THE ART OF MAKING POTTERY IN GARO HILLS, MEGHALAYA

A Project Report

Submitted to

Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi

Under the Scheme of

Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India, 2014-2015

Dr. Q. Marak
Principal Investigator
North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

When a project proposal was envisioned against the Sangeet Natak Akademi's national advert for "Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage" in the year 2014, I had originally planned to study traditional craftsmanship of the Garos. This was planned due to the lack of knowledge and reading materials on Garo material culture, as well the state of endangerment that some material cultural items faced. Initially I envisioned doing a complete study on Traditional Craftsmanship of the Garos, the first project (of year 2013-2014), but was constrained by funds. I had to limit the study to only one aspect, i.e., the Garo drums. Therefore, in the second and present phase (year 2014-2015), it was decided to study the Pottery Traditions of the region.

As I progressed into the project I realised the pottery traditions in Garo Hills is in a critical state, and possibly will be completely eradicated unless some interventions take place. Therefore, with the help of the District Museum, Tura, we conducted a two days workshop for potters who could showcase their art to the interested public.

I am grateful to many for the completion of the project - my research assistant Anthony Marak; Ms. Kimde Marak for facilitating the workshop in Tura, Prof. Simon John and Ms. Y. R. Marak for consultation and advice, and my documentation team – Gangotri, Atsi, Milan and Venybirth.

Q. Marak

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Traditional crafts are items that are mainly used in everyday life (or had been used in the past), manufactured mainly by hand, by using a traditional technique or skill, made from traditional or locally available materials and manufactured in a certain specific region. Among all items that are listed on the UNESCO manifesto on Intangible Cultural Heritage, traditional crafts and its craftsmanship is the most tangible manifestation. Traditional craftsmanship gets expressed through various means - tools; clothing and jewellery; costumes and props for festivals and performing arts; storage containers, objects used for storage, transport and shelter; decorative art and ritual objects; musical instruments and household utensils, and toys, both for amusement and education. Many of these objects are only intended to be used for a short time, such as those created for festival rites, while others may become heirlooms that are passed from generation to generation. The skills involved in creating craft objects vary as the items themselves.

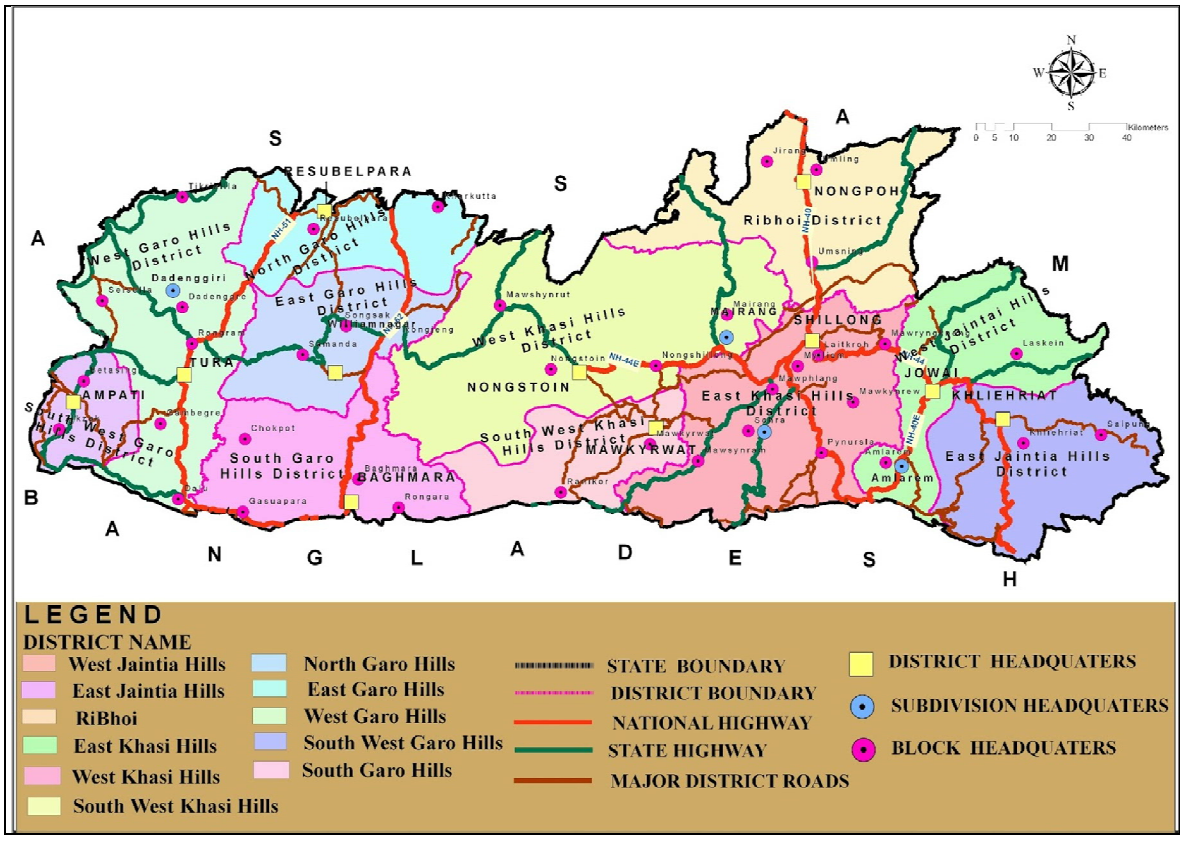
This project report is on the traditional craftsmanship found in Garo Hills, Meghalaya on the tradition of making pottery.

