
Terracotta Temples of Birbhum: An Ethno-archaeological Prospect

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Abstract: *The terracotta temples of Birbhum are one of the unparalleled cultural heritages of the country. Present paper speaks about the aesthetic values of these monuments. In addition, present work has tried to bridge a temporal gap between past and present social cognition as reflected in the making of these monuments of Birbhum. The paper shows past life-ways carried remarkable influence and inspiration to the artists and architects of studied monuments. Ethno-archaeological parallels can be witnessed in modern day rural Birbhum as discussed in present paper.*

Keywords: Art, Architecture, Cultural Heritage, Analogy, Ethno-archaeology, Terracotta Temple, Birbhum

Introduction

The art of terracotta dates back to the Indus Valley civilisation. It was about 3,000 years before the birth of Christ when Indians mastered the magic of this craft. Astonishingly, yet, it is only in Bengal and a few places in Jharkhand that this craft was used to decorate temples, mosques and other places of worship. In Bengal, artisans opted for terracotta tiles or plaques mainly due to the non-availability of stone and for its easy usage. Bengal province (modern Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal) saw a remarkable surge in patronage and experimentation in art and architecture in the form of terracotta brick temple, from the mid-17th to the mid-19th century.

Although there are, plenty of evidences concerning human settlement in Bengal from prehistoric times but there are inadequacy of evidences. This is because of the soil structure of Bengal. The civic of this area being spread on the alluvial plain of the mighty river of Ganges, the whole region is vulnerable to flood and it's resulting unsettling geographical pattern. The single undulated regions being the western Chotanagpur and the Himalayan ridges of east and the north. This soil structure is reflected in the building material chosen by the Bengali temple designers. West Bengal

is a lucrative region for studying terracotta as it has a long, rich, and a continuous presence of terracotta art from ancient times up to present day. Predominantly in terracotta temples, with elaborate surface decorations on the walls. At present some communities, mostly *kumors* (by caste pot makers), from different parts of West Bengal are engaged in making terracotta objects.

Even though the finest terracotta temples of Bengal are found in Bankura, Hooghly, and Burdwan districts, some places in Birbhum are also blessed with exquisite temples, mostly all near Shantiniketan, where Rabindranath Tagore founded a university “Visva-Bharti.” Shantiniketan lies in the eastern part of Birbhum district, standing apart with its own unique identity. This district (Figure 1) comes under south-west part of Bengal. It is bounded on the north and west by Santhal Paraganas, on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan and on the south by Burdwan, from which it is separated by the Ajay river. Birbhum is situated between 23° 32' 30" (right above the tropic of cancer) and 24° 35' 0" north latitude and 87° 5' 25" and 88° 1' 40" east longitudes, and about 4,545 square kilometres in area. (District Gazetteers, Birbhum, 1910).

