

Abstract No 13

Theories mentioned in Sanskrit crafts literature regarding the manufacture of spittoons

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Ancient spittoons and chunam boxes are exceptional metal creations. Their exceptionality is due to their being manufactured with special skills. Such knowledge was transmitted to the workers concerned through Sanskrit literature on crafts. One theory about spittoons is that its mouth's diameter should be one third the height of the entire object. Two-thirds of that height should form the space area of the spittoon bottom. The remaining one-third should form the base of the spittoon. This indicates that the width of the base is half that of the mouth of the spittoon. Another theory is the following. Should the diameter of the spittoon mouth be divided into five parts, the total height of the spittoon would consist of three such parts. Two of the three such parts would contain the body of the spittoon. One of these parts would form its base. The width of the base mouth is the equivalent of one part of the mouth width of the spittoon. The shape of the spittoon mouth is that the lotus flower. There are two types of spittoons. The first is relatively long. The other is relatively short. The discovery of the manner in which above mentioned theories have influenced the manufacture of spittoons forms the subject of this research. Another purpose of this research is the making known of these theories to modern manufacturers of such artefacts. In the course of this research the national museums of Colombo, Kandy, the Martin Wickremasinghe peoples' museum, as well as spittoons still in the possession of ancient families were subjected to examination. The theories under consideration are only relevant as regards the short version of the spittoon. Although the lotus form is the predominant shape of classical spittoons, there are however other variants as well. It must be mentioned that the present day flower vases came into being through the popularization of spittoons. Spittoons manufactured by modern skilled workers lack the qualities of the ancient ones. Making the modern manufacturers aware of these ancient artifacts would influence them to a greater imitation of the classical types.

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