

## **India Now**

We are told India is the new power house but as in China this only involves a tiny percent of the population while the rest remain rural and poor. The same can be seen in the pottery world. I have met very talented young studio potters bursting with ideas and exhibiting all over the world but also met the very poor traditional potters whose lives are very different and whose skills are unappreciated.

The aspiring young Indian pottery student has a tough road to follow. From the start, parents may dismiss pottery as an unsuitable profession. This deep rooted objection stems from the fact that traditional potters have very low status. Then there is the difficulty of persuading the public that pottery is as much an art as painting.

There has been no industrial revolution in India. The old ways have not melded with the new and run side by side. Ledgers sit beside computers and donkey carts beside cars. Similarly the traditional potters are still making the same pots in the same way using the same wheels and kilns that they have done for 4000 years while in parallel, studio potters exist on a different plane.

Although often described as village potters a colony of them is nearly always found in the poorest sections of Indian cities. They do not want their children to be potters but hope education will help them aspire to a better life. Their work is unappreciated and due to plastic and tin water and cooking vessels and concrete flower pots, domestic ware is not in demand and some colonies are dying out. However their votive ware and pots for festivals are still popular and their throwing skills are often used to make pots which studio potters then glaze.

The Indian studio pottery movement was pioneered by Gurcharan Singh who was a friend of Bernard Leach and in the same way travelled to Japan and came back with ideas for art pottery. He started the Delhi Blue Art Pottery and produced glazed tableware. He held his first exhibition in 1954 in Bombay which was a landmark in the history of Indian studio pottery. Since then dedicated potters have continued making, experimenting, teaching and running workshops.

In the West we can buy in one shop all that we need to set up a workshop. Once trained the young Indian potter will have to find the equipment and clay which is often obtained from the local traditional potters. Many studio potters work hard to raise the profile of their traditional counterparts some of whom are bridging the gap and producing beautiful burnished pots.

Selling ceramics in India is becoming easier with a growing number of exhibitions and galleries. Collectors are showing an interest and internet technology has made an important difference to communication and for selling. However there are no ceramic shows where potters sell directly to the public. Studio potters nevertheless exist where there were few a decade ago and the entrepreneurial class is taking an interest in ceramics. Well sponsored high profile shows could stimulate an interest and demand for the potters art of which there is a rich Indian inheritance.

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