

ITP 2014

Exhibition Projects

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Country:

INDIA

Project title:

" SHELL BANGLES OF BENGALI
SHANKHA, SYMBOL AND SOCIETY "

Date: 01/ September / 2014

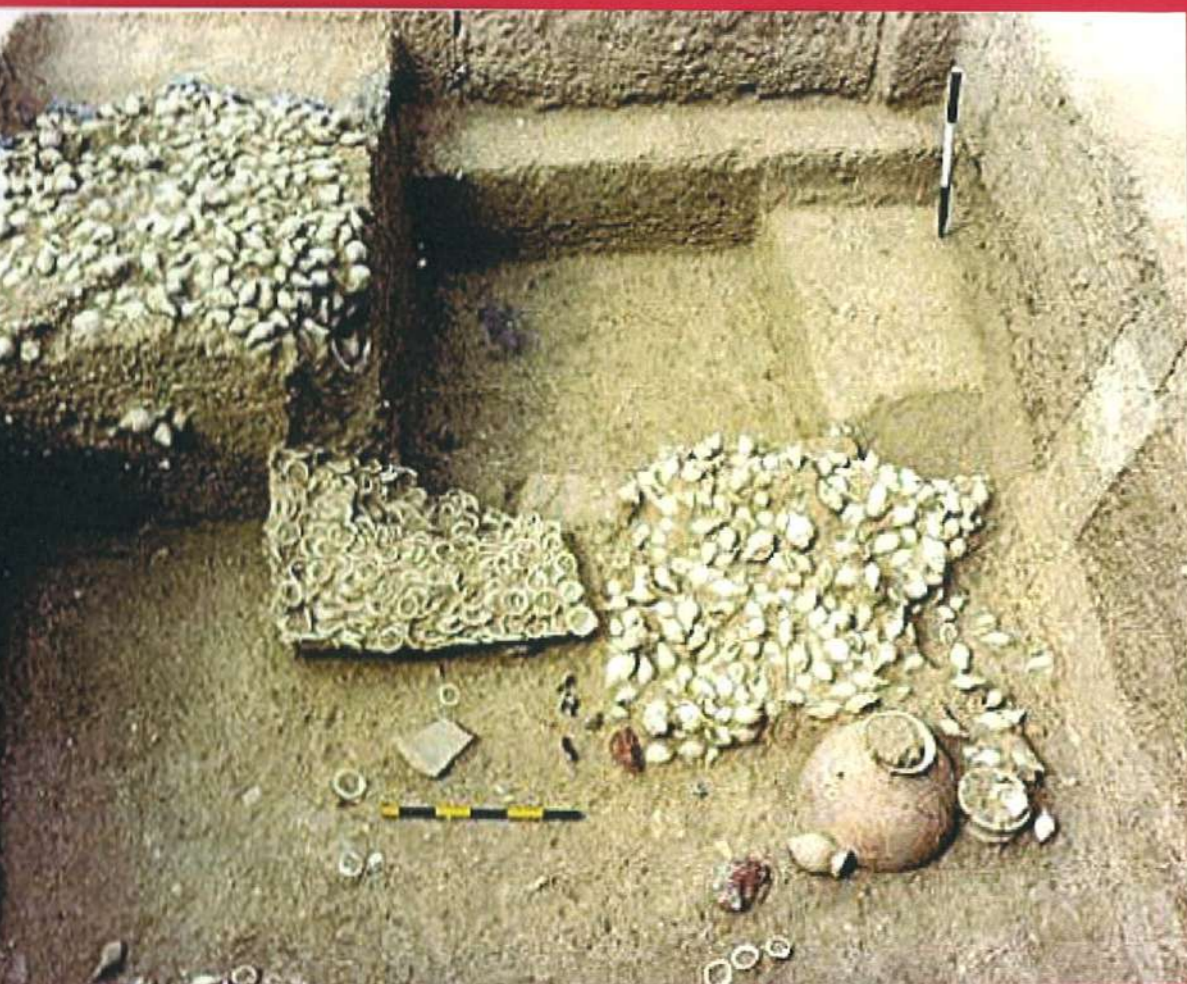


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Shell bangles of Bengal: Shankha , Symbol and Society

Symbols are powerful expressions of human culture. In India wearing the symbols of marriage supports tradition and customs. Every region of India has symbols of marriage for women. Shell bangles known as *shankha* are such a symbol for the women of Bengal. Hindu Bengali women wear certain symbols of marriage, such as *shakha*, *pola*, *loha* and *sindoor*. *Shankha* are white bangles of conch-shell and *pola* are red bangles made of red corals. *Shankha* and *pola* are worn together in both the hands. *Loha* is an iron bangle and a mandatory symbol for married Bengali woman.



