

# Documentation of Terracotta Horse of Bankura

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## Introduction

Broadly Bengal clay pottery can be divided into two segments-Bankura Clay Pottery and Krishnanagar Clay Pottery. Bankura's art form is an ancient form than the art form of Krishnanagar. It was the Kumbhokars or potters of Panchmura, 16 miles away from Bishnupur, who started to make the famous Bankura horses. The 'Bankura Horse' has now come to be regarded as a symbol of the artistic excellence of Indian rural handicrafts - a fact which finds confirmation in its use as the official crest-motif of the All India Handicrafts Board.

## About Bankura

Bankura is located in the western part of the state of West Bengal. It is a part of Bardhaman Division and included in the area known as "Rarh" in Bengal. It ranks 4th according to population and literacy rate of 2001 Census in the state. The district is bounded by latitude 22038' N and longitude 86036' E to 87047' E. The Damodar River flows along the northern boundary of the district. The adjacent districts are Bardhaman District in the north, Purulia District in the west and Paschim Medinipur in the south. Bankura boasts some of the finest example of terracotta temple panels in the State at Bishnupur. Some pre-historic artifacts have also been discovered at Sushunia hillock of this district. Though basically an agricultural district, being the fourth highest producer of cereals in the State, Bankura is also developing industrially with 10,887 registered small scale industries employing about 52,864 persons as on 31.8.2000 (Economic Review 2000-2001).

## About Bishnupur

Bishnupur is a sub-district and a municipality in Bankura District in the state of West Bengal, India. It is famous for its terracotta temples and the balucheri sarees. Bishnupur (the distance from Kolkata is 152 km by road and 201 km by train), now the headquarters of the subdivision of the same name in Bankura district, is a seat of crafts and culture. For almost a thousand years it was the capital of the Malla kings of Mallabhum,



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of which Bankura was a part, till their power waned during the times when Mughal rule weakened under the last monarchs of the dynasty. The patronage of Malla king Veer Hambir and his successors Raja Raghunath Singha and Veer Singha made Bishnupur one of the principal centres of culture in Bengal. Most of the exquisite terracotta temples for which town is justly famous were built during this period.

Apart from the unique architecture of the period, Bishnupur is also famous for its terracotta craft and its own Baluchari sarees made of tussar silk.

Royal patronage also gave rise to Vishnupuri gharana (school) of Hindustani classical music and the Bishnupur school of painting.



### About Panchmura

Panchmura is the name of the village, which is located at a distance of about 40 km from Bishnupur, and 11 km from Thaldangra, the Thana (Police-station) of the the sub-district and is known for its Traditional Terracotta Horse and Mansha jhar, and other Handicrafts.

The Panchmura village has 60-70 kumbhkars (Potters) family who do the Terracotta works, The Crafts work has been continued for many years, and the hereditary skill has pass down from generation to generation. Earlier there was 300-400 craftsman, but now many have shifted to other profession, or does some side business.

Only the Kumbhkars people of the village practices the Craft and they also provide formal training to other people. Although the village is not very developed, it has its rich tradition of Terracotta crafts; Even the soil on the ground looks red, similar to the terracotta clay.

### Other Crafts of the Region (Bishnupur)

**Silk weaving of Baluchar** still retains its importance in Bengal's handloom tradition. Famous Baluchari saris were manufactured at Baluchar of Murshidabad, which has been introduced by the weavers of Bishnupur. The Baluchari tradition dated back to the 7th century A.D and since then it has undergone several changes in style and technique in



the intervening ages. Woven on unusual punch-card looms, these sarees have episodes from the Mahabharata woven into the border and pallu.

**Conch Shell** is one such resource which stands unique in the scenario of Bengali craft. The conch shell workers slice sparkling conch shells with simple hand tools and make bangles, bracelets and a range of ornaments. A typical type of bangle, known as sankha, made from conch shell, is worn by the women of Bengal as a sign of marriage. Conch Shell also has a lot of religious significance.

