



The finest clay for bricks is found in Galmaduwa

Rows of brown bricks amidst large clay mounds caught our attention. The gadol (brick) makers of Galmaduwa in Ampara were toiling in the early morning sun.

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Photographs Menaka Aravinda and Anuradha Perera



A brick maker places the clay mixture in the mould

From the main road, we turned onto a gravel path, as far we could see there were plots of land being utilised for the making of bricks. People from around the area, not only Ampara, but from Batticaloa and beyond, also come and set up camp to engage in their livelihood. It is believed that the best clay for brick making is found in Galmaduwa.

The brick maker rents a plot of land and then builds his makeshift hut or wadiya, which will be his temporary home for a period of one year. As long as there is sunlight, bricks can be made throughout the year. It is only during the months of November and December that work is halted due to incessant rains.

The clay is dug out of the earth and arranged into small mounds. Water is drawn from wells or canals nearby. The clay is first softened with water, and then mixed with dahaiya (the remaining dust after the threshing of paddy) to the required consistency. This is then covered and kept overnight.

The next day sections of the mixture are taken and spread across a wooden mould to form rectangular blocks. These wet bricks are placed on the ground with ash sprinkled over it before it is left in the sun to dry overnight. Once dry, the bricks are arranged into neat rows.

The kiln (rectangular in shape) is formed with the sun dried bricks and after this reaches about ten rows in height, the central core is filled with scraps of wood and dahaiya. This is lit and thus the clay blocks are baked to form reddish brown bricks with heat generated by burning fodder and wood.

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As the workers of the individual plots complete each task in rhythmic motion - one cutting the clay, the other mixing, making the kiln and arranging the bricks - it is apparent that the gadol makers consider this a way of life rather than a livelihood alone.



Rows of newly prepared bricks ready to be placed in the kiln

Many narrate tales of how Galmaduwa has been famous for bricks since decades ago. The reddish brown bricks, thus created under the golden sun of the eastern sky makes their way to build homes across Sri Lanka.

The Gadol Makers of Galmaduwa