SHANKHA: HISTORICAL LEGACY

Shell bangles have been worn by Indian women for about 5000 years. They were excavated from various sites of the Harappan Civilisation. The skeleton of an elderly female excavated in Rakhigarhi site was found with shell bangles in her hand. Shell bangles were amongst the most prolific finds in Surkotada site. The bangles found at Surkotada have geometrical patterns as well as channeled patterns on them. Clank shell which is abundantly available along the Kathiawar coast (modern Gujarat region) was collected and made into remarkable ornaments.

TRADITIONS AND RITUALS

Shankha and *pola* are worn on both wrists. Within the first year of the marriage, they should not break. Should a bangle break then it is considered to be a bad omen for the married life of the bride.

Traditional Hindu Bengali weddings starts at dusk, according to the sacred time prescribed by the Hindu priest. On the morning of the wedding day, the mother of the bride presents the *shankha* and the *pola* to the bride so that she can wear them. *Sindoor* (vermillion) is smeared on the parting of the bride's hair by the bridegroom, during the wedding ceremony. The *loha* bangle is gifted by the mother-in-law to the bride when she enters her new home.





THE DEVOTEE AND THE GODDESS MAA DURGA

Maa Durga - The divine mother arrives in the mortal world every year and her idol is worshipped by the devotees for five days. This festival known as Durga puja is the most important event in the Bengali calendar. The idol of Mother Durga is adorned with symbols of marriage (*sindoor*, *shankha* and *pola*) just like her female devotees. These manifestations of marital symbols on the goddess provide a deep connection between the goddess and the female devotees.







MARATHI MEE
2013
dwarak, oct. 9-14















Shankha bangle

Shell

Bengal, India, or Bangladesh

19th century

This is a pair of ritualistic bangles. They are made out of shell and worn after marriage particularly by the women of Bengal.

As1972,Q.554.c-d

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Handling sessions: Visitors handle *shankha* to obtain a feel of the object. Both shell and plastic *shankha* will be handled.

Film screenings: Documentaries on wedding rituals and festivals of Bengal or films from Bengal in which the traditions of wearing marriage symbols and related social impacts have been highlighted .

Crafts workshops: traditional craftsmen from West Bengal demonstrates *shankha* making techniques

Lectures and talks: On topics like culture, symbols and continuity in different societies

Community involvement with the Bengali diaspora to share their own experiences with *shankha* in India as well as in the UK

Performances of Bengali music or dance

SHANKHA: PRODUCTION

A documentary showing the technique of producing *shankha* .

SHANKHA : A DYING TRADITION ?

Discussed through series of interviews with the community

- Rising prices
- Impractical adornment for modern working women
- General loss of interest in *shankha*
- Dwindling number of *shankha* craftsmen

SPACE AND DESIGN ORIENTATION

The exhibition space will be circular as to symbolize the circumference of the shell bangle. The object will be placed in the center on an eye level pedestal. Black mannequin hands will be placed on the pedestal and those hands will be wearing the shell bangles. As shell bangle is easily breakable so the pedestal will be glass covered for protection. The pedestal will also will be round in shape and the encircling space will have 9 sections

1. The object will be in the center of the circular room.
2. First section will have introduction panel for the exhibition with text and pictures
3. Second section will have panels with picture an text to show the historical legacy
4. Third section will show the traditions and rituals associated with the shell bangles through film clippings as well as pictures
5. Fourth section will have pictures and text to show the connection between the Divine mother Durga with the devotees, particularly the females
6. Fourth section will show the production technique of shell bangles through a short (approx 4 minutes) documentary film and also through pictures and text.
7. Sixth section will show the challenges facing the *shankha* tradition. Series of interviews of the craftsmen and the women from the Bengali community of different age groups and various socio- economic backgrounds.
8. The seventh section will have an activity area. Visitors can try and experience the bangles. The table will have both varieties. The recent plastic *shankhas* and the real shell *shankhas* to experience the difference.
9. Beside the exit door there will be a panel giving the details and timings of the various events and activities related to the exhibition.

COLOUR SCHEME

The exhibition space will have red and white colour scheme so as to symbolize the ritualistic combination of white *shankha* and red *pola*. The text panels will be in red with white text on them. The exhibition space can use traditional white *shola* patterns and soft wedding *sehnai* music could be played in the background to enhance the ambience.