1.1: BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

The Garo Hills is part of the Garo-Khasi range in Meghalaya, India. This area is inhabited mainly by tribal dwellers, the majority of whom are Garo people. People who reside in the Garo Hills are known as the Garos. Besides the Garo Hills, there are Garo settlements in Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and Bangladesh. The Garos call themselves *A·chik* or *Mande*.

In the state of Meghalaya, the Garo Hills region comprises 5 districts. Tura is the largest town with a population of about 70,000 located at the foothills of often cloud covered Tura peak. The town is centrally located to other regions of the Garo Hills range and popular game/wild life sanctuaries in the district such as Balpakram

and Nokrek, and natural caves like the one in Siju (this is one of the longest in Asia). These places are rich reserves of natural flora and fauna.



Map 1

Map of Meghalaya showing the 5 Garo Hills district

The material cultural items that Garos use daily are a part of their self-sufficiency. Among these may be mentioned their textile, pottery, basketry and the products of a large number of other crafts. The art of making clothes, pots or baskets developed in the long past. Of these, pots are items that have withstood time since they can still be seen in the archaeological context due to its imperishable nature.

In Garo Hills, potsherds (broken parts of pot) belonging to the Neolithic context have been reported from villages such as Selbalgre (West Garo Hills), reiterating the fact that pottery is a tradition that has continued from the prehistoric past. However, this indigenous art form known in the prehistoric past has now dwindled to a large extent. Today only a handful potters are involved in ceramic production in places such as Siju, 132 kms from the town of Tura. Due to the emergent situation, it was felt

necessary to document the pottery traditions seen in Garo Hills today, which could disappear in a decade or so.

Figure 1

A Garo woman making a clay vessel with hands

Figure 1 shows a woman giving shape to clay with the help of a beater and a polished stone. This very clearly illustrates the traditional nature (i.e., the use of traditional items and techniques) of this dying craft among the Garos.

1.2: BRIEF INTRODUCTION ON POTTERY

Pottery refers to the art or craft of a potter or the manufacture of pottery (Rado, 1988). It is made by forming a clay body into objects of a required shape and heating them to high temperatures, which removes all the water from the clay, which induces reactions that lead to permanent changes including increasing their strength and hardening and setting their shape.

In the prehistoric context, pottery seems to have appeared just before 6000 BC at early agricultural settlements in southwestern Asia such as Catalhoyuk, Jarmo, and Jericho (Moore 1985). In Japan however, it was first made by hunter-gatherers of the Jomon culture around 8000 BC (Akazawa & Aikens, 1986). However the invention of

pottery coincided with the beginnings of more lasting settlement. The first clay vessels were probably used for domestic purposes: for cooking, carrying water, and storing food. They soon assumed more specialized roles in salt making, in ceremonial activities, and as oil lamps, and burial urns (Fagan, 2001).

1.3.1: Pottery Technology

The clay used in pot making was invariably selected with the utmost care; often it was traded over considerable distances. The consistency of the clay is important – it is pounded meticulously and mixed with water to make it entirely even in texture. By careful kneading, the potter removes the air bubbles and makes the clay as plastic as possible allowing it to be molded into shape as the pot is building up (Fagan 2001).

When the clay is fired, it loses its water content and can crack, so the potter adds a temper to the clay, a substance that helps reduce shrinkage and cracking. Although some pot clays contain a suitable temper in their natural state, pot makers usually add many other materials such as fine sand, powdered shell, or even mica as artificial temper (Fagan 2001).

There are usually three methods of pot making:

1. *Coil method*: The vessel is built up with long coils or wedges of clay that are shaped and joined together with a mixture of clay and water. Sometimes the pot is built up with a lump of clay. Hand methods were common whenever pot making was a part-time activity satisfying local needs.
2. *Mold or Mould method*: The vessel is made from a lump of clay that is either pressed into a concave mold or placed over the top of a convex shape. Molding techniques were used to make large numbers of vessels of the same size and shape, as well as figurines, fishing net weights, and spindle whorls. Sometimes several molds were used to make the different parts of a vessel.
3. *Potter's wheel method*: Wheel-made pots came into wide use after the invention of the potter's wheel in Mesopotamia about 5000 years ago. The vessel is formed from a lump of clay rotating on a platform turned by the potter's hands or feet. The wheel method has the advantage of speed and standardization and is used to mass produce thousands of similar vessels.


Figure 2 & 3

Potter's wheel method seen in Southern Tamil Nadu


Figure 4 & 5

Mould method seen among Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur

The method of pottery making in Siju, Garo Hills is seen to be of the *mold method*, where a lump of clay is shaped into thin layers and placed over a mold.

