



The Earthy Indians: Sensuality and Sexuality as Reflected in Early Historical Terracotta and Contemporary Literature

APARNA BHOGAL

Curator (Archaeology), CSMVS, Mumbai

Abstract: The term 'Shringara' has dual meaning. One meaning is 'adornment' and another is 'copulation'. A number of early historical terracotta (baked clay) objects ranging from C. 3rd century BCE to C. 4th century CE, in the collection of CSMVS, apparently deal with the theme of Shringara. Terracotta plaques as well as figurines in round are recovered from different historically important sites like Mathura, Kaushambi and Rajghat in Uttar Pradesh and Chandraketugarh in West Bengal. One of the salient features of these objects from this vast territorial span is the sensuality either latent or articulated. These figurines consist of beautifully bedecked females with elaborate coiffure, voluptuous and sensuous figures wearing transparent clothes revealing their form. We also have amorous couples and orgiastic scenes.

It is difficult to know exactly what these terracotta figurines were made for. However, there are often elements of shringara in them which echo the sentiment of contemporary poetry and drama. In this essay, some verses are selected that can enliven our appreciation of some of the terracotta figurines by relating them to the verses from Gahasattasai, Buddhacharita and Saundarananda. Further, the purpose behind their creation is also discussed.

Keywords: Chandraketugarh, Gahasattasai, Kamasutra, shringara, terracotta.

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The ubiquitous term 'shringara' is usually taken in the sense of 'prasadhana' (adornment) as well as 'maithuna' (copulation) in Indian society. It is actually associated with erotic mood. Wide range of ancient Indian artworks if observed reveal that our ancestors certainly had a healthy outlook towards sensuality and sexuality. A number of early historical terracotta (baked clay) objects ranging from C. 3rd Century BCE to C. 4th century CE, in the collection of CSMVS, bear testimony to the fact. Though we have few human male figurines as well as animals represented in this art form, female figures or femininity seems to be a dominant factor. These terracotta plaques or figurines in round are recovered from different historically important sites like Mathura, Kaushambi and Rajghat in

Uttar Pradesh and Chandraketugarh in West Bengal. One of the salient features of these objects from this vast territorial span is the sensuality either latent or articulated which unifies them. The plethora of beauties consist of female heads with elaborate coiffure, beautifully bedecked, voluptuous and sensuous figures with transparent clothes revealing their form, as a part of amorous couples or even orgiastic scenes associated with both spiritual and mundane world. Sometimes an innocent look, sometimes a coquettish glance and graceful posture make these fragmentary but remarkably artistic terracotta figurines more meaningful.

It is difficult to know exactly what these terracotta figurines were made for. However, there are often elements of *shringara* in them which echo the sentiment of contemporary poetry and drama. In this essay, some verses are selected that can enliven our appreciation of some of the terracotta figurines by relating them to the verses from Gahasattasai (Gathasaptashati), Buddhacharita, Saundarananda.

Though 'beauties' are frequently described '*nakhashikhanta*' (from tresses to toes) in Sanskrit and Prakrit literature unfortunately the fragmentary terracotta figures rarely provide scope to have an idea of one figure in totality. Like a picture made by mosaic of different pieces these fragments collectively depict an ideal Indian woman in the glory of her youth, a dream girl perhaps every ancient Indian man thought of.



Figure 1, Female head, Black Terracotta, Mathura, 1st century BCE, 5 cms X 4.8 cms, CSMVS, 65.12

मारेसि कं ण मुद्धे इमेण पेरन्त-रत्त-विसमेण ।

भु-लआ-चाव-विणिग्गअ-तिक्खअरद्धच्छि-भल्लेण ॥ ५०४ ॥ गहासत्तसइ (Mangrulkar and Badhe 1984)

Beauty! Who is not wounded by the arrows of your sharp edged eyes emerging from the bow of your vine like eyebrows?

This head of a woman (probably pressed from a mould) has two strings of pearls or beads in appliqué with hair ornament (now missing) in the centre bordering her forehead. Her oval face with

large expressive eyes somewhat elongated, carefully shown eyebrows, fleshy cheeks and hair decked with small flowers certainly shows artist's love for details. Hair is shown in linear pattern.



