

MOULDING EARTH : THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TERACOTTA
FOR ARCHITECTURAL PURPOSES

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Terra-cotta, Italian term for Baked Earth literally means any kind of fired clay.

The process of moulding clay for utilitarian and architectural purposes could be identified as one of the oldest crafts of man kind. A craft which stands still over last 2 - 3 million years or in the case of Sri Lanka it is in a state of gradual degradation.

Although the technique of the ancient decorative bricks or tile maker virtually is not known today, quantitatively the usage of bricks and tiles in the construction industry has immensely increased. Moreover, Sri Lanka's present housing movement is mainly geared to cater every body a roof and walls in 'permenant' materials, namely, a tile roof and brick walls. With the efforts to identify the role of vernacular traditions and process, in the housing movement, re-introducing the traditional role of 'Ulu Vaduwa' (terracotta technician) and continuing traditional practises in rural areas to fire bricks for their own house by themselves etc should be taken into consideration.

It may not be wrong to name terra-cotta as the most readily available material for Sri Lankans specially with their tank fed agro based economy, tank beds forming the ready source of clay.

Cheapness, availability, versatillity, and the reversibility to nature of terra-cotta makes it the mostly suitable non pollute material for future development strategies.

Architectural applications of terra-cotta in the past varying from ridge tile to sewerage channels and septic tanks, indicate the vastness of its future avenues.

References: C.E. Godakumbura, Teracotta Heads, Archaeological Department Colombo, 1982.
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