



Project 2: Conversations with Clay | Sakshi Gambhir | IDC

Approval sheet

This Project Report entitled 'Conversations with Clay' by Sakshi Gambhir (08625006) is approved towards partial fulfillment of the requirements for the post graduate degree of Master of Design in Visual Communication.

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Declaration

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/ data/ fact/ source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

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Project 2: Conversations with Clay

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
the degree of Master of Design

By
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Abstract

I love clay. In it I feel seeds of growth that I can nurture with my hands. Pots are like babies and pottery a bliss. Every pot is a projection of my self but it has a language that is beyond the grammar of written words. It is like a conversation that happens between clay and fingers, the former almost commanding the latter how to move in a certain rhythm and create the form. It is challenging yet simple, it is primordial yet playful, it is formless but creates the form and it is full of surprises.

Goals for the current project:

- * To demonstrate the ability to create a set of identical pots to the extent to which the effortless ease of production pottery has been internalized.
- * To evolve my own aesthetics of form and glazing.
- * To develop a clarity with regards to repositioning of a craft.
- * To explore pot-making.
- * To follow the bliss.



Introduction

Who knew a two day weekend workshop at IDC and a month long summer internship in pottery would spark off an undying interest in a craft I never thought of pursuing before. It has been my state of mind ever since and I guess one could call it an obsession now. I knew during the internship that I could work with clay and turn pots for all my life. It is like finding a calling. Some people spend their lives to figure out, I feel blessed to have found it atleast.

It had been six years of staring at the computer screen (two years of computer science at school and four years of graduation at college) and I knew I didn't want to do that anymore. I was bored of sitting at one place in front of a box. My project this semester certainly had to do with 'doing' things, going out there away from the computer, working with hands, shaping something.

I do not intend to negate the use of machines at all but no machine can compare with a person's hands. Machinery gives speed and precision but it cannot give creativity and freedom. There is a certain homogeneity

and universality about the products that the machine produces in contrast to the works done by hand; each one unique, distinct and special. As Soetsu Yanagi rightly puts it:

"There is something so basic, so natural in the hand that the urge to utilize its power will always make itself felt. Moreover, the chief characteristic of handcrafts is that they maintain by their very nature a direct link with the human heart, so that the work always partakes of a human quality."

Certainly, it looks simple from a distance but when you are at it do you realize that it is not a cakewalk. No craft is easy. All of them require that extra push to finish things to their last detail. It takes years of practice and dedication to make a few hundred pots daily. I am aware of the fact that it doesn't happen in a day and one has to constantly keep at it with a lot of concentration, patience and dedication. This project is an attempt to improvise that skill of the hand, turn more pots, learn the basics again and evolve.



Pottery in India

Among the various media chosen by man for expressing his joy through art, music or literature, soft and malleable clay has been one. Nimble fingers mould the most beautiful form and expression and reflect man's aesthetics. A piece of pottery has a visual message in its form, texture and color. Pottery has often been called the lyric of handicrafts.

Like all other handicrafts and crafts, the tradition of pottery in India is very old. Ancient pottery speaks volumes about our civilization. Being an agricultural country, pots for storage of water and grains were in demand. The real beginning of Indian pottery began with the Indus valley civilization. At that time, the potter's place was quite an important one in society. The craft was well advanced. Rectangular oven for firing the products were in use. Seals and containers were made that were put to use effectively.

India is home to more than a million potters. Different regions of India have different and distinct character that reflects in the artworks. There is an astounding variety of shapes, sizes and designs - depending upon the location of its creation. The diversity of Indian handicrafts is all so much evident in its pottery traditions. Be it Bengal and terracotta, Rajasthan and blue pottery, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat - every Indian state is special in its traditions of pottery. The pretty, unglazed Kumbha matkas (water pots of clay), piled high in various cities across the country are usually made with locally available clay.

According to a Hindu legend, the first pot was made to store amrit (the nectar of immortality) thrown up during the great churning of ocean. Thus the Kumbhas, the name also given to the potters' community, were held in high esteem.

Chapter 1: Kick-start

The first few months of the project, I read books on pottery and crafts, saw works of various potters (online and offline) in India and abroad, tried putting together a collection of pictures of works that I like more over the others. It is important to know one's aesthetics and likings. There is a strong instinct in each one of us that makes us like certain things and not all. I'm trying to understand that though I may not be able to articulate it precisely in words. It doesn't happen overnight but I am making a conscious effort to realize it.

I clearly remember the day when Professor Mohanty called me and said if I could reach Fabindia store in Powai that point of time. I rushed there to see him waiting, holding two vases in his hands, ready to be bought. He asked me what I thought about those, in general. I took both in my hands, held them for a while and I knew I liked (rather loved) one of them and not the other. Sir liked the one I did not. That is what I mean. Each one of us has a certain kind of liking with which one relates. It could be because of form, color, texture, glaze, anything. It is like an invisible wire laid out between you and the pot. It connects.

Very little throwing (on the wheel) but most of the field visits happened during this time of the project. To practise a craft, one has to understand the set up he/ she is working in and the kind of work that has already been produced. I have gone to meet and talk to traditional and studio potters to get a sense of their environments and understand the set of variables (and parallels) for both.

There exist more traditional potters than studio potters in India. The scenarios for both are quite different. Traditional local potters usually work as a community and are involved in production pottery. Their work is identical and need based. They are less experimental and usually work with locally available clay. Their pots are not glazed at all because it is energy intensive. This could also be because of lack of resources. The chances of the latter are higher. Their production largely comprises of unglazed kulhars, matkas, ghadas, haandis, toys, dolls, wall hangings, lanterns and diyas. Interestingly, studio potters present quite a different picture. They work alone or in small groups and create unique items and pots in small quantities. They also

experiment with non functional and sculptural pottery. Their work is mostly glazed (they don't really mind their carbon footprint) and they explore possibilities of combining different types of clay. They choose to call themselves ceramic artists (no offense intended).

Studio potters visited during the project:

- * Meena Vohra (Studio 78, Noida)

- * Kavita Gupta (Thane, Mumbai)

Traditional potters communities visited:

- * Kumbharwada (Mumbai)
- * Chinhat (Lucknow)

A mix of studio and traditional potters work at:

- * Pandits (Kalakaar niwas, Mumbai)

13th - 16th October
2007
Solo Exhibition
←
Excellent show!
Good luck
Good health
All success



Studio 78 @ Noida

I went to D 78, Sector 21, Noida for the first ever time in the summer of 2009. I climbed up a floor to witness the most spectacular ceramic works stuck on the walls of the staircase. There were mosaics on the wall made by putting together broken pots in a spiral, few hand painted pots on small wooden planks, terracotta elephants close to the gamlas (planters), a huge carved wood wall hanging and a name plate that read the names of the couple. I went in to meet Meena Vohra, the studio potter I got my first hands on experience in pot making from. She is also Sheetal Vohra's mother. Sheetal is an IDC alumnus. Small world!

The living room was full of pots that she had turned over the years. No color missing, she had the entire range of blues, browns, greens, yellows, whites, blacks, pinks. You name it and you have it. Everywhere there were pots - bowls, platters, kettles, cups and lots of vases. Tastefully done a room, it had energy about it; like a mirror that simply reflected her passion for the craft. Pottery is not just an art form, it is a therapy for the AIFACS awardee. She believes it is never too late to learn. She had her first brush with clay at the age of 50.

She has had a journey through its realms and has carved a niche for herself. She had been a school teacher for thirteen years but was always interested in art. After raising her kids, she decided she would do pottery when she got the time. One fine day she didn't go to school and bought a wheel instead. She hasn't received much formal training because she didn't want to adopt any particular style.

Without too much initial investment, her Studio is now equipped with two potters' wheels (kick wheels), a gas kiln, custom glazes (stocked in every possible corner of the studio, I think I counted 35 different colors when I went last), half a dozen boxes of tools and lots of enthusiasm! "Its divine. It is very close to life. It teaches you determination, patience, detachment, dedication and develops an eye for beauty. The satisfaction you derive out of holding the 3D pot you create, the sheer joy of feeling it is immense", says Aunty.

I did my summer internship under her and got a hang of being at a wheel, working with a material I had not handled before. The duration was one month but I

didn't realize how time flew by. The second time I visited her recently during the course of this project. It was nostalgic. I went to the Studio, spent the entire day at the wheel, spoke to her for hours, discussed my project ideas, heard from her what she was doing for her Diwali

range of pots and the All India Potters' Exhibition to be held end of this year. It was an interesting exchange of ideas. I made a lot of notes in my diary. It was only a weekend visit. Monday morning I was back to the campus to sign attendance and get started with classes.

Biologist turned potter @ Thane

It wasn't me alone visiting a potter this time. There were four of us from IDC - Professor Mohanty, Ujjwal, Somya and me. We took the local train to Thane with chips, drinks and newspaper in my bag. After getting off at the station, we took two auto rickshaws to Dr. Kavita Gupta's house. It was in a lush green locality. Monsoon it was.

Taking the elevator to the sixth floor, we entered her house. It was an average size, the sorts you usually find in Bombay due to space crunch. We sat in the living room on a low couch facing a huge window. Dr. Gupta served us orange juice and we had started bombarding her with questions already. Her husband and daughter kept giving glimpses of themselves from time to time.