1.3: OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The project is an attempt to study the traditional art of pottery as prevalent at present times. However, the specific objectives include the following:

1. To study the method of making handmade pottery in Garo Hills, and
2. To list the types and functions of pots made.

1.4: METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected through first hand study of potters and their wares. This entailed fieldwork in centres of pot-making, and data collection on potters and their ceramics.

The different processes of making pots were studied, together with the different types and functions. Detailed information was collected on colours, styles, and decorations used. All the above information was collected through interview and observation. The data collected was supplemented by visual aids.

Additionally as an outreach programme a workshop was conducted in Tura, the district headquarters of West Garo Hills District where potters were invited for an interface with the public. A demonstration of traditional pottery making was also held herein for the interested public (Figure 6).

Figure 6

A workshop on pottery held at Tura

CHAPTER II

POTTERY TECHNOLOGY

Pots or any ceramic objects are made by forming a clay body into objects of a required shape and heating them to high temperatures which removes all the water from the clay, which induces reactions that lead to permanent changes including increasing their strength and hardening and setting their shape.

The traditional method of making pots in Garo Hills is the **mould method**. In the following the different stages of making pots are given.

2.1: TOOLS AND MATERIALS

The raw material and tools used in Garo Hills in the making of pots are all locally procured and produced.

2.1.1: Raw Material and its Procurement

Among Garos, clay (or sticky soil) is the only raw material required in the making of a pot. This clay referred to as *a·dikka* by the Garos is not found at all places. There are certain localities where this soil is found – and the locations are passed on generation to generation through oral traditions. Garos have experimented with varieties of soil, but the best soil for making a pot among Garos is the *a·dikka* soil. Siju, in South Garo Hills District, is one place where this soil is seen.

The topsoil is not used. The soil from around 2 feet below the surface is collected for making the pots. Since the soil is collected from deep inside the earth, it is believed that the clay quarry looks like a rat-hole mining.

Today, potters from different locations in Garo Hills usually collect *a·dikka* from Siju either directly or through a middleman. The procurement of this clay is therefore a tough work since after digging it out, it has to be carried manually over long distances. Some of the potters carry it over 10-15 kms to their own villages, while those who use a middleman have to shell out a large amount of money.

The clay that is dug out is then left to dry in the sun for days till it dies up completely. This clay is then broken up into small pieces to allow the preparation of clay for pot-making (See Figures 7 & 8).

Figure 7

Freshly dug a·dikka *clay being dried in the sun*

Figure 8

Granules of a·dikka *clay*

2.1.2: Required Tools and Implements

Tools used in making pots in Garo Hills are comparatively very simple. They are usually items that are found in all houses. These include the following:

1. Mortar and pestle – This is used for pounding dry clay into fine pounder.
2. Bamboo sieves – These are required to sieve the powdered clay into finer grains. It is believed that the finer the grains, the smoother the pots will be.
3. Different sizes of *diplak* (beater), *turs* (small ladle), *ro·ong* (stone, used as anvil), *sui* seeds (used as polisher), old mats and old pieces of cloths.
4. Old pots as moulds – Since the method of making pots is the mould method, Garos require old pots to be used as a base.

Figure 9

Implements used in pot-making

Figures 10 & 11: Sui *seeds for polishing and a stone anvil (left);*
Wood beaters of different sizes (right)

Figure 12
Old pots used as moulds

2.2: STAGES IN POT MAKING

Pot-making among the Garos follows the mould method. In the following the steps in the making of a pot is given chronologically.

2.2.1: Preparation of Clay

The *a·dikka* clay is dug out from below the top soil. This is then laid out under the sun to dry. Once dry, it is broken up into chunks and granules. Stalks of grass and other impurities are cleaned out from this dry clay. This is then pounded in the mortar with a pestle to get a powder (Figure 13).

Figure 13

Granules of dry clay being pounded in a mortar

This is next sieved with a bamboo sieve to get a finer powder (Figures 14 & 15). It is believed that finer the powder, the smoother is the pottery product. The sieve used varies from potter to potter, i.e., the size of the holes of the sieve. Depending on the holes of the sieve and the number of times the clay powder is sieved, the finer will be the consistency of the powder.

This fine powder is then mixed with water and kneaded with hand to get a consistency of elasticity that the potter feels is correct. This kneaded clay is then considered ready for pot-making (Figure 16).


Figures 14 & 15

Powdered clay being cleaned (left); The resultant fine powder (right)

Figure 16

Clay mixed with water to an elastic consistency

2.2.2: Fabrication – I

A lump of clay is then taken and patted out to make it flat (Figure 17). It is then placed on a flat surface, mat, or a bamboo sieve and then the peripheral edges of the lump of clay spread out using the fingers (Figure 18). So that the fingers do not stick, the fingers are repeatedly dipped in water. Additionally care is taken to do the spreading on a clean surface, for if any impurities get mixed with the clay, it will crack when burnt.


Figures 17 & 18

A lump of clay is flattened and its edges spread out on a bamboo surface

Figure 19

Clay being spread out with the fingers

The process of spreading out the edges of the clay continues till it reaches the required size – depending on the size of the pot (Figure 19). Care is taken so that the layer of clay being spread out is as even as possible – so that there is no (or less) inconsistency in terms of the thickness of clay.