**Circular playing cards called Dasavtara or ganjifa**, which have hand-painted figures of the ten avatars of Vishnu on them, are also popular souvenirs. No one remembers how the game is played anymore though.



### Typical Features of Bankura Horse

If look closely it will be noticed that the Bankura horses have more erect neck and ears and look more dynamic. Their jaws are wider, their set of teeth can be seen, eyebrows are drawn and their forehead is decorated with Chandmala.

### Religious Reason

The original function of these terracotta horses were a ritualistic one. People would offer them as a token of their



devotion to Dharma Thakur, Manasa and numerous other village deities. Such offerings



are also made on the tombs of Muslim Saints whose worshippers do not necessarily belong to the Muslim community alone. The structure of 'Bankura Horse' has been so fashioned as to symbolize a mark of devotion.

### Introduction to the Craft

Bankura is famous for its Terracotta Temples of Bishnupur and many other places in the district. For centuries together the

artisans of this area have developed this art. The most famous product of this district in terracotta handicrafts is the famous 'Bankura Horse'. It is produced exclusively by the artisans of Panchmura, a village, about 8 Km. south-east of Taldangra Block Headquarters.



In course of the last few decades the fame of the commonly known 'Bankura Horse' has reached many parts of the globe. The 'Bankura Horse' has now come to be regarded as a symbol of the artistic excellence of Indian rural handicrafts - a fact which finds confirmation in its use as the official crest-motif of the All India Handicrafts Board.



The long-necked Panchmura Horse is made hollow with some circular vents to facilitate uniform firing in the country kilns. Panchmura Horse stands on its four legs with the neck held high and the ears and the tail erect and straight.

Terracotta of Bishnupur (Bankura) forms began under the Malla dynasty, during the late medieval period. Terracotta horses and elephants comprise the main objects of Bankura clay modeling. Bankura's art form is a more ancient art

form than that of Krishnanagar. It was the Kumbhokars or potters of Panchmura, a place in Bishnupur, who started to make the famous Bankura horses and elephants.



These horses display the skill and craftsmanship of Bengal. A pair of terracotta horses in a corner of a room adds class to any Bengali living room. These horses are not just decorative artifacts, but they also display the skill and craftsmanship of Bengal.



The potters here derive their inspiration from the glorious history of kings, soldiers and wars. The Bankura pottery is mainly used for ritualistic purposes. The rituals are almost all exclusively associated with local village gods and



worship of various kinds of tribal, semi-tribal and folk deities.

folk-festivals in the

The Panchmura-style of pottery is the best and the finest of all the four types. The symmetry of shape, the rhythm of the rounded curves of the body, especially of the

horse, has lent a dignity and charm to its form which is incomparable. Simplicity and dynamism are the chief components of Panchmura-style.

It is more sophisticated than the other three types-Rajagarm, Sonamukhi and Kamirpur types are a little less sophisticated and more massive. In Jhargram and Gopiballavpur areas in Midnapore district, within the tribal belt, the terracotta horses assume a crude near-primitive form and are fully hand modeled.

## Raw Materials

The Basic Raw Materials needed for making the Bankura horse and other similar crafts is mainly the TERRACOTTA clay, which is generally available in the region; otherwise the "Kumbhkars" (potters) get the clay from the other neighboring region of Bishnupur. The clay which they get is impure and the potters make the clay fit for the



craft by removing the dust-particles - stones from it. The clay is generally ordered in bulk, and is kept outside of the house, and is covered if there is any rain.

The other Raw Materials which are mixed with CLAY are SAND, some "KHAR" -HAY, WATER & COLOR (PIGMENTS). Generally the water is either from the tube well or from the local pond. Sand and Grass is used to hold the clay together and bind it firmly.



