Pottery Making Tradition of Assam: A Study among the Kumar Potters

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Abstract: The tradition of pottery making in the northeastern region of India has been traced back to the Neolithic period as attested in the stratified layers at Daojali Hading in North Cachar Hills district of Assam. The cord marked pottery wares have been a distinct feature of this region since Neolithic period. Apart from the hand made pottery finds a large number of wheel made wares, either in sherds or in full, have also been recorded through exploration as well as excavation in numerous sites across the region. It has been observed that pottery making has continued as a tradition among some groups of people in this part of the country. Through this paper an attempt has been made to provide an ethnoarchaeological perspective into the wheel made pottery making community residing across the state of Assam.

Keywords: Kumar Potters, Pottery Making Tradition, Cord Marked Pottery, Ethnoarchaeological Perspective, Implements, Manufacture, Wares

Introduction
Pottery wares have played a very important role in the lives of man from the remote past. Archaeological sites all over the world have contributed to the knowledge of pottery through the material finds of the past. Although C.J. Thomsen discovered that pottery was made during all the three ages viz., the stone, bronze and iron ages (Renfrew and Bahn, 2005: 198) yet pottery sherds occur to be the commonest of all objects which often provide clues to the Neolithic communities (Scupin and DeCorse, 2009: 201) and is practically indestructible (Krishna Murthy, 1995: 34) because once fired, pottery retains its form and colour for hundreds of years (Singh, 2015:117). Pottery is tangible and is considered to be as old as civilisation itself (Duary, 2008: 98). It is a great source of information to anthropologists and archaeologists. Either in sherds or a complete whole, pottery reflects the way of life of a man or a community. Moreover, its non-perishable nature and the variety in forms and designs aid in providing evidence about dating as well as in making inferences about exchange, economy and society (Grant et al, 2002).

The study of pottery remains an important branch of archaeology because it provides some idea about a ceramic society which might have existed in the same locality or nearby the area and elsewhere (Medhi, 2002: 17) in the bygone days. Ancient pottery has
been a matter of curiosity among the scholars and thus been regarded as one of the most vital materials that archaeologists use ceramics as an indicator to measure the by-gone time, to determine cultural affinities, or to gauge the scale and socio-political context of craft production. The shape, size, design, thickness of earthen wares are not just mere attributes but are reflections of other aspects (Ngullie, 2014: 199) of the society in motion along with its material products.

Pottery making was found to be in a hand designed crude form and in initial stage during the early Neolithic phase of evolution of mankind, which later was believed to be thrown on wheels. This change has perhaps been regarded to be the earliest conscious utilization of a chemical change by man (Childe, 1936: 89-90). It is because of the trouble associated with the storage of the cultivated crops that food-producing economy subsequently stimulated the invention of earthen pots as containers in contrast to food-gathering phase (Bhattacharya, 1997:112-113). Apart from its primary utilitarian purpose, earthen ware has other cultural connotations too. Pottery has been regarded as a mirror of the cultural patterns of a society (Medhi, 1992: 1). Pots have been considered as tools and not only as markers of time or identity. Although it proved troublesome for the nomadic hunter-gatherers to carry heavy clay pots in their search for new herds and food sources, the settled agrarian lifestyle encouraged the development of pottery that facilitated cooking and storing of food (Scupin and DeCorse, 2009: 201).

In the ancient times, pinching, coiling and the wheel were the three methods used for making a pot; to which casting – the fourth method has been introduced by the potters (Krishna Murthy, 1995: 34). The shards of handmade wares are crude and not even but earthen wares made on wheel are smooth and even in texture, as well as possess concentric circles along the complete vessels. Clay used to prepare wares by hand is coarse and not much cleared of impurities but clay thrown on wheel to manufacture wares is well levigated.

Archaeological evidence showed that pottery was in use in Egypt and Mesopotamia before 3000 B.C. and in Italy about 1000 B.C. (Krishna Murthy, 1995: 35). Numerous studies on ceramics have taken place till date. Stark (2003) has remarked that besides typology and a host of provenance techniques to the study of pottery, a surge has been seen in ceramic ethnoarchaeological studies worldwide in the last decade, dealing with important topics such as ceramic production, technological change, ceramic use and distribution, and social boundaries (Jamir & Hazarika, 2014: 6). Some of the contributors to this kind of discourse are Clive Orton, Paul Tyers, Alan Vince (Orton et al. 2005), Miriam Stark (1998), Saraswati and Behura (1966), Bandita Medhi (1992), S.K. Roy (1977), among others.