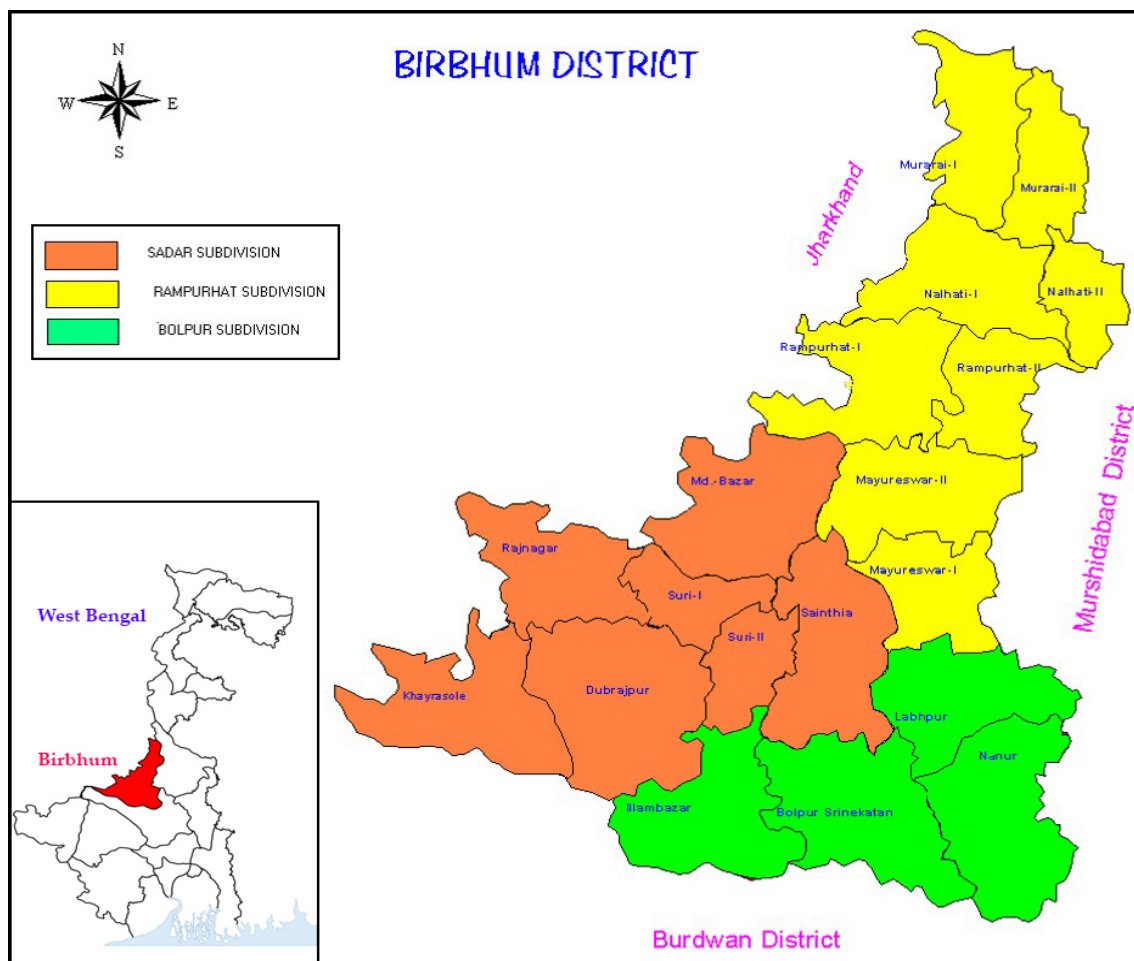


Figure 1: Map of Birbhum District (Courtesy: <https://upload.wikimedia.org>; <http://updateox.com>)

Brief History of the District

Earlier, eastern part of the territory was called Rarh, ruled by Mauryan Empires, succeeded by Guptas, Gauda's Shasanka, Harshavardhana of Pushyabhuti dynasty, Palas and then during 12th c.n. AD lordship passed on to Sena kingdom. Western part was called Vajjabhumi i.e., the "Land of Thunderbolt". It was more rugged and wilder. From 13th century onwards, this district comes under Mohammedan rules. In 1765, East India Company administered Birbhum from Murshidabad, until 1787. In 1879, Birbhum was reconstructed as its present area. (District Gazetteers, Birbhum, 1910).

Temples can be viewed as a significant indicator of a region's culture, closely associated with contemporary movements in religion, literature, arts, as well as political, social, and economic development. Late medieval terracotta temples of Birbhum play certain role in these aspects. To some extent these temples and vernacular structures of all over Bengal remains similar until date.

This paper is dealing with certain socio-religious aspects. This directly or indirectly influences by those terracotta temples. In present time too, architectural and aesthetic values of these terracotta temples shows their prominence in modern society. Also as a key material demonstration of early society and with the help of ethnographic experience, it attempts to provide possible ways to reflect on the cultural significance. For a distinct approach, we can divide the terracotta temples based on two aspects i.e. architectural aspect and stylistic approach.

Scope of Research

This work attempts to understand different aspects of present day vernacular architecture and life pattern related to terracotta art and architecture used in temples of Birbhum during late medieval epoch. Consequently, it can associate both late medieval and modern stretch through ethnographic study. Through this study, the potential of comparisons between these two eras can be possible.

As discussed previously, in this work terracotta temples are seen as one of the important jargons of past and present folks reflecting different interconnected facets of culture. Before presenting the research outcomes and interpretations, it is needed to expound the aims/objectives and methodology of the current work.

Objectives

The major aims of the work are as following:

- To understand the reasons of continuing same architecture in present day vernacular architecture, same as terracotta temples.
- To study the similarities between art form of terracotta plaques and real life.
- To explore existing oral traditions in order to interpret the stylistic forms of temple panels and their significance in present day daily life.