**The dry leaves are used as fuel for the firing of the Terracotta products in the village Klin**

## Tools used

The Basic tools needed for making the Bankura Horse, is mainly the Potters WHEEL, with a STICK (danda) to rotate it manually. The wheel is used to make the Basic shapes such as CONE and CYLINDER, which are the main body parts of the Horse. The wheel is generally made of wood, and is 3-4 feet in diameter, it is made locally.



The Wheel is generally carried out - outside of the house, as it needs some space to maneuver. The wheel is also cleaned after the wheel work is finished so that it is in good condition for the next session.



The Electric-Powered Wheel is not used, as there is scarcity of Electric in the village, also the potters prefer the traditional Wheel. The Slurry, which is diluted clay with water, is used during the wheel work, to give better finish to the products.

The tools that are used, after the basic wheel work is done are the mainly the scraps - such as BAMBOO TWIG, CUTTER'S BLADE, small piece of wood pointed at ends. These tools are mainly used to do the motifs and detailed decoration work, on the body of the horse, mainly the head and neck.

In local language, these tools are called as CHIARI made of bamboo of about 4.5" by .5 " used for decorating clay figures. These tools are mainly made by the artists only, and the shape and size varies. Each Craftsman has his own tools to do the motifs work, and the tools are made according to the need of how motifs should look like, For example, if the motifs should be more detailed than the twig or blade with more sharper edges are used. These tools are just like pencils or pen to draw and design on the body of the Horse.

The small piece of Bamboo with rough edges at the sides is called UCHA which is a semi circular piece of bamboo used for surface finishing and also to SCRAPE gently the clay surface before putting the motifs work.



The sphere made of stone is called BALYA which is a stone tool of about diameter about 3.5 " (inches) and is used as a beater of the inner surface of a pot, and the wooden bat is called Pitna which is a wooden beater of about 10 " by 4 " used for beating and shaping the outer surface of the pot.

The cloth is an important tool, It is used to keep the lump of clay together, when motifs work is being carried out, so that the clay does not get dried too early and also to keep the clay away from dust.



The Piece of wet cotton cloth (NAIKRA) is also used to rub on the surface of the Horse, before putting the motifs, so that its get stuck well to the body of the Product.

A wooden Planck (PATARA) is an important tool to carry out the detailed patterns and motifs, the Planck is used to roll out long and thin rods of clay (like threads) which are used to decorate the horse and other similar crafts product like clay elephants, fighting bull, etc.,

Also some ready-made MOULDS made of plaster of Paris (POP) is used for parts such as EAR, and of snake-head to make the 'MANSA -JHAR' which is the figure of the goddess MANSA surrounded by similar looking snakes head.



## Process

The complete process of making the product from the first stage to the last is shown below as a flow chart:-

- Preparation of the materials
- Mixing the Clay properly
- Wheel work
- Drying
- Hand work
- Detailed Motifs work
- Final Drying
- Colouring
- Firing
- Testing/Sorting



### Preparation of the materials

The Preparation of the materials starts with removing the dust particles - small stones from the Terracotta clay to make it pure and refine for the wheel work. The clay is generally impure and need to be refined, this is done by breaking the lump of clay and making it into more finer and powder grains, and also refining it by removing the sand particles either by hand or by using some fine nets.

After the clay has been refined, the next step is to add the other raw materials such as sand, khar (dried paddy plants) and water. Generally the other raw materials apart from terracotta clay is available locally, and the kumbhkars (artists) does not have to go far to get these materials.

### Mixing of the Clay

Mixing of the clay, after adding the other Raw materials is an important step in the process of making the BANKURA Horse, the better is the mixing of clay with other ingredients, better is the outcome of the final product. Generally the mixing is done by hands if the quantity of the clay is less, but if the quantity is more than kumbhkars prefers using their legs. The mixing of the clay takes about 5-6 hours and sometimes even 2-3 hours depending on the number of person doing the work, and the working conditions.



