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# Locating Terracotta Animal Figurines into Spatial Landscape: An Ethnoarchaeological Analysis in Birbhum, West Bengal (India)

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**Abstract:** Human have a long history of relationship with animals. This is evident from the abundant number of terracotta animal figurines specifically horse, elephant, and tiger that have been discovered from various archaeological sites of Bengal. These tangible terracotta animals are generally associated with certain intangible cultural heritage like space. The main objective of this paper is to understand the location and spatial orientation of terracotta animals which further help to know how human behaviour has contributed to the patterning of these artefacts over a given landscape, which has regional and ritual impacts. This paper is the result of an ethnoarchaeological approach for comprehending the notion of location and space associated with terracotta animal in larger varieties of spatial context. The present ethnoarchaeological study shows that terracotta animal's usage pattern provides a detailed and often complex and multilayered understanding of people's sense of space and spatial practice.

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**Keywords:** Space, Terracotta Animal Figurine, Shrines, Ritual, Landscape, Ethnoarchaeology, Birbhum

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## Introduction

Human life is largely dependent directly or indirectly on the various services of the animals. The figurines of animal are one of the very popular themes of Indian terracotta art. Among the various animals, particular three animals i.e. horse, elephant, and tiger since the ancient times in immemorial, from being the symbol of royalty, pride, and fierce to being an effective inspiration for the famous terracotta sculpture. The large quantity of these terracotta animal figures that have been discovered at different archaeological sites in Bengal is proof of this. The artefacts that people make and use are the general basis for understanding what people think and how they view their world (Kassam & Megersa 1989). Human and cultures is disappeared but the archaeological records of survived terracotta animal figurines can be used to reconstruct the past cultures.

But the archaeological problem is that we are still handicapped by many limitations towards formulating a comprehensive and detailed picture of terracotta animals. There

has not been any effort to relate these artefacts to spatial perspectives. According to Baumanova (2016) every paradigm throughout the history of archaeological theory has dealt with space in some manner when interpreting the archaeological record, either by drawing attention to it or by using it to help describe other phenomena that have been seen and despite the fact that space is an intangible entity, it may nonetheless be created, changed, and shaped by tangible elements. The combination of the tangible terracotta animal artefact with intangible artefact space makes itself an individual object, an experience and a representation of human culture. The space gives a continuous reminder of the relationships between the living and past people, and consequentially of lines of descent and inheritance.

This insight has prompted a growing concern with the way that how terracotta animals have been used in a space within an integrated world of materials conducted by people. The present paper is the result of an ethnoarchaeological approach for understanding the notion of location and space associated with terracotta animal in larger varieties of spatial context of Birbhum district of West Bengal in India. Such ongoing approach of terracotta animals from the ethnographic survey on the basis of spatial dimension can be attempted to understand the terracotta animals found in various archaeological sites in a much more holistic manner.

## **The Archaeological Assemblage of Terracotta Animal Figurines in Bengal**

Several archaeological sites of Bengal have yielded enormous corpus of terracotta animal objects belonging to different periods of history, ranging from the chalcolithic to early medieval period. The terracotta horse figurines have been found from Chandraketugarh, Gobadhanupur, Mangolkot, Pandurajar Dhibi, on the other hand, the terracotta elephant from Bangarh, Baneswardanga, Gobardhanupur, Harinarayanpur, Mangolkot, Tamluk, Tilpi etc. The rider figurines of horse and elephant have been evidenced from Bangarh, Chandraketugarh, Mangolkot, Tilpi. The rider figurines on tiger have found only from Chandraketugarh. Many of the significant terracotta animal figurines, relevant to the study, represents accidental finds and no accurate data with regard to the stratigraphic of the finds are available. Therefore, conclusions are very often drawn by scholars mainly on the basis of form and characteristics features of a particular period. Furthermore, lack of horizontal excavations in Bengal makes it really difficult to get an idea about the contextual and spatial associations of the terracotta animal. So, there is only one way i.e. to take help from the present circumstance to draw an analogical model to interpret the ancient terracotta animal figurines.

## **Previous Research**

The artefact terracotta animal is failed to attract the concentration of detail works. Mostly the works are based on the form and technological dimension. Kramrisch (1994), a pioneering historian of Indian art classified these terracotta artefacts into "timeless" and "timed variation" variety on the basis of forms. Two works deserves

special attention as they emphasize the spatial dimensions of terracotta objects. Gangopadhyay (2002) has been carried out a detail ethnographic survey to look into the spatial context of the terracotta objects used in the contemporary society in Bankura district of West Bengal (India). He studied the terracotta object's life cycle from the manufacturing period to the point where they are deposited after passing through different contexts. Gangopadhyay (2006) has placed the ritual artefacts in their social context so that their actual function could be observed. He mentioned this ethnographic case study suggested that the terracotta objects were patterned directly according to the ritual behaviour of the people. These studies on ritual artefacts of the Snake Goddess of a particular community of Bishnupur, Bankura district gives a very insightful understanding on the formulation of a methodology of interpreting artefacts with extra utilitarian form. The other important ethnoarchaeological work on terracotta objects have been done by Dutta (2013). This work explored the terracotta manufacturing techniques, patterns of marketing and usage on the basis of ethnographic survey. This study also focused on the spatial and gender dimensions associated with the ritual use of terracotta in West Bengal.

Both of these works have been mainly concentrated on the Bankura district where terracotta animals became gradually commercialized for aesthetic need of the decoration with side by side the traditional system of offering terracotta animals to local deities. Similar tradition of offering terracotta animals to varieties of local deities is also a continuous aspect in Birbhum also. But no authors pay attention on this area. On the other hand, along with the spatial location of the terracotta animal, the surrounding landscape also has to be considered. So, the review of these works indicates the potential of ethnographic data in amplifying archaeological spatial interpretations of terracotta animal figurines.

## Area of Study

The present study has been concentrating on some specific zones of the Birbhum district of West Bengal (India). Birbhum is physiographically a part of the ancient *Rarh* region. It is bounded on the north and west by the Santal Parganas, on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan, and on the south by Burdwan, from which it is separated by Ajay river (Majumdar 1975). The study area is falls basically into two topographical major regions i.e. Suri-Bolpur plain and Bakreswar upland. The first region is covered the interfluves of Mayurakshi and Ajay rivers in the south-eastern part of the district comprising study area of the C.D. Blocks Bolpur-Sriniketan, and Illambazar. The Sal and Bakreswar rivers drain the region from north-west to south-east (Birbhum Census 2011). The surveyed villages like Adityapur, Goalpara, and Ushardihi are fall under this topographical region (Figure 1). The second region extends over the western portions of the district and comprising the study area of the C.D. blocks of Khoyrasol and Rajnagar. This region is drained by the rivers like Dwarka, Mayurakshi, Bakreswar, Ajay, Shal and Hingla flowing towards the east and south-east (Birbhum Census 2011). The survey village like Arali, Muradganj and Lokepur are fall under this topographical area.