Figure 2, Female head, Terracotta, Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh, 1st century CE, 5 cms X 5.6 cms, CSMVS, 66.19

मअणगिगणो व धूमं मोहण-पिच्छि व लोअ-दिट्ठीए।
जोव्वण-धअं व मुद्धा वहइ सुअन्धं चिउर-भारम् ॥ ५७२ ॥

Like a (magical) feather captivating eyes of people, she carries her hair dressed like a perfumed flag of youth (looking) like a fire of passion.

This female head in all probability represents lady of fashion. Her elaborate fan-shaped headdress consists of multiple horizontal floral bands and two strings of pearls or beads adorn her forehead-revealing portion of her hair. Large circular earrings decorated with floral pattern flank her pretty, delicate face. Realistically delineated face with small expressive eyes bear testimony to the artist's skill.



Figure 3, Yakshi, Terracotta, Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh, 1st century BCE- 1st century CE, 5.5 cms X 5.7 cms, CSMVS, 66.18

एइ इमीअ णिअच्छइ परिणअ-मालूर-सच्छहे थणए ।
 तुड;गे सप्पुरिस-मणोरहे व्व ह्मिअए अ-माअन्ते ॥ ५७९ ॥
 Come! Behold!

Her breasts like ripe fruits of *bilva* (Aegle marmelos or Indian bael) so high like wills of good people that cannot be confined to the heart and hence exposed.

Probably a yakshi, this high bosomed woman can also be typical representation of *nayika* depicted in Sanskrit *kavya* with so much zeal by the poets and play writers alike.

She is represented as standing under a tree with sprays of leaves sheltering her, providing a canopy. Her headdress is decorated with flowers. Similar flowers are shown blossoming on the tree. Though her facial features are obscure due to the tiny size of her head, her disc-like large hanging earrings and the necklace are significant. A sash is shown across her upper body passing between her full breasts idealized in Sanskrit literature as *suvarnakumbha* or *amritkumbha*. Emphasizing her slender waistline, her posture is delineated like that of *shalabhanjika* as she is holding branch of a tree with one of her hands. Another hand seems busy touching her earring.

It reminds one of the verses in Buddhacharita:

चूतशाखां कुसुमितां प्रगहयान्या ललम्बरे ।
 सुवर्णकलशप्रख्यान् दर्शयन्त्यः पयोधरान् ॥ ४/ ३५ ॥ बुध्दचरित (Chaudhary 1948: Canto IV, verse 35)

...other holding fully blossomed mango-bough leaned, displaying her golden jar like bosom- Ashvaghosha (78-150 CE) describes one of the temptresses musing for a while on a popular theme of *shalabhanjika*.

The terracotta artist also seems to have dwelt on her breasts for a while as her carefully shown nipples suggest.

अणुराअ-रअण-भरिअं कञ्चण-कलस्स व्व तरुणि-थण-वट्टम् ।
 तस्स च्चिअ मुहम्मि किआ मसि-मुद्दा मअण-राएण ॥ ८०६ ॥

Like (one would seal) golden jars carrying gems of love, the God of Love has sealed openings of the round breasts of this maiden with black (nipples)!



Figure 4, Female head, Terracotta, Kushana, C. 1st century CE, 11.5 cms X 8 cms, CSMVS, TC 114

सामाङ्ग गरुअ-जोव्वण-विसेस-भरिए कवोल-मूलम्मि ।
पिज्जइ अहो-मुहेण व कण्णवअंसेण लावण्णम् ॥ ४३९ ॥

By bending to reach the end of her cheeks the earrings of this damsel in her full bloom of youth, are drinking the elixir of her *lavanya* (youthful beauty).

This is another example of fashionable woman or Court lady though only head is available. Her double tiara like headdress is patterned with lotus petal design. Hairstyle is revealed by lines and hair bun is shown on the top of her head. Another prominent feature of this beautiful image is her large, thick earrings of which only one is extant. It is further decorated with checkered pattern.

Kama Sutra (Sutra 14) (Upadhyaya (tr.) 1974: 76) recommends ‘A maiden should study in private the sixty- four arts or *kalas*. Along with painting, vocal and instrumental music as well as dancing the other arts enlisted are coloring teeth, hair, nails and other toiletries (adornments), making various garlands, dressing and decorating body, crafting ornaments, adorning foreheads, proficiency in pressing, shampooing and dressing hair. It is no wonder small objects like our terracotta figurines have such wonderful coiffures, beautiful and sensuous transparent costumes and are profusely adorned too.

