

The Use of Art and Traditional Sinhala 'Serasili' for the Surface Decoration of Earthenware Clay Vessels in Sri Lanka

Ranasinghe W.M.N.D.¹

Sri Lanka is famous for earthenware products manufactured from the prehistoric era. Archeological excavations have discovered it back to over 1000BC and it has an ancient legacy. Aesthetic appearance and the product functionality are the main considerable facts of functional products. That aesthetically pleasing quality plays an important role in the product lifestyle. Decoration or art is an optimal media to promote or enhance their ideas to the society. In the beginning, surface decorations were in the primary stage, and the only purpose was to fulfill their requirements and product function. But later on they considered the aesthetically pleasing nature of the product. Surface decoration adds additional renders, something more attractive or embellishment to the object. Furthermore it will help the functional value too.

It is important to do the surface decoration in the product's outer surface rather than in the inner surface of the product. It gives significance and an idea about the product. Surface appearance could be identified as a significant aspect of a pottery product, because several types of media can be used as a base for decoration as walls, costumes, and flags etc. From that, clay is an ideal material to do the painting layers and it provides a proper basement.

Several types of earthenware products can be found from the prehistoric era. Among earthenware products, painted earthenware objects have a unique and quite elegant appearance. It can significantly be identified as a horizon of the cultural empire and a social item which explains the past historical evidence. The earliest painted clay vessels can be found from the Embilipitiya area. "Recent excavations at a village called Uda Ranchamadama near Embilipitiya, an ancient settlement site situated 3,000ft above sea level have uncovered sherds of a painted pot, which through Carbon 14 dating has been placed at 1120BC, making it the oldest pot found in Sri Lanka so far" (Amarasinghe U., 2010). Pottery painting has been evident from the time of proto history. It was not only a design, but the name of the owner was also curved to the pottery surface, it was found from the Thissamaharama area and there was an inscription written in early Brahmin script on this pot. It is evidence to prove the early surface treatment.

Painting method is mainly applied to the pottery vessels made out from the potter wheel. Because of that most of the hand painting techniques were done when rotating the object. As a result of that painted pottery products were painted all over the body especially as a band or a border. Decorated pottery ware enhanced the social lifestyle and the craftsmanship at that time. Product quality and decorations enhanced the social status and hierarchical level of the society.

¹ Lecturer, Department of Integrated Design, Faculty of Architecture, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.