Dr. Gupta hails from a small city in India. She was always interested in painting and arts. She had studied

biology and was in a decent job when she decided to quit and make pots. She has a loft (connected from the living room by an open staircase made of concrete and covered with wood) that she has converted into her little studio housing a wheel and a small kiln. Packs of clay were stored under the wooden seating area in the living room. We felt a little weird when she told us that. It was like sitting on clay, literally!

She showed pictures of her pots and Ganpati sculptures, took us around her studio and discussed her approach towards work. We spent couple of hours listening to her stories of first encounter with the material and an exhibition of hers that had happened recently. She was also quite keen to know about the ceramics studio at our department and what students were up to. It was quite an interesting exchange of ideas.



A day not wasted @ Kumbharwada

'It seems like Hong Kong', exclaimed Prof. Mohanty seeing the expanse of the 'swine flu clean' expressway on our way to Sion in a fresh-out-of-the-oven-autorickshaw. The autowalla bragged off his new TVS noiseless rick when we told him 'Bhaisaab bohot badhiya auto hai'. It was a smooth joyride. I carried my camera and lots of enthusiasm for my first visit to the place.

We hit Kumbharwada and met Yusuf, a potter who showed us around the place. The first glimpse of an old traditional potter is the one that is still clearly etched in my mind and shall always be. He's been making pots for quite some time now and works on a 'chaak', hand rotated wheel. He makes not dozens but a few hundred pots daily. Sheer delight to see him work at jetspeed. While he does this outside his household, his wife sits in the aangan to make a spout in each of the leatherhard pots he would have made only couple of hours earlier. Yusuf took us around to show huge kilns, foot kneading, several households that made different types of pots. Dozens, hundreds and thousands of those, each day.

Later, he also made us meet his brother Haneef and his father who have a pottery studio of their own. We climbed a flight of totally spooky stairs to get there, but it was all so worth it. A hundred stoneware pots around you, identical, each one picture perfect.

Completely awed by this already, we walked further to Bhimji's studio. Saw very interesting, occasion-specific production of pots including matkas for kulfi, diyas for diwali, ghadaas for puja. We spent some decent amount of time here and decided we wanted to take some pots back with us for the ceramics studio. Bhimji agreed and very graciously gave four of his ravishing pots to us. Three fourth the height of me, each one of those pots talked; talked of the effort gone into making them, the astonishing simplicity about them, the grace with which they stood, tall. While these were being loaded and bound to the cab seat, we grabbed chai. Though it was a little too sweet, it was good for a starving stomach. Having finished that, we left for coming back to the campus, to unload the pots at the department and see them make magic, as it was in Kumbharwada.

Chinhat charms

Not very advertised a place, Chinhat is located at the outskirts of Lucknow and is a must visit for all pottery lovers. I have been there a few times to shoot pictures, grab videos and talk to potters but I'm fond of the place for a reason other than that. I have been born and brought up in the same city. There's an inviting air about the place, a positive energy, a down-to-earth attitude, a charm that casts a spell.

I have visited a few traditional potters residing in the area before but this time there were fewer potters at work than usual. I gathered from the ones who were there that monsoon is a dull season for production as there is a problem of drying and storage. I walked, walked and walked; from house to house, passing by several bhattis, areas for drying 'kacche' (leatherhard) pots in the sun, local shops and more potteries without its potters.

Basic and small, the potteries here churn out attractive planters, bowls, tea sets, mugs, vases and dinner sets round the year. The production picks pace around Diwali and most of it gets exported. Terracotta and

stoneware clays both are used and usually the pots are left unglazed. Dozens of P.O.P. moulds of bonsai planters and lanterns can be spotted in these tiny households. Slip-casting is a favored technique but that doesn't mean that the potters leave it at that. They spend ample time in fussy detailing of the pots. Each one is touched up for faults if there are any. It is all so natural that it begins to seem almost effortless at that. The potters work on hand rotated wheels during the day, with natural light blessing their pots, unlike most studio potters who have electricity twenty four - seven to their advantage.

Simply dressed, the men and women potters here equal each other in number (almost) and match in skill. Production happens with collaboration and most importantly they enjoy what they're doing. Extremely approachable, these potters are not insecure about their craft or craftsmanship.

The unglazed pots usually get sold in and around Chinhat or exported whereas most of the glazed pots that are sold in the area are outsourced from Khurja,

the ceramics city of India. These are mostly tableware and are glazed in bright colors. Brilliant blues, glorious greens, cheerful yellows and refreshing oranges are the favored colors. Unique patterns are hand painted

too. These are microwave-proof and Mom loves picking up a few dishes everytime for her kitchen. I bagged a few vases and soap dishes too, but came back with an everlasting memory of the pots still unpossessed.

Pandits @ Kalakaar niwas

It took me a hundred minutes from campus to hit Bhayander station. Fighting my way in and out of steaming mahila dibbas (of the local trains), I got pushed out where I intended to get off anyway. I took an autorickshaw from the station to Kalakaar niwas but two men jumped in it too. I liked the fact that it was a shared rick unlike other places in the city where one enthrones the auto like a maharaja, but what I did not like was the proximity of one of them. He was the typical touchy sorts (read: shady). I tried to give him looks but when he didn't take the hint I told him to keep away.

It wasn't too long before I saw a painted metal board reading Pandit ceramic arts at the start of a narrow gully. Dehydrated but relieved, I got off the rick and rushed in to find my way to the people and place I had wanted to visit for so long. The first hint of human habitation of the place was given by a kumbhar who was slipcasting a pot in the aangan. He told me to enter from the front gate. I did so, to be welcomed by a man in spotted white clothes. He was instructing the kumbhars on how to do something they're brilliant at, better.

Panditji didn't speak much but warmly showed around the studio cum home, full of tens of thousands of pots, with his wife Devkiji, clad in a grey cotton sari who didn't talk much either. After a quick chakkar of the three storied niwas which had stocks of their most selling item and USP - bonsai - I stood at the ground floor staring at a huge kiln which rolled out on wheels to be loaded. Everyone was going about their jobs diligently and I looked on, completely intimidated by the size of the kiln, feeling small. As if someone read my mind right then, I heard a voice from behind me asking 'Big kiln isn't it?' and I turned around to be greeted by Abhay Pandit, Panditji's elder son. He introduced himself and so did I. He spoke at great length explaining minute details of the pots and processes and kept appreciating his 'Pappa's' efforts into building all this up for over forty years.

Taking me around to show some of his studio pottery, he introduced me to his wife Khushboo and younger brother Sailesh. While Abhay concentrates on the form of the pot, Khushboo works out the fine detailing that goes on it. Sailesh isn't interested in doing pottery right now.

Khushboo showed some of her absolutely gorgeous pots, stark and confident black strokes achieved by controlled smoke firing (a technique that the couple knew before but perfected in UK recently). Abhay's work is strongly graphic (he has a fine arts background), inspired from absolutely anything in nature. Visual abstraction of landscapes, waves, corals, rocks and sun can be noticed in a lot of his pots. Flipping through some of their catalogs and holding some of the pots to feel them, I was served tea in an astonishing turquoise - choco brown glazed cup. The tea tasted different. I think I drank along with it the sweat, dedication and energy gone into making that one cup, perfect. Sailesh

showed a potpourri of pots that were kept in the living room. These included works of renowned Indian and international potters, each one signed and dated.

I was in a completely different zone. A sense of lightness prevailed, like the feeling of being blessed. Hours had passed already. I had consumed quite a great deal of their time and didn't want to bother them more by encroaching on their routine. I left from the Pandits' thanking them for having spared so much time for me; came back without any pictures in the camera (but ofcourse in the brain's memory card) and that was the beauty of it.



Chapter 2: Invisible gains

I love clay but there is something about working with it that is inexplicable. It's a language of the material that is beyond the grammar of written words. You can't just think you've made pots by seeing a potter do it. It seems very simple from a distance; which I agree, has its own charm and a jaw-dropping bewilderment but you have to experience it yourself to believe what I'm talking about. It's a feeling of complete immersion where each process gives a high.

This craft and its material present a range of surprising contrasts - it is challenging yet simple, it is primordial yet playful, it is formless but creates the form and most importantly, it is full of surprises. Sometimes the results are absolutely unpredictable, which is what makes it really fascinating.

The only memory I have of clay from my childhood is of plasticine (colored clay) that we got in primary school to make miniature animals of. I enjoyed 'making' things since that age. I have always liked the feel of materials. I appreciate tactility. It is addictive. The more you work with them, the more you want to. There's this playfulness

about doing things with the hand. It is almost like focusing all energy of existence into the fingers that make magic, and that cannot be conscious but natural. A conversation happens between the clay and your fingers, the former almost commanding the latter how to move in a certain rhythm and create the form. Once this channel of communication gets established, you begin to understand a little bit of the language of the material and enjoy it. When that happens for me, the mind stabilizes. Restlessness fades away. The world ceases to exist. Calm spreads. I hear music in a deafening silence, see colors in clay and feel seeds of growth between my hands that I nurture. Pots are babies. Pottery is bliss.