Methodology

Being a native of this region, author is familiar with the lifestyle and architecture of the inhabitants. Therefore, it is easy for her to study this region's ethno-archaeology, and compare them with the temple art and architecture. So far, the methodologies taken for present research are:

- Present work involves intensive ethnography in different villages and the study of terracotta temples of Birbhum district.
- Observation of the temple art and architecture.
- Study rural life style.
- Observe vernacular architecture.
- Study published material, concerning this topic.
- Also, most importantly through personal communications acquire knowledge about the local history and cultural tradition.

Art and Architecture of Terracotta Temples

The temple structures contain gabled roofs, which are colloquially called the *chala*. For example, a gabled roof with an eight sided pyramid structured roof is called *at chala* or literally the eight faces of the roof. In addition, frequently there is more than one tower in the temple building. These are built of laterite and brick bringing them at the mercy of severe weather conditions of southern Bengal.

There are wide-ranging typologies present in the aspect of terracotta temple type. District Birbhum, like other places of Bengal, has specific types. However, in this paper, only the eccentric typologies, which are comparable with modern architecture, are cited. The main features of terracotta temples are internal domes and arches, rounded entrances, curved cornices, and walls covered with sculpted burnt-brick plates. Among the other distinctive categories of these brick temples, the styles of roofs or *chalas* have remarkable variations. The *Chala* or *Bangla* type roof of a temple is derivative from covers of thatched hut in rural Bengal. *Ratna* is a type of late mediaeval temple in Bengal with sloping roofs and curved cornices. The two major groups being the sloping roofed or *chala* styles and the towered or *ratna* styles usually classify terracotta temples (www.aishee.org). Those terracotta temples can be classified according to their architectural differences of roof styles. Those are as follows:

- *Do Chala/Ek Bangla/Jor Bangla*
- *Char Chala*
- *At Chala*
- *Deul*
- *Dalan*
- *Nava Ratna*
- *Octagonal*
- *Tero Ratna* (www.aishee.org)

These terracotta temples of Bengal or Birbhum have been influenced by daily life of this region from very early period. From its architecture to its artistic form, in every aspect there are impacts of day-to-day life. In present day as well, modern houses, huts are seen made by modern artisans are same as those historical monuments. Therefore, in this case, this region deals with a spectacular direct equivalence. The plaques of terracotta give us a glimpse of the early culture of the people of Bengal, sometimes, which is not even available in Bengali literature. This proves that this plastic art supports the literary art of Bengal. These terracotta reliefs are noteworthy contribution of the artists. As it is natural to narrate temple art with religious aspect, but in some cases it correspondingly the local tradition or folk lore. Which were indirectly influenced the artisans. Sometimes oral traditions play the role of stylistic inspirations. For example, the influence of contemporary society was seen in *Mangal Kavyas* as well as in the portrayals of the marriage of Shiva and *Parvati* in temple art. While describing the marriages between the poor and homeless *Shiva* and the beautiful *Parvati*, poet drew upon scenes of ordinary Bengali life in which girls of tender age were occasionally given in marriage to old men. In their descriptions of such scenes, poets did not hesitate to emphasize the pain and regret of the young girl. In addition, this was true in 18th and 19th century when marriage between old men and young girls was a common practice. In the depiction of this popular scene, temple artist did not follow the standard iconographic texts but preferred to represent *Parvati* as a small girl, and *Shiva* as a half-naked old man. Hence, this way different tales from *Puranas* and epics were narrated by storytellers at village gatherings and undeniably influenced terracotta artists of that time. (Personal Communication).

One of the most noteworthy features of the history of this enormous architecture in Bengal is the strident disruption in tradition that coincided with the Muslim conquest. Architects working for Muslim patrons developed an inclination for covering entire wall surface with finely worked terracotta plaques that combined traditional decorative motifs. Hatakali temple (1750 A.D.) at village Itanda in Birbhum has influence of all three communities respectively. The terracotta carvings reveal a mix of Hindu, Muslim and Christian influence. By the end of the 16th century, an exceptionally Bengali style of temple architecture and sculpture had established itself as the Hindu artistic expression of the new social, religious and Cultural Revolution. The wide range of temple styles comprised basics of both change and continuity, typical in the vibrant but traditionally based Bengali society. Additionally, the temple decoration portrayed the aspects of everyday life of the contemporary society, particularly the spirits of the temple builders. This shows that temple building was the result of an intense concentration of economic and artistic properties, as well as public means of expressing power.