Vatsyayana does not forget to boast that a princess or a daughter of a highborn official, as long as she cultivates these sixty-four arts, will certainly enjoy her husband’s favour in spite of having a thousand wives in his harem. In Indian polygamous royal or noble households, it was definitely useful to have knowledge of sixty-four arts (Upadhyaya 1974: 80). Verses 20 – 21 of *Kama Sutra* claim (Upadhyaya 1974: 79, 80): A courtesan, endowed with character, beauty, and virtues attains an honoured place among the public and acquires the rank of *ganika* if she is expert in sixty- four arts. Such a woman is ever honoured by the king and even by the virtuous, and since she is sought after, and courted by one and all, she becomes the cynosure among the class and enjoys universal regard. In fact, the *Sutras* 11-17 mention that the sixth section dealing with courtesans was separately elaborated by Dattaka at the request of the courtesans of Pataliputra (Upadhyaya 1974: 67). Therefore, these courtesans like Vasantasena of Ujjayini were supposed to be beauty with brains. Ideal companions for *rasika nagaraka* like Charudatta. No wonder the courtesans of Pataliputra aspired to become ideal like the heroine of ‘*Mricchhakatikam*’ of Shudraka and Amrapali the celebrated beauty of Vaishali.

सर्वाः सर्वकलाज्ञाः स्थ भावग्रहणपण्डिताः ।

रुपचातुर्यसम्पन्नाः स्वगुणैर्मुख्यतां गताः ॥ ४/९ ॥ बुध्दचरित (Chaudhary (ed.) 1948, Canto IV, verse 9)



Figure 5, Female Head, Terracotta, Shunga, 1st century BCE, 6 cms X 7 cms, Karl J. Khandalawala Collection, CSMVS, 2009.658

All of you know all the arts, are skilled in captivating the emotions, possessing beauty and intelligence, owing to your skills you have achieved prominence.

Ashwaghosha praises the temptresses in his Buddhacharita.

अइ-पीण-त्यण-उत्तम्भिआणणे सुअणु सुणसु मह वअणम् ।

अ-थिरम्मि जुज्जइ ण जोव्वणम्मि माणो पिए काउम् ॥ ९१७ ॥

Listen to my words, Oh, high bosomed beauty with raised (arrogant) head!

Why are you angry with your lover when youth is transient?

Is this highly decked *shukasarika* angry with her lover and not responding to his love messages? She is depicted with beaded double strings with flower at each end adorning her forehead. Her hairstyle also shows flowers with the largest in the centre surmounting her head. One of her earrings is visible. It is a large circular earring with floral pattern in the centre. Her broad necklace also shows floral design. Her sash-like upper garment or *Uttariya* covering her both the shoulders is suggested by striation. Visibility of her full breasts suggests transparency of her garment. Large heavy bangles adorn her hands. She is probably touching branch of a tree, which is not clear due to the damaged condition of this plaque. Her left hand is supporting a bird placed on her left shoulder.

Perhaps she is waiting at the gate anxious to meet her paramour as possibly she has just received message sent by her lover through this bird messenger!

रथा-पइण्ण-णअणुप्पला तुमं सा पडिच्छए एन्तम्

दर-णिहिएहिं दोहिं वि मड;गल-कलसेहिं व थणेहिम् ॥ १४० ॥

She is waiting at the gateway to welcome you with two auspicious jars of her (round) breasts, placing (on your way) blue lotuses that her eyes are!



Figure 6, Yakshi, Terracotta, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, 2nd century CE, 7 cms X 3.5 cms, CSMVS, 65.14

णिहुअण-सिष्यं तह सारिआइ उल्लविअं ह्य गुरु-पुरओ ।
जह तं वेलं माए ण आणिमो कथ वच्चामो ॥ ५८९ ॥

Oh mother!

When this Myna described our lovemaking, in front of the elders, we just could not understand where we should hide!

It is a representation of a woman standing cross-legged in *padaswastika*. One of the striking features is large, thick anklets adorning her feet. Ends of her garment are shown hanging on her both sides. She is touching her left breast with her right hand that can be taken as symbol of fertility and nourishment.

