

Vessels of the Past

How DakshinaChithra preserves South Indian kitchen heritage

DakshinaChitra is a living heritage museum that preserves the culture, lifestyle, and traditions of South India. One of the most important parts of traditional life is the kitchen. The vessels used in olden days show how people cooked, stored food, fetched water, and lived with nature.

During my visit, I captured images of traditional vessels from the four South Indian states to explore their uses and cultural significance.



In olden days, vessels symbolized health, purity, and family tradition. According to reports in The Hindu and The Times of India note that brass, copper, stone, and clay vessels kept food fresh and nutritious, making them suitable for daily use. These vessels reflected a family's culture and were passed down through generations. Today, museums like DakshinaChitra help preserve this valuable heritage.

Tamil Nadu House

People cooked on firewood stoves, using iron dosa tawas, stone kalchatti, and brass sombus for water. Ural and Ulakkai were used every morning to grind spices, creating a familiar sound in village households.



Brass water pot: Keeps drinking water cool and fresh naturally.

Brass sombu: Used daily to store and serve drinking water.

Metal grain storage container: Protects grains from moisture and pests.

Stone kalchatti: Ideal for slow cooking traditional curries.

Ural and ulakkai: Used to grind fresh spices by hand.

Kerala House

Kerala kitchens used brass Urulis for payasam, clay pots for fish curry, and coconut scrapers for preparing fresh coconut. These vessels gave Malayali dishes their rich aroma and taste.



Uruli: Large brass vessel used for cooking festive and special dishes.

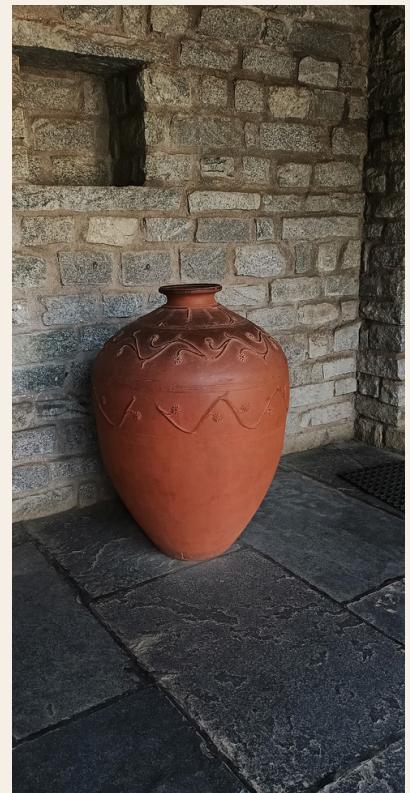
Coconut Scraper: Traditional tool used to scrape fresh coconut daily.

Clay Pot: Commonly used for preparing fish curry.

Fish Curry Vessel: Enhances the taste and aroma of seafood dishes.

Andhra Pradesh House

Andhra kitchens used red clay pots for spicy curries, large vessels for festival cooking, and strong mortars and pestles for grinding fresh masalas. Spice boxes stored chilli powder, turmeric, and other podis.



Red Clay Pot: Used for slow-cooking spicy curries.

Spice Box: Stores daily spices used in cooking.

Boiling Pot: Large vessel used for cooking food in bulk.

Mortar & Pestle: Used to crush and grind fresh spices.

Karnataka House

Karnataka homes used copper water pots, wooden boxes for grains, and iron kadais for cooking. Tools for making ragi rotti were essential in their daily meals.



Copper Pot: Used to store drinking water believed to stay pure.

Rotti Tools: Traditional tools used to prepare ragi rotti.

Iron Kadai: Used for frying and cooking everyday curries.

Rice Storage Box: Wooden box used to store grains after harvest.

They were made from natural materials like stone, clay, brass, and copper.
Food tasted better and stayed healthy.
Each vessel was designed based on local climate and culture.
Families passed these vessels from one generation to the next.

These vessels were not just objects — they were part of people's daily routine, festivals, cooking traditions, and memories.



My visit to DakshinaChitra helped me understand the deep connection between vessels and culture. Each State's kitchen shows how people lived, cooked, shared food, and built traditions. Through this photo essay, I captured not just vessels, but the story of South Indian heritage.