Cord-impressed pottery has been attested from prehistoric sites in Northeast India. Besides other archaeological sites, excavations at Daojali Hading (Sharma, 1989) and Saruturu (Rao, 1977) in Assam, and Selbalgiri (IAR 1967–1968: 8) in Meghalaya have yielded handmade pot-pieces made of impure clay with cord impressions on the surfaces and were manufactured by the use of the coil or ring method (Misra, 2001: 511). Apart from the cord
marked hand made sherds recorded from different sites of Assam and the northeastern region as a whole, numerous wheel made earthen wares in sherds or in complete whole have been found. Kaolin wares are another type of wheel thrown pottery found from sites of Assam, initially recorded from the site of Ambari at the heart of Guwahati.

Ethnoarchaeology has been regarded as a combined effort of archaeology and anthropology to understand the past and the present cultures. The term ‘ethnoarchaeology’ was coined by Jesse Fewkes in 1900 to refer to an archaeologist “who can bring as preparation for his work an intensive knowledge of the present life” (Mitri, 2009: 20). Fagan (1988) has pointed out, “Ethnoarchaeology is the study of living societies to aid in the understanding and interpreting of the archaeological record … that bridge the gap between past and present.” It documents the material aspects of people’s lives to understand the archaeological evidence, either from the same region or from a totally different part of the world (Renfrew and Bahn, 2005: 71) that is the contemporary culture is studied from an archaeological point of view related to the same or a different region. Farid Khan (1994: 83) refers to ethnoarchaeology as ‘a study of modern and traditional processes which result in specific phenomena which might also be observable archaeologically’. In this perspective a study among two kumar families of Assam has taken place which is detailed in the coming paragraphs. A number of steps are involved in the manufacture of earthen wares, the principal of which include (Orton et al. 2005: 114):

- procurement of raw materials
- preparation of raw materials
- forming the vessel
- pre-firing treatments
- drying
- firing
- post-firing treatments

The essential raw materials necessary for a ceramic product are clay and water. Use of non-plastics or tempers or openers is generally added to the clay mix and slips, paints or glazes to provide a finish to the pots. Fuel is needed for firing the vessel (Orton et al. 2005: 114), which is basically easily available natural products like dry twigs, branches, leaves, bamboo, grass, straws, wood and wood slices etc. Usually pottery manufacturing sites have a particular system of division of labour based on gender, which is flexible among some communities where both genders can work with each other at certain stages of production (Devi and Panjwani, 2013: 93) as observed among the Hira and the Kumar potter communities of Assam. Potters are described as working on a seasonal basis (often the dry season) producing vessels, sometimes in large quantities, when their agricultural work is at a standstill in many societies (Kramer, 1985: 80) including Assam where people are basically agriculturists.

There are numerous potter communities in the northeastern region of India including Assam who practice the making of earthen wares by bare hands or on the wheel. This
practice has been found from the past with evidences from archaeological sites till the present day. The Andros of Manipur, the Laruri and the Changki communities of Nagaland are a few of the potter communities in this region who are continuing with the tradition of making earthen wares. Although it was initially said that the Khasis did not know about the potter’s wheel, yet there has been evidence found that the pottery of the entire Khasi society was manufactured at Larnai, which is a village potter’s community (Rao, 1977: 194).

Potter Communities of Assam
Pottery in Assam is an art of expertise by people of two communities or two distinct caste groups. They are the Hira and the Kumar communities. The Hira produces handmade earthen wares whereas the Kumar manufactures potteries on wheel. Both the communities have their own belief system regarding the art of clay and have traditionally handed down to generations one after another.

The Kumar Potters and their Tradition of Pot-Making
The Kumar community of potters prepares their earthen wares using the potter’s wheel. They manufacture various types of clay wares by wheel-throwing and the implements used are simple, the chief among these being the wheel or chaak. The community is distributed in the districts of Kamrup, Goalpara, Nalbari and Tinsukia among few other districts of Assam. The male folks of the Kumar community are basically engaged with this art. For instance, ethnographic data has been collected from two kumar families (These potter families are originally from the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh respectively but have settled in Assam for six to seven generations now. They have adopted the Assamese culture so well that there is no marked difference between them and the other Assamese residing in their locality.), residing at Bongaon village of Guwahati and near Doomdooma police station respectively. They have been making the traditional clay wares essential for every household purpose and rituals observed by the Assamese population. The clay used to prepare the wares is black in colour and sticky in nature which is found in the bed of rivers or in paddy fields of Assam. A brief ethnography regarding the process of manufacturing clay-wares by wheel turning is provided below.