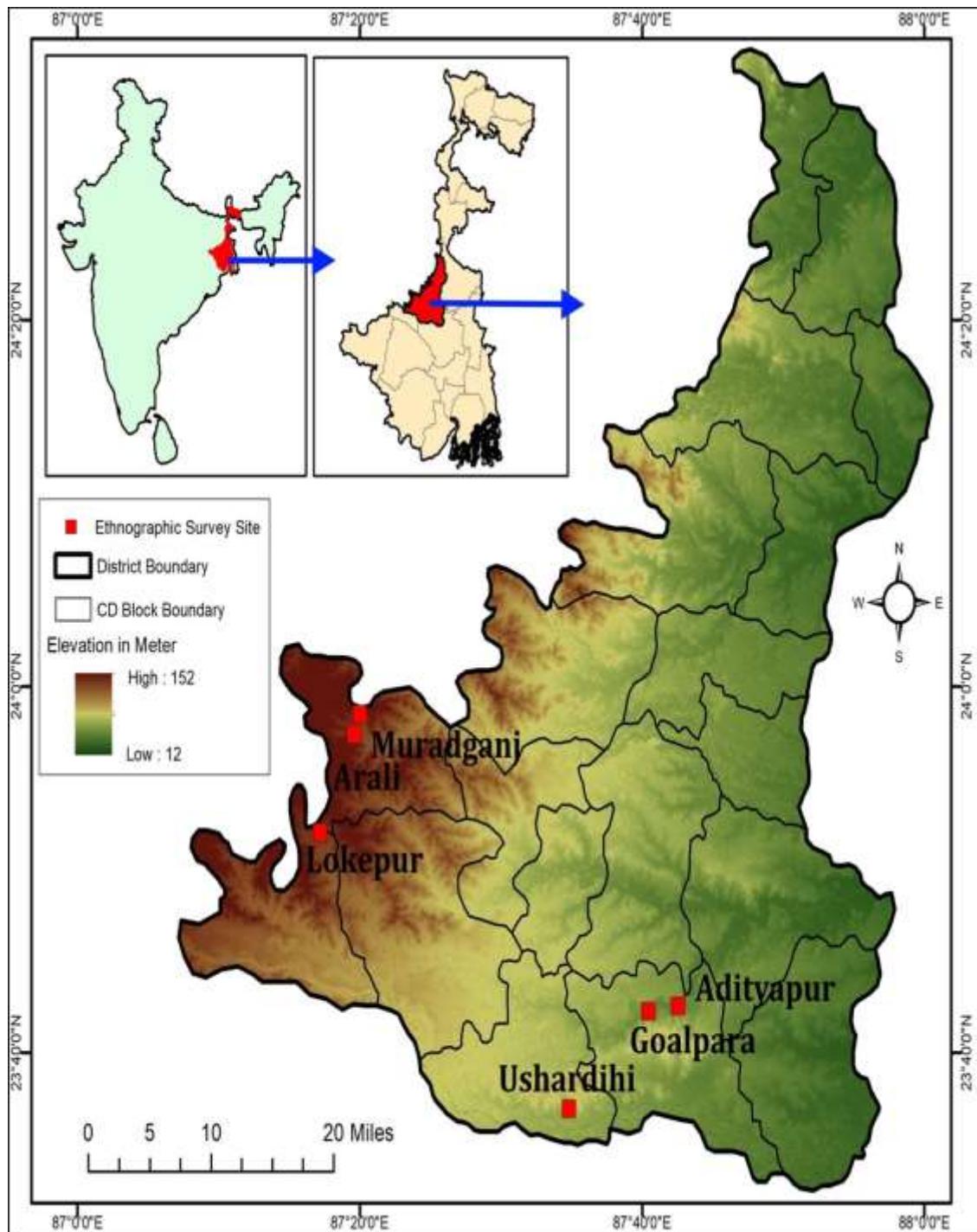


Figure 1: Map of Birbhum district showing surveyed villages

## Aim and Methodology

The main aim of this paper is to understand the location and spatial orientation of terracotta animals which further help to know how human behaviour has contributed to the patterning of these artefacts over a given landscape, which has regional and ritual impacts. The study also aims to know how this artefact is embedded within the daily

routines and living space of the multiple levels at which sacred terracotta animal interacted with a diverse range of communities, individuals and negotiated between these. The above mentioned objective is sought to be realized through a well planned methodology. The field work is conducted in the vernacular language i.e. Bengali. These are as follows-

- The methodologies of the present work involve intensive ethnography in different villages of the Birbhum district. Methods like interviews and participant observations were utilized extensively. Electronic gadgets like tape-recorder on mobile, camera, compass, and Google map were used. Extensive photography was undertaken to record various human activities related to the animal figurines, geographical landscape features and festivals and ceremonies which utilize the figurines.
- The work entails to understand the usage of terracotta animal figurines over the spaces, so, it is imperative to understand their locational contexts. In order to get a comprehensive picture, the understanding of the background and environment of the villages has been important part. Details like the landscape, the caste structure, the description of the regional and local deities, myths, and folk belief regarding the deities, settlement pattern, populations are attempted to be documented. Individual assemblages of terracotta figurines have also been studied, which is important to understand the pattern of use and disposal.
- All the previous works including, published books and research papers as well as unpublished works such as thesis and dissertations on different aspects of the terracotta art have been taken into consideration. This is an important aspect of local culture so the present study also looked into the various studies on folk culture, folk religion, and folk craft to understand this traditional culture.

### **Analogy and Ethnoarchaeology of Terracotta Animal**

The use of ethnographic analogy from contemporary material culture to that of the past has been continuously debated. The different techniques are there for drawing an analogy like direct historical, general comparative and social agency or formal approaches. Processual archaeologists like Binford (1978) has transcended geographical and historical restrictions and studied contemporary Nunamiut for interpreting the middle Paleolithic artefacts from sites in France with using general comparative approach. On the other hand, Hodder (1982) viewed ancient remains as a medium of communication, symbolism and shaping culture with using formal analogy. In general cases archaeologist after collecting the ethnographic data, they compared these with analogous archaeological data to explore the possibilities to formulate hypothesis between living culture and past culture. As mentioned by David (1992) ethnoarchaeology creates a live link between human and their artifacts. But here the case is different. Not such kind of archaeological interpretation is available in the Bengal from where it can be used for analogy.

The determination of using the appropriate technique for drawing an analogy is closely depended with the archaeological problems related with specific artefact in specific region. Interpreting and explaining tangible residues of terracotta animal figurines from archaeological excavations and explorations (where there archaeological contexts are largely missing) in terms of the human behaviour through the lens of ethnographic survey is the main aim of this research. Mainly three important goals of the analogy are used in the present research, such as- a) to identify and explain patterns of terracotta animal figurines in relationship between human behaviour and its archaeological consequences in the contemporary, b) to give ethnographic information and interpretation of those data that are of direct relevance to the interpretations of archaeological terracotta animal materials and to model building in archaeological practice and c) to document patterns in the contemporary society in order to reconstruct the past behaviours from their extant material remnants of terracotta animal figurines without using direct historical analogy.

Analogies provide not only hypotheses but also secure its base on which such hypotheses may be based for the formulation of general principles and the extension of theory to unknown phenomena. It helps to define the known situations in order to work to the unknown circumstances. The author has studied the terracotta animal products of contemporary culture to infer the human activities responsible for similar patterns in the archaeological records. It is different from ethnography in that it asks specifically archaeological questions about spatial aspects of archaeological terracotta animal material, concentrating on subjects that ethnographers often bypass like the disposal of terracotta animals in particular landscape. Instead of direct historical analogy the work aimed to use the general non historical analogy to explain the archaeological problem.

## **An Ethnoarchaeological Analysis of Human, Space, and Terracotta Animal**

Ritual places are dynamic constructions with each community and generation imposing their own cognitive perspectives. It includes specific acts, sequences of acts by which each community define their individuality, legitimization, and sustain their occupation. Various sacred places of the present studied villages are full of history, legend, myth, knowledge, and power. Tacon notes, “Experience, history, value systems, relationships, circumstance, and individual choices all play a part in how landscapes are....described” (cited in Anschuetz et.al 2001). The combination of all these enhances the potential to evaluate critically the ritualized incorporation of special spaces on landscapes where terracotta animals have been used.

On the present circumstances, the religious beliefs of the Birbhum under study are concerned with the worship of a large number of folk deities or popular cults and a set of rituals. The terracotta animals are composed a vast component which is one of the foundations of material culture of the rural people. They are used as votive offerings to local and regional deities. Certain deities have particular importance to a particular

caste. Before discussing the locational criteria of the terracotta animals over the spaces, a short introduction of various regional deities has been given for understanding the background of religious beliefs of the rural people of the villages under the study area.

## Major Deities Associated with Terracotta Animal Figurines

*Baghrai Chandi/ Baghrai* worship is widely practiced by the schedule caste community in the various villages of Birbhum. Local faith is that the tiger is the vehicle of the deity. The tiger comes and meets the Goddesses at night (Mitra 1957). According to the local belief he (male version) is agricultural deity or she (female version) is worshipping for prosperity of agriculture. If the deity is properly worshipped, the paddy will not be stolen or even it will not be destroyed by insects. He is also a protector from any kind of danger (Kamilya 1991). Another view is that *Baghut* is an animal deity. If he is satisfied by the proper worship, no harm will be inflicted on the domestic animals. In the earlier days, people were killed by the tigers but they had to go to the forest for their livelihood. So they worshipped tiger before going into forest (Kamilya 2000).

Some people gain respect and love for their benevolent activities and have turned into a deity like *Barh Thakur*. Towards Goalpara village in the forest of arjun (*Terminalia arjuna*), banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*), and bael (*Aegle marmellos*) is the tomb and trident of this deity. Little is known about his origin, but it is known that he was a great devout ascetic. By virtue of his supernatural powers many were healed. Various medicinal plants forest is the sources of his medicine. Many women received healthy and normal child by his medicine. This message of curability spread in other villages also. Not only childless women, many people come to *Barh Thakur* from the nearby villages to eradicate other difficulties. When someone is older than husband, he is called as *Barh Thakur*. He gradually becomes accepted a known by this name (Chattopadhyay 2019).