She is one more example, which can be described as *shukasarika*. A bird is resting on her waist. Has that bird pricked at one of her full round breasts mistaking it for fruit? Is this a representation of a poetic fancy? Quite possible! There are innumerable verses in Sanskrit and Prakrit literature describing beauty of maidens with such fanciful examples where birds are taking fancy of full, round breasts looking like ripe *bilva* fruits.

Isn't it appropriate depiction of sensuous figure of a *nayika* (heroine)? The physique of this *nayika* looks epitome of Indian beauty. If carefully observed 'areola' is also suggested on her breasts.

These figurines (Fig.5 and 6), also remind one of Sanskrit *kavya* (Poetics and Dramatics) literature where *nayika* or heroine is frequently described as talking to her pet bird about her lover. Birds were trained to repeat love- phrases, which were used to remind the significant other of their undying love or to invite them for tryst. Training parrots and mynas to speak and sing was one of the sixty- four arts enlisted in *Kama Sutra* (Upadhyaya 1974: 78). It is even said that if trained properly these birds can memorise messages and carry them where their owner wishes. In *Kama Sutra, nagaraka*, or man of the town, is advised to hang in his house the cages and keep different kinds of birds in them (Upadhyaya 1974: 82). *Vidushaka* Maitreya observes in the 7th quadrangle of Vasantasena's household pet birds of different kinds (Kale 1962: 133,134).



Figure 7: Yakshi, Terracotta, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, 1st century BCE-1st century CE, 5.5 cms X 6 cms, CSMVS, 65.16

कं तुड;ग-थणुक्खित्तेण पुत्ति दार-द्विआ पलोएसि ।

उण्णामिअ-कलस-णिवेसिअग्घ-कमलेण व मुहेण ॥ २५६ ॥

Carrying your lotus like head on your high (full) breasts just as one would keep a lotus (for worship) on the highly placed auspicious jars, who are you waiting for standing at the gate?

This petit woman is having round moon-like face. Two large disc-like earrings flank her pretty face little bit tilted, suggesting coquettish glance, emphasizing her graceful gait or subtly disclosing her anticipation towards coming of something or somebody. Her heavy, puffy hairstyle is adorned with round ornament not clearly visible. Her large breasts are shown prominently. Even in this small image, so much damaged, the artist is successful in creating idealistic picture of her beauty.



Figure 8: Female figure, Terracotta, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh C. 1st century BCE, 13.5 cms X 6 cms, CSMVS, TC 28

विलासिणि-गुरु-णिअम्बो तीरउ चलणेहिँ दोहिँ उव्वहिउम् ।
एआई उण मज्झो थण-भारं कइ णु उव्वहइ ॥ ७९६ ॥

Her two legs can carry load of heavy bottoms of this beautiful damsel but how can her single waist hold burden of her two heavy breasts?

This mystery remained unsolved in the minds of *rasika* ancient Indians. However, Ashvaghosha relishes his notions of ideal femininity in the description of Sundari, wife of Nanda.

ततश्चलन्नूर योक्त्रिताभ्यां नखपभोडनासितराडगुलिभ्यां ।

पद्मां प्रिया या नलिनोपमाभ्यां मूर्ध्ना भयान्नाम ननाम नन्दः ॥४/१७॥ सौन्दरानन्द (Johnston 1975: Canto IV, verse 17)

Her lotus-like feet, which were girt with tremulous anklets and the toes of which gleamed with the brilliance of their nails... Saundarananda

Though head does not exist of this figurine, this elegantly dressed lady might be an embodiment of fashion of the bygone days. Her earrings, long, hanging necklace reaching her navel, her broad multi-layered girdle and heavy anklets seem quite popular in the contemporary society. Her right hand is stretched down while her left hand rests on her waist. It seems one of the popular poses in Sanskrit *kavyas* where beauties of the *nayikas* are depicted with much zeal.



Figure 9: Female figure, Terracotta, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, C. 1st century BCE, 8.7 cms X 6cms, CSMVS, TC 25

मसिणं चड;कम्मन्ती पए पए कुणइ कीस मुह-भड;गम्।
णूणं से मेहलिआ जहण-गअं छिवइ णह-वन्तिम् ।। ४६३ ।।

Why is she distorting her face while walking slowly stride by stride?

Actually (as she walks) her waistband is being rubbed against the nail marks on her buttocks.