Once the required size is achieved then the spread-out clay is carefully lifted and placed over the mould (an old pot) (Figure 20). It is then patted over the mould and

its edges smoothed out by taking out the extra and unwanted segments (Figure 21). In order to make the outer edges smooth sometimes water is used (Figure 22). Usually, hands and fingers are used to smooth out the surface as much as possible – finally getting a smooth surface as in Figures 23 and 24. Sometimes a piece of cloth is placed over the mould before placing the clay sheet so that it becomes easy to take off the clay later (Figure 22 & 23).

Figure 20

A flattened out sheet of clay placed over a mould

Figure 21

The extra edges of the sheet of clay over a mould are broken off

Figure 22

The sheet of clay is evened out over the mould

Figures 23 & 24

The shaped clay is left to dry on the moulds

These (Figures 23 & 24) are then kept in the sun to dry on the moulds. Drying is done for over 5-7 hours till it is semi-dry but not completely dry.

2.2.3: Fabrication II

When the clay moulds (Figures 23 & 24) are semi-dry, then a beater is used to lightly beat all over the outer surface (with the clay still over the moulds) till a smoothened surface is procured (Figure 24). These are again left to dry some more.

Figure 25

A woman beating a clay mould while two other beaten moulds are left to dry

Figure 26

A woman smoothening the walls with a beater and polishing stone

The clay is next taken out of the mould and then with the help of a wooden beater and a polishing stone (Figure 26 & 27), the walls of the pot are smoothened out and made thinner and consistent.

Figure 27

A potter smoothening the walls of the pot

Sometimes a pot requires a neck or a rim. If adding a neck or a rim, at this stage, an elongated piece of clay is added on (Figure 28 & 29).

Figure 28

A neck is added onto the clay pot

Figure 29

A rim is added onto the clay pot

This is then again smoothened with the help of water and left to dry. Then again after and hour or so, it is beaten with the help of a beater to smoothen it.

If the pot is small or has a neck, then the inside wall of the pot is smoothened with a small bamboo ladle called *turs* (Figure 30). This is the stage where all rough edges are smoothed out (Figure 31).

Figures 30 & 31

A turs *being used to smoothen the rough edges*

This half-made pot is then kept to dry for a couple of hours. It is next smoothened with the help of water. An old rag is first dipped in water, then the wet rag is used to softly wipe the whole pot so that the surface is smooth (Figure 32). This smoothened pot is left to dry to a leather hard condition (Figures 33-35), at times overnight.

Figure 32

A pot being smoothened with an old rag dipped in water

Figure 33

Smoothened pots kept to dry

Figure 34 & 35

Smoothened pots ready for drying

If designs like applique and incising are done then this is the stage when these designs are made. Incising marks are usually made with a *turs* or a small knife (36 & 37). These are then left to dry for over 8 hours or even overnight till it gets a leather-hard condition.

Figures 36 & 37

Incising designs being made on pots

2.2.4: Polishing

Once the pots are in a leather-hard condition, they are polished till it gets a sheen on the surface. Polishing is done with *sui* seeds – the seeds are rubbed softly all over the

outer surface of the pots. This is a time-consuming job and a job that can be relegated to new potters, even to children.

Figure 38

A woman polishing a pot with sui *seed*

Figure 39

A woman polishing a pot with sui *seed*

Figure 40

Polished pots left to dry before pre-firing

Once the pots have been polished, they are again kept aside for sometime before the smoking or pre-firing stage.

2.2.5: Pre-Firing

The polished and dry pots are next pre-fired or smoked before firing them. Usually, these pots are kept in the kitchen over the fireplace or near the fireplace for days altogether so that it slowly gets dried and smoked (Figure 41). Sometimes smoking in the kitchen takes place over 7 days and at times over months. This stage is of utmost importance if the resultant pots are to come out without any cracks on firing. This stage is required so that any moisture that could have been in the clay is removed completely.

Figure 41

Pots being smoked in the kitchen

However pots are also smoked in the open (Figure 42 & 43). In such a case care is taken so that the fire is not too flaming and there is only some smoke emanating from the open fire. This open fire smoking takes over 3-4 hours and has to be constantly monitored so that the fire is conatined. Smoking continues till the pot becomes reddish black (Figure 43).

However, smoking in the open is not preferred and only resorted to in case of an emergency.

Figure 42

Pots being smoked in the open

Figure 43

Pots are smoked till it becomes almost black with smoke and soot

2.2.6: Firing

This is the final stage in the pot-making process. Firing brings in a chemical change in the clay so that it becomes durable and can be used for storing water as well as a cooking vessel.

Firing takes place in an open area where firewood and dried bamboo are used to fire the pots. Care is taken so that the area where the pots are to be fired is away from habitation areas or near dried forests and jungles. If unavoidable, then contstant monitoring is required.

The smoked or pre-fired pots are placed carefuly one on top of the other (Figure 44). Over and under these, dried wood, bamboo, and dried leaves are placed and then set on fire. The fire has to be stoked so that it does not die down or becomes smoky. If the fire dies down inadvertently then the pot assumes a greyish tinge, which is usually not preferred.