A characteristic feature of the district is that at a number of places the worship of *Brahmadaitya* takes place sometime every year. The centre of attraction is a tree haunted by the ghost of Brahman as by popular beliefs. The popular belief is that worship at the spot ensures cure from disease, fulfillment of a desire etc (Majumdar 1975). From the untimely death of Brahmin person, the *Brahmachari* evil spirit came into context. It is very likely, that the worship is done to get rid of the evil spirit. Generally a trident, a pair of *kharam* (Clogs), and lots of clay horses represent the symbols of deity.

*Chandi* is the most popular as well as complicated folk Goddess of Bengal. The diverse nature of the Goddess that were conceived during various chronological periods owing to different local conditions in the different parts of Bengal were all unified in the course of time under one common name *Chandi*. She is conceived as a benevolent deity who looks after the individual and the welfare of the family (Mahapatra 1972).

*Dharmaraj Thakur* worship is a famous festival of the *Rarh*. In the *Dharma* worship there has been an assimilation and admixture of indigenous faiths and beliefs, customs

and manners, rites, rituals and ceremonies. The materials essential in the *Dharma* worship, the votive offerings in worshipping the deity, the rites and rituals performed in the worship, the methods of ceremonies, the magico-religious beliefs and socio religious customs- all these characterize the *Dharma* cult as a primitive folk cult of Bengal (Mahapatra 1972). *Dharma Thakur* is associated with human fertility, rain, and agriculture. He possesses the attributes of curing diseases. The diseases like leucoderma, leprosy and eye diseases are associated with *Dharma Thakur*.

*Gonsai* is worshipped in many places of the *Rarh* region. Trident is the main symbol. A pair of *kharam* (clog) is also noticed. *Hookah* (*Kef*) is also offered to them. They are worshipped for various purposes like bountiful crop production, protection of crops, curing diseases, desirement of child, or various other wishes (Kamilya 1991). *Gonsai* also connected with *Vaishnava* saints.

*Mahadana / Madana* is believed to be the God of grain. The livelihood of the people of the villages is largely dependent on the crop. If the loss of that solely dependent crop is caused by the adverse situation, then the survival of village people is likely to be endangered. According to the local belief *Mahadana* protects the field crops from natural disasters and also from the thieves and robbers (Chakraborty 1984). Usually people from the *Bauri* community (a cultivating, palanquin bearing caste) organized this ceremony and *Mal* (a cultivating caste) community also worshipped this deity.

*Manasa* is one of the important folk divinities of the rural Bengal. It is associated not only with sexual reproduction of human fertility but also fertility of the soil. In the Puranas, *Manasa*, the snake Goddess is described as the daughter of *Shiva*, the most important Brahmanical phallic Goddess of fertility and regeneration. In rural Bengal, *Manasa*, the Goddess of the serpents, has been worshipped during the rainy season especially by the rural folks because of the practical reason of abundance of serpents moving about in the localities (Bandyopadhyay 2007).

Goddess *Sasti* is worshipped all over Bengal in every month by different names of various purposes is generally regarded as the protecting Goddess of childbirth and offspring. As a source of human fecundity, she causes the conception of children, delivers them out of their mother's womb safely, and protects them from all dangers and evils (Bandyopadhyay 2007). The Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*) is associated with *Sasti*. The tree bears numerous fruits. So it symbolized as seat of *Sasti*, the deity of fertility and many children (Mahapatra 1972).

## **Location of Shrines and Its' Patterns Over the Multiple Spaces**

The location of the shrine is very much important for the present study to understand why people established this shrine in particular spaces. The significance of the spatial location of the shrines is important to study the spatial analysis of terracotta animal's behaviour and function. Ray (2011) is rightly pointed out that the crucial element in the Asian landscape was the religious shrine and it is important to locate it in a social

context and to unravel the multiple levels at which sacred sites interacted with a diverse range of communities and negotiated between these.

The place of shrines where terracotta animals are deposited is popularly known as *than*. *Than* is a place where Gods and Goddesses resides. The word comes from *devasthan>sthan>than*. Other connotation may be *asthana> than* (Chowdhury & Sengupta 2013; Basu 1966). In most cases, there is only a platform surrounding the bases of the tree devoid any other definite or permanent structures. *Than* is always walled on three but the front portion is always open. It has always a triangle shaped structure on the upper portion. Some refers that the Sanskrit word *sthan* is the source of the word *than*. *Maroh* is also used for the *than* (Kamilya 1989). Another noteworthy feature of these *thans'* is their extreme simplicity.

A detailed study on the sacred area of selected villages in Birbhum district is undertaken. The votive animal figurines are tokens of their vow. Though these shrines remain active through the year but the annual festivals are the main attraction of the shrines. The layout of the selected villages with special emphasize on the location of shrines has been given here for understanding the spatial analysis. The spatial dimensions of the terracotta animals have been recorded through this study. They have been found inside well structured temple. Some are found in domestic *than* which is shared by four to five families- these will be called as 'shared domestic *thans*'. There is other domestic *than* maintained by one family exclusively within their house boundary. These will be called as 'domestic *thans*'. Another *than* is the village *than* where there is no temple but worshipped and maintained by the entire village community. These will be regarded as 'Community *than*'. The layout of the villages and locations of shrines are discussed below-

### **Adityapur**

This village is located in Bolpur Sriniketan Tehsil of Birbhum district in West Bengal, India. River Kopai serve its northern boundary. This is a multi caste village. Cluster pattern of settlement are noticed.

**Shrine no 1-** The *Dharmaraj* temple is situated in the eastern side of the settlement of *Purvapara* (connecting eastern part of the village) (Figure 2). This area is settled by the low economic status castes like *Hadi*, *Lohar* and *Bagdi*. The temple is small but well constructed, facing south. In the front of temple large number of terracotta horses are deposited under the Ashwatha tree (*Ficus religiosa*), Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) in a scattered manner. Some of them are broken, some are decorated or simple. Glossy, well painted, and decorated horses are also kept inside the temple. Only horse figurines have been evidenced. Beside the temple is a big pond. The temple complex has a big courtyard. The annual worship is organized on the full moon day of *Baishakh* month (April-May).

**Shrine no 2-** A small assemblages of terracotta horse figurines are found in a small room like enclosure popularly known as *Sasti tala* (Figure 3). It is located just outside

the boundary of the village and has a west orientation. A Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) tree with small bushes encompasses the area. Generally village women come together here in the day of *Jamai Sasti*. This is a festival depicting the beautiful relationship between sons-in-law with his in laws. It is celebrated to bring son-in-law nearer to the family of his in laws. The name *Jamai* means son-in-law and *Sasti* means the sixth day of *Shukla Paksha* (the first fortnight between New Moon Day and Full Moon Day is called *Shukla Paksha*, the period of the brightening moon) according to the Hindu calendar. On this day Goddess *Sasti* is worshipped. The festival occurs in the month of *Jaistha* (May-June).

**Shrine no 3-** Small amount terracotta horses including broken ones have also been found amidst agricultural field beyond the village settlement boundary. This place is surrounded by big bushes. Local people said that this is another place where *Dharmaraj* worship is happened earlier.

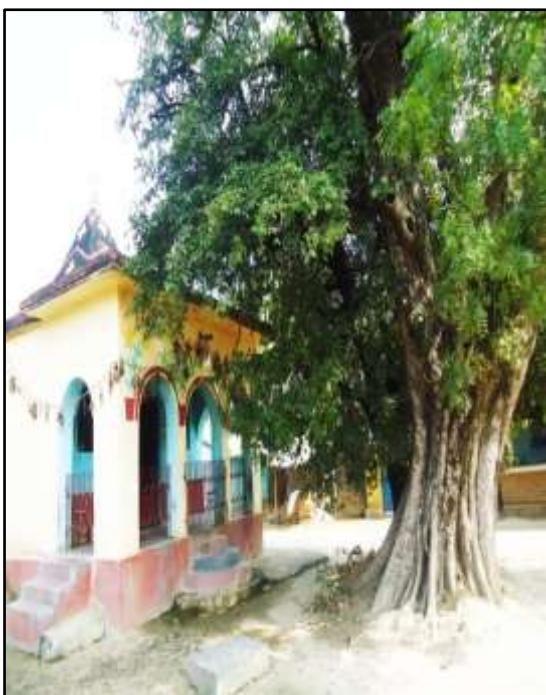


Figure 2: Shrine No. 1



Figure 3: Shrine No. 2

## Arali

Arali village is located in Rajnagar Tehsil of Birbhum district in West Bengal, India. River Kushkarini or Kushkarnika which is the tributary of Mayurakshi, flows nearby this village. The entrance of the village is surrounded by small woods. After one to two kilometers the main settlement area starts. Linear type of settlement is noticed in this village. This village has a multi-caste population though Muslims are dominant in this village.

