



306/C

**The usage of surface decoration methods for the
functional validity of earthenware culinary products**

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The history of clay craft can be traced back to the prehistoric era and Sri Lanka was known for its earthenware culinary products from ancient times. Surface decoration is an important element in the earthenware product which can be identified as an addition that enhances its attractiveness as well as its functionality. The surface decoration methods of earthenware culinary products were primitive at the beginning but developed subsequently as a traditional craft with several types of designs, patterns and decorations used for the functional as well as decorative purposes of the products. Pinching, engraving, embossing and stamping are the main decoration methods used in earthenware culinary products. Culinary items can be divided into three main categories-cooking, auxiliary and cleaning and washing items. The “*Nembiliya*”, an earthenware culinary product commonly used for cleaning and washing purposes in Sri Lanka was considered for the study and attention was focused on examining how the decorations cater to the functionality of the product. A “*Nembiliya*” is used mainly for the removal of sand and grit when washing rice although it is also used for other secondary purposes. Rice immersed in water in a “*Nembiliya*” is swirled round to let the heavier sand and grit sink to the bottom and remain there and the surface texture of the inner surface plays an important part in this process. Characteristic comb lines can be seen on the inner surface and the tool “*Irrigahana Katuwa*” has been used for the decoration before the firing of the pot. The lines vary in different parts the surface. Three types of lines-curved lines, spiral lines and lines with continuous short curves engraved on the inner surface are grouped together to form a decoration. The decorations at the bottom flow towards the centre. The decoration between the rim and the bottom is simple and forms the main pattern covering 2/3 of the inner surface. The inside edge pattern is continuous along the rim without any flow towards the bottom. It is evident from these considerations that spiral shape designs and engraving methods have been effectively used to create a textural inner surface that helps in removing sand and grit when washing rice. The “*Nembiliya*” can thus be considered as one of the best examples of an earthenware culinary product in which surface decorations have been used for the functional validity of the product.