Figure 44

The smoked pots are arranged to be fired in the open

Figure 45

The pots are open-fired

Figure 46

A fire dying down

Figure 47

Fired pots are taken out

Figure 48

A series of baked (on the left) and unbaked (on the right) clay pots

Once the fire dies down, then the pots are taken out and placed aside till they cool down. Once cool, they are cleaned with dry grass stalks.

Once firing is over, then the pots acquire a reddish tint even though no slip or colour is applied. As in the above photograph (Figure 48), the difference between a baked (or fired) pot and an unbaked one can be clearly seen due to the difference in colour. Once firing is complete, the pot is now ready to be used.

CHAPTER III

POTTERY TYPES AND USAGES

Pottery can be of different shapes and sizes – from huge storage jars to tiny miniature cups. They can also be of varied functions. However, in the context of Garo Hills pots are usually for utilitarian purposes, i.e, for cooking, serving, and storing. In the following the different types of pottery found in Garo Hills and their usages are given.

3.1: TYPES OF POTS

Clay pottery found in Garo Hills is found to be of different types. In terms of morphological form, i.e., shape and size, pots can be classified into the following types.

a. Open-mouthed pot: These look like bowls but are of different sizes ranging from small bowls to large ones. These pots do not have a neck. However, rims are present.
b. Pots with neck: These pots are also of different sizes. These pots have a neck and a rim.
c. Amphora: These are thick and heavy pots shaped like a large jar or amphora.
d. Miscellaneous types

3.1.1: Open-mouthed Pots

These pots look like large bowls. Some of the small sized pots in this category range from 5 to 7 cms in diameter. However, the largest ones can be over 2 meters in diameter.

These are pots with an open mouth and possessing a rim. They do not have a neck. These pots usually have a rounded base; such that they do not stand properly and gets tilted when kept standing. Again, depending on the rim, these pots can be divided into three types (a) pots with a splayed rim, (b) pots with a pronounced rim (like thick lips) (Figure 49), and (c) pots with a thin rim (Figure 50).

Figure 49

An open-mouthed pot with a pronounced rim

Figure 50

An open-mouthed pot with a thin rim

These pots are called *samdik*, i.e., a curry pot. However, based on the size, there are specific names for these pots, even though these open-mouthed pots are all called by the generic name *samdik*.

Dikrong is a small-sized pot of approximately 5 cms in diameter. The next pot, in terms of size is the *samdik* – this has an average diameter of 15-20 cms. *Matchamdik*

is a large pot with dimensions of about 30 cms in diameter, while the largest open-mouthed pot is the *Sangkho* which can range from 40-50cms in diameter. The commonly found pots however are the *samdik* and *dikrong*.

Figure 51

Samdik *(left) and* dikrong *(right)*

A variation of the *samdik* is the *minil medik* (Figure 52). This pot is like the *samdik* (pot without a neck), however, it has holes in the bottom so as to steam rice in this container.

Figure 52

Minil medik *or the steamer*

This vessel is a part of a layered utensil, in which the bottom part is a common pot, on which the upper part (Figure 52) sits. The utensil is then covered with a lid or with leaves, so that the *minil* rice placed in the upper container gets cooked from the steam entering the vessel from below.

3.1.2: Pots with Neck

These pots are of various sizes – however all of them have a neck. Again, depending on the neck, these can be divided into two groups – (a) Pot with splayed out rim and long neck with carination, and (b) pot with less moderate neck with a slightly flared out rim with body bulging out.

Figure 53

A small pot with moderate neck and flared out rim

These pots are referred to as *medik*, i.e., rice pots. These are also of different sizes. Again, just like the *samdik*, these pots also have specific names though the generic name is *medik*. These pots range from about 8-10 cms in height to about 1 meter in height, or even more.

Figure 54

Two pots with neck of various dimensions

The *diku* is the smallest pot of about 8-10 cms in height. This is followed by the *medik* which can be of varying sizes, the average size being about 20 cms in height. The largest pot in this category is the *rongdik* which can vary from approximately 50 cms to 100 cms or more.

Figure 55

Medik *(left) and* diku *(right)*

3.1.3: Amphorae

These are thick and heavy pots with constricted neck and short flared out and thickened rim. The body is slightly rounded and supported by a ring made of bamboo and the pot is enclosed by bamboo to retain weight due to its heavy contents. These pots are usually called *dikka*.

The amphora-type pots can also range in sizes from around 50 cms in height to upto 200 cms in height.

Figure 56

Amphora-type pots of different sizes and shapes

3.1.4: Miscellaneous Types

There are also other types of pots that are nowadays made by Garos. These are usually new types of pots or pots meant as decorative items or for other uses. These usually do not have a specific type of shape, and depends on the potters' creativity and the consumers' demand.

Some of these types can be seen in the photograph below.

Figure 57

Four miscellaneous types of pots can be seen in the foreground while in the background there are two pots with neck

3.2: FUNCTIONS OF POTS

Among Garos pots are usually utilitarian in nature. However, some of the pots in the past were used for ceremonial purposes too. The types of pots on the basis of function are given below:

3.2.1: Utilitarian Pots

These pots are used for domestic purposes. Again, depending on the purpose, these can be grouped as under:

3.2.1.1: Cooking Pots

The main function of pots is for cooking purpose.