The pot is a projection of the potter. It is a convergence of his thoughts, feelings and way of seeing. Daniel Rhodes has written in his book *Pottery Form*, "To find reality in one's work, to project honestly into it, is to become centered. Forms grow with the person." I couldn't agree more. He further writes:

"Pottery making is shaping of material, a postulation of form, an actualization of dreams which can occur in a

natural way without an undue challenge to the ego. It is not pretentious. Its commitments have to do with right making more than with exhibitionism.”

The charm about pot-making is that they suggest something beyond themselves. It is actually not just an activity but a basic self-reflective urge. It is an extension of inner being, a reflection of thoughts, a space for meditation. Pottery is peace. To talk more realistically and truly, the gains of pot making are invisible and intangible. It teaches a lot many things like focus, concentration, detachment, patience, devotion, balance... The list would go on. The gains are in terms of larger human values. These are not evident immediately or explicitly but take effect over time.

The memory of the incident when I first dissected a pot is still embedded in my mind. At IDC, I had done very little pottery before my summer internship. I don't think I made more than half a dozen pots till then (and those too as heavy as dumbles). The incident goes like - I was making a bottle-vase at Meena Vohra's studio and I had

got it quite right. The wedging, centering, throwing, contours, everything. I was happy with it. It was the first vase I had made and I was getting attached to it. That same time Aunty walks into the studio and says, “Let us dissect whatever you've made today to see how thick you got the walls”. Ouch! It hurt. It hurt real bad that day; but I had learnt a lesson for a lifetime.

I think it would be quite appropriate to mention here the Japanese notion of beauty in imperfection. According to Japanese philosophy, such ideas are the precursors of modern deformation and free form. Both ideas - of imperfection as a stage on the way to perfection and of the rejection of perfection - are only relative. In this, there is neither acceptance nor rejection. Asymmetry is but a natural outcome of their state of mind, not the result of conscious choice. Their minds are free from any attachment to symmetry as well as asymmetry and they just go about their work without pretence. The deformation of their work is the natural result of nonchalance, free from any restriction. They are quite free from the conflict between the beautiful and the

ugly. Deformations are born, not made, unlike the kind of distortion that is current today. To quote from Yanagi's book *The Unknown Craftsman*:

"The precise and perfect carries no overtones, admits no freedom; the perfect is static and regulated, cold and hard. We in our human imperfections are repelled by the perfect, since everything is apparent from the start and there is no suggestion of the infinite. Beauty must have some room, must be associated with freedom. Freedom, indeed, is beauty. The love of the irregular is a sign of the basic quest for freedom."

Every time I read it, I find the thoughts more clear and teeming with meaning. As I absorb more meaning every time, it reflects in the work that I do in the studio. The thoughts grow on spirit. When I first started doing pottery, I was conscious to get everything from the wall to the rim perfect and symmetric, flawless. I used to repair the dent on the pots, get the rim back to perfect circle if it would have got distorted and spend copious amount of time pushing my ideas onto the pot. Slowly and gradually as I understand the deeper meaning of it, my process of pot-making too has less forceful about my notion of perfection, symmetry or form.



Chapter 3: Studio and work

At IDC, the ceramics studio is equipped with 2 electric wheels, a few prepared (and unprepared) glazes, a gas kiln, an electric kiln, buckets full of terracotta and stoneware clay, pottery tools and supplies, showcase windows exhibiting pottery works for years and a lot of fervor. Though it is shared between clay and P.O.P. workspaces, there is enough room to do what you want to do, however you want.

The initial period of the project comprised of just understanding the material and playing with it. I made a few hand built and wheel thrown pots but most of what I made, I chucked. It was only for practice and evolving the skill. Studio work also included sorting things at the workplace - recycling the clay, making test tiles, figuring out boxes full of age old chemicals that could be used for glaze experiments, allocating space for various stages of pots (fired, glazed, unfired, etc.) and cleaning up the studio. The basic idea behind all this obviously was tidying the space but apart from that the larger goal was to make the studio more inviting and full of energy.

A marked departure from my earlier pieces is evident in some of my current work. I can myself see an evolution and progress in terms of skill and treatment to form. The contours have got sharper, the walls thinner, the base better trimmed, the foot-ring more defined and the effort more patient. This has been possible because I limited my exploration to a few basic shapes like cups, cylinders and bowls; and practise just those. The idea was to not complicate the form for its sake and be at basics. I didn't loiter around making one off pieces throughout the course of the project. Once in a while, ofcourse, I did explore possibilities and experiment with form but largely I stuck to production practice and improvising my skill. I didn't want to drift from fundamental learning. Quite a few glazing experiments were done to understand the behavior of certain kinds of chemicals on stoneware body. Initially, tests were carried out on tiles. Later when there was better understanding of glaze application, pots were glaze-fired too. There has been learning in each throwing, glazing and firing. I shall discuss them one by one.



Clay

Clay differs from the inelastic earths and fine sand because of its ability, when wet with the proper amount of water, to form a cohesive mass and to retain its shape when molded. This quality is known as clay's plasticity. When heated to high temperatures, clay also partially melts, resulting in the tight, hard rock-like substance known as ceramic. The most common types of clay are earthenware, stoneware and porcelain. We use earthenware and stoneware at our studio (supplied by Sandeep Manchekar). I enjoy stoneware more.

Stoneware clays are plastic and are often grey when moist. Their fired colors range through light grey and buff, to medium grey and brown. Fired colors are greatly affected by the temperature and type of firing. Clay body usually consists of china clay, ball clay (added to increase workability and plasticity), potash feldspar,

silica and than clay. These clay bodies are available in the market and ready to use.

Wedging the clay is the primary and most important activity of pot-making. Wedging helps compact the clay and get air pockets out. It ensures that the clay is uniform in stiffness. If the clay body isn't wedged properly, the chances are you won't get your pot right. Quite interestingly, on the contrary, if the body is wedged well, throwing will be almost effortless. It is not so much to do with visual but the feel of it. You don't have to look at it to center it really. It is almost automatic. It happens by Grace. After that is done, the walls can be pulled up perpendicular to the wheel and the pot can be shaped. Once the pot is lifted from the wheel, it is left out in the open to dry. Shrinkage due to drying is generally between 4% to 10%.



Wheel

The processes I mentioned before remain the same even though the kind of wheel may vary. Depending on the manner in which these wheels are used, they are of various types:

Kick wheel - It works by kicking the flywheel in a specific rhythm. This powers the wheel head (like in Meena Aunty's studio).

Chaak - This is set in motion by hand, using a long stick (like in Kumbharwada and Chinhat).

Electric wheel - This uses power to spin, and has the advantage of not demanding any manual interference. Thus, when using this pottery wheel, the potter can concentrate completely on the work his hands are doing (like in the studio at IDC).

The most common type of pottery wheel these days is electric. It usually comes with a foot pedal that turns the wheel faster when pressure is put on it or a knob which when rotated adjusts the speed accordingly. The potter will have it turn relatively slowly as he centers the clay

and much faster as he makes the clay taller. All this while he wets the clay, so there is a splash guard around the wheel. As the potter works on the piece, he doesn't have to worry about the clay getting thrown all over the room. Manual wheels work the same way, except the rotation speed is controlled by the potter himself. There is a separate wheel at the bottom of the frame that the potter kicks with his feet. The faster he needs the wheel to turn, the faster he must move his feet.

There are ergonomic issues with wheels too. They have to be the right height, size and shape for the potter to be in a comfortable position to work on it for hours. I realized an issue like this with the smaller electric wheel we have in our ceramics studio. The wheel has a circular splash guard around it, which makes it a little difficult to hover on the lump of clay or get closer to it. The bigger wheel on the other hand has a splash guard which is better shaped, almost aligns to the thighs. You can get as close to the lump of clay as you want to. It makes for a better sitting-working posture.



Kilns

Kilns are basically containers for heat. In the most primitive forms, this could be nothing more than a trench or pit dug into the earth. Today, there are many different types of kilns. There are two basic types of kilns that all others fall into. These two primary types are continuous (tunnel) kilns and periodic (intermittent) kilns. Continuous kilns are always firing. They never cool. The ware to be fired is loaded into cars and slowly goes through the kiln on a track or rail. After cooling, the still-moving cars are unloaded and reloaded to begin the circuit again. These kilns are used in industry. Periodic kilns are the ones most familiar to potters. They are fired on an intermittent schedule. The kilns are loaded, brought to temperature, cooled and unloaded (not firing all the time). Types of periodic kilns include updraft kilns, downdraft kilns, sprung arch kilns, catenary arch kilns, hill climbing kilns, bottle kilns, car kilns, top hat kilns.

We have an electric and a gas fired updraft kiln (ones that introduce the heat at the bottom and exhaust at the top) at our ceramics studio. We usually bisque fire in the electric one and glaze fire in the gas kiln. The

electric kilns operate by radiant heat generated from an electrical current passing through coiled wires. Since these kilns have no fireboxes and no burning inside, they have no need of a damper or flue. Thus electric kilns have no hole at top. What they share with the fuel-burning kilns is insulation and a loading area. The doors (when bricked in) are quite thick and use IFB (insulating fire bricks). These bricks are porous, light, have high insulation value and are easy to handle. They have shorter life than hard bricks. Oxidation firing is the only type possible in the electric kiln. Most modern electric kilns are equipped with electronic shut off devices to monitor the firing process.

