

Tales IN TERRACOTTA

Over the years, the National Crafts Council of Bangladesh (NCCB), has played an important role in promoting local crafts and thus uplifting the livelihood of neglected craftsmen across the country. By acknowledging their work, the Council has worked to preserve, restore and encourage artisans to continue their work.

With an effort to acknowledge their creativity and age old traditions, recently the NCCB, with the help of UNESCO, arranged a workshop for rural artisans of Mithapur and Jamalapur, and their products were subsequently displayed at the Terracotta Fair and Exhibition 2017.



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The primary goal of the initiative was to pinpoint the needs of the 'Pal' community and identify talented artisans skilled in the making of terracotta plaques and other clay items.

The workshop was attended by 26 craftsmen, who were encouraged to break away from conventional norms and to try incorporate contemporary approaches to their work.

Under the direction of Chandra Shekhar Shaha, who is also the president of NCCB, the participants of the workshop experimented with patterns and designs, and among the 26, the works of 20 were displayed at the Fair.

Bangladesh prides itself on a rich pottery tradition however, the new generation of the craftsmen are no longer interested to continue this vocation. Although some have retained the profession of their forefathers, the younger generations are not too keen on following their footsteps.

Contributing factors for this apathy are small monetary returns and lack of appreciation of their profession. Another important factor for the decline of this industry is improper marketing of the products. To make ends meet, artisans are compromising on quality and this is having a spiralling effect on the declining market.

"I have been working as a traditional potter for almost 30 years. I learnt the skill from my father, and he, from his. Our work is very difficult and requires time and experience.

"In the times of my forefathers this art was much appreciated and was also taken up by almost all the family members, but now there is almost no market for it. Our children

prefer working in different areas, witnessing how taking this path makes it harder to lead a decent life. But what about our culture? Our heritage that is now dying?" Supada Chandra Pal asked, while expressing his anguish on the troubled days they lead.

In the exhibition, the products on display were a fusion of traditional art with contemporary vibes, made solely for the fair.

A lot of local and international craft and cultural enthusiasts were among the invited guests; the artists got a chance to get introduced to entrepreneurs and the mainstream. Communicating with different guests, the craftsmen got an opportunity to share stories of their struggle and what needs to be done for the improving their socio-economic conditions.

Through the Terracotta Fair and Exhibition 2017, NCCB and UNESCO tried to create a wider market for their clay figurines, pottery and other terracotta items.

The Pals of Bangladesh represent a unique culture and tradition. In order to survive, this community needs patronisation and wider acceptance of their trade.

And endeavours like the Terracotta Fair and Exhibition 2017, held between 10 and 18 February, 2017 at the Bangladesh National Museum, can hope to achieve exactly that.

By Mormee Mahtab

Photo: Sharear Kabir Heemel

মাদার বড়ন নাম

কালার গার্ড

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