Similarities between Temple Architecture and Vernacular Style

Vernacular architecture is a category of architecture based on local needs, construction materials and reflecting local traditions. Despite of being associated with tradition, it

could still be considered a contemporary activity. It offers substitutes to conventional architectural practices that are highly responsible for today's energy crisis.

Factors Persuading Vernacular Architecture

- Geology and Climate
- Local material used
- Technology adapted

Geology and Climate: Birbhum district is comes under south-west part of Bengal. This region is belonging to Chotanagpur plateau. During summer, sometimes temperature goes up to 40°-45° celsius. Due to tropical monsoon zone medium rainfall occurred in this area, which are 100-150 centimetres. Rivers and channels are non-perennial in nature. During winter, normally, the temperature is 10°-12° celsius. Sometimes it becomes 7°-8° Celsius (Bengal District Gazetteers, Birbhum, 1910).

Local material used: Thatch/*khad* and rammed earth, bamboos are the raw materials, which are easily available locally.

Technology adapted: Roofs or *chalas* of huts are made with thatch and walls with rammed earth. Finishing touch or plaster of the walls given with a thick coat of mud and dung.

Present research is dealing with the similarities of both temple and vernacular architecture. As stated earlier. Therefore, here are some examples of both temples and huts, which can make a bridge of equivalent parallels.

Do Chala/Ek Bangla Style

The *Ek-bangla* (or *do-chala*) structure contains two sloping roofs with curved edges or cornices meeting at a curved ridge. Internally, there is a single rectangular chamber covered by a vaulted roof. This style imitates single-celled domestic huts in Bengal and first adopted in Islamic architecture, the earliest example being the 17th century tomb of Fateh Khan at Gaur (Figure 2). Although simple in structure, temples of this style are rare. A more preferred variant seems to have been the *Jor-Bangla* temple (Figure 3), with two adjacent, connected do-chala temples, with a central upper tower. A *Jor-Bangla* style temple called Hatakali Mandir is situated at Itanda village, 20 km east of Shantiniketan, at Bolpur in Birbhum district. It was built in 1750 A.D. This *Do-Chala* terracotta temple (Figure 4) is made on a high platform. Inside the temple is a pedestal for the goddess, but the idol is unfortunately missing.

In case of vernacular architecture, we found various similarities with temple, like the low edges of roof. Doors and windows are short. However, when it comes to temple architecture, maximum examples are showing arched pattern entrance of the temple. This is a rare exception between both the architecture. Gitanjali auditorium at Bolpur, in Birbhum is a modern building (Figure 5). It has resemblances with the famous *Jor-*

Bangla style temples of this region. Now a day mostly for the purpose of beautification, this *Do-Chala* style is adopted by modern architectural construction.



Figure 2: Tomb of Fateh Khan, at Gaur, Malda (<https://www.bcmtouring.com>)



Figure 3: Jor Bangla Kali Temple at Itanda



Figure 4: A do-chala hut at Itanda



Figure 5: Gitanjali Auditorium, Bolpur

Do-Chala architecture was used mainly in Bengali huts and temples. Later Bengali mosques adopted it and finally this style transferred into Mughal architecture. The *Sheesh Mahal* (The Palace of Mirrors) (Figure 6) is located within the Shah Burj block in northern-western corner of Lahore Fort. The roof is surprisingly similar with the *Bangla* hut style. Low-roofed pattern indicate towards its resemblances with Fateh Khan's tomb at Gaur.

Char Chala Style

This type of temple has four triangular roofs meeting at a point, with the ridges of each chala and cornices curved. The *char-chala* style is rare except in the districts of Birbhum, Murshidabad, and Nadia. Most *char-chala* temples are quite small and have a single entrance. *Char-chala* temples (Figure 7) with triple-arched entrance are exceptionally rare. Raghunathjee temple (Figure 8) is located in the village Ghurisa, near Illambazar. Near-about 30 km west of Bolpur Shantiniketan. This is a private, family owned temple. It is a small Char Chala temple founded by late Raghunath

Bhattacharya, on 1633 A.D. The entrance of the sanctum or *Garbhagriha* is through a wooden door. There are four open verandas in the four side of the temple. Exterior walls of the temple, heavily carved with terracotta plaques. Those are generally mythical and floral engravings. (Sarkar, 2010).