 Implements Used
The main implement used is the wheel which can be rotated on a wooden pivot in the centre. The other implements (Figure 1) required are - a spade, an iron cutter, a club etc., which are detailed in table 1.

The potter’s wheel or chaak is composed of a wheel or a big wooden disc laid parallel to the earth surface on a small wooden piece (or killa) at the centre. The wheel is about 3 feet in diameter with two shallow holes or furrow at opposite sides to each other, each at about 15 cm from the edge. Additionally, at present, concrete chaaks are also found. The killa is about one and a half feet long. It is triangular in shape and acts as a pivot, with only 1/4th of it above the ground and the 3/4th remains inside the soil to give a
better support to the wheel while in motion. The *killa* is usually made of *bel* tree. The turning of the wheel is done with the help of a bamboo or wooden pole, which is about two feet in length. One end of the pole is held in the furrow or shallow hole made on the *chaak* to assist in rotating the wheel, whereas the other end of the pole is held by the potter at work.

Table 1: Implements used by the *Kumars* during preparation of the clay wares along with their local names and functions/uses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Implements used</th>
<th>Local term</th>
<th>Function/ Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Spade</td>
<td><em>Kodal</em></td>
<td>cutting of clay lumps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Container made of plastic or aluminium or a half broken pot</td>
<td><em>Baira</em> or <em>bason</em></td>
<td>storing of water during the making process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Club or an implement made of a quadrangular solid piece of clay or wood or cement attached to a bamboo handle</td>
<td><em>Thokoni</em></td>
<td>thrashing and breaking of clay lump during storing and during initial preparation of the clay for making wares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Wheel made of cement</td>
<td><em>Chaak</em></td>
<td>making of wares by rotating the wheel and throwing the lump of clay at the centre just above the pivot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Long stick of wood or bamboo</td>
<td><em>Dandaa</em> or <em>Laathi</em></td>
<td>to rotate the wheel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Thread</td>
<td><em>Jori</em> or <em>Rosi</em></td>
<td>to cut the completed vessel from the lump of clay while rotating on the <em>chaak</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Flat rectangular strip of iron or iron cutter</td>
<td><em>Cheman</em></td>
<td>to slice clay from the lump in order to remove impurities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Sack</td>
<td><em>Bastaa</em></td>
<td>to spread and beat the clay lumps in the initial stage of production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Disc shaped base</td>
<td><em>Paarhi</em></td>
<td>to move the pot over it while giving shape to it by beating with a beater on the exterior surface and supported by an anvil of wood on the inner surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ash powder</td>
<td><em>Saai</em></td>
<td>to spread on sack while kneading the clay lumps with water which aids to check elasticity of the clay</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Soil (red or brown)</td>
<td><em>Gerumaati</em></td>
<td>to give colour and prepare slip in order to check porosity of wares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Paddy straws</td>
<td><em>Dhaan kher/naraa</em></td>
<td>to cover the stack of dried wares and also as fuel during firing of wares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Wood or bamboo</td>
<td><em>Kaath or Baanh or khori</em></td>
<td>as fuel during firing of wares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Clay mould with longitudinal grooves and a hole in the middle</td>
<td><em>Khirkhiri</em></td>
<td>to design the outward lip of dhupdaani etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1: Implements used by Kumar Potters for Making Clay Wares**

**Process of Manufacture**

Van der Leeuw in 1994 suggested three vital concepts involved in pottery making, which are: (1). Typology that determines shape; (2). Patronomy that observes how the earthenware is divided into sections and (3). Sequence i.e. the order of manufacture (ManiBabu, 2015: 54). The *Kumar* potters undergo several steps to process the clay to desired level and then manufacture the clay wares. The essential steps include: collection of clay, preservation of clay, preparation of clay, making of wares, drying, colouring and firing of the dried vessels. The male folk are the sole manufacturer of the pots except that women extend help in colouring or moving the completed wares to
the area of sunshine for drying purpose. The complete process of making clay pots is laborious. The different steps involved are discussed below:

**Procurement of Clay**
The clay required for making wares are bought by the potters of Bongaon from far-off places like Amingaon, Goalpara, Tetelia etc. since the magical clay is not available in the vicinity of the potters. On the other hand, the potters of Doomdooma procure the essential sticky clay from the cultivable lands or fields.