The most common kiln design utilized by contemporary potters is the natural gas updraft kiln. Natural gas is clean, efficient and easy to control. Also, it is environmentally desirable (produces very low levels of pollution) and is relatively inexpensive compared to electricity. This type of kiln has two burners firing under the hearth that are connected to a blower for air supply and natural gas to make up the combustion mixture. Proportions of the two are adjustable for either



oxidation or reduction atmospheres. The kiln has to be started manually by lighting up the burner one at a time (low temperature ramp). The frame is made of heavy angle iron and 1" thick steel tubing. Each arch is comprised of a coarse SDF (super duty firebrick), backed with 3" of fiber blanket and 1" of insulating ceramic fiberboard. The door is double hinged and kiln lining is engineered to expand and contract. Hot gases, called sting, exit from the top of the kiln. The atmosphere in a gas kiln is a mixture of gases: nitrogen, water,

carbon dioxide, oxygen, carbon monoxide and a little hydrocarbon. The atmosphere can be oxidizing, neural or reducing depending on the concentration of these gases. Pyrometer reads the temperature at each stage of the ascent. It is housed outside the kiln but linked through wires to a thermocouple (heat sensor) fitted through the wall of the kiln, protruding into the firing chamber. Temperature can also be recorded visually (through the color of the flame) or through pyrometric cones for cross checking.



Bisque Firing

Bisque firing is the first time the pots go through high temperature heating. It is done in order to vitrify the clay pots enough that they won't be harmed when glazes are applied, but not vitrified to such an extent that the glaze won't adhere correctly. The bone-dry greenware is very fragile and must be loaded into the kiln with a great deal of care. The kiln is closed and heating is slowly begun. A very slow temperature rise is critical. During the beginning of the bisque firing, the last of the atmospheric water is driven out of the clay. If heated too quickly, the water will turn into steam while inside the clay body, causing the clay to burst.

When a kiln reaches about 350 °C, the chemically bonded water will begin to be driven off. By the time the clay reaches 500 °C, it will have become completely dehydrated. At this point the clay is changed forever; it is now a ceramic. The bisque firing continues until the kiln reaches about 850-900 °C. At this temperature, the pots are sintered, made less fragile while still porous enough to accept the application of glazes. Once the desired temperature has been reached, the kiln is turned

off. The cooling is also slow, to avoid the pots breaking due to stress from the temperature changes. After the kiln is completely cool, it is opened and the newly created bisque ware removed. As a good rule of thumb, if you fire the kiln one day, let it cool overnight and unload it the next.

Although bisque fire can be done in either electric or fuel-burning kilns, electric is preferred. The main reason for this is that an electric kiln is much easier to control at the very low, preheating settings. Fuel-fired kilns tend to rise in temperature much faster due to the amount of fuel that must come through the fuel nozzle in order for the burner to remain lit.

Bisque firing pots is actually quite important. This allows the potter to do much more decorative work with stains, underglazes and glazes with a greatly reduced risk of the pot being damaged. Because the bisque firing is brought to temperature much more slowly, bisquing also reduces the chances of pots cracking or exploding in the glaze firing.



Glazes

Glazes are a type of glass that is especially made to stick onto pots and other ceramic surfaces. When molten, this specialized glass is stiffer than glass that is poured or blown is. Vitrification is the process of melting that clay and glaze go through as they are fired to maturity. In a fully matured clay body, the spaces between refractory particles are completely filled up with glass, fusing the particles together and making the clay body impervious to water. Glazes provide strength, color, finish and impermeability. Glazes after being prepared and mixed well can be applied onto the pot by dipping, spraying or brush. The pots are loaded carefully in the kiln after letting them dry for a bit. One has to avoid touching the glazed pots again and again as the glaze coat keeps getting removed. After packing the kiln, it is switched on to a low setting to drive the surplus water retained by the bisque-ware as a result of glaze application. This is not necessary if the dipped ware is thoroughly dried after glazing. They consist of four key components, each with their own function:

Silica, the glass former - Silica is both the base material for glass and for ceramic glazes. It melts at about

1710 °C. It is a major component of raw clay, and can be introduced into the glaze that way. It can also be introduced into glazes as silica oxide, flint or silica sand.

Fluxes, the melting agents - Fluxes lower the melting point of silica, making it usable to create ceramic glazes. They can be divided into alkaline fluxes, alkaline earths and miscellaneous fluxes which are often metal oxides. Some are very active fluxes, allowing glazes to mature at earthenware temperatures. Others are less active and are useful in mid-range and high firing temperatures. Eg. Feldspar.

Alumina, the refractory - alumina or aluminium oxide is used in nearly all glazes as stiffening agent, allowing glazes to stick to a pot's vertical surface without running off when it has melted (alters viscosity). Alumina is often introduced into a glaze through adding clay, which also contributes some silica. Eg. China clay.

Colorants and glaze modifiers - Silica when melted, is transparent. Colorants are added to glazes to produce a wide range of hues. Ceramic colorants must be able

to withstand high temperatures without burning off. Most colorants are metallic oxides like iron oxide, cobalt oxide, chromium oxide, copper oxide and copper carbonate. In addition to colorants, glazes can also have other modifiers. These may modify the glaze opacity, iridescence or working qualities when the glaze is still raw (unfired).

Color - Colors in glazes are affected by the clay, slips, stains or underglazes. Most ceramic colors, however, are a result of metallic oxides being dispersed in the fabric of the glaze itself. Eg. Manganese dioxide (brown), copper oxide (green), cobalt oxide (blue). However, under varying circumstances, these colorants can give very different results. Three main factors affecting glaze color are the composition of the glaze, the temperature to which the glaze is fired and the firing process. If the atmosphere in the kiln has plenty of oxygen, it is called an oxidation firing. If the atmosphere has very little oxygen, it is called a reduction firing. The amount of oxygen present in the kiln can drastically change a glaze's color. For example, a basic glaze using copper carbonate to color it will be turquoise if fired in an

oxidation atmosphere or bright red if fired in a reduction atmosphere. Electric kilns are naturally in an oxidation or neutral atmosphere. With fuel-burning kilns, however, care must be taken to ensure that the kiln does not go into reduction until the latter part of the firing, usually the last half hour to the last hour and a half. A kiln entering reduction at too low a temperature can result in clay and glaze defects, including bloating and carbon coring.

Opacity - Different minerals can cause opacity in an otherwise clear glaze, but other characteristics such as surface and the development of crystals can also be achieved. These minerals are called glaze modifiers. Opacifiers can be added to create a white or opaque glaze. These include tin oxide, zirconium silicate, titanium dioxide (which also promotes matteness and opalescence).

Surface quality - Glazes can have a satiny finish or a dry looking matt surface. Some specialty glazes can even be quite rough texture. Matting agents include barium carbonate, strontium carbonate, alumina hydrate, lithium carbonate and titanium dioxide.

Temperature - All glazes don't melt at the same temperature. Most glazes have fairly specific melting ranges. Too little heat and the glaze won't fully melt or mature. Too much heat and the glaze will become too fluid and may even run off the pot onto the kiln shelf.

Varying amounts of metal oxides are mixed to transparent clear glaze to achieve a range of colors.

Recipe for clear - transparent glaze (supplied by Sandeep Manchekar):

Feldspar	: 45%
Silica	: 15%
Calcium carbonate	: 20%
Zinc oxide	: 5%
Barium carbonate	: 8%
China clay	: 7%



Glaze firing

Once glazes have been applied to the bisqueware and have had a chance to dry, the ware is carefully loaded into the kiln for the glaze firing. Pots cannot be allowed to touch at all, or the glazes will melt together, welding the pots together. The kiln is heated slowly to the proper temperature to bring the clay and glazes to maturity, and then slowly cooled again. Only after the kiln has cooled can it be opened and unloaded. As a kiln is firing up and cooling down, the changes in temperature make some profound changes in the clay. The clay goes from this soft, totally fragile substance to one which is rock-hard, impervious to water, wind, and time. The change is nearly mystical in its complete metamorphosis.

100 °C : Water boils.

100-200 °C : Clays lose 'mechanical water'.

200 °C : Typical kitchen oven baking temperature.

374 °C : 'Critical' temperature of water. Chemically combined water leaves clay.

500 °C : Red glow in kiln.

573 °C : 'Quartz inversion'

Quartz has a crystalline structure that changes at

specific temperatures. These changes are known as inversions. One such inversion occurs at 573 °C. The change in crystalline structure will actually cause the pots to increase in size by 2% while heating, and lose this 2% as it cools. Ware is fragile during this quartz inversion and the kiln temperature must be raised (and later cooled) slowly through the change. Slow, careful firing is required until 600 °C. (100 °C per hour).

800 °C : All organic matter in clay burns out by this temperature (carbon and sulfur)

800-1000 °C : Orange color in kiln. The clay particles begin to fuse (sintering). Low-fire earthenwares and low-fire lead glazes mature. Normal firing temperature for red bricks, flower pots.