## Wheel Work

The mixing of clay is followed by the wheel work, which is mainly to make the basic shapes such as CONE, CYLINDER, etc., which acts as the main body parts of the horse or the elephant, for example, the four legs are conical, the belly is a cylinder and also the jaw of the horses is a cone, with a shape of



inverted onion on it. The clay for the wheel work is much more refined and pure. The wheel work is done by the male person of the family, and its been done 2-3 times a week depending upon the demand of the products in the peak season.

## Drying

The drying of the product which has been made on the wheel, is an important step, Although the drying is mainly a Natural Drying, and it takes around a day or 2 for the product become a bit tough, so that it is ready for the next step. Care is being taken to put the put the products in sunlight and also to protect it from rain.



Sometimes the drying process is carried out on the corridor and not directly in front of bright sunlight, also care is taken that only the products are being dried just a bit and not become very hardened. Also small products are also covered with clothes to protect from excess drying during hot and humid day.

## Hand Work

After the wheeled products are dried a bit, the hand work is done, which is mainly the joining of the different parts made on the wheel and to assemble it together to give a basic structure and shape to the product. This step is primarily done by the male person of the family.

The images below shows the step by step joining of the basic shapes made on wheel to give a basic structure to the HORSE.

1. This picture shows the first step, where the basic conical shapes are kept uncover.
2. The four Inverted cones are kept at equal distances, and will form the legs of the horse
3. A cylinder is kept on the legs, which becomes the belly of the horse
4. Joining the basic shapes and filling the gaps are all being done by hand only.



The filling of the gap is also an important step, and being done carefully.

1. The filling of the gap, is a delicate step and needs a bit experience & patience.
2. Small holes are left on the body for the tail, to be put at later stage.

3. When completed the horse takes its basic shape, and followed by the detailed work.



### Detailed Motifs Work

The detailed motifs work is done after the Horse/ Elephant have taken a basic shape, and have dried a bit to carry the designing work, also before this step, the surfaces are scraped to make it even and smoother using the small piece of semi-circular bamboo (chiari), also additional clay are put where ever needed to bring the horse into a perfect shape.

The Pictures below shows how the detailed work of Decoration and Pattern making is being done by using simple tools (chirari) made from Bamboo. The Motifs and Patterns varies from one lot of Horses/ Elephants to the other, and also from one artists to the other.



The upper and lower parts of the body are put together during the motif work, so that the Design on both the parts looks similar. An application of wet cloth followed by little scraping is done so that the motifs sticks well to the surface.



The Motifs work is generally carried by the female member of the family, and is done by bare hand only, and the motifs/decoration can be simple or can be more elaborate, depending upon the demand from the client.



The Decoration work takes about 30-45 minutes for a horse, of size around 3 feet, and more for bigger sizes and elaborate work.



## Final Drying

After a little drying in the sun, holes are made on appropriate parts of the body. This is done before full drying, otherwise the inner and the outer surface of the body will not be equally dry. Cracks may develop in the body for unequal drying of the inner and the outer portions. The dehydration is slowly done in the normal temperature of a closed room for about six or seven days.



## Colouring

After Final Drying they are brought out of the room and heated in the sun. On the figures thus heated the colour coats are given and the main work of coloring is done before firing in the kiln. The whole work of coloring is done by women from natural colours prepared from clay.



The natural earths (clay) are generally of three types. (1) Khadigad, looks white like chalk (2) Bhalogad, looks yellowish, glazy and oily and (3) Banak, looks brownish, oily and glazy. These earths produced from natural resources, are powdered and dissolved in water. The ingredients are placed in earthen vessels for about two or three months, while testing the water and sifting the sediment of sand from time to time. The residual portion is thickened into pigment under sun and preserved for coloring. The three kinds of pigments, Khadigad, Bhalogad and Banak are mixed with water and applied one after another on the pot and animal figures. Firing is done after coloring.