**Preservation of Clay**
After the Kumar ceramist receives the clay unloaded by trucks from distant places, he sprinkles water on it and makes the clay moist. The clayey soil after being bought is stacked in a shaded area of the courtyard or in a room in the house meant for storing the clay. This is sprinkled with water at intervals so that the stock of clay does not dry up. It is utmost necessary to keep the clay in moist condition.

![Figure 2: Various Stages of Preparation of Clay](image)

**Preparation of Clay**
With the help of a spade the potter slices the clay from the heap and subsequently treats it using his legs in order to knead the same. The clay is kept moist over an empty sack by sprinkling water at intervals. He again slices and then tempers the clay by sprinkling ash on it. The tempered material in the form of ash or soil or sand is used to attain the workability affect and further counteracting the ill-effects of shrinkage and thus facilitating the drying process of the finished product. The process is repeated for 10-12 times which brings back the grey colour and the sticky nature of the clay. The treated clay is then converted into a lump, which is further sliced very finely with a *cheman* (flat, rectangular iron implement with the ends bent at right angles to the flattened surface to have a better grip of the hands while working; though previously made from bamboo slice) in order to separate the smallest pebbles and other particles from the soil, and then are further removed by hand-picking. These impurities would otherwise obstruct in the manufacturing of the wares and hence allow them to break
down. After the clay is cleared of impurities, it is again passed through the previous process of sprinkling water and kneading until appropriate dough (i.e. the desired level) of the clay is prepared. The kneading here is done by pounding with a thokoni (an implement made of a quadrangular solid piece of clay or cement attached to a bamboo handle). Care is taken so that the dough does not get dried and the moistened dough is then made ready for throwing in the wheel (Figure 2).

**Forming the Vessel**

The potter gives a rotatory motion to the chaak with the help of the long pole for two or three times and then removes it. The chaak rotates on the pivot and then a lump of the prepared clay is thrown at the centre of the chaak. Subsequently, using the two palms and the fingers, the vessels are made by the kumar giving the desired shape and size. The palms and the fingers of the potter give a magical touch to the wares he prepares. The pole is also used to speed up the motion of the turning wheel if it slows down. On completion of making a particular ware, he brings it down from the wheel by cutting near the base with a thread, thus separating the base of the clay ware from the lump of the clay that still rotates on the wheel. It is because of the rotating motion of the wheel that the body of the prepared pot shows concentric circles and the base is cut straight by the thread. The chaak or the rotating wheel is concrete in nature. This is both manually operated by hand with the help of a long wooden or bamboo pole rotating over a wooden or concrete pivot and operated by machine that is with the help of a pump, which gives the wheel a rotatory motion via a belt or chain. On this rotating wheel, the smooth lump of clay is thrown by the potter to prepare the required variety of vessels (Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Forming the Vessels on the chaak and the Prepared Vessels of Different Shapes*
Drying of the Clay Wares
Later on the clay items after completion of production are kept under the sun for drying (Figure 4). It takes about a day or two during summer and about five to six days during winter to dry the earthen wares so that these become leather-hard. After the utensils become leather hard, liquid prepared by mixing the soil with sufficient water is poured on them and dried. The items are then burnt in fire to give the final product.

Pre-firing Treatments
Colouring of Wares: The commonly available red soil or clay is taken in a vessel and enough water is added to it. The mixture of soil or clay and water is stirred sufficiently to give it a homogeneous liquid form, neither too thick nor too watery-type. This liquid when poured on a completely dried vessel acts as slip on the earthen wares and seals the pores present on the vessel thus cease leakage. The so-coloured vessels are then dried in the sun so that these become leather hard and ready to be baked. Thus, a kind of natural colour appears on the vessels after they are fired due to the slip.

Other than this method of colouring, the kumar community of Bongaon at times uses a mixture of few available materials to give colour to the products. They mix red soil collected from the nearby hills (a sack full), bark of mango tree (one sack), washing soda (about one and a half kilo) and kaathaa (an item used in betel leaves for
consumption; about 100 grams) in the given proportion and allow them to dry. Then the ingredients are powdered and mixed well. To the fine mixture, water is added sufficiently so that a desired liquid is obtained. The liquid is then poured over the leather-hard earthen wares, which gives colour to the vessels on firing (Figure 5).

**Decoration:** To give a decoration in the wares, the *kumars* use a bamboo stick called *saddakkar* of about 5-6 inches. They also use *khirkhiri* to design the outward lip of *dhupdaani* etc.