**Shrine no 1-** The shrine of *Baba Pir than* or *Kendupir Baba* is situated just at the junction of Bahilapara village (neighboring village of Arali) and starting point of the Arali

village (Figure 4). Another name is *Asthatala* (Astha means the faith; villagers have strong faith on this deity). It is situated under the Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*) facing east. Assemblages of terracotta horse, tiger, and elephant figurines are largely deposited in a dump manner. Usually they are not organized but in the day of annual worship they are arranged in linear fashion. Flags of *Muharam* are found hanging from the tree. The terracotta figurines are simple, small in sizes in normal terracotta colour or some are white, made of kaolin. The annual festival happens on the first day of Bengali month *Magh* (January-February).

**Shrine no 2-** Just opposite of this road there is another sacred grove which is situated under Gaub tree (*Diospyros malabarica*). This is locally called *Tarpa Burir than* (Figure 5). Here also assemblage of terracotta animal figurines has been noticed in a scattered manner. If someone is suffering from vermes or convulsion disease and barren women gift these votive offerings of animal to get rid of their illness. The annual festival is arranged on the first day of *Magh* (January-February).

It has been noticed that various deities name is associated with the particular word *buri*. The word *buri* comes from the word “*sthabira*” which means very aged women, or who obeyed *Sannyasi* life for more than ten years. This also means a knowledgeable aged woman. Actually the word is expressed with respect and dignity. So, most of the villagers have sought to establish the Goddesses in the seat of honour and dignity by attaching the word *buri* (Acharya 2003).

**Shrine no 3-** The *Dom* (drummers, cultivators, labourers) community of this village have their domestic shrine known as *Baghrai than*. Four families have shared one shrine (Figure 6). They live on the western side of the village. This *than* is situated under Panjan tree (*Clerodendrum phlomidis*) within the compound of their houses. A small brick structure is constructed for their deity. Dump of terracotta horses, elephants, and tigers have been noticed with a small vermillion pasted stone. The figurines are not organized but in time of festival, they are linearly organized in a proper manner. The whole structure and the terracotta figurines are coloured with kaolin in day of main worship. This *than* facing south. Annual festival is organized on the fourth day of *Magh* (January-February).

The etymology of *Rai* has an evolution. *Ray* word comes from word *Raja* (king). The evolution of the word is *Raja>Raya> Ray*. Probably the title of Roy of the ruling of the feudal emperor of Bengal was later associated with religious affiliation (Chowdhury 1956).

**Shrine no 4-** Beside the *Baghrai than*, another domestic shrine is located under a tree in the same *Dom* locality. This *than* is dedicated to *Manasa*. Very small amount of terracotta figurines have been noticed in a scattered manner with a trident. This is known as *Shaorali Manasa*. *Shau* is said to be a type of grass whose plants are used for food purpose for cows, and its seeds are cereals. Serpent goddess *Manasa* was

worshipped in that *shau* filled basket. Most probably *Shaorali* word comes from *Sharavani* because it is worshipped in *Shravana* (July-August) (Fouzdar 2019).



Figure 4: Shrine No. 1



Figure 5: Shrine No. 2



Figure 6: Shrine No. 3



Figure 7: Shrine No. 6

**Shrine no 5-** A newly constructed big temple of *Manasa* is located beside the *Kumor para* (potter locality), facing east. Beside this temple, a small structure has been constructed where terracotta figurines have been situated with a pair of *kharām* (clog)

and trident. The annual festival happens on any Monday or Friday of *Chaitra* month (March-April).

**Shrine no 6-** Another temple of Goddess *Manasa* is situated towards the western side of the settlement (Figure 7). This temple belongs to *Bauri* community. The door is closed during the survey but people said that terracotta figurines were present in the inner room of temple. Annual festival is organized on *Shravana* Month (July-August).

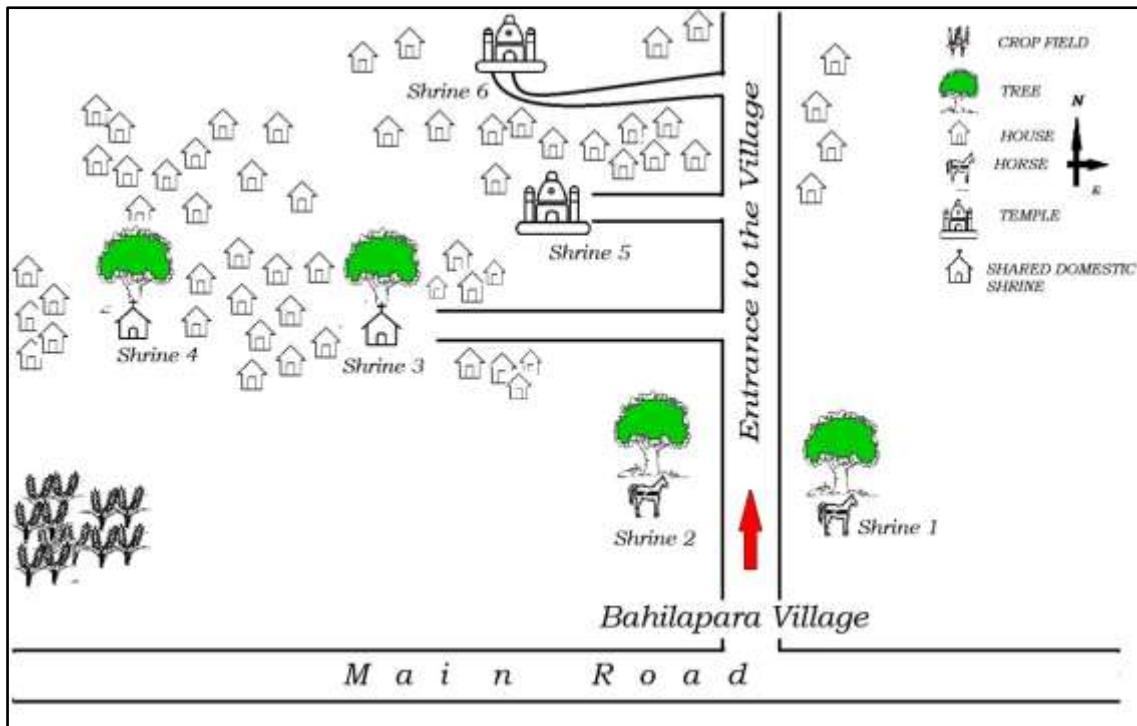


Figure 8: Layout of Arali village (not to scale)

Arali has total six shrines (Figure 8) Two shrines are located just at the entrance point of the Arali village and ending point of the neighboring Bahilapara village. Two domestic shrines i.e. *Baghrai* and *Manasa* shrine are located in *Dompara* and these are shared by the four families. One newly big *Manasa* temple is in under construction procedure. It is located just beside the *Palpara* and *Dompara*. It is a community temple. During the annual festivals the whole village communities participated including the potters. Another domestic shared *Manasa* temple belongs to the *Bauri* community and it is located at the end of village boundary. Terracotta animals have been noticed in every shrine in haphazard way but during the annual festival, these have been properly decorated and arranged in organized manner.

### Muradganj

The potters of Arali village are the manufacturers as well as suppliers of these figures to other villages. These villages are situated within surrounding areas of Rajnagar. These are *Kushma*, *Nakash*, *Khasbazar*, *Muradganj* etc. Among them *Muradganj* village have been surveyed as this village also have a *Baghrai than*. This is a medium

sized village located in Rajnagar block of Birbhum district. The village is 4 km away from Arali village. It deserves special attention due to presence of various local deities.

**Shrine no 1-** There is a small *Manasa than* located at the entrance of the village where small amount terracotta figurines are deposited. This is a domestic shrine shared and maintained by three families. It is facing west. The annual festival is organized on the month of *Shravana* (July-August).



Figure 9: Shrine No. 2



Figure 10: Shrine No. 3



Figure 11: Shrine No. 4 (Outside View)



Figure 12: Shrine No. 4 (Inside View)

**Shrine no 2-** There is a *Brahmadaitya than* along with *Baba Gonsai* which is situated at the peripheral end of the village. This *than* is a small cement structure where few amount of terracotta animal figurines are dumped with vermillion pasted stones (Figure 9). It is located beside the road under open air and faces west. Beside this *than*, a pond is situated. The annual festival is organized on the third day of *Magh* (January-February).

**Shrine no 3-** Another *Manasa than* have been situated under the Banyan tree, facing east (Figure 10). It is also a domestic shrine and belongs to *Bauri* community. Total six small terracotta horse figurines were present at the shrine with a stone paste with vermillion. It is also known as *Shaorali* (same as *Arali*). A festival happens on *Shravana* month (July-August).