## Firing

The old traditional village kilns are generally of circular or parabolic (Kula-type or bamboo fan shaped) with enclosures on all sides with a permanent stoke-hole. It is locally known as Sheuna Poan and the circular type is known as Berasal Poan.

Generally the Firing takes about 10-15 days, or even a month sometimes depending upon the



size of the Klin (Bhatti).

Generally the terracotta horses and elephants of Bankura are turned out in two different shapes (COLOUR). The normal terracotta red color is obtained by letting out the smoke through the vents of the kiln after firing, and the black color, by sealing the vents and not letting out the smoke. The red color horses are more known and famous owing to the natural terracotta color.



### Testing/Sorting

After the Firing work is completed, the sorting and testing of the Product is carried out, the damaged pieces are separated from the good ones, and are kept together, also there are few pieces which does not burn properly in the kiln and the outer colors does not comes good, so, those products are also removed. Finally the good ones are kept together for display and the damaged ones are either repaired or sold at a lesser price otherwise thrown.



### Working Environment: the Village

The working environment of the village is very peaceful, although the village is not very developed in terms of electricity and other facilities, but the Kumbhkars (potters) make out it. The name of the Particular area or Para is "Kumbhakar"



Para" owing to the name of the Kumbhkars (Potters) which have been there for many generations. This is the center of the village, it is a kind of Sitting Place (BAITHAK) where the village Gram Panchayat gathers for important meeting. The Craftsmen have also formed a community "Panchmura Murti Silpi Samabha Samity" which looks after the overall growth and problems/issues related to the Crafts and its people.



### Storage/Display at Home

The storage and display of the Handicrafts are mainly carried out in the verandah (corridor) of the house and also are kept inside the house, depending on the space availability, but not on the open air. Also the Horses are arranged according to the size, the bigger goes to the back and the smaller at the front.

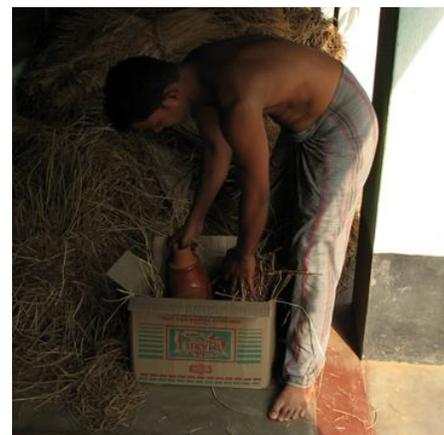


Generally the ear and the tail are kept separately, as they are similar and can be put later.

### PACKAGING & TRANSPORTATION

The Packaging of the Product is also done by the kumbhkars or by the family member if someone purchases the craft directly from them.

The material used for packaging the delicate horses and elephants is HAY, and generally its packed in a Carton of fruit or something else which is locally available. The hay are used as a shock-absorbing material against some kind of shock or damage. In local shops also HAY and stuffed Newspaper is used as packaging material. After stuffing the hay and Newspaper the carton is tied with a rope and a handle is made from the rope to carry it.



The Transportation of the Handicrafts products are carried by 3-wheeler pedal rickshaw for smaller distances and by buses for larger distance, such as to Bankura or

Bishnupur, which are the nearest tourists spots of the District, and also to the yearly fair at Bishnupur.

#### DISPLAY AT LOCAL MARKET

The picture shows the display at the local market at one of the tourists spot near Rasamancha temple (BANKURA). Generally the local retailer buys the Horses and other Terracotta Handicrafts from the Kumbhkars of Panchmura and sell to the tourists.



The range of the prices of the Bankura Horses varies from rupees 20 to 2000. The price gets higher with more detailed and elaborate work, and also with size. The size varies from 4 inch tall to 6 and half feet. The bigger horses are made in several pieces for the convenience to carry it during transportation.



Nowadays the Horses made of WOOD are getting more popular among the tourists, because its more rigid, and does not get broken if it gets some damage. The shape and style of the wooden Horses are similar to that of the clay one, but its much more expensive than the terracotta ones.