**Firing the Wares**

The leather hard clay wares are arranged in a circular way over a hearth. About a hundred of the wares are stacked in this way with the bigger ones at the base and then in decreasing order till the top of the circular stack is filled by the smaller ones. The broken potsherds are put in the empty spaces between these wares and also straws and wood dust are added in such blank spaces created by the arrangement of the dried pots and other vessels. When the arrangement is over it is covered by a layer of dry straws. This layer is then enveloped by a thin paste of red soil. The paste is made by mixing commonly available red soil with adequate quantity of water. Over it another layer of straws is added again followed by another layer of this paste of clay. Thus there appears a sandwich of straws and liquid red soil. Thus, this appears to be a closed kiln structure. The nature of firing the earthen pots is closed and takes place in hearths. The hearth is then fired with the help of logs of wood, bamboo and other fuels. The firing process takes about six-seven hours (Figure 6).

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 6: Firing of Dried Vessels in Closed Kiln* (i. circular stacking of dried clay wares, ii. Preparation of the thin paste of red soil, iii & iv. Covering of the stack by straw and red soil paste layers, v & vi. Firing in the hearth using wood and bamboo as fuels).
Post-Firing Treatment
After firing is over, the vessels are removed from the kiln (Figure 7), allowed to cool down and arranged in stacks. These vessels are then ready for sale in the nearby markets or sent to faraway places. The ashes of the fuel wood are collected and kept aside for using as tempering material.

![Figure 7: Post Firing Treatment of the Vessels](image)

Figure 8: Additional Implements for Making Clay Wares by the Kumar Potters (i. Pinu, ii. Pitan, iii. Khirkhire, iv. and v. Paarhi, vi. Bhusir saai, vii. Pot being reshaped on paarhi)
Apart from the above mentioned *kumar* potter communities of Assam and their process of pot-making on *chaak*, there is an additional treatment of some wares by the potters of Doomdooma. They prepare these special vessels (urns with round base) both by wheel throwing and by using hands. Moreover, they also use motorised wheel or *chaak*. After these wares are brought down from the *chaak*, the potters keep the vessels to dry for some time, at least a day till the extra water from the ware is evaporated out. For such a special treatment, the *kumars* use additional simple implements like *Pitan* (a wooden club) to beat the ware from outside when being rotated on *Paarhi* (made of clay in the shape of an open-mouthed shallow bowl to which a layer of cement is added to give longevity); *Pinu* (a mud anvil); and *Khirkhiri* (made of clay and baked) used to design the outward lip of *dhupdaani* (Figures 8 and 9).

They use *chewan*, an iron cutter similar to *cheman* for slicing the clay lumps in order to remove the impurities like stone, pebble, quartz etc. The incompletely dried pots made on *chaak* are taken and the clay from the base is removed making a hole in it. It is then put on the *paarhi* to which *bhusir saai* (ash of wooden slices) is sprinkled. Then the pot is rotated slowly on it and subsequently beaten by the *pitan* from the exterior surface with the *pinu* as support from the inner surface. Thus the body of the elongated pot is rounded and a different kind of vessel is created out of the pot with an elongated body and narrow wheel-made base. This pot is called *patil* and used for keeping curd.

**Figure 9: A Motorised Chaak and a Potter during Work on It**

**Types of Wares**

Various types of vessels are prepared by the *kumar* potters on the *chaak*. Some of the products are *saaki* (earthen lamp), small bowls for rituals, *dhuna daani* (essence vessels), *ghati* (small pots), *gosa*, urns and flower tubs. The earthenwares manufactured can be grouped into (1). Utilitarian and (2). Non-utilitarian categories based on their
functional aspect. The utilitarian wares include storing, cooking, drinking, serving and eating, and water carrying vessels. On the other hand, the vessels used for ritualistic purposes come under the purview of the non-utilitarian group. These are provided in tables 2 and 3 and Figure 10.