1000-1160 °C : Yellow color in kiln. High-fire earthenwares mature. Feldspars begin to melt.

1170-1190 °C : Bright yellow-white color in kiln. Mid-range clays and low-fire stonewares mature.

1250-1285 °C : White color in kiln. Stoneware clays vitrify, feldspathic glazes mature.

1285-1350 °C : High-fire stonewares, porcelains vitrify.

1712 °C : Silica melts

2050 °C : Alumina melts



Soaking - Soaking a kiln means to keep it at the same temperature for a period of time. This gives the ceramic materials time to absorb more heat, and the glazes time to smooth out. Generally, a twenty to forty minute soak at the end of the glaze firing is appropriate.

Cooling - There is another event that clay goes through, this time as it cools. That is the sudden shrinkage of cristobalite, a crystalline form of silica, as it cools past 220 °C. Cristobalite is found in all clay bodies, so care must be taken to cool the kiln slowly as it moves through this critical temperature. Otherwise, pots will develop cracks.

Glazes do not always come out the way we expect or hope they will. Sometimes there are happy surprises, but we can also experience real frustration when we open the kiln to find glaze defects, reasons for which could be underfiring (dry, scratchy glaze surface) and overfiring (glazes that begin to run), application problems, lack of adhesion, blebbing (blebs are air pockets caught in the clay body; although this is more of a clay body defect, it can also affect glazes, causing blistering, pinholing, and pitting), glaze-clay body fit (clay and glaze may have different coefficients of expansion and the glaze can become too small for the pot and may craze), kiln accidents or power interruptions.



















Learning

- * Apply bat wash to the shelves of the kiln to avoid glaze run-offs and stuck pots.
- * Wax should be applied at the bottom extremely carefully or else avoided (spillovers lead to resist glazing that hampers glaze uniformity).
- * Mix the glazes too well, or the glaze wouldn't stick properly to the clay body.
- * Do not use tap water.
- * Glaze should be the right consistency. Too thick will crack up, not stick. Too thin will run off.
- * Dipping is a good way to get a uniform glaze.
- * Glazes that are required for dipping tall vases or wide bowls should be in large quantities to avoid jugaad.
- * Stronger glazes should generally be applied in the end or they stain the other glazes.
- * Do not attempt too many effects in the same pot.
- * There is a limit to which any pot can take.
- * Record placement of the pots in the kiln.
- * Different placements in the kiln with the same glaze might give different effects.
- * Pots that have been glazed need to have at least a quarter of an inch of space around them so as to avoid pots welding to each other.
- * Remember, pots expand in the kiln as it heats.
- * For both bisque and glaze firings, pack the kiln as tightly as possible. Full kilns heat more efficiently than loosely stacked kilns do.
- * Do not heat or cool the kiln too quickly.
- * The kiln should be let to cool off for couple of days (till it reaches room temperature) and then opened.
- * Do not allow cool air into the kiln too early, such as opening the kiln lid while the ware is still too hot.
- * If you hear pinging from inside the kiln, the kiln is cooling too quickly. The pinging is the noise of cracking occurring. Close the kiln.
- * Never fire without a back up cylinder.

Chapter 4: Repositioning of a craft

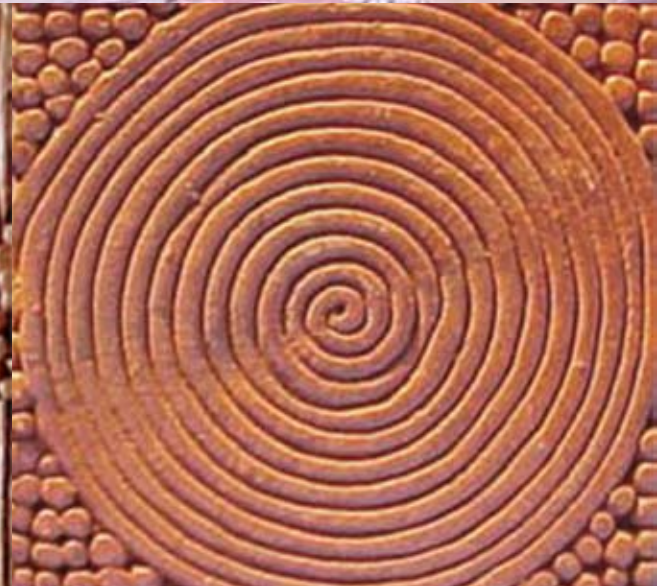
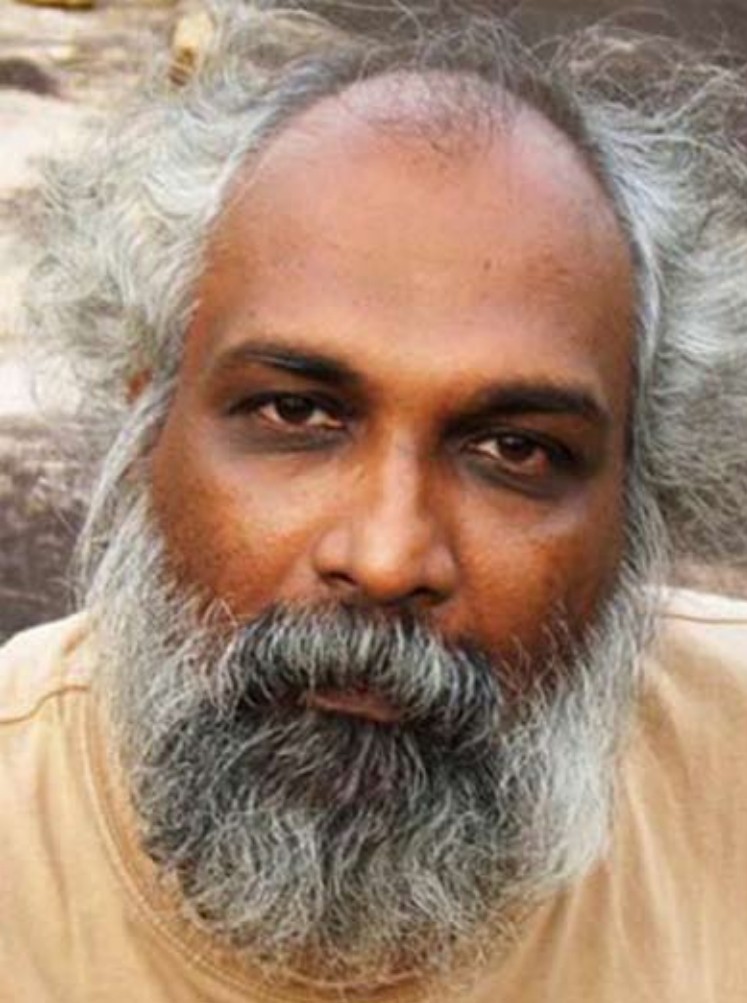
This chapter is not so much an outcome but a process. To talk about it, I don't have a tangible output yet but I would like to present my thoughts atleast. A part of the process of getting clarity on matters related to repositioning of a craft has been to familiarize myself through personal contact and through reading of work done by people in this field in India.

Let me start from the start. The first thought I had when I had to decide my project topic for this semester was repositioning and contemporizing an Indian craft. Today, we see the market flooded with industrial goods. They're all over but most products today are beginning to become faceless. They are all the same, no matter where you buy them from. They lack essence and character. In this mechanized age, handicrafts are almost like an endangered species and they're obscenely expensive. Why, because there are few people making them and fewer who want to. Children of a lot of craftsmen are not taking up the craft as a viable livelihood option. This is true of most Indian crafts, including pottery. Pottery in the present context would not appear promising to

potters' children, though the reality is that there is a big demand for crafts in the urban spaces that is invisible to the artisans, especially in the rural areas. On the brighter side of the picture are people who have been trying to improve the scene. Jinan, a craft activist cum designer based in Kerala, plans to do a learning activity with potters' children in the age group 18 to 24. The training that would be of nearly two years duration will enable them to obtain the skills needed to pursue pottery in the present context. The participants will be given exposure to pottery, especially to the present interest among the urban population as well as role of craft in the coming ecologically sensitive era, modern ways of marketing. To go back a few years, Mansimran and Mary Singh, potters at Andretta pottery were anxious to get potter families interested in the craft to suit modern day demands in an effort to stop the youngsters from leaving to look for jobs elsewhere. Apart from setting up their own studio pottery workshop, they also established there a pottery and rural marketing centre in 1984, with a view to promoting and preserving the rich but dying crafts of the region.

But as they say, you can only make a sentence when you have got the words right and if you haven't, the chances are you won't. I believe too that only after understanding, learning and committing to a craft can one contribute to it or else it would be like doing

Jann Seva without knowing the Jann (person) in you. So, the first step was to get acquainted, meet potters and practise the craft; and in this process understand the nuances of repositioning it. I would like cite a few examples to explain my thoughts better.



