

Hatti Mutti!

Posted on



Awaiting the mallet and the blades for the smooth finish



On an earthy brown earthen dish rested a ball of fiery red chilies, a deep yellow ball of turmeric and a slightly smaller ball of jet black brindall berry. Cool, clear water swooshed from an earthen jar (*Guruleththuwa*) into a delicately curved terra cotta mug, spouting forth a soothing drip. A tangy 'sour fish curry' simmered in a blackened pot from which wafted a tempting aroma. The globular form of the beige water vessel competed for the limelight. Grandma's kitchen always provided a platform for the best earthenware competition, with the sheer number of clay pottery or colloquially hatti mutti.

Words Chamindra Warusawitharane Photographs Indika De Silva

In the beginning, Sri Lanka's pottery culture observed a few simple guidelines: the utensil should first and foremost suit the function it is supposed to perform; it should always bespeak the suppleness, authenticity and the faultlessness of the clay used in its formation; the designs on the utensil should not interfere with the functionality and instead support the functionality if possible and the external beauty of the utensil, though important, should not be the priority. These sum up the culture of pottery in Sri Lanka and each type of earthenware seems to embody the guidelines.

Making Of A Clay Pot

Pemawathi placed a ball of clay on the pottery wheel and started spinning it with her right foot. Her hands wove around the supple clay expertly fashioning it into a curved pot. Once the pot took its desired shape she used a piece of twine to sever the pot away from the wooden spinning wheel. After a few hours, the pot was ready to acquire its final shape. Up went the pot (upside down) on to the spinning wheel and she peeled away the excess clay from the bottom to prevent cracks from appearing. Then with painstaking yet quick precision Pemawathi hammered and carved the pot into its smooth, faultless roundedness. After a few hours in a scorching brick oven and the sun the clay pot assumed its proper shade and shape.

Kalaya

The spherical form and the fluid curves of the 'Kalaya' resonate the symbols usually associated with those who use it most – women. The 'Kalaya' is used to carry and store water. Women would tuck the 'Kalaya' on their hips, put a protective arm around it and carry the water back home. Such everyday vessels though delicately curved have no designs on them whereas the ones used to perform the 'Kala Gedi Natuma' – a dance performed by women, have dainty patterns on them. The dance itself grew from the close association of women and the 'Kalaya'. The dancers mimic the graceful movements of women carrying a 'Kalaya' swaying their hips in balance with the extra weight.

Nambiliya

The 'Nambiliya' is an excellent example of the design supporting the functionality of the utensil. An even pattern of twisted lines or swirls spread deep into the curved bowl-like 'Nambiliya', and the patterns themselves serve the main purpose of the utensil. These utensils are used to clean rice after soaking and washing the rice several times in the 'Nambiliya'. It is tilted and gently swayed sideways in slow rhythmic movements, while pouring out a little bit of rice and water at a time. The

twisted pattern inside the ‘*Nambiliya*’ would arrest the heavier residue such as stones, leaving the rice clean and ready to be cooked in the earthen pot.

Muttiya

These pots which bear close resemblance to the ‘*Kalaya*’ sans the graceful curves, with slightly wider mouths, come in various sizes and perform a multitude of tasks. The regular sized pots are used to cook rice while the marginally larger pots are used to collect the juice of coconut and *kithul* flowers or to concoct a herbal mix which people use at the auspicious bathing time during the traditional New Year season.

The external beauty of the utensil, though important, should not be the priority.

Hattiya

Lengthwise, the ‘*Hattiya*’ is wide yet not as deep as the ‘*Kalaya*’ or the ‘*Muttiya*’. This shape renders these utensils ideal for cooking various curries and making certain sweetmeats. Some ‘*Hatti*’ come in handy with a lid to allow the curries to simmer in a dense cloud of heat.

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Guruleththuwa and Kothalaya

Both items are used to store drinking water but each item has a distinctly unique shape. The ‘*Guruleththuwa*’ has a wide, rounded bottom and a long elegant neck that ends in a smoothly cut mouth. Certain ‘*Guruleththu*’ are adorned with patterns of dancers, flowers and vines. The ‘*Kothalaya*’ somewhat resembles a tea pot with a spout and is usually used in ‘*Thovil*’ ceremonies to store the sanctified water.

The list goes on..., starting from ornamental vases, piggy banks, ornate spittoons, terra cotta lamps to miniature pots for children. However, the pots made for children should not be confused with the ‘*Arakshaka Mutti*’ – mini pots with lids, which people bury around the four corners of their houses with charms secured inside each, to ward off evil.

Photographs taken at: Eco-tourism village, Maduruwela, Ampitigala

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