This epitome of feminine beauty again repeats the pose of fig. 8. In this case, head is extant hence one is able to see her somewhat round face with tiny, pretty features, her hairstyle typical of those days is consist of beaded strings adorning her forehead with a large flower on the top of her head. Her large cylindrical earrings and necklaces are shown with much effort. Her thin waistline is embellished with a broad girdle, which seems to have shifted slightly. Her right hand is lying aside and a left hand rests on her waist, which gives her somewhat haughty appearance.

One would ask her:

तरलच्छि चन्द-वअणे थोर-त्थणि करिअरोरु तणु-मज्झे ।
दीहा ण समप्पइँ सिसिर-जामिणी कह णु दे माणो ॥ ९१८ ॥

Oh, high bosomed Beauty with moonlike (round) face, hazy (dreamy) eyes, slim waist and thighs like trunks of elephants, why this anger of yours when long night in the Shishira (autumn/ fall) is not yet over?

But someone like Ashvaghosha would admire her as:

mee nemenbmee नयनद्विरेफा पीनस्तनत्युन्नत पद्माकोशा... ॥ ४/४ ॥

A very lotus-pond in the shape of a woman with her laughter for the swans, her eyes for the bees and her swelling breasts for the uprising lotus buds...

as he describes Sundari in Saundarananda.

Such norms of ideal beauty were imbued in Indian society for generations. Ashvaghosha in his Buddhacharita praises the beauties as:

भावज्ञानेन हावेन चातुर्याद्रूपसम्पदा ।

स्त्रीणामेव च शक्ताः स्थ संरागे किं पुनर्नृणाम् ॥ ४/१२ ॥ (Chaudhary 1948: Canto IV, Verse 12)

Having knowledge of the sentiments, embellished with beauty and brain (intelligence), you have power even over women, concerning passion, why not (over) men. (means: certainly, you have more power over men)

Highly adorned woman in her full glory of youth was in fact thought of as an auspicious symbol. It was a sign of opulence and fertility. Often goddesses were also represented in this form suggesting their cultic significance in the realm of fecundity (Fig. 10).



Figure 10: Mother Goddess, Black Terracotta, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, 2nd century BCE, 23 cms X 10 cms, CSMVS, 67.1

मग्गु च्चिय अ-लहन्तो हारो पीणुन्नयाणं थणयाणम् ।
उब्बिम्बो भमइ उरे जउणा-णइ-फेण-पुज्ज व्व ॥ ९९९ ॥

As necklace of this high bosomed lady could not find the space between her two voluptuous breasts, just like foam floating on the waves of River Yamuna, it lies on the nipples of her breasts.

This female figurine in black terracotta might have served as prototype for depicting celebrated femininity in later years. Identified as mother goddess this hand-modelled lady is provided with a tiny parasol on her head emphasizing her divinity. Few protruding leaf-like patterns further embellish her heavy headdress. Beaded earrings, strings on her forehead, her necklaces and broad girdle all are suggested by small plaques in appliqué.



Figure 11: Mother Goddess, Black Terracotta, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, 2nd century BCE, 22 cms X 9.5 cms, CSMVS, TC 27

अण्णं लडहत्तणअं अण्णा चिअ काइ वत्तण-च्छया ।
सामा सामण्ण-पआवइओ रेह च्चिअ ण होइ ॥ ९६२ ॥

This dusky lady (Shyama) is indeed not pictured (created) by usual Prajapati (Brahma-the creator god). Her bright complexion and elegant slenderness too seem extraordinary!

The head of this female is pressed from a mould while her body is modeled by hands. Her face is oval and eyes are elongated. She is wearing a very elaborate headdress consisting of a number of rosettes bearing stamped dotted pattern, bordering her face and are attached to the Damaru-shaped earrings. They are partially covered probably by her tresses or ornaments. Her necklet has oval central piece with vertical incised lines. Another, little longer necklace with stamped rosettes has pendant fashioned in horse-shoe pattern. One more necklace reaching her navel is made of oval-shaped decorations with horizontal incisions. The pendant of this necklace also follows horse-shoe pattern. Three strings on each side are attached to this necklace and her girdle which is decorated with vertical incisions. She is wearing plain anklets. All ornaments are shown in appliqué. She is characterized with heavy breasts, slender waist and broad expansive hips, an ideal Mauryan female in alluring form.

Subtle sensuality was though more common in case of ancient Indian terracotta art there are no less examples of vigorous sexual depictions.