Figure 6: Sheesh Mahal, Lahore
(Courtesy: www.pakistanadventures.com)



Figure 7: Char Chala Hut and a Temple
(Courtesy: www.chitrolekha.com)

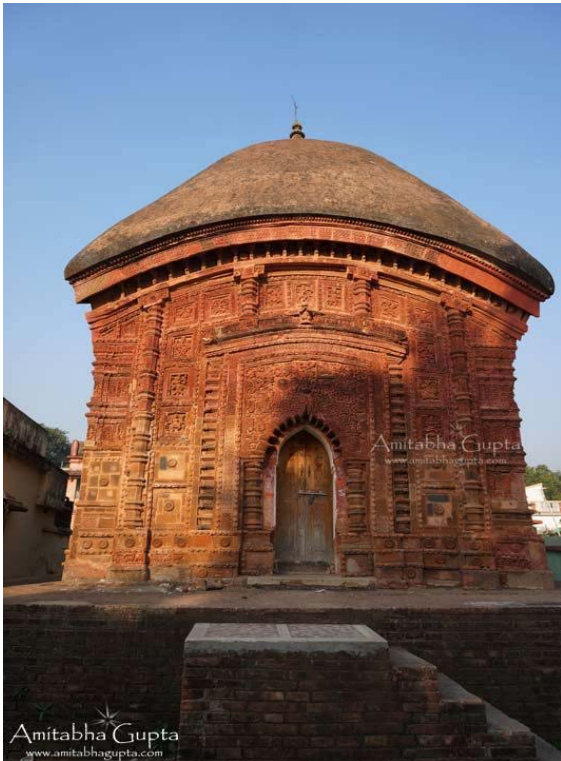


Figure 8: Raghunathjee Temple, Ghurisa
(Courtesy: <https://www.wordpress.com>)



Figure 9: Madan Gopal Temple, Amadpur (<http://www.aishee.org>)

There are other temples with similar architecture, as well. A Shiva temple at Charkalgram village, 30 km east of Shantiniketan has *char-chala* style architecture. However, this temple is rather plain with no terracotta plaques on the walls of it. This temple was established in 1838 A.D. At Uchchakarna, four Shiva temples were built attached to one another on a two feet high platform. This temple was built in 1768 A.D. and a private or rather family owned temple. Another char-chala Shiva temple at

Jubutia village, 35 km east of Shantiniketan is situated. It was built in 1728 A.D. This temple is a private property, and known locally as Jampeshwar Shiva temple. The temple is low in height and situated on a 2 feet high platform (Sarkar, 2010).

Char-chala type is very common style for rural huts of Bengal. It shows some ethnographic impact on modern architecture. Though *char-chala* style is rather infrequent in temple form. However, it has great influence on vernacular architecture of this region. It may be due to low expenses of this particular architectural style. We found the most common huts of Birbhum or all over Bengal is *char-chala* style, in present scenario too.

At Chala Style

When a char-chala temple is condensed and a miniature replica of a *char-chala* is added on the top of it, it becomes an *at-chala* or eight-roofed temple. However, this region lacking the *char-chala* variety, the *at-chala* style is very common instead. It seems to have been very popular in Bengal with artificers and patrons in the 18th and 19th centuries. As the architecture of the *at-chala* temple became common, the decorative measures of terracotta panels on the concealment also became consistent, letting artisans to build hundreds of fairly similar *at-chala* temples in this region. Although the both architecture and decoration of the temples became similar, it was sufficiently complex to allow both patrons and artisans to experiment and invent.

Local merchants and landowners built several terracotta temples in Amadpur in the 18th and 19th centuries. This village is 21 km north of Bolpur. A *at-chala* temple known as Radha Madhav, built by local Chowdhury family in 1739 is situated. A short distance from the Chowdhury family temple is the neglected but elegant at-chala Madan Gopal Temple (Figure 9). The Banerjee family built this temple in 1730. It has a triple arched entrance porch. Another at-chala Siva temple stands on a raised podium on the open ground next to the home of the Nath Family. This temple, built in the late 18th century, also has a triple-arched entrance porch and a rich terracotta facade. On a high plinth beside the main road of Amadpur village is this small but elegant at-chala temple built by the Nandi Family in 1792 (Figure 10). The temple has a single-arched entrance and a rich terracotta facade but in the condition of abandonment (Personal Communication).

Another at-chala temple, popularly known as Paschim Para Shiva temple is situated at village Surul, 5 km west of Shantiniketan. On the south-western side of the village, Srinivas Sarkar founded this temple (Figures 11-13). This is a 19th century *at-chala* with triple entrance (Personal Communication).