(1) *Medik* – As the name suggests, the *medik* or the pot with the neck, is the rice pot. This is the pot that is used to cook rice. Therefore, depending on the requirement of the family, the size of the pot would vary.

(2) *Samdik* – The *samdik* is the curry pot. This is the pot that is used to cook curry. Just like the *medik*, the size of the *samdik* also depends on family requirements. The small-sized *samdik* called *dikrong* is used as a bowl.

Figure 58

A samdik *(left) and* medik *(right)*

3.2.1.2: Storing Pots

Pots are also used to store items such as food grains, water, etc. Some of these uses are mentioned below:

(1) Water storing pots – Traditionally Garos stored water in large bamboo and gourd containers, however today it is seen that large pots with neck (*medik*) are also sometimes used, though rarely.

(2) Grains storing pots – Large *medik* (open-mouthed pots) like the *rongdik* are used for storing rice and other grains. The name *rongdik* itself refers to a "rice grain storer".

(3) Seeds storing pots – The small pots like the *diku* and *dikrong* are used as seeds storer, i.e., to store seeds.

Figure 59

Water stored in a pot

3.2.2: Ceremonial Pots

The large-sized pots can be referred to as ceremonial pots since they are used during ceremonial occasions and not on a daily basis. These pots are used on special occasions like birth, marriage, or death ceremonies for communal cooking since the size of these pots are large and can accommodate more food.

The large open-mouthed pots like *matchamdik* and *sangkho* are used for cooking curry for a large gathering. These curries would usually comprise of meat such as beef, or pork, cooked with naturally procured alkali called *kalchi* or with the addition of rice powder to thicken the gravy. These days however meat curry is also cooked in mustard oil with the addition of various spices. It is believed that meat cooked in these pots enhance the flavour of the meat.

On the other hand, the larger pots with neck (*medik*) are used to cook rice for a large gathering too.

3.2.3: Sacred Pots

The amphora-type pots called *dikka* are used as rice-beer pots, i.e., to ferment rice beer. Originally, rice-beer was prepared for different rituals and ceremonies among the Garos. This is considered sacred since it is offered to the gods and spirits in each and

every rituals, before it is consumed by men and women. Therefore, these pots where rice-beer is fermented can also be considered sacred in nature.

However, today some households make rice beer solely for consumption and not for any rituals.

Figure 60

Rice beer being kept for fermentation in a dikka

Figure 61

Fresh water being poured into a dikka *before straining the beer*

In bygone days, the sacred drum called *dimdima* also used a pot-base. This was a drum that was used only for ritual purposes, and only a select few could touch and play it. It was believed that very powerful spirits resided in these drums, and therefore, only the *nokma* (the chieftain) could own one and keep it in his house. This drum was beaten only on special occasions.

Figure 62

The drum dimdima *in which the body is composed of clay*

3.2.4: Decorative Items

Items for decorative purposes are also made by potters. These are items meant for decoration in their houses. Usually these items are prepared by the potters on the basis of orders. One of the items most commonly made by potters includes a model of the pot *dikka*. The original *dikka*s are rarely seen in houses today since majority of the Garos are now Christians and abstaining from rice beer (due to its intoxicant nature and association with spirits) is a way of life for Garo Christians. Therefore, in many houses models of the *dikka* is preferred.

Figures 63 & 64

A model dikka *(left) and a model amphora (right)*

3.2.5: Miscellaneous Purposes

Pots are also found to be made for miscellaneous purposes such as – (a) ash trays, (b) candle stand, (c) lamp, (d) piggy bank, (e) cups, (f) bowls etc.

Figures 65 & 66

Decorative ash trays

Figure 67

An oil lamp with a handle

Figure 68

A piggy bank with a coin insert

3.3: MORPHO-FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

The pots can be classified in the following manner on the basis of their morphology and function.

Table 1

Morpho-Functional Classification of Pots

Type of Pot	Brief description	Purpose	Decoration, if any
Medik	Pot with a wide neck; with lid and without lid	Cooking rice	Plain, no decoration
Samdik	Open-mouthed pot; with lid and without lid	Cooking curry	Plain, no decoration
Minil medik	Layered pot with a wide constricted neck; with or without lid; holes in the upper layer for steam to come through	Cooking *minil* rice	Plain, no decoration
Rongdik	Large pot with a wide neck and mouth;	Storing rice and other grains	Plain, no decoration
Dikka	Large amphora-type pot with a wide neck and mouth; bamboo and cane casings around it for support	Fermenting rice beer	Plain, no decoration
Sangkho	Large open-mouthed pot; usually without a lid	Used for dry-frying rice to make *chira* (flattened rice) or rice beer	Plain, no decration
Diku	Small sized pot with a constricted neck	Storing seeds etc.	Plain, no decoration
Dikrong	Small sized open-mouthed pot; usually without a lid	Storing seeds etc.; also used as bowls	Plain, no decoration
Miscellaneous items	Cups, bowls, plates, decorative items	For daily use as well as for decoration only	Mostly with decorations like appliqué and incised designs

Figure 69

Incised and appliqué designs seen on an upturned model dikka

Figure 70

Thumb impressed designs seen on a piggy bank

CHAPTER IV

REJUVENATION AND DISSEMINATION

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones.