Kumbham: Contemporary terracotta

K B Jinan is a craft activist cum designer working with traditional craftspeople in India. I got a chance to meet him during the conference week at IDC. He was here for a couple of days but took some time off to talk to a few of us. He is a post graduate in product design (ceramics) from NID where his project revolved around 'humanizing the professional'. A stint in Nagaland, where he stayed at the Gandhi ashram for six months, strengthened his belief that craft and its development was interactive and belonged to the people. During his interaction with rural and tribal people he tried to understand the role of culture in shaping one's aesthetics. From 1993 onwards he has been living and working among the potters of Aruvacode, a tiny village in Kerala, which has now become famous for its potters. He brought together a group of villagers when they had lost all their traditional skills due to the influx of cheap industrial substitutes in the village. He explored the possibilities of terracotta suited for the modern context and thus 'Kumbham' was born. Kumbham presents the story of an artisan village recapturing the craft they had all but lost, and redefining it to the contemporary world. He says, "There was, on one hand, the search for the lost

cultural roots of people who have been systematically stripped off our innate sensibilities through a process of formal education (like me) while on the other hand, simultaneously engaging a community of potters in a continuing experiment to give the traditional pottery to the new and varied needs of an urban market, grown from within their traditional repositories of knowledge."

The community as a whole has witnessed a dramatic turn-around: from being on the verge of dissolution as an impoverished artisan community whose women were often pushed to working as sex-workers to a resurgent group of potters whose craft was once again wanted. The Kumbham initiative is being hailed as a rare instance of a traditional artisan community rehabilitating itself through the very craft they had been alienated from. They again started making tiles and murals and things for landscaping, and interacting with architects who are rediscovering terracotta with Kumbham wall tiles, lamps and columns. Today, Kumbham can rightfully claim to have facilitated a product range of over 500 designs, including kitchen and household ware, landscaping products (garden

lamps, bird baths, water cascades, pots and urns, garden furniture, path lamps, mushroom lamps) and murals.

Jinan's dream is to create more village centers of creativity in truly rural areas that would generate pride among the villagers, centers that are organic, where control rests with them and not with a bureaucrat. "Then there will be true cultural strength", he says. "There is so much to learn from these people. The present destruction of the eco systems is a direct result of the domination of reason over intuition, conscious over sub conscious, individual over collective, self over self-less, materialism over spiritual, of anthropocentrism

over nature centrism and so called scientific (western) knowledge over wisdom knowledge."

The Kumbham experiment in pottery is being extended to other craft areas as well - Dhokra metal craft and patachitra paintings to name a few. In both cases, modern application areas for these crafts are being identified and new products are being designed to suit the characteristics of the craft. As a designer, Jinan has been working as an active collaborator with artisans, helping them conceive new design possibilities, extend their design and product vocabulary and concentrate on their own artistic expression.

The fantastic Fabindia

The Fabindia story is really fabulous. It started in the year 1960 with a strong belief that there is a need for marketing the vast and diverse craft traditions of India; thereby providing rural employment. Their endeavor has been to provide hand crafted products which help support and encourage good craftsmanship. With 57 stores in the country and one each in Rome, Dubai and Guangzhou, Fabindia has managed to create sustainable employment by providing jobs to close to 15000 artisans today and is hopeful of supporting another 1,00,000 in the next few years. ¹

Four things that Fabindia did right, from the start:

1. Create an exquisite and exclusive product.
2. A price point that defines that exclusiveness yet not

out of reach of common man.

3. Operate at a niche market with limited accessibility that builds an aura.
4. Never advertise but make people talk about the product and shopping experience.

There are quite a few material combinations that one can notice in Fab India products. I clearly remember one out of them all. It was a coffee mug, a deep brown glaze. It had a wooden disc as its saucer, with the foot-ring of the mug clearly engraved. The mug's handle had a provision to insert a wooden spoon that came along with it. It had bamboo wrapped on it. A perfect set to keep looking at; not massive effort but remarkable value addition. Who wouldn't mind paying a bit extra for this?

The bamboo story

Bamboo is the fastest growing biomass. It is eco-friendly and a future material for designers. Bamboo craft with its unique traditions opens up new possibilities in 'design expression' with woven forms. India has 13 million bamboo craft persons all over the country with ranging skills. Most of them earn very little from the practice of craft, often abandoning the profession. There is vast scope of 'repositioning' bamboo craft by 'design' to reach urban and export markets thereby increasing the earnings of village craft persons.

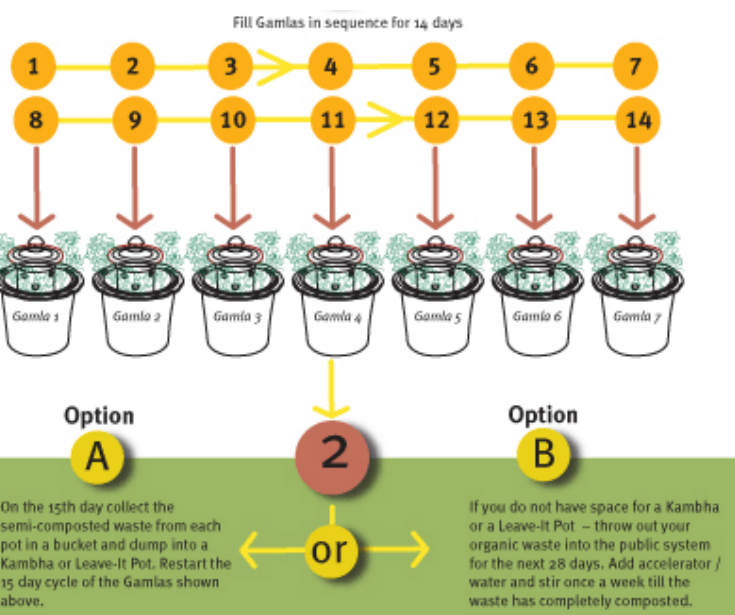
A multilevel approach is necessary to address these problems right from the product source to destination. Apart from afforestation schemes and regulation of prices, it is vital to establish links between the rural artisans and the urban consumers through developmental agencies. Entrepreneurship by professional designers would help identify new product areas. These could be communicated to artisans to produce contemporary items and the generation of a sustainable source of income. According to Prof. A.G. Rao, who leads the project at IDC, export of bamboo products would require mass production either by

organizing large numbers of artisans with small equipment and facilities, or using mass-producing machinery. In the Indian context, the former would be a better option. The IDC team believes in an integrated approach to bamboo craft which includes design, technology, training and marketing. Work on bamboo crafts has been in progress for more than a decade through various projects sponsored by International Network for Bamboo and Rattan. In 1993, IDC hosted Jagruti - a unique national workshop on bamboo craft design which brought together designers, crafts persons, students, officials and entrepreneurs. The outcome of the workshop was the identification and development of new bamboo products such as utility trays, desk stationery, lamps, citation boxes, paper knives, corporate gift items and packaging material. The publication of Bamboo Craft Design, a comprehensive collection of elaborate articles covering diverse aspects of bamboo crafts was an important sequel to the workshop.

Skilled craft persons from Tripura and Mumbai are working continuous in developing new craft products with a team of 'designers' and design students at the

bamboo studio. The team has taken a fresh perspective to re-position bamboo-craft in the urban setting, so as to enable it to compete with other materials like plastic. Further, it is working to create both quality and market awareness among artisans, and develop educational material to impart systematic training. An indirect

advantage of the use of new technologies for bamboo crafts is the promotion of adult education among artisans, many of whom are illiterate. As pointed out by Professor Rao, it is important to recognize technology as an extension of craft and to treat bamboo work not merely as a craft, but a craft industry.



kambha



patta kambha



Daily dump: Compost at home

Daily Dump is a set of earthenware pots that helps households to manage their organic waste by converting it into compost. The complex organic matter breaks down into its simpler elements, resulting in a dark, earthy, sweet smelling nutrient rich humus. In the West, composting at home has been adopted widely, with a number of products to choose from. These products are designed to encourage compost in urban India homes, conveniently and hygienically. So, the

home's contribution to the city's waste gets reduced by 60%. Varying sizes and types of these composters are available. One could buy it according to the size of his family, how often he cooks, kind of space available or how committed he is to managing organic waste. Kitchen and garden waste can be composted in various stages, shifted to various tiers of the pots. Brilliant context based solution to a problem that hovers on all. Great to gift!



Baby steps

This is the first step in realizing the nuances of repositioning of a craft. There are several levels of understanding the complexities involved. I am attempting to get some clarity. There were several discussions between Professor Mohanty and me regarding the souvenir shop at IIT Bombay. The shop sells merchandise like T shirts, pen, key chains, bags etc. We were thinking – what if we had some things to contribute to the shop too? What if we kept a few vases maybe? Or sets of kettles and teacups? Instead of the not so interesting things that occupy the shelf space and don't even get noticed, isn't it better to pep it up a bit with contemporary ceramics; things that people would love to buy?

That was where it all began. We thought of various possibilities (product as well as non-product ideas) that

one could explore with clay. In the process, we also debated selling things versus gifting them. To think of it practically, selling would fetch the funds that would keep the studio active and growing; but it negates the idea of what goes into making the pieces. Money can't buy love, care or warmth. It would only undervalue them, sweeping away all their worth. This directed us to the idea of give aways. Sir suggested we have a barter festival where we would give a few cups to the coffee/ chai café in the department. I loved the idea. It was the missing link I was looking for. It made sense of production pottery too, so the cups I would have tried to get identical would be gifted. What I wasn't too convinced about was the name of the festival. It sounded too 'give-take'. I was feeling the need of calling it something more 'give-give'. So we called it 'Celebrating pot-making and tea-drinking'.