Like *char-chala* structure, *at-chala* also is very common in vernacular architecture of Birbhum. Still now, people made this type of roofs with different raw material. Whether it is thatched or terracotta tiles or aluminium sheets or made of asbestos. For the wall, they use rammed earth. Now days it altered with baked brick or sometimes concrete.



Figure 10: Shiva Temple of Nandi Family, Amadpur



Figure 11: Terracotta Tile and Straw Made *at-chala* Hut



Figure 12: Paschim Para Shiva Temple



Figure 13: Hut Made of Terracotta Tile and Straw

***Dalan* Flat Roofed Style**

The influence of British colonial period was reflected in *Dalan* style temple. The Gothic architecture inspired many of Indian architecture of contemporary time. This style was first pioneered in Western Europe in the Middle Ages. It began in France in the 12th century. The Gothic style grew out of Romanesque architecture. It lasted until the 16th century. The term, Gothic was first appeared during the latter part of the Renaissance. The characteristics of Gothic architecture are stone structures, large expanses of glass, clustered columns, sharply pointed spires, intricate sculptures, ribbed vaults, and

flying buttresses. One of their main characteristics is the ogival or pointed arch. However, in case of Bengal, there is no stone architecture found in Gothic style. (Wikipedia).



Figure 14: Sridhar Temple, Itanda

Therefore, mostly the administrative buildings and zamindar baris mirrored Gothic style of architecture. In Birbhum district, some of the known zamindaris were from Hetampur, Raipur, Surul, Rajnagar etc. These zamindars built their houses in Dalan style. It gradually influenced temple architecture. Sometimes they made their own shrine adjacent to the house. Commonly, dedicated to goddess Durga, and often called as Durga Bari or Durga Dalan. This type of temples mostly made of brick and lime plaster, with high pedestal. The faced have columned arches, and huge Gothic style pillars. Sanctum or Garbhagriha lies beyond the pillared verandas. The roofs of this type of architecture are always flat.

Vishnu temple of Itanda, named Sridhar temple (Figure 14) 20 km east of Shantiniketan is made of Dalan architecture. The house-turned temple at Itanda has a veranda with several pillars of varied styles. It is a double story temple. The raw material used for

building this temple is brick and plastered with lime. Though, recently some places of the walls are being plastered with cement. The sanctum contains a throne for the deity where the idol of Vishnu is regularly worshipped. Sandhu family built this temple on 1750 A.D. The massive double storied flat roofed temple can be easily mistaken as a Zamindar Palace. This temple is adorned with beautiful pillars and arches in its both floor (Personal Communication).

Another residence come temple is at Surul Boro Bari Durga Mandir (Figure 15). It is situated 5 km west of Shantiniketan. Sarkar family owns this temple, built in 1960 A.D. Brick and cement mortar were used to build this temple. (pers. comm.) This two-storied building looks impressive with lofty halls and verandas. The Durga mandapa is present inside this building. In front of Durga mandapa there is a *natmandir* (Figure 16). Old-fashioned octagonal and round pillars surround it.



Figure 15: Surul, Boro Bari (Courtesy: <https://amitabhagupta.wordpress.com>)



Figure 16: Natmandir (Courtesy: <https://amitabhagupta.wordpress.com>)

In case of Dalan style, modern buildings are rare. Only the remaining monuments are specimens of it. These types of buildings are good samples for ethno-archaeological study. Since, the owner of those Dalan houses is still maintaining their aristocracy. Some former Zamindar families are still preserving their tradition. These stated architectural features are quite similar with modern day buildings and vernacular architecture of Bengal as well as Birbhum.

Stylistic Features on Temple Walls and Its Familiarity with Ethno-Archaeology

Bengal temples are usually small in structure and cannot be called grand. However, they are rich in their aesthetic value. These temples are covered on outer surface with exquisite terracotta reliefs. Thousands of terracotta panels on the temple walls of Birbhum depict mythological as well as modern scenes. Some of these panels give an insight into the traditions and manners, costumes and jewellery, even court dresses worn by women and the man of 18th and 19th centuries. However, the significant part of this terracotta plaques are, their connections with present time. A vibrant picture of ethno archaeology is present in these terracotta temple panels. Remarkably even in

modern time, these terracotta relics are realistic and into the practice in day-to-day life. Hence, we can make a bridge between modern lifestyle and the life of late medieval time. At Joydev-Kenduli or Kendubillo (Kavi Joy deva's birthplace), the Radha Vinod Temple (Figure 17) established in the year of 1683. (Bandyopadhyay, 1984) An annual fair is held on the last day of ninth Bengali month *Pous*. Pilgrims from all over India attend this fair. This fair's main attraction is the *Bauls*, the wandering minstrels of Bengal. This temple has navaratna-style architecture, with nine *sikharas*, and excellent terracotta carvings on the temple wall depicting Ramayana and Krisnalila scenes.