Figure 12: Mithuna, Terracotta, Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh, 1st century BCE, 13.2 cms X 6 cms, CSMVS, 66.22

जाओ सो वि विलक्खो मए वि हसिऊण माढमुवगूढो ।
पढमोसरिअस्स णिअंसणस्स गण्ठि विमग्गन्तो ॥ ३५१ ॥

As he was (hastily) trying to undo the knot of my garment (in the dark) that was in fact already slipped, he felt ashamed and I, while laughing, embraced him tightly.

This plaque shows couple kissing each other. Lady is embracing her lover while he touches her girdle (or garment?). Lady is decked with earrings, armlets, necklaces, girdle and anklets. Her hair bun is also prominently shown behind her head. The male is sporting a turban, necklace and armlets.

Ashvaghosha would have described it as:

कन्दर्परत्योरिव लक्ष्यभूतं प्रमोदनान्द्योरिव नीडभूतं ।
प्रहर्षतुष्टयोरिव पात्रभूतं द्वंद्वं सहारंस्त मदान्धभूतं ॥ ४/८ ॥ (Johnston 1975: Canto IV, verse 8)

The twain dallied blindly together, as if they were a target for the God of Love and Rati, or a nest to hold Delight and Joy or vessels for Pleasure and Satisfaction...

Saundarananda



Figure 13: Mithuna, Terracotta, Kaushambi, Uttar Pradesh, C. 1st century BCE, 5.6 cms X 6 cms, CSMVS, 81.4/10

अल्लिअइ दिट्टि-णिब्भच्छिओ वि विहुओ विलग्गए सिअए ।
पहओ वि चुम्बइ बला अ-लज्जए कह णु कुप्पिस्सम् ॥ ८९१ ॥

When I look with scornful glances he draws me closer, when I push him away he tries to snatch my garment, when spanked he forcefully kisses me! How can I be angry with this shameless person?
And what happens later?

माणोसहं व पिज्जइ पिआइ माणंसिणीअ दइअस्स ।
कर-संपुड-वलिउद्धाणणाइ मइराइ गण्डूसो ॥ २७० ॥

When her lover raised her mouth tenderly with his cupped fingers, the angry lady drank wine from his mouth as it was medicine on her anger.

This is yet another plaque depicting amorous couple kissing each other. Male touches her girdle and her head with his hands. Her narrow waist is accentuated by the extensive portion below her waistline.

In ancient India *prajotpadana* or procreation was considered sacred and essential duty of *grihastha*, the householder. The images of *mithuna* suggesting fertility were always considered auspicious and hence they were thought to be apotropaic, a charm or amulet for warding off evil. As symbol of procreation it stands for longevity or continuity and hence for eternal life, youth and vigour (Sengupta 2005: 58). In *Atharvaveda* also *mithuna* mark is used as a magical device to secure fertility (Keith 1995: 46).

Explicit representation of erotica is also not uncommon in ancient terracotta art. There are few plaques displaying couples copulating or *maithuna* (Figs. 12 and 13).

These erotic representations have sensuous as well as ritual significance the seeds of which go to the Vedas.

यन्ति । वा । एते । मिथुनात् । ये । संवत्सरम् ।
उपयन्ति । अन्तर्वेदी । मिथुनौ । सम । भवतः । तेन ।
एव । मिथुनात् । न । यन्ति ।

Yanti va ete Mithunad ye

Samvatsaram upayanti antahvedi
 Mithuno sam bhavatah teneiva
 Mithunannayanti (Rajwade 1976: 86) (*TaittiriyaSamhita* 7-5-10)

It means after observing *samvatsara satra*, that is celibacy for one year, in the end, if the *yajamana* or host see *mithuna* from *yajnavedi* or sacrificial altar it motivates him for copulation. It also suggests observing copulation was considered as aphrodisiac.

According to Arputha Rani Sengupta 'the symbolic scene (*mithuna*) reveals wide dispersion of shared belief in after life, in which provocative erotica immortalize hierogamy or sacred marriage. The ritual act indicates 'sowing of the seed' in an explicit manner so that the sensuous embrace transforms the votive plaque into 'garbhagriha' (*sanctum sanctorum*). Dr Devangana Desai put forward suggestion by D.H. Gordon that terracotta was used as votive offerings to the Mother goddess and her partner (Desai 1975: 14).