**Shrine no 4-** The *Baghrai than* situated under the Mahua tree (*Madhuca longifolia*) is located in the middle of the football field at the end of village (Figure 11). The area is devoid of any settlement. The shrine faces south. It is a domestic shrine which is maintained and worshipped by the family of the priest. The house of the priest is located far from this *than*. Very small amounts of terracotta animal figurines including horse and tiger are scattered around the Mahua tree (Figure 12). The annual festival is organized on the third day of *Magh* (January-February).

## Goalpara

Goalpara village is located in Bolpur Sriniketan Tehsil of Birbhum district. The village is surrounded by undulating paddy fields and rivulet Kopai cuts along the northern border of the village. This village is multi-caste and multi occupational. Among the various castes the Brahmins are most dominant. The village follows a linear pattern and some amount of cluster type of settlements. This village is famous for *Dharmaraj* festival. It is their main festival. The following four places in or near the village are where *Dharmaraj*'s worship is done.

**Shrine no 1-** A newly big temple constructed by the village committee is the first important shrine (Figure 13). The *Dharmaraj* temple is situated in the largest Brahmin quarter at the entrance to *Purvapara* (eastern locality). It becomes the first place of worship as a visitor when entering the village from the main road lying to the east reinforces *Dharmaraj*'s important presence in the village, because of its central location (Korom 1997). Daily worship is done by the Brahmin priest. Annual festival occurs on the full moon day of *Chaitra* month (March-April). Straw figurines of horses are also used for the decorative purpose on the temple. Many straw clay figurines along with terracotta horse figurines are deposited inside the inner sanctum of the temple.

**Shrine no 2-** The *Buroray Dharam tala* is the second major place of worship for *Dharmaraj* (Figure 14). It is open grove facing south marked by a number of Banyan trees, with a sacred pond called *Muktadhar pukur*. This place is located outside of the settlement area. Since there is no specific temple or enclosure located on the spot, it is highly possible for an outsider unknowingly to step on the circle of stones that

represent the *sat ray vai*, (seven brothers) which are the manifestations of *Dharmaraj* located at the *tala*. The only clues that hint at the *tala*'s sacredness are the numerous straw clay and terracotta horses offered to *Dharmaraj* during the annual *puja* in fulfillment of a vow. The horses remain at the spot until they are reclaimed by the earth. The *Buro Dharam tala* is not a place of daily worship, and it is quite common to see cows grazing on or near the spot.



Figure 13: Shrine No. 1



Figure 14: Shrine No. 2 (Courtesy: Abhishek Chatterjee)

**Shrine no 3-** The third sacred spot commemorated to *Dharma* is *Megh Ray tala* (related with cloud), another scenic spot located on the western bank of a small pond in *Paschimpara* (western locality). The stone representing *Megh Ray*, one of the *sat ray vai* (seven brothers), is surrounded by thorn bushes and is, for all practical purposes, inaccessible. This area is located outside the village and belongs to *Shabar* community (traditionally forest dwelling tribe). Famous *Meghgarjan* (the sound of drums like cloud is roaring) rituals are performed here.

**Shrine no 4-** The last one is located on the northern boundary of the village. The stone circles with clay straw horses are observed under a Tamarind tree (*Tamarindus indica*) (Figures 15 and 16). There is a pond beside this *than*. The horses are damaged due to rain. Beside the clay straw horses a big wooden horse was there.

**Shrine no 5-** *Barh Thakur tala* is located in the mid portion of agricultural field in the north eastern side of the village. This is situated outside the village. Few terracotta animal figurines especially horses in broken pieces have been found within the small forest of Banyan tree with bushes. A trident has been noticed. The annual worship occurs after two days of *Saraswati Puja*.

**Shrine no 6-** A *Sasti tala* is located under a Banyan tree within a small forest area. This is close to the *Megh Ray tala*. Very few terracotta horse figures have been noticed. The annual worship is performed by women folk on the day of *Jamai Sasti*.



Figure 15: Shrine No. 4 (Outside View)



Figure 16: Shrine No. 4 (Inside View)

The **Goalpara** represents clear boundary wise village shrine construction. It has total six shrines (Figure 17). The shrine no 1 i.e., *Dharmaraj* temple is situated in the middle portion of the villages within settlement area and at crossing of roads. Shrine no 2 i.e., *Buroray Dharmraj tala* is located towards its southern boundary beside a pond where

*Muktasnan* (ritual bath of *Dharmaraj*) ritual have been performed. The third sacred spot *Meghray tala* is situated towards its western direction beside a pond. Near to this shrine, Shrine no 6 i.e. *Sasti tala* is located under a Banyan tree with lots of bushes. Shrine no 4 is situated towards its northern boundary beside a pond. It is regarded as the incarnation of *Dharmaraj*. Shrine no 5 is situated towards its eastern boundary within the middle of the agricultural field. So, the shrines are located at important junctions. If one looks carefully, the *Dharmaraj* temple is situated in the middle portion of the village and other shrines are located in its surrounding areas according to cardinal directions defining boundaries.

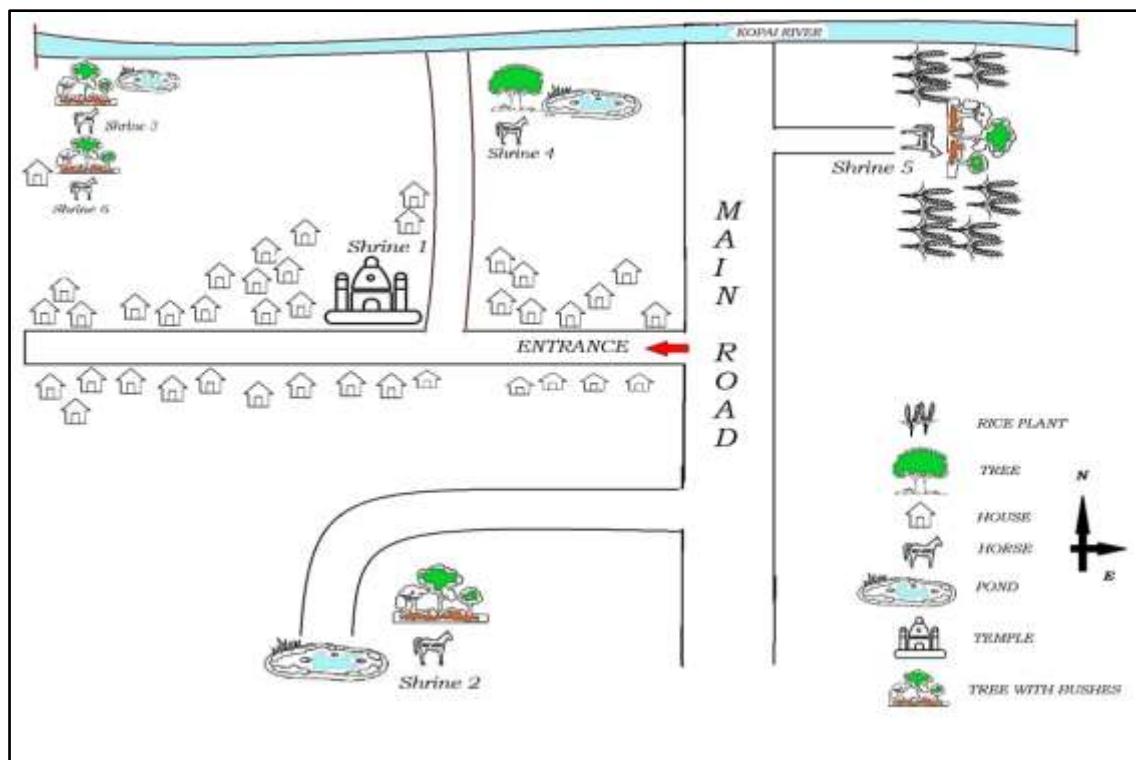


Figure 17: Layout of Goalpara village (not to scale)

## Lokepur

Lokepur is a village and *gram panchayat* in Khoyrasole community development block in Suri Sadar sub division of Birbhum district. This village is multi-caste and multi occupational. The village is a prosperous one. The nearby river is Shal which is 3 to 4 km from the village. Varieties of spatial orientation of terracotta animals have been noticed in this village. There are many local deities for which the terracotta animals are offered. To understand these various spatial contexts, this village has been selected. Another reason is that the animal rider figures have been found only from here.