Figure 17: Radha-Vinod Temple of Joydev

(Courtesy: https://usercontent1.hubstatic.com/13345840_f520.jpg)

However, along with these, there are interesting depictions of *Baul* singers. One of the walls of this temple has a terracotta plaque, where a *Baul* singer engraved with the *ek-tara* or single string instrument in his hand. However, the condition of this particular plaque is very poor.

Baul songs (Figures 18 and 19) are very famous in Bengal, especially in Birbhum district. In present day also, this culture is enduring by the minstrels of Bengal. These singers are the free wanderers. They are free from the bondage of society and family. They move from place to place. They are living on the alms they given by those who can plumb the profound depths of their prudence.



Figure 18: Depiction of *Baul* singer on the wall of Radha-Vinod Temple



Figure 19: *Baul* Singers are Singing Inside the Shantiniketan Express

In medieval Bengal, artists freely used the legends of Lord Krishna and his divine consort Radha to express many sensual events & dance was not an exception. In nearly all terracotta temples in Bengal, we thus see figures of Radha & Krishna dancing. Besides this, many devotees and ascetics used to dance as part of worship. Sri Chaitanya Deva, the great religious teacher who initiated a form of Vaisnavite (followers of Lord Vishnu) religious movement in 15th century Bengal also introduced a form of devotional song called *Kirtan* or *Nam-Sankirtan* (Hymn praising the Lord) escorted by dance. *Kirtan* is a devotional song, typically about the life of Krishna, in which a group repeats lines sung by a leader. In terracotta temple art of Birbhum (Figure 20), we found such reference, depicted on the wall of Gopal temple of Ghurisa.



Figure 20: Dance with Kirtan, Lakshmi Janardan Temple
(Courtesy: www.somensengupta.com)

Even in present day, Kirtan is a very popular part of practicing Viasnavism in Bengal. A person performing Kirtan is known as a kirtankara or, colloquially, a "kirtaneera" (Figure 21). Kirtan practice involves chanting hymns or mantras to the accompaniment of instruments such as the harmonium, *tablas*, the two-headed *mridanga*, or *pakhawaj* drum and hand cymbals (*karatalas*).



Figure 21: Modern day Kirtaneera (Courtesy: <https://i.ytimg.com>)

Another attention-grabbing feature on the terracotta temple walls of this district is *Chaal-chitra*. This motif is commonly found in terracotta temples of Bengal. During Durga Puja, we have seen *Chaal-chitras* on the backdrop of the idols painted with various figures. In Terracotta panels, *Chaal-chitras* were designed like a halo or *Prabhamandala*.

Chaal-chitra is a semi-circular background that forms an integral part of the idol of the goddess Durga. Usually it is made of wood, paper, or even, clay. A piece of exquisite artwork, depicting mythological aspects woven in a local perspective, is indigenous to this part of India. The Gouranga Mahaprabhu temple of Hath-tala at Illambazar, 15 km west of Shantiniketan has an example of *Chaal-chitra* (Figure 22). The upper arch panel above the main door is that of Goddess Durga and her family. In present day, the *Chaal-chitras* are mostly made of paper like material. But in some cases traditional clay made *Chaal-chitras* are made in Durga puja (Figures 23 and 24). The motifs are generally floral. Sometimes it's of mythology.



Figure 22: Durga in Mahaprabhu Temple with a wave pattern *Chaal-chitra*
(Courtesy: www.somensengupta.com)



Figure 23: Clay Made *Chaal-chitra*



Figure 24: Paper Made *Chaal-chitra*

Animal drawn carts, specifically bullock carts, are the oldest mode of transportation, existing in India and as well as Bengal since the past unknown. The conventional bullock carts are made of wooden wheels and bamboo / wooden load carrier. Still, bullock carts (Figures 25 and 26) are the utmost important mode of transportation in many parts of rural Bengal. Used especially for carrying goods, the bullock cart is pulled by two oxen (bullocks).

