

CHANGES THAT MAKE US #NOWINLIFESTYLE



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Terracotta returns

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He mobilised his community to improve their skills in the traditional pottery of their ancestors and organised them into co-operatives so that their success could be shared by all artisan members of Bauphol. In 2018, Bauphol potters are famous all over Bangladesh and the credit for this goes to Bisheshwar Pal. It has been his life's goal to create the best products and he remained resilient even in the face of adverse circumstances. He introduced a variety of techniques, innovative packaging for transportation of the delicate products, taking the artisans to craft events and including the educated members of the families in the business. The contribution of Bisheshwar Pal to the wellbeing of the potters of Bauphol, and the country in general, is outstanding, and he is an ideal and exemplary artist for us," writes Nisar Ahmed Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka in an article.

"Currently his sons Tarun and Shishir are doing everything possible to support the industry and the students of Art College. The brothers are looking after the business and the marketing side of the family business, and in the process, helping the potters of Bangladesh. There are possibilities of export and there is also a small, but dedicated market for pottery and terracotta products in our country. What is lacking are patrons—potters who are still making traditional items are suffering the most as their market is bracketed to villages only," says Estambul Haque, General



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Secretary of National Craft Council of Bangladesh.

"Our potters are very skilled artisans and working with designers and getting guidance from patrons they have the capability to take our pottery industry to a stable position. Just to cite an example, the recent exhibition of terracotta products created by the artisans of Mithapur and Jamalpur, two villages near the UNESCO Heritage Site Paharpur Buddhist Vihar, implemented by the NCCB. The exhibition displayed some beautiful crafts the potters made, with some guidance. In my opinion, the need of the hour is patronisations," Haque feels.

"We have a licensed godown in Rayer Bazar, Dhaka to store products not only from our factory but also from fifty plus potters from all over the country, we buy in lots from these producer groups and market them to retailers," says Tarun.

"When new potters approach us to sell their products, we help them with market surveys and ask them to make samples, and depending on demand, place orders for 200 or 500 pieces. This is our general practice. Corporate houses are our clients— they place orders for Boishakh, New Years for corporate gifts items and according to the demand we place orders with our producers. We always pay whatever the potter asks for, and mark it up by taka one for our profit. Those who are attached with us get a fair price, because my father knows the poor potters' stories all too well. Our family were once a marginalised producer group," he adds.

Tarun and his brother established Crafts Village, a handicraft company and are looking into export. "Ours is a three-year-old company. Besides marketing other handicrafts like baskets and all, we are also trying to export pottery. Small planter pots for saplings have a huge demand and we are looking into markets in Netherlands. Such orders will help more than fifty potter's family throughout the year. Thus the industry is not that plagued, and all we need are good patrons and fair commissions," he puts it squarely.

Fifth generation potters by family profession, Pal and his sons are given special credit in this field, that is marred with various shortcomings. However, the small window of opportunity of exporting and the local niche market with patrons like Sanjana has kept the terracotta industry in the country spinning.

Photo: LS Archive

To watch the companion video, visit The Daily Star's official YouTube Channel and Star Lifestyle's Facebook page.

TERRACOTTA FACTS

Terracotta has been man's first medium to try his creativity. An example would be how archaeologists uncovered the first terracotta figurines in the excavations of Mohenjo-Daro, Pakistan (3000–1500 BC). Throughout the ancient world, one of the most common uses of terracotta was for brick-building, roof tiles, and sarcophagi; the last often decorated with paintings.

Then there were the terracotta pottery and ceramics; the difference between 'pottery' and ceramics is that objects typically made using earthenware or terracotta i.e. pots or planters and table serving ware for the home are generally called pottery when the earthenware remains in its natural unglazed state. Fired vessels are more correctly known as glazed ceramics. The term 'terracotta' has also been used to refer to both the material itself as well as the object produced.

The art of pottery making itself has an even more fascinating history. Examples of early pottery originating from the Neolithic period date back as far as 29,000 BC. It is a testament to its resilience that we are still producing objects and everyday vessels from terracotta. Earthenware clay pottery or terracotta pottery has featured as tableware since the 17th century across most of Europe, the Middle East and China. While distinctive styles, methods and techniques exist, what is interesting about terracotta tableware is the way in which colours, motifs and decorations used give a cultural insight into where and by whom the objects are made.

CONGRATULATIONS on winning small obstacles to big challenges

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