**Shrine no 1-** Deities like *Sindhuraja*, *Bagraja*, *Manasa*, *Chandi*, *Jharuni*, *Kuruni*, *Ma Sitala*, *Basanta Buri*, *Dakshina Kali* are also worshipped along with *Dharmaraj* in this temple (Figure 18). Small quantity of terracotta horses has been found inside the temple as most of the figures are immersed into water every year during the *Muktasnan* of

*Dharmaraj* (ritual bath) due to paucity of space. The temple is located at middle of the village which is the connection point of old Lokepur and new expanding Lokepur village. The temple facing south is in the heart of the settlement area. It has a big plastered courtyard and also a veranda. The temple is well maintained and large in size. The locality is known as *Majhpara* (middle of the locality). Annual worship of *Dharmaraj* happens on the full moon day of *Baishakh* (April- May).

**Shrine no 2-** The *Dom* community lives at the periphery of the village with their domestic shrine. Like Arali, they have also shared a single *than* with four families. Their *than* is named as *Basanta Buri* (Figure 19). The worshippers said that *Maa* (mother) has a pox sign all over the body. So they call her *Basanta*. They have built small temple like structure where Brahmanical deities have been printed on the tiles. It is not found inside the houses but within the settlement area. The assemblages of terracotta horses and elephants and tigers have been noticed to be in an organized manner with vermillion pasted stone covered with red cloth. This is a well maintained *than* facing east. The annual festival happens on the first day of *Magh* (January-February).

**Shrine no 3-** This is another domestic shared *than* which belongs to *Dom* community. A small enclosure is constructed for their God. Small amount of terracotta horse figurines have been noticed with big to middle sizes stones pasted with vermillion. It is situated within the settlement area under Date Palm trees (*Phoenix dactylifera*). Annual festival occurs on the first day of *Magh* month (January-February).

**Shrine no 4-** Close to *Kumorpara* are a few Muslim houses. There is a pond named as *Pathangarh*. They have their own *Pir than*. A small structure has been founded (Figure 20). *Muharam* flags are flown in the air. Here small amount of terracotta horses have been noticed in an organized manner.

**Shrine no 5-** Towards the western side of the villages, a *Mahadana than* is situated in the middle portion of agricultural field outside the village locality under a Date Palm tree (*Phoenix dactylifera*) with bushes. There is a pond named as *Khunkundi pukur* (pond). This *than* also belongs to *Dom* community and it is a shared domestic shrine and faces south (Figure 21). The small amounts of terracotta animal figurines are found scattered in the small cemented floor. The annual festival is organized on the first day of *Magh* (January-February).

**Shrine no 6-** Next to this *Mahadana than*, towards its south *Neem talar Burir than* is situated in the middle of agricultural field under a Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*). The name of the *than* is derived from the tree. It is also located at corner of the village outside the settlement. Two big terracotta red horses decorated with silver colour along with small figurines have been worshipped in the small structure. The *than* which is east facing is also a domestic one which is shared by two-to three families and belonging to *Mal* (cultivators) community. Annual festival occurs on fourth day of *Magh* (January-February) though the place is worshipped three times in other

occasions. These are- when paddy seed are sown on the ground, when first rain water falls on the earth and before cutting of the paddy.

**Shrine no 7-** Few kilometers from *Neem talar Burir than*, there is another *than* located under a Bael tree (*Aegle marmelos*) in the middle of the agricultural field. This is known as *Bel talar Burir than*. A small red colour cemented structure is made for their deity. Few terracotta figurines have been found in a scattered manner. Worshippers say that the animal figurines are sometimes taken by children as toys. An annual festival occurs on first day of *Magh* (January- February).

**Shrine no 8-** *Madana than* is located near the bus stand road of this village within the agricultural field (Figure 22). Beside this *than*, there is a pond. There are terracotta horse figurines with vermillion pasted stones. Some of them are painted with kaolin with red colour while others are simple. This is also a domestic shrine belonging to the *Lohar* (metal fabrication, cultivators) community. A beautiful red colour cemented structure is made for their deity. It is facing south. An annual festival is organized on the first day of the month of *Magh* (January-February).

**Shrine no 9-** A small red colour *than* is located in the market cross road area under an ashwatha tree (*Ficus religiosa*). This *than* is locally known as *Chandi than*. Small amount of terracotta horse figurines have been noticed arranged in a linear arrangement.

**Shrine no 10-** There are two *Manasa* temples. One temple belongs to *Bauri* (cultivating, earth working, palanquin bearing) community and is located within the settlement area. The temple facing south is a well made structure situated on the road. Annual worship occurs on the *Shravana* month (July-August). Small amount of red colour painted with silver colour horses are present inside the temple in an organized manner. There is a wooden plank on the cemented structure where big stones pasted with vermillion have been kept.

**Shrine no 11-** Another domestic *Manasa* temple is located at *Dhibarpa*. It is east facing belongs to *Dhibar* (fishing) community. Five snake figurines pasted with vermillion have been kept inside the temple with terracotta vessels. Two or three terracotta small horses have been found there. Annual worship happens on the month of *Bhadra* (August-September).

**Shrine no 12-** There are large numbers of *Gonsai than* at Lokepur village. It is very difficult to document each and every space of *Gonsai than*. The Brahmin priest of the village suggests more than fifty *Gonsai than* in the village. Four to five *Gonsai thans* has been documented. Most of these are not shared with other families. They belong to each individual families of *Shil* (account service or writer), *Lohar* and many more others community. One *Gonsai than* is located nearby the Lokepur High School. These *thans* are situated under the open sky. Some of the *thans* are very well structured. One *Gonsai than* is well decorated with white marble structure, decorated with varieties tiles depicted various Brahmanical deities. Various sizes of terracotta horses and elephants

figurines have been found in this *than* (Figure 23). There is a pair of clog and trident kept in these *thans*. The container of *hookah* (kef) has been found in every *Gonsai thans*. These are daily worshipped by the Brahmin priest and annual worship also occurs through the time varies from house to house.



Figure 18: Shrine No. 1



Figure 19: Shrine No. 2



Figure 20: Shrine No. 4



Figure 21: Shrine No. 5



Figure 22: Shrine No. 8



Figure 23: Shrine No. 12

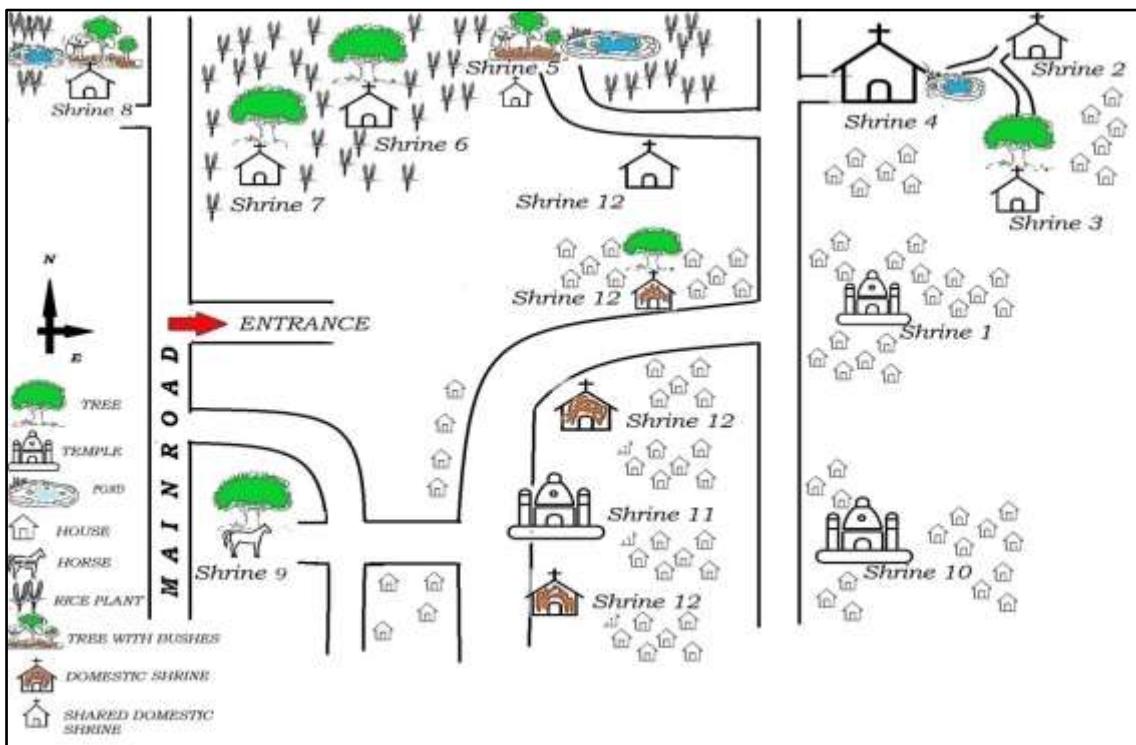


Figure 24: Layout of the Lokepur village (not to scale)