That was on sacred level but on mundane level also a possibility cannot be overruled that such *maithuna* plaques with perforations on the top were meant for hanging in the bedrooms of *nagaraka* or even of courtesans (Sengupta et al 2007: 146). The *Kama Sutra* also mentions that clay figurines were presented or shown by the *nagaraka* to his beloved (Desai 1975: 17). According to Prof. Naman Ahuja the more recent research on these erotic images shows that the angle of vision of the viewer of the plaques and the direction of the gaze of those depicted on the plaques actually reflect either a self-consciously narcissistic or, at other times, a voyeuristic gaze (Ahuja: 39, 45). In medieval Indian miniature paintings there are number of colourful illustrations of erotic poses commissioned by the royalty or nobility. 'Raja Shrinathji in Zenana' (CSMVS, 57.2) depicts the king enjoying intimate moments in harem. The painting is bordered by different erotic postures depicted in tiny compartments. Such depictions on the walls of royal bedchamber possibly had voyeuristic function. We can also assume that they might have worked as tools for sex education (Murals in the King's bedchamber of 16th century Mattancherry palace in Kerala have mythological figures engaged in love-making. I am grateful to my colleague Nilanjana Som for bringing it to my notice).

Such *maithuna* scenes are also elaborately pictured in terracotta art during early historical period. Here an example can be given of a plaque (Fig. 14) from Chandraketugarh where rather bold depiction of sexuality is found.



Figure 14: Erotic scene, Terracotta, Chandraketugarh, West Bengal, 1st century BCE- 1st century CE, 5 cms X 4.8 cms, Gift of Dr. Pratapaditya Pal, CSMVS, 96.2/4

चन्द-सरिसं मुहं से सरिसो अमिअस्स मुह-रसो तिस्सा ।
स-कअ-गह-रहसुज्जल-चुम्बणअं कस्स सरिसं से ॥ २१३ ॥

Her face is like a moon, taste of her lips is like *amrita* (elixir). What can be compared with the passionate kiss I had with my hand holding her by tresses?

This plaque shows a man advancing towards a woman and the woman is depicted seated with legs spread. Her full breasts are shown with much care even in this small plaque. Man is shown holding her head or her loosened hair with his left hand. He is holding something in his right hand not clearly visible.

Perhaps he is lovingly assuring her:

दइअ-कर-गह-लुलिओ धम्मिल्लो सीहु-गन्धिअं वअणम् ।
मअणम्मि एत्तिअं चिअ पसाहणं हरइ तरुणीणम् ॥ ५४४ ॥

During *kamakrida* or erotic sports, hair disheveled as held by (hand of) lover and mouth perfumed with wine are only embellishments of the maidens that attract the attention.

Another rectangular plaque (Fig. 15) from the same site seems to be depiction of sex orgy.

दट्ठण तरुण-सुरअं विविह-विलासेहिं करण-सोहिल्लम् ।
दीओ वि तग्गअ-मणो गअं पि तेल्लं ण लक्खेइ ॥ ५४७ ॥



Figure 15: Orgiastic scene, Terracotta, Chandraketugarh, West Bengal, 1st century BCE- 1st century CE, 7.5 cms X 6.2 cms, Gift of Dr. Pratapaditya Pal, CSMVS, 96.2/2

As was engrossed in viewing erotic sports of young lovers, full of different postures and passionate expressions, the lamp was oblivious to his finished oil.

This plaque shows a group of males and females seated or standing, showing their genitalia suggestive of orgy while a woman in the centre in *uttanapada* or birth giving posture is seated on the lap of a male in coitus act both rested on the back of a human figure on his four and head down, is peculiar. The nudity of other females and the *uttanapada* posture of at least three suggest it is orgiastic scene. Did this scene have some tantric association or ritualistic significance? *Kama Sutra* vividly describes such erotic congress hence they might have even secular context.

Lady in the centre is apparently performing *viparita sambhoga*:

सिंहि-पिच्छ-लुलिअ-केसे वेवन्तोरु बिणिमीलिअद्धच्छि ।

दर-पुरिसाइरि विसमिरि जाणसु पुरिसाणँ जं दुःखम् ॥ ५ २ ॥

Your hair are disheveled (looking) like peacock feathers, thighs are trembling, eyes are drowsy, you are so fatigued after taking for a while role of man (in the love sport), can you just imagine the men's pain (what efforts the men take)?