The prices of the products are higher in the local shops, so many of the Agencies and NGOs directly buys the Handicrafts from the Craftsman at Panchmura, But in the shops there lots of varieties offered and also one

can get almost all the Handicrafts from that region.

#### Display/Sale at Fairs (Mela)

The outlets sale during the Annual Fairs provides a good opportunity to the craftsman to display their crafts and also to sell the Crafts and earn something for a living. Generally the Horses and elephants are kept on the ground and displayed in open air, and the smaller crafts in the stalls.



The Mela or Fair happens yearly, one of the famous fair is the "CHARAK MELA" which happens at the CHAITH month of the Bengali calendar, also the other festivals such as Kali puja, Durga Puja provides good opportunities to the local craftsman for some earnings, the peak season is from October to January.

### Involvement

The Crafts council of West Bengal is highly involved with the Craftsman of Panchmura, and is concerned with trying to find avenues for a better life for craftsmen both as part of their larger community and that of the natural environment. The Council also helps the Craftsperson to develop prototypes, introducing advanced methods of production, encouraging exports through overseas expositions and assisting



the craftsmen to market their creations at a better price.

### Problems

There are few problems which the Craftsmen from Panchmura are facing, which also forces few of them to shift to some other occupations, especially if the family is big and there is only one earning member.

The first is the LACK OF SPACE - there is not much space for the craftsman to make their crafts, and they have to adjust in small spaces inside their home.

The other problems are: still the same OLD METHODS/TECHNIQUES



are used for years and new advanced methods of Production have not been introduced or adapted by the craftsman.



New Designs and New methods have not been adapted by the craftsman they say, that the new Designers comes and give them new ideas and guidance, but it does not work in market to attract customers, so they did not experiment with new designs. and they make what they can sell and earn a living.

Also nowadays People who like Terracotta work buy the Handicrafts, and is not famous among the younger generations, where Rapid Prototyping and other things is more easily done.

One of the major problem that I find during my craft-visit was LACK OF QUALITY & DETAILINGS, most of products did not had a very good finishing, and lacked the quality to attract customers, there may be numerous reasons for that, but the quality was not Upto the mark.

Another important problem, as told by the kumbhkars, was the UNAVAILABILITY OF THE TERRACOTTA CLAY. the raw clay for the terracotta products is not available easily and the craftsman have to pay extra and also sometimes wait longer to get the clay. Similarly the colour used before firing is not easily available.

One of the problems that were mentioned by the Kumbhkars is that they don't get much opportunity to go out and see what people like what are their tastes, so they can't come up with



something new which people would appreciate. Also they feel that there is not much co-ordination at the National & International Level to promote the Terracotta Handicrafts from Bankura.

### A craftman's Profile

Name - Baul Das Kumbhakar  
Age - 42 years  
Place - Panchmura, Bishnupur  
Status - Married  
Experience - 23 years  
Award - District & State Award



Baul Das Kumbhakar is from the Panchmura Village of Bankura District, which is known for the famous Bankura Horses and Mansa Chali, He comes from a traditional Potters family, that pass down their skill from generation to generation. His father and grandfather were both National Awardees and they were the first class craftsmen. He has received State & District award from the Government of West Bengal. Below are some of his certificates.

### Proposed Guidelines for Future Development

The Proposed guidelines for the Future Development of the Terracotta Crafts at Panchmura are follows as:-

There should be more encouragement from the Government or from the State Craft's council to promote the Craft at National Level. More Exhibitions and Sales outlet should be done so that common people get to know more about the Terracotta Craft. Also a good Network should be build at National Level to bring out the Terracotta crafts to the tourists. The Craftsman should be given liberty to experiment with their crafts so that more new Design/Pattern/ Motifs can be generated. The Craftsmen should be given exposition to the outer world so that they know what people like and what they should add more to their crafts.

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