Lokepur has represented a very interesting picture (Figure 24). This picture proves that space is not static; it can be reconstructed and reproduced. This village shows that the various spatial dimensions of ritual context of terracotta animals. The *Dharmaraj* temple (Shrine no 1) is situated towards its northern boundary of the villages. This temple is not only dedicated to *Dharamraj* only but varieties of deities like *Chandi*, *Manasa*, and

*Kali* are also worshipped along with *Dharmaraj*. It is the juncture point of old Lokepur and new Lokepur village. A *Manasa* temple (Shrine no 10) is located within the settlement area. Second *Manasa* temple (Shrine no 11) is located *Dhibarpara* within settlement area. It belonged to *Dhibar* (Fisher folk community). The terracotta animals are presented in an organized manner inside the temple. The shrine of *Gonsai* (Shrine no 12) is located in various places. It was not possible to document each. But total four *Gonsai* have been documented in the layout, among which three are purely domestic shrines which exclusively belong to one family, situated within a house compound area and other one is a shared domestic shrine. Shrine no 4 is located near the pond belongs to Muslim community. It is interesting to note that this kind of shrine is not only limited to Hindu religious faith. This is labeled as *Pir than*. Towards its northern-eastern boundary there are two shared domestic *than*. These areas belong to *Dom* community. One is known as *Basanta Burir than* and another is *Baba's than*. Both of them are located within the settlement area. Shrine no 5, 6, 7, and 8 are located in the middle portion of agricultural field beside a pond. They said that they constructed the shrine in the field because they believe that their God will protect and guard their crops. Most of them situated under a tree and small cemented structure have been constructed. The Shrine no 9 is situated at cross road in market area under a tree. Very few terracotta animals have been found here. So, the shrines are located in temple as well as household complex and also in agricultural field.

## Ushardihi

This village is located in Illambazar Tehsil of Birbhum district. This village is popularly known as Ushandi. It has a liner type of settlement. The village is multi caste and multi occupational. The total village is surrounded by the agricultural field. There are many ponds dotting the entire village. River Ajay is close to this village. This village is famous for *Brahmadaitya than* where large heap of terracotta animals have been found.

**Shrine no 1-** Large heap of terracotta horse figurines have been located in the entrance of the village (Figure 25). There were first two small *thans* and recently before two to three years ago a big structure has been made. The quantity of the terracotta objects is far more in number than any other *thans* in the present study area. It is dedicated to *Brahmachari* or *Brahmadaitya*. Local villagers called this as *Babar than*. A huge banyan tree with bushes of tree is surrounds the area. One trident and pair of *kharam* (Clog) have been noticed. No settlement is noticed around this *than*. There are two ponds beside this *than*. The newly made big structure is west facing but the smaller ones are facing south direction.

**Shrine no 2-** One *Manasa than* is located within settlement locality. It is temporary structure constructed of bamboo and plastics. Assemblage of terracotta (middle to small sizes) horses and elephants has been noticed inside the room (Figure 26). They are pasted with vermillion and organized in a linear fashion. This *than* is a domestic one and belongs to *Lohar* caste. In the front of this *than*, potters use this place to dry their clay objects under sunshine. Beside this there is a big *Durga* temple and a pond.



Figure 25: Shrine No. 1



Figure 26: Shrine No. 2

**Shrine no 3-** The *Dharmaraj* temple is situated at the north-western boundary of the village. One *Shiva* temple and *Kali* temple are also located beside this *Dharmaraj* temple. Few terracotta animals have been noticed inside the room. One pond is situated behind the temple. This area is basically a temple complex area. Annual worship occurs on the full moon day of *Baishakh* (April-May).

The Shrine no 1 is the main *Gramdeveta* (main village deity) of **Ushardihi** village. This shrine is located its northern-eastern boundary of the village. It is located at the outside of the settlement area (Figure 27). The shrine is located within a grove. Large heap of terracotta horses from small to big sizes are there under Banyan tree (*Ficus*

*benghalensis*). The number is comparatively huge from any other sacred *thans* of other villages. Animal figurines are deposited at the shrine throughout the year as votive offerings. There are two ponds beside this *than*. One *Manasa* than (Shrine no 2) is located within the settlement area and it belongs to *Lohar* community. Terracotta horses and elephants have been found here in an organized manner. The Shrine no 3 is located at the end border of northern western boundary of the village. It is dedicated to *Dharmaraj*. Beside this there is a pond. The temple is situated beside a Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) with lots of bushes. Terracotta animals have been noticed inside the temple.

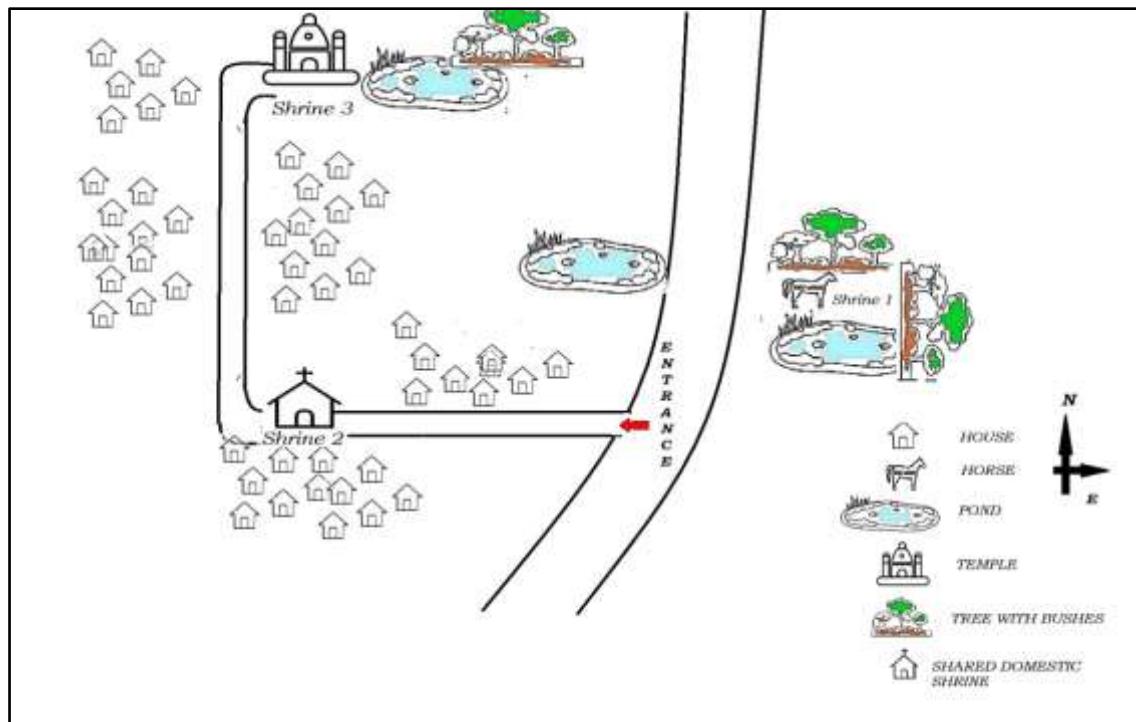


Figure 27: Layout of Ushardihi Village (not to scale)

The specificity of space is an essential element in understanding the use of terracotta animals because the meaning of space always involves a cognitive dimension and cannot be understood without symbolically constructed life worlds of the people, including feelings, memories, awe, emotion, wonder. The ethnographic survey has been observed that the association of terracotta animal figurines' with the local deities are not only found in exclusively in temple, or community *thans*, or shared by some families in the household complex or in the middle portion of agricultural field but also exclusively in individual family *than* in household compound area.

It has been noticed that most of the shrines are located beside a pond in the ethnographic survey. Generally bathing and ritual purification play a major role in any religious rituals. They must be performed before to worship as purification before the deity is a necessary precondition of worship in virtually all religious rituals, and purification must be performed if a rite is to be effective. The villagers have been told

that the bath should be performed to clean body and mind before any worship. In order to enter the realm of the sacred, the people should be pure. Here water also played a powerful sacred symbol. Daily activity makes people impure, therefore, bathing is necessary.

