniques of manufacture and evidences from archaeological sites but also study of the intangible aspects of terracotta usage in broader social-cultural space.