Celebrating pot-making and tea-drinking

Tea culture is defined by the way tea is made and consumed, by the way the people interact with tea, and by the aesthetics surrounding tea-drinking. Tea is commonly drunk at social events, and many cultures have created intricate formal ceremonies for these events. Western examples of these are afternoon tea and the tea party. In the east, tea ceremonies differ among countries, Japan's complex, formal and serene one being the most known. Drinking tea in India is too-everyday-an-activity. The world's largest producer of tea, India is a country where tea is popular all over as a breakfast and evening drink. There is no ceremony attached to it. So, we thought of making tea drinking special, at a manageable scale. Department was a good bet. Three of us (Sir, Shilpa and me) made a set of teacups to be gifted to Descafe at IDC. So, each time one would have chai, there would be a memory. A little get-together was organized on 13th November. A mail was sent out to all, inviting them to come and sip tea in the handcrafted cups. It was a great gathering. Everyone appreciated the cups and the tea served in them. We hope that, in time to come, people would refer to tea in these cups as Special Chai!









Currently

What I am currently exploring is the technique of transfer printing on the ceramic body (not those cheesy ones you get in malls these days). This could open up vast possibilities of experimenting with surface graphics and treatment. Like any other print, these too can be monochrome or color. A plate and eventually a film is

made (a print sticker), which is then transferred onto the body of the bisqued or glaze fired pot. Then it is loaded in the kiln for its final firing that fuses it with ceramic body. These films are available in low temperature and high temperature firing options, depending upon the requirement of the graphic and its colors.



Conclusion

Enough of writing what I want to do; let me now also talk about what I don't want to do (the two being obviously connected). I don't want to be yet another trained designer who creates products for the market using the existing knowledge and skills of craftsmen and use them as mere tools of production. I don't wish to bombard them with some random ideas or force myself on them. I don't intend to do all that. Instead, I wish to get into a healthy collaboration with some of the potters in future who are always brimming with energy;

no matter what. They have skills I never can. I respect that. I also believe that traditional and studio potters can benefit each other. I have a lot to learn from them and maybe, in time to come, can offer something to them too. I see this project as an opportunity to do that in future. This is the first step in the tall ladder that I have envisaged as my goal in life. This project hasn't been so much to do with an activity resulting in cylinders, bowls or cups of value or aesthetic merit but rather is an outcome of an urge to find my own form and face.

Appendix

1. The Fantastic Fabindia

By Roop Mukhopadhyay

I always wanted to write about Fabindia but never got the time or the right frame of mind. Yesterday, my aunty took me to the Fabindia store in GK2. By the way, I am in Delhi at the moment working on zoom and pixels. She bought me a lovely khadi kurta in a greenish aquamarine shade.

The Fabindia story is really fabulous. It started in the year 1960 with a strong belief that there is a need for marketing the vast and diverse craft traditions of India. Thereby provide rural employment. Their endeavor has been to provide hand crafted products which help support and encourage good craftsmanship. With 57 stores in the country and one each in Rome, Dubai and Guangzhou, Fabindia has managed to create sustainable employment by providing jobs to close to 15000 artisans today and is hopeful of supporting another 1,00,000 in the next few years.

Fabindia's success story is now a HBS case study. Without any advertising this one time small retail store has managed to create such a huge equity in the marketplace that it has become a household name today. You want to buy some authentic Indian clothes, just walk inside any Fabindia store and you have it. The store design is also very unique, bright colors, local motifs, spacious displays and lots of free space for consumers to touch and feel; a business model which many have tried to copy but without much success.

It goes on to show it's not necessary to do advertising or hire an agency to create a brand. Fabindia also shows us how to build a sustainable business model by bringing people together. But then Mr. John Bissell was a visionary. He had the conviction to turn that vision into a reality. "Our constant endeavour is to resist the temptation of going 'mainstream' which is more of a

commodities game, and develop and widen the niche markets in which we are the dominant player,” says

Mr. William Bissell, Managing Director, Fabindia. Four things that Fabindia did right, right from the very beginning:

1. Create an exquisite and exclusive product.
2. A price point that defines that exclusiveness yet not out of reach of common man.

3. Operate at a niche market with limited accessibility that builds an aura.

4. Never advertise but make people talk about the product and shopping experience.

Their strategy paid off. A lesson on branding that I learnt as a planner. The solution does not always lie in advertising or communication. Innovation can be at any level, you need an eye to identify what that innovation would be and how easily that can be en-cashed upon in the most interesting yet engaging manner.

2. Delhi Blue Pottery & Gurcharan Singh

Source: www.delhibluepotterytrust.com

All along the land route from Persia to India-via Isfahan, Samarkhand, Kabul and Peshawar - the Islamic invaders left their trail: the Royal Mosque at Isfahan, the Gur-i-mir at Samarkhand, the Fort in Lahore and Chini ka Rauza in Agra stand till today, symbols of one of the world's most enduring cultures. All these monuments have a striking similarity - the profuse and intricate use of brilliant turquoise tiles. In time the color came to be generally known as 'Persian Blue'.

The conquering kings traveled with their entourage of artisans and craftsmen, a group of who settled down in the village of Khurja, a few kilometres from Delhi, where the tradition was handed down from father to son.

Then came the British in the early 17th century. Having taken the sea route, they failed to observe the progression of 'Persian blue' from Central Asia to India, and they promptly christened the blue pottery they saw 'Delhi Blue', a name that has remained till today. 'Delhi Blue' was begun many years ago - as far back as 1952, by Gurcharan Singh. In the early 1920s when Gurcharan

Singh was in Japan he decided that commercial pottery was not for him; he opted instead for studio pottery.

On his return to India, he established a workshop at his old pottery, which became known for its Persian copper-blue tiles. In 1927 he founded the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (AIFACS). He was head of the Government Pottery Institute at Ambala in Jammu from the late 1930s until 1952. Singh then returned to his old pottery works, renaming it the Delhi Blue Art Pottery (now the Delhi Blue Pottery Trust). In 1974 Gurucharan Singh was awarded the Sahitya Kala Parishad's best artist award and in 1991 he received the Padmashree from the President of India for his contribution to the field of ceramics. He is also known as the author of Pottery in India, published in 1979.

Khurja by that time had been forced into producing cheap, easily marketable items, and the famous blue pottery had been more or less eliminated except for the occasional piece. There was thus the danger of the blue glaze formula, a secret transmitted from father to son,

dying out completely. Gurcharan Singh brought Abdullah, one of the direct descendants of the original emigrants, to Delhi along with a couple of others. The showroom of the pottery had a beautifully arched ceiling, full of pots of all shapes and sizes clad in amazing glazes concocted by that wizard of glazing - Sardar Gurcharan Singh. About 40 per cent of what was produced at that time was tableware, for which there was a constant demand. Along with the pottery, Delhi Blue produced the most exquisite stoneware tiles and jaalis. The ceramic tiles of splendid geometric design covered the floors of nearly all the rooms; these had been made in the factory of Sardar Ram Singh Kabli. Outside, under the majestic neem

trees Gurcharan Singh and his son Mansimran taught students young and old, from children to diplomats in a laid-back, peaceful manner.

Delhi Blue Art Pottery became the best-known centre for studio potters in India. In 1986 unfortunately, the Government acquired the land surrounding the pottery, and the kilns had to be shut down. It was a piece of Delhi that should never have been lost. Today the Delhi Blue Pottery Trust which was founded in 1991 runs the pottery school in the basement of the Delhi Blue Apartments. The trust encourages the development and promotion of studio pottery in India.

3. Andretta Pottery

Source: www.potteryindia.com

Mansimran Singh or Minni, as he is affectionately called, is an artist - potter of significant merit. His English wife, Mary, is also a professional potter. Andretta Pottery came to be because a woman called Norah Richards came to live in Andretta (Himachal Pradesh), in the 1920's. She was a theatre lady and several artists visited her. Painter Sobha Singh moved here after partition; and Gurcharan Singh who started Delhi Blue Art Pottery would often visit Sobha Singh at Andretta.

In the early 1980's there were still 120 out of nearly 270 potter families still existing in this area. Mansimran and Mary Singh were anxious to get them interested in pottery to suit modern day demands in an effort to stop the youngsters from leaving to look for jobs elsewhere. Apart from setting up their own studio pottery

workshop, they also established there a pottery and rural marketing centre in 1984, with a view to promoting and preserving the rich but dying crafts of the region. The Singhs involved the Development Commission, Handicrafts in the Ministry of Textiles, and then the Rural Marketing Centre, which gave them a subsidy of Rs. 85,000 for land building and furniture.

Andretta Pottery and Crafts Society was set up in 1983. The Singhs worked in glaze and slips on terracotta, encouraging the village craftsmen to experiment. Since then Andretta Pottery has taken part in many exhibitions all over the country. The traditional potters have also accompanied the Singhs on many of these exhibitions. Presently Mansimran Singh teaches students and also holds workshops at Andretta.

4. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

Source: www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/kamaladevi_chattopadhyay

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay (April 3, 1903 - October 29, 1988) was a Gandhian, a social reformer, a freedom fighter, and most remembered for her contribution to Indian independence movement, for being the driving force behind the renaissance of Indian handicrafts, handlooms, and theatre in post-Independence India, and for upliftment of the socio-economic standard of Indian women by pioneering the co-operative movement in India.

Numerous cultural institutions in India today are a gift of her vision, starting with National School of Drama, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Central Cottage Industries Emporium, and The Crafts Council of India, to name a few. The doyen of Indian arts and crafts, a person

single-handedly responsible for reviving Indian crafts back from oblivion of 200 years of foreign rule where they went without any patronage, be it government or public, due lack of awareness of its richness as well as its accessibility to the common man.

She stressed the significance which handicrafts and cooperative grassroot movements, play in the social and economic upliftment of the Indian people. To this end she withstood great opposition both before and after independence from the power centres, but managed to leave behind a rich and formidable legacy of thriving Indian handicrafts, theatre forms and arts that have now become an integral of our rural economy, across the nation.

5. Studio potters: Shaping a new niche

By Mukesh Khosla

Over the years, a sense of despair has overcome the traditional Indian kumbhar (potter) who has been reeling under the crippling grip of power cuts, hounded by the anti-pollution laws for his coal-fired bhatti and burdened by a 12.5 per cent sales tax on the finished product. And as he abandons the profession to look for other avenues of earning, the ancient art of pottery has become a languishing craft, sorely in need of government intervention.

But while the traditional kumbhars find themselves in this knotty predicament, a new breed of urban studio potters is re-casting the scenario in the most eloquent terms. Functioning from their individual studios these artists have not just up-held the traditional utility of clay pots but have been instrumental in elevating this modest craft into an artistic pursuit, at par with painting and sculpture. These 'clay' artists have gained instant recognition for their innovative designs. They've crafted wall hangings and jewelry hitherto unknown in pottery. Their creations range from tiny plaques and coasters to

large murals, which adorn the foyers of business houses. The art came to India during the renaissance brought about by Rabindranath Tagore at Santi Niketan and many of our now established studio potters have that background. Though most of the potters still follow the traditional European style, two distinct and different schools have emerged from India - Delhi Blue Pottery established by Sardar Gurcharan Singh and The Golden Bridge Pottery at Pondicherry started by Deborah Smith and Ray Meeker.

The continuity of tradition and aesthetic approach is important to any art form and particularly in studio pottery despite the advancement and changes in technology and tools. But in India studio pottery is still at a growing stage as it is only in the last few years that some of the potters have become financially independent and have also begun teaching. Lately, some art schools like JJ School of Art, Department of Fine Arts, University of Baroda and NID have started teaching studio pottery in an organized way.

Apart from veterans like the late Sardar Gurcharan Singh and Devi Prasad other potters of repute include Nirmala Patwardhan (who compiled her own experiments and formulae of glazes in New Handbook for Potters), Ira Chowdhary, Daroz Panduranga, Manisha Bhattacharya, Jyotsna Bhatt, Monica Agnihotri, Leena Batra and more. Though the majority follows the traditional lines of the Euro-Oriental style started by Leach and Hamada blended with their own distinct signatures, others are ready to break away and try a different approach.

Gurcharan Singh, the father of the art form was the driving force behind the growth of studio pottery in the country. Until his death in 1995, he relentlessly struggled to give this ancient art its due credit. He founded the Delhi School of Blue Pottery which even after his death has been carrying on its good work under the tutelage of his son Mansimran Singh, who himself is one of the world famous studio potters. Today Gurcharan has been immortalised by his works that adorn the Parliament House and Delhi High Court.

Though pottery started off just as a means for providing utility items over the years it has become one of the admired art forms. Buyers for such designer ware are still few though the costs can range from as low as Rs. 100 for a bowl to Rs. 2500 for a tea set. None of these studio potters is willing to stagnate or take clients for granted. Being largely a work of intellectual creativity, there is a constant momentum towards evolving newer ideas and items.

Though little effort is going into integrating the lowly roadside potter, Devi Prasad feels that some of the enthusiasm generated towards the work of studio potters should be translated to alleviate the lot of the traditional potter as well. "The government must not let this village art die," he says, "in fact the encouragement should come from the top. Let Rashtrapati Bhavan start using kulhars and handis made by traditional craftsmen. Then only will the world see the real excellence of our pottery. And once the traditional karigar is motivated he'll leave city designers way behind."

6. Terracotta: Continuity and change

By Ranjana Mohan

There are said to be over one million potters in India, producing a profusion of clay objects - using traditional techniques, and shaping and decorating the objects according to the social, religious and utilitarian needs of the region(s) and consumer(s).

In most regions, men create the clay objects and do the firing while the women are responsible for preparing the clay and for decorating the pots. The most notable exception to this is Manipur, in north-east India, where women potters outnumber the male potters.

Every region has its own folklore and beliefs centred around the use of earth to create objects. The essence, however, remains the same - a potter's livelihood and tools and techniques are gifts from the God and ancestors. It was - and still is - the potter who is the repository of the oral tradition surrounding the trade.

The myths have been passed on from one generation to the next, through stories narrated by the elders of the family. Some myths have been lost, several songs

and stories forgotten. However, here we endeavour to recount a small portion of what remains.

Legend has it that in the beginning of time when the epic churning of the ocean took place and the gods procured amrit or the divine nectar, they needed a vessel to keep it. So Visvakarma, the celestial artisan, crafted a pot.

Indian potters - throughout the length and breadth of the country - believe that they are the descendants of Visvakarma; potters in some regions still carry his name: Prajapati, the Lord of Creativity. The methods he practised, the techniques he used in utilizing the wheel for coiling and adding clay, for beating and extending surfaces, for enhancing the form by decoration and for purifying it with fire have been passed down from generation to generation. Potters, in deference to their tradition, light a small oil lamp as a mark of respect to their creator before they start work every morning; till today, they lay down, clean and worship their tools on Visvakarma puja.

Another legend states that Lord Shiva, while getting ready for his marriage with Parvati, found that he had no kumbha (water pot), a necessity for the marriage ritual. So he fashioned a man from a bead and asked him to make a pot. The potter agreed to do so on the condition that Shiva gave him the circular stone on which he sat to serve as a wheel, the trident to keep the wheel moving, and a string from Shiva's sacred thread to remove the pot from the wheel. Using these tools, the kumbha was created and its maker became known as the kumbhar (potter).

It is believed that a potter's equipment is symbolic of the cosmic forces of creation. The wheel represents Vishnu's chakra (the wheel of the Eternal Law of Life) and symbolizes the cycle of birth and death, rest and regeneration. The rod for turning the wheel is Indra's vajra (the thunderbolt), the flat cone of clay is symbolic of Shiva's linga (the phallic form) and the water container is Brahma's kumbha (water pot), a symbol of the mendicant ascetic.

Jaya Jaitley in her book, *The Craft Traditions of India*, writes about the origin of the word kumbhar. "When elephants by the riverside poured muddy water onto their foreheads, the clay dried in the hollow part, leaving a cup shaped object which man used as a storage vessel. The head of the elephant is called kumbha, so the subsequent make of such clay vessels came to be known as the kumbhar."

The kumbha or common water pot represents fertility and prosperity. A water pot filled with water has, from time immemorial, been a symbol of good omen and is indispensable in any ritual. In a ceremony, for purposes of worship, if no image of a deity is available, a water pitcher suffices: it is, therefore, called mangalghat, the sacred vessel. A pot filled with holy water and crowned with leaves symbolizes the sacred cosmos and is used outside homes and temples to welcome visitors.

Common clay is used for making clay objects. The color and plasticity of the clay vary from region to region and

the pottery of a region has often evolved in response to the local materials. Clay is usually tempered with substances to create an even texture and counteract excessive shrinking, warping or cracking during drying and firing. Often, animal dung is added to the clay when making idols, tiles or bricks, but never when making utensils. The low heat produced in traditional Indian kilns results in a porous and brittle product - terracotta. Although this porosity is ideal for cooking and storing food, the vessel becomes contaminated through constant use. Indian terracotta vessels are, therefore, broken and replaced at regular intervals.

Votive earthenware is much more varied and much more local. Each village practically has its own form of the gram devata or village deity, who protects the village and the villagers from disease, aggression

and famine, and brings to them good luck and good fortune. Votive offerings are made in a variety of forms and on various occasions: sometimes in fulfillment of a vow; sometimes in gratitude to the Gods for warding off some disease or misfortune.

On festivals, fresh votive idols are made and worshipped, as the old ones are believed to have lost their propitiatory qualities. The old idols are left in some quiet spot to crumble, and fuse back into Mother Earth again, or else are often immersed in water.

Utilitarian pottery comes in bewildering profusion. A variety of earthen objects are made: lamps, dolls and toys, earthen drums, flower vases, pots, musical instruments. The commonest clay object is the kulhar, which is used for holding water, tea, dahi; actually just about anything.

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