Chand Rai Thakur Jiu temple at Uchchakaran village, 30 km east of Shantiniketan has such decorative art depicted on its doorframe (Figure 27). The temple has been renovated, retaining only the wooden door jam and the extravagantly decorated

wooden door, leading towards sanctum. Both the outer frame of the door are decked with various motifs. The inner frame is ornamented with floral motifs, while the outer frame was adorned with scenarios from mythology and social set-ups. The door also had floral decoration. One of the specific panels of this door jam has an engraving of bullock cart carrying goods (Figure 28) (Sarkar, 2010).



Figure 25: Traditional Bullock Cart



Figure 26: Traditional Bullock Cart



Figure 27: Decorated Wooden Door and Frame, Chand Roy Jiu Temple



Figure 28: Carving of Bullock Cart in Wooden Door-frame



Figure 29: Central Arch Panel of Lakshmi Janardan Temple





Figure 30: A Farmer Milking a Cow

Some of the terracotta relics have depiction of general life. In rural Bengal, day-to-day life has certain activities. Those are very common from the past time until the present day scenario. In pastoral life, we often noticed some minor but essential process of daily life. As for example, one of the essential processes among them is milking of cows. Central arch panel of Lakshmi Janardan temple (Figures 29 and 30) at Illambazar has such example.



Figure 31: Modern Ferry Boat of Bengal
(Courtesy: <https://www.wordpress.com>)



Figure 32: Base Panel of Gopal Temple at Ghurisa

Like bullock cart, in Bengal boat is also an important medium of transportation (Figure 31). Even in modern time, some the rural places are connected through only river channels. Terracotta temples of Birbhum have many examples of this instance those

temple walls. Some of the panels showing foreigners are travelling on boats. Mythological characters, hindu gods and goddesses, all are depicted on the terracotta panels of the temple walls. Base Panels of Gopal Temple at Ghurisa is showcasing boats in terracotta (Figure 32). In this temple, many of the base panels are in recognizable state. There are many boats at the base panel.



Figure 33: Bride and Groom Playing a Game of Dice
(Courtesy: <https://amitabhagupta.wordpress.com>)

Marriage is one of the vital social institution. There are numerous rituals in a wedding ceremony. Some of them are important and some are not much weighty. In a Bengali marriage there are few leisure things present. Like playing the game of dice. Corresponding type of plaque is found at Uchchakarn *Char-chala* Shiva temples (Figure 33). There are four temples built adjacent to one another. Second temple from right (to the viewer) has a terracotta panel, which has an interesting engraving on it. A single panel shows Bengali Bride and Groom are playing a game of dice. (Gupta, Amitabha).



Figure 34: Kori khela in Bengali Marriage

(Courtesy: https://c1.staticflickr.com/9/8013/6969009710_0d36c66cc5_b.jpg)

In present scenario as well, we find nearly similar games during the marriage ceremony. Though the game pattern is slightly changed now days. Cowries or Koris are used instead of dice. This is called *Kori Khela* (Figure 34). These type of rituals are still in practice in Bengali marriage.

Present paper is dealing with an ethno-archaeological perspective. This is an attempt to correlate the modern life and vernacular architecture with the terracotta temples of Birbhum. The architecture and art of the terracotta temples of this district are nearly in a good condition to study the ethno-archaeology. Whether it is in the form of terracotta panels or the architecture of the temples. Though West Bengal with its rich terracotta accumulation both in past and present provides a worthwhile opportunity to study the social and cultural significance of the craft, there are several limitations which make it difficult to work with. Meanwhile, it is very important to document the existing oral narratives as people are fast losing these narratives with the effect of rapid urban growth and spread of electronic media. With the loss of these narratives related to the use of terracotta art, archaeologists would certainly lose valuable resources of better understanding the past.

Terracotta art should be viewed as a aesthetic and habitual importance. In these senses the primary issue of awareness in archaeology is to find out cultural significance attached to these objects. While doing ethno-archaeology on terracotta art, it is important to recall the related Processual and Post-processual prototypes (Tilley 1989). Archaeologically, cultural significance is given to make sense of potentially coherent examples. There are specimens 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 reflect contemporary life in palaces or villages.

Therefore, present work considers terracotta art and architecture as a key substantial demonstration of late medieval life ways. With the help of ethnographic experience it

attempts to provide possible ways to reflect on the cultural significance of terracotta art in present life style.

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