There is one more interesting plaque, rectangular in shape, depicting woman in curious act (Fig. 16).



Figure 16: Female figure, Terracotta, Chandraketugarh, , West Bengal, 1st century BCE- 1st century CE, 6.7 cms X 5.6 cms, Gift of Dr. Pratapaditya Pal, CSMVS, 96.2/3

कुसुममआ वि अइ-खरा अ-लद्ध-फंसा वि दूसह-पआवा ॥
भिन्दन्ता वि रइअरा कामस्स सरा बहु-विअप्पा ॥ ३ २ ६ ॥

Made of flowers and yet extremely sharp, cannot be touched still unbearable (causing unbearable pain), great fighter (or conqueror), piercing yet generating love- so varied are the arrows of the God of Love.

Seated in *uttanapada* posture a woman who is depicted in remarkable detail, is inserting some arrow like object or plant in her genitalia with her right hand. Her hair is arranged in a bun and she wears circular earrings. Though the exact purpose of this plaque remains unclear apparently, it is a depiction of auto- eroticism.

Artificial aids to promote sexual pleasure have been known since a long time in India. Some people resorted to the use of aphrodisiacs and others made use of artificial aids. Vatsyayana enumerates *tarka karma* as a *kala* wherein proficiency was essential for a successful and popular *nagaraka*. It is explained by commentator as '*apadravya*'. He has laid down that there should be a separate room for preparing artificial aids in the house of *nagaraka* (Upadhyaya 1974: 82). Interestingly Vatsyayana has mentioned homosexual women who indulge in sexual practices with the help of artificial aids. They may be indulging in auto-eroticism by means of such aids. Vatsyayana has mentioned that males in the absence of females for the sexual act, experience auto-eroticism with *viyoni*, *vijati*, figures of females and by *upamardana*. The females practiced auto-eroticism by using '*kanda*', *aluka*, *kadali*, *mula*-root of *tala*, *ketaki*, *fala*- *alabu*, *karkati* (Upadhyaya 1974: 43). It is open secret that the life in harem for any lady was uncertain totally dependent on whims of her lord whose admiration for her would change like waxing and waning of the moon.

Nonetheless, this plaque might have another aspect also- a religious aspect. According to Dr. Pratapaditya Pal 'the woman is extracting an ear of paddy from her sex organ. She could be the fertility goddess behind the concept of Devi as Shakambhari (Pal 1987: 141). On mundane level the plaque displays erotica, on a ritual or symbolic level, according to him, it would have been buoyed in the field to improve fertility. All over north India, farmers are known to copulate on the field to improve fertility and as a substitute; they could have inserted such plaques symbolically. It is quite convincing (email correspondence).

However, apart from the above mentioned there are numerous other terracotta plaques from Chandraketurgarh projecting different sexual positions. From plain, old missionary position, we have plaques depicting coitus from behind, partners standing side-by-side, bestiality, auto- eroticism and others (Sengupta et al 2007: 140, 151). Was this variety considered just for ritualistic purpose?

The *Shilpashastras*, *Vastushastras* and other authoritative text embodying rules of sculpture and architecture written after the Gupta period refer to the portrayal of erotic figures on doors and other architectural parts of religious monuments (Desai 1975: 1). The ancient norms of sexuality were indeed devoid of modern morals and concept of sin attached to it. These depictions on the mass-produced terracotta plaques of sensuality and sexual activities in ancient Indian art should not be judged by the modern norms. The precise idea behind this mass production of erotic scenes is unknown but their availability on such a large scale is testament to their popularity. Is it possible that the artists- artisans tried to cater to the needs of different strata of society? If it was so no wonder cheap and plastic material like baked clay was selected medium for this popular art. Even if religious or ritualistic purpose is accepted behind their creation, they interestingly reflect private aspect of social life in ancient India.

Vatsyayana echoes the earthy/ practical Indians who gave *kama* or sensual/ sexual pleasures due importance:

The pleasures of *kama* are as essential for the proper maintenance of the human body as is food. Moreover, they take their very roots in *dharma* and *artha* (Upadhyaya 1974: 74).

Thus it can be said that the importance given to sensuality and sexuality by ancient Indians is mirrored in the field of art especially terracotta art, literature and other aspects of Indian society during early historical period.

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