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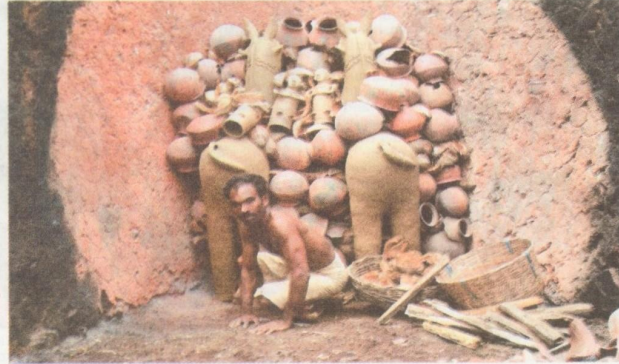
## The art in offerings

TERRACOTA OFFERINGS ARE MADE TO A VILLAGE DEITY IN TAMIL NADU, REPORTS KISHORI SUD



Worshipped predominantly in Tamil Nadu, is a village god, Lord Ayyanar. He is primarily worshipped as a guardian deity, who protects the rural villages. Ayyanar worship is a very ancient ancestral clan-based worship system linked to nature and fertility worship. The festivals of Ayyanars are celebrated in Sacred Groves during spring season by all the related clan. The Ayyanar shrines are usually located at the peripheries or boundaries of rural villages and the deity is seen riding a horse. Interestingly, this horse and the offerings made to the Lord are all Terracotta. Presented to the God each year, these offerings are made to assure protection and well-being of the villagers, the families, cattle and their harvest. The life-size terracotta horses look bright and alive due to the colourful eyes, and other features.

IGNCA (Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts) held an exhibition titled "From Earth



To Earth" displaying this devotion and the terracotta offerings in Tamil Nadu, which have been beautifully photographed by Julie Wayne. This festival is of most importance to the Tamil potters, who belong to the Velar jati and their ancestral ties to Ayyanar is such that the head potter has priestly functions during the course of the festival.

Along with the life-sized offerings which are often horses and cows, the potters also create a few hundred smaller statues of cows, devotees and dogs. The potters put in all their effort, burning the midnight oil at times for more than five weeks just before the festival, kneading, stamping, smoothening the clay surfaces and then the completed statue is left to dry for a week. The villages have make-shift ovens which is the method of firing like that of a tandoor. In the end, after

the completion of all processes, the statue is then primed with lime whitewash and finally the paint is applied.

The photographs by Wayne do not really need much of description. Visually explaining step by step, the hard-work and queer-ness of the customs in the festival, the photographs have an impact one cannot forget so easily. The colours, the story behind the pictures is in a way educating enough for people to know, what we still are not aware of in the context of art and culture in parts of our country. The roles of sambrani (resin smoke), garlands of flowers, copper paduka (sandals) and a rooster are very important in these rituals and offerings, which some may find a bit disturbing. Conclusively, the exhibition is a pure, transparent display of the art of Terracotta and the level of devotion of the potters of Tamil Nadu.