**Table 2: Varieties of Earthen Wares Prepared by the Kumar Potters with their function**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>English equivalent</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Function/Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Saaki</td>
<td>Earthen lamp</td>
<td>Ritualistic</td>
<td>Worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Gosa</td>
<td>Earthen lamp with stand</td>
<td>Ritualistic</td>
<td>Worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Maalaa saaki</td>
<td>Small disc with a hole in the middle and with or without wavy borders</td>
<td>Ritualistic, Ceremonial</td>
<td>A few are tied to a thread or jute rope and hanged at the entrance of a marriage <em>pandal</em> from one end to another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Dhuna daani</td>
<td>Open or closed essence bowl on stand with or without perforations and a handle attached; sometimes wavy line is found along the open mouth or at the jointed portion along the circumference made by <em>khirkhiri</em></td>
<td>Ritualistic, Ceremonial</td>
<td>Worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Dhupati</td>
<td>Small elongated or oval bowl on stand with perforations to put on incense sticks</td>
<td>Ritualistic, Ceremonial</td>
<td>Worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Kalah</td>
<td>Pitcher</td>
<td>Daily/ household</td>
<td>For storing water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Kataa; patil</td>
<td>Bowls</td>
<td>Daily/ household</td>
<td>For storing milk and/or preparing curd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Dhakoni</td>
<td>Flat or shallow discs</td>
<td>Daily/ Household and Ceremonial</td>
<td>Used as lid to cover pitchers and pots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Ghat</td>
<td>Small pot</td>
<td>Ritualistic, Ceremonial</td>
<td>Worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Tekeli</td>
<td>Small pot</td>
<td>Ritualistic, Ceremonial</td>
<td>Worship, as storing utensil, preparing <em>pithaa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sl. No.</td>
<td>Name of vessel/earthen ware</td>
<td>English Equivalent</td>
<td>Type of vessel</td>
<td>Functions/Uses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td><em>Baati</em> <em>(xoru)</em></td>
<td>Small bowls</td>
<td>Ritualistic, Ceremonial</td>
<td>To offer <em>bhog</em> or <em>prasad</em> to deities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td><em>Gilas</em></td>
<td>Glass</td>
<td>Ceremonial, Daily household</td>
<td>Offer water to deities; for drinking water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Different Types of Earthen Wares Prepared by Potter Communities with their English Equivalent and Uses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of vessel/earthen ware</th>
<th>English Equivalent</th>
<th>Type of vessel</th>
<th>Functions/Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><em>Kalah</em></td>
<td>Urn</td>
<td>Body is big and round with short neck</td>
<td>Stores water, used as filter for checking impurities in water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><em>Paila</em></td>
<td>Bowl</td>
<td>Bowl-like with body tapering a little to the base or with an oval body, have short neck</td>
<td>Preparing curd from milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td><em>Saaki</em></td>
<td>Earthen lamp</td>
<td>Oval shaped body with an extended lip-like protrusion to put wicks</td>
<td>Religious purpose and in festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td><em>Dhup daani</em> or <em>dhupati</em></td>
<td>Incense holder</td>
<td>Elongated with a bellied body, small in size with perforations in the body to hold incence</td>
<td>Religious purpose and in festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td><em>Dhunar xaaj</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bowl with a handle and base on a stand, sometimes perforations in the body of the bowl</td>
<td>Religious purpose and in festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td><em>Shivar murti</em>, <em>Lakshmir murti</em>, <em>Saraswatir murti</em> etc.</td>
<td>Idols of Gods and Goddesses, viz., of Shiva, Lakshmi, Saraswati etc.</td>
<td>According to the needs of the idols, small to medium size</td>
<td>Religious purpose and in festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td><em>Putola</em></td>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>Dancing girl, tortoise, elephant, deer, bird etc.</td>
<td>Playing and also decorative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td><em>Sowali murti</em></td>
<td>Female figurine</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Decorative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

711
Conclusion

The manufacture of ceramics by the Kumar potters involves the technique of throwing a lump of levigated clay onto a moving wheel or chaak. Only a few simple instruments are required for the process of making the wares. The techniques or the technology of pot-making is a process replicated and transformed through learning (ManiBabu, 2015: 53). ManiBabu’s observance that people acquire inherited information related to the art within a pot-manufacturing community which is transmitted through the mechanism of social learning is also true for the potter community of Assam. The pottery wares prepared by them are used for various ritualistic, ceremonial, decorative and day-to-day purposes of storing, cooking etc.

Pottery manufacture process may be part-time or full-time or based on economic strategy. The functionally based classification deals with the size, shape, presence or absence of decoration on the vessel or any such other features. Whether it be the hand-
made or the wares prepared on the potter’s wheel, the manufacturer puts her/his effort with the thumb and the fingers delicately which gives the final shape of the ware as required. This effort put on with the aid of the delicate movement of the fingers of the potter is praiseworthy.

Although pottery has been regarded a plastic art, it acts as a medium which is very much suitable for reflecting changes that has been observed in the replacement of indigenous pottery, mostly utilitarian in nature, by metallic utensils (Roy, 1981: 35).

References
Jamir, Tiatoshi and Manjl Hazarika. 2014. 50 Years After Daojali-Hading: Emerging Perspectives in the Archaeology of Northeast India. New Delhi. Research India Press.