Therefore, as a part of this project, a small workshop was conducted in order to help rejuvenate and disseminate the dying art of pottery making to a larger group.

4.1: WORKSHOP ON POTTERY

At present, the locations where indigenous potters are found are situated only in South Garo Hills. However, during the time when the project was undertaken the situation in South Garo Hills was not conducive for such a programme. Thus, due to security and logistic reasons it was decided to hold the workshop at the headquarters of Garo Hills – Tura – in West Garo Hills District, Meghalaya.

In this workshop, potters from four locations that we had identified were invited. However, potters – master craftsman and women – turned up from two locations only, i.e., Siju and Williamnagar.

This workshop was conducted for 2 days on 8th and 9th December, 2015 at the premises of the District Museum, Tura. In all, six potters participated in the workshop which was made open to the public.

4.1.1: Objectives of the Workshop

The objectives of the workshop were the following:

1. To document the art of pottery,
2. To disseminate the knowledge of pottery making to the public, and
3. To discuss safeguards to promote this art.

4.1.2: Brief Proceedings of the Workshop

4.1.2.1: *Day 1(8th December 2015)*

Inauguration (9.30am – 10.30am): The workshop started with a brief inauguration at the premises of the District Museum, where Dr. Q. Marak (NEHU, Shillong), Chief Organizer of the workshop, introduced the programme and the idea behind holding it. The resource persons and the master craftsmen/women were introduced. Ms. Norinchi Momin, District Research Officer, as Guest of Honour, highlighted the importance of the art of pottery and the need to revive it. Ms. Kimde Momin (Curator, District Museum) delivered the vote of thanks.

Session 1: Introducing raw materials (10.30am-12noon)

The master craftsmen/women introduced the raw material i.e., clay which they had brought with them. Dr. Q. Marak, resource person, discussed at length the importance of the correct proportion of mixing of the ingredients to make the clay dough. The clay granules were then pounded in a mortar and pestle and mixed with water. This was kneaded till it acquired a sticky and necessary consistency.

Figure 71

Potters beginning to knead the clay on Day 1

Session 2: Pottery making -1 (1pm-5pm)

In this session, Dr. S. S. John, resource person, discussed the importance of different stages of pottery making, and how one cannot jump a stage. Also he talked about the difference between handmade pottery and wheel made pottery. Thereafter, the different stages of pottery making began with 6 potters making pots and guiding participants. Ms. Yesikhani Marak, Ms. Daisy Momin, Ms. Norinchi Momin and Ms. Kimde Momin (resource persons) interacted with the potters regarding problems they face.

Figure 72

Potters starting to roll the clay

Figure 73

Potters giving initial shape to the clay

Figure 74

Visitors discussing over the pots on display

Figure 75

The workshop in progress

4.1.2.2: *Day 2 (9th December 2015)*

Session 3: Pottery Making -2 (7.30am – 12 noon)

The second day session started early in the morning in order to take advantage of the morning sun. The pots made the previous day were given final shape and left to dry. Final shaping of the pot however had many stages as the participants were made aware of.

This session was conducted by Dr. S. Simon John who discussed the different types of folklore existent among the potters and the participants about pottery – its making and usage. The participants were highly enthused and had a heated discussion while making pots themselves.

Figure 76

Young participants at the workshop

Figure 77

A few pottery items on display

Session 4: Pottery Making 3 (1pm – 7pm)

In this final session, potters and participants tried to finish the pots they had given shape to previously. Polishing of the pots, before final drying, smoking, and firing was done.

Figure 78

A young student trying her hand at pottery

Figure 79

A potter explaining how polishing is done to a participant

Figure 80

Women participants asking questions

After the pottery session was over, an informal valediction took place, where Dr. Q. Marak, PI of the Project, thanked the resource persons, the master craftsmen/women,

and the participants for actively taking part in the two-day deliberations. After the departure of master-craftsmen/women and participants, the resource persons sat down and deliberated over the recommendations.

4.2: MASTER CRAFTSWOMEN AND CRAFTSMEN

Six potters took part in the workshop. Three were from village Dobagre, South Garo Hills District, and three from village Dobetkolgre Terresgittim, East Garo Hills District.

The village of Dobagre lies in South Garo Hills. There exist traditional potters in this village. Pottery has been traditionally followed since the times of their ancestors. But as the story goes - the area from which the potters collected the clay for making the pots fell on a different village. The other villagers refused them the accessibility to collect the clay for pot making. As such they had to leave their traditional occupation of pottery and indulge in other occupations. But with development in all sectors, the old tradition of pottery is reviving. As such the potters were happy to come and showcase their traditional skills. They not only make pots for daily usage but also for decorations and various other purposes.

On the other hand, the village of Dobetkolgre lies near Williamnagar in East Garo Hills. Although not a traditional potters' village, a lady named Tomai Sangma started a Self Help Group and taught pot making to twelve other ladies. There is no specific family or group that practices traditional pot making in this village. The members of the Self Help Group meets twice a week and make various articles and keeps it for a week before baking the articles. They have decided to fix a rate and then take the articles they manufacture for selling to the market. They are in look out for suitable market for their products.