The next interesting feature is that all shrines except few ones are located under a tree. There is no temple; it remains open under the sky. Not all types of trees are there but especially which are evergreen like Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*), Ashwatha (*Ficus religiosa*), Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) etc. These trees are also worshipped during the ritual festivals along with deities. During the early days of the food gathering and collecting, people depended on the trees, which provided food, shelter, and medicine. Perhaps for this reason, people worship trees. A number of seals, sealings, potteries, and potsherds were discovered from the Harappan civilizations sites with the depiction of certain trees. These trees include Neem, Pipal etc. are depicted in such a way which signifies that the people of this culture did pay oblations and worshipped at least a few trees (Malla 2000). As a sacred plant the tree of life is deeply rooted in all the religions of the world. Trees are found associated with almost every ancient sanctuary as visible manifestations of the divine spirit. This is continued from the Harappa civilization to the contemporary present. According to Bendopadhyay (2008) tree is recognized as the symbol of life, fortune, and knowledge. All trees in the sacred groves are sacred. If there is a cut or even a twig is removed, it is believed that it will bring illness or calamity. Even dry foliage is not touched. Villagers believed that any kind of disturbance will offend the deities, causing disease, natural calamities or failure of crops.

It is generally noticed that most of the sacred groves as well as the face of the terracotta animal figurines has been left towards south direction or east. The villagers of the Goalpara also believed that temple or shrine's face should be towards southern or eastern side because it is prescribed in all religious literatures. The horses are given to get protection from Yama (deity of death). The reason is mentioned by the Kramrisch (1994) herself-

*"The south (Daksina) is the region of Yama (death). The daksinayana, the southern passage of the sun, is the Pitryana. Along it move the ancestors, the Pitrs, on the way of transmigration. Yama, the Pitrpati (lord of the manes) and Pretaraja (king of the ghosts) is the son of the sun. Horses draw the chariot of the sun. The terracotta horses are the vehicles of the Pitrs who are lored over by Yama, son of the sun; doubly the horses are related to the sun, in its southern course. The sun sinks into the netherworld and rises from the lap of death in the east. The elephant, vahana of Indra, the recoverer of light, is the guardian of the east".*

The same terracotta animal passes through different contexts in their lifecycle from production to distribution to usage to deposition. These different contexts give insights into the intrinsic meaning of the terracotta animals because meaning is embedded within a space. Concept of 'boundaries' could be mapped with the help of artefacts

(Gangopadhyay 2006). The local deity occupies important positions in each of the studied villages. In different occasions including the annual festivals people make terracotta animal offerings. The establishment of shrine is considered as an important event. If one looks carefully, some shrines are located at the beginning of the settlement and another one at the end of the settlement. These shrines are likely used as demarcation of boundary. Boundaries are of major significance in structuring existential space both in and between places and regions (Tilley 1994). According to Dutta (2013), the shrines do indicate the binary understanding of the world, i.e., wild/domestic, settlement/jungle, known/unknown, etc.

It indicates that placement of shrine is important because people believe that these deities use these terracotta animals as vehicles to protect and guard the village. They believe that the ancestral spirits i.e. benevolent spirits ride on the horses and elephants which are offered at the groves and drive away the evil spirits from the village. This spatial dimension of the sacred groves to its space of disposal is very important part to be interpreted in archaeological context.

The key question can be addressed: why were particular spaces chosen for performing religious ritual and the erection of *thans* as opposed to others? Here present study has also wished to follow Tilly's (1994) two features in particular - the symbolic of space perception and the role of social memory in choice of site location. These sacred spaces are not arbitrarily produced. She rightly mention that "a centered and meaningful space involves specific sets of linkages between the physical space of the non-humanly created world, somatic states of the body, the mental space of cognition and representation and the space of movement, encounter and interaction between persons and between persons and the human and non-human environment".

The villages' *thans* are pertaining to these characteristics. *Thans* are socially produced space combines the cognitive, symbolic, physical and emotional into something that may be reproduced but is always open to transformation and change. The *Baghrai than* of Arali village is shared by four families, but during the festivals, a particular family have a plan to create a separate *than* exclusively for their own. So, the religious space is transformed from the shared to individual. For that reason, numerous individual domestic *Gonsai than*s are situated at Lokepur village. Each family maintained their own *than* in their own household compound area.

Ashmore and Knapp (1999) gave some interesting approach to study the landscape. The present study also fulfills some of these criteria. The erection of sacred *thans* alters the visual character of landscapes which is called by them as "constructed landscape". The sacred *than* is regarded as the materialization of memory, folk stories, all situated in a specific temporal and historical context. They called them as "landscape as memory" as memory implies continuity in the space, often through reuse, reinterpretation, and reconstruction. Every year they repeated more or less same ritual process which creates the memory transferable from generation to generation. The

villagers of Birbhum recognize, and collectively maintain the sacred *thans* in ritual, symbolic, and ceremonial terms; and in turn these places create and expressed their socio-cultural identity. This is termed by them as “landscape as identity”. Various forms like, boundaries of trees, deposit of terracotta animals, shrine construction, ponds, the overall surrounding landscapes exemplify ready avenues for understanding the identity of sacred area.

## **The Temporary Shop vs Permanent Shop: Potters' Choice Over the Space**

The ethnographic survey has been observed that most of the potters have their shop in their own houses. The verandas have been used for this purpose. So there are instances of direct purchase of terracotta items from terracotta making owners. Few potters of Arali village have their shop in main market. But they also sell their products from their home. The potters' house is served as the procurement centre of animal figurines in Lokepur (Figure 28), Arali and Ushardihi.



Figure 28: Shop and workshop in potter's home, Lokepur

This kind of permanent shop in the houses of the potters has great scope to understand the workshop of manufacturing centre of terracotta animal figurines. The evidence of raw materials, various tools and equipments, the kiln for firing and also the debitage findings in the space will help to determine the nature of the production centre. On the other hand during the time of festival, the potters of Ushardihi give a temporary shop in the surrounding area of the place where worshippers offer their votive figure (Figure 29). This kind of shop will not define the area of workshop because these types of spaces only give evidence about the final products. They are choosing this area for only the purpose of selling the products during the festival. The other villages also do same but the Adityapur potters are more depended on the wholesale marketing. This

village is largely commercialized due to its nearby position with Santiniketan market. Whereas, the producer community of Goalpara village make the horses only before the Dharmaraj puja. The order has to be placed one to two months before by the customers to get the product during the festival.

Every village is not associated with the production of the terracotta animal figurines. Some are depended on the other villages for procurement of the terracotta animals like the Muradganj is depended on the Arali for buying the terracotta animal. So, it has been noticed that every villages are the user of the terracotta animal but every villages are not the producer of terracotta animal among the study area.

Various villages are showing different perspectives of selling the product and how these all have been reflected on the space also an important aspect to understand the spatial dimension of the finished terracotta animal figurines. The idea of understanding manufacturing site and the space utilized for finished products or industrial assemblage in an archaeological context can be analyzed through this example.



Figure 29: Temporary shop during *Brahmadaitya puja*, Ushardihi

## Conclusion

The present ethnoarchaeological study shows that terracotta animals usage pattern are able to give for a detailed and often complex and multilayered understanding of people's sense of space and spatial practice. Every space of terracotta animal is unique. This ethnoarchaeological research has been attempted to emphasize that the deposition or discarded terracotta animals with associated religious rituals helps to create the markers of village boundaries. After the performance of religious rituals the terracotta animal figurines are not destroyed, replaced, or immersed, but they are kept at sacred groves which carry past ritual performances.

The sacred spaces are not arbitrarily produced. The specificity of space is an essential element in understanding the use of terracotta animals because the meaning of space always involves a cognitive dimension and cannot understand constructed life world of the people, including their feelings, memories, awe, emotion, and wonder. The sacred *than* and their surrounding landscapes including the presence of tree, location of pond, the deposit of terracotta animals, shrine constructions held a symbolic significance, so that their construction and use are referred to significance of the sacred space. This study has also taken these exclusive characteristics features of spatial analysis into consideration.

Apart from this, an attempt had been taken to look into the different spatial context of the terracotta animals used in the contemporary societies. Here it has observed that the terracotta animals are used in various spaces like temple, community *thans*, domestic shared families sometimes in the middle of the agricultural land as well as individual family *than*. The potters also have their choices in selecting spaces to sell and marketing their products. The understanding of temporary vs. permanent spaces is also crucial to get a comprehensive background the nature of workshop in any archaeological sites.

Bengal has an unbroken tradition of terracotta animals' manufacture; therefore, an ethnoarchaeological approach has much potential to enhance the various aspects of prehistoric, proto historic and early historic terracotta animal figurines found from various sites in this region. If one knows a lot about the spaces of excavated terracotta animals, then one can interpret new situation and unique cultural arrangements beyond the present-day analogy. The present study feels that more precise and interesting study of animal figurines can be made in the future if the excavators and explorer were to give some more details about the location of the figurines on a particular site stratigraphical data which are lacking in the reports would also be helpful in this regard.

## Acknowledgements

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