Following are the names of the master craftsmen/women who had taken part in the workshop.

1. Ms. Penilla N Sangma, Village Dobagre, South Garo Hills
2. Ms. Bellina C Marak, Village Dobagre, South Garo Hills
3. Mr. Witherson R Marak, Village Dobagre, South Garo Hills
4. Ms. Tomai R Sangma, Dobetkolgre Terresgittim, East Garo Hills
5. Mrs. Lusitha R Sangma, Dobetkolgre Terresgittim, East Garo Hills

6. Ms. Merrybell N Sangma, Dobetkolgre Terresgittim, East Garo Hills

Figure 81

The potters who took part in the workshop

4.3: REJUVENATION AND DISSEMINATION

While undertaking the project and conducting the workshop it was strongly felt that this dying art needs to be rejuvenated.

It was clearly seen that the art of pottery, using traditional methods and raw materials, is facing threat of extinction in the region. This has happened due to the following inter-related reasons.

(a) Change in traditional economic system

(b) Introduction of market economy where there is cheaper and easier access to plastic and other goods

(c) Replacement of traditional crafts by durable plastic items

(d) Dwindling demand for traditional pots

If the same scenario continues then it is highly likely that the art of traditional pottery will no longer be seen in Garo Hills in the next decade or so. In this situation it is of utmost necessity that this art has to be rejuvenated.

Rejuvenation of traditional crafts including pottery can be attempted in the following manner:

(a) Encouraging potters by inviting them to workshops and interaction programmes to showcase their art regularly,

(b) Giving financial assistance to the potters so that it acts as an encouragement, and in lieu of the agricultural activity they miss out,

(c) Disseminating the art to the interested youth, students etc. through regular workshops, and

(c) Some form of government recognition to potters, either through a plaque or cash awards.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Traditional craftsmanship, with traditional wisdom and know-how, around the world, is a dying art. In this report, I have discussed the traditional craftsmanship involved in making pottery in Garo Hills, Meghalaya. In doing so, I have discussed the technology involved, the different types of pots constructed, and the need for rejuvenation and dissemination.

In the construction of pots, the materials that are used are those that are found locally available – *a·dikka* clay, tools and implements used such as mortar and pestle, different types of bamboo sieves, old clay pots as mould, stone and seed polishers, and locally made wood beaters. The technology used is handmade where the whole shape of the pot is made with bare hands using a method known as mould method. However, there are various steps in this method too as discussed in detail in Chapter II.

Figure 82

Handmade pottery in Garo Hills

Due to the method of handmade, as opposed to wheel made pottery, this method is time consuming and once the clay being shaped breaks, it cannot be re-shaped. Again, this being handmade pottery there are some limitations to its making, i.e., it is very difficult to make huge pots or amphorae due to its sheer size. Only an expert potter can make these types of pots. Again, the raw material that is used needs to be finely sieved, and without any foreign particles (such as stray and sand). Before the final firing it is also required that the pot is first smoked so that all the moisture is drained out. If there is some moisture in the clay, then on burning the clay pots will burst (Figure 83).

Figure 83

Some burst and broken pots on firing

Traditionally, it is only women who make pots in Garo Hills. This gets reflected in the types of tools and implements that are used in its manufacture – tools that are easily available in Garo houses and used in the kitchen. It is likely that the art of pottery must have passed down from mothers to daughters in the past. However, at present, there are very few women potters and fewer daughters who have learnt the trade.

In terms of the types of pots it was seen that the most commonly made pots are those of utilitarian nature, i.e., pots that are used in cooking and storing. Cooking pots

are usually of two types – (a) those having necks, and (b) those without necks. The former are usually used for cooking rice, while the latter as curry pots. Besides this, there are varieties in terms of the size and shape. For example, there are large amphorae where rice beer is fermented and stored. Additionally, today a few modern types are also made mainly for decorative purposes as well as items such as bowls, ash trays, piggy banks etc.

However without doubt traditional pottery is dying and there are only a few potters alive today who know the art. In order to help in its rejuvenation and dissemination, as a part of the project, a workshop was held in the premises of the District Museum, Tura on 8th and 9th December 2015. For this workshop a few potters were invited to showcase their art, and for an interaction with the public. It was witnessed that the potters were highly enthused to take part in the workshop and to display the method of making pottery.

Figure 84

A view of potters and participants making pots in the workshop

The public who attended the workshop were also highly interested and wanted to buy their products especially the ones for cooking. It is strongly felt that the public needs to be made aware of this art – possibly on a large scale.

Figure 85

Potters and Workshop participants along with the Project PI

In conclusion, it is strongly felt that there should be some government initiatives for the potters in terms of recognition and financial assistance so that they can continue the art of making pottery.

A brief recommendation includes the following:

(a) Encourage potters by inviting them to showcase their art regularly at different places, possibly district headquarters of the 5 districts in Garo Hills as well as at Shillong, the state capital.

(b) Financial assistance to the potters,

(c) Conduct regular workshops in order to disseminate the art to the interested youth, students etc., and

(d) Set up cooperatives in order to continue the art as well as to sell the products in a systematic manner.

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