

## THE POTTERS OF BINDAPUR

When Jane Perryman heard that I was going to Delhi she told me of a video 'The 700 Potters of Bindapur' featuring a colony of potters. I had read that Delhi was the centre for studio potters in India and hoped to meet some. In Delhi no one, including the tourist office, had heard of Bindapur or of any studio potters. In another country I would have found the information and gone by myself but this was India. I was reminded yet again that traditional potters in this part of the world are very lowly artisans.

Eventually a friend of a friend took pity of the 'mad woman' who kept asking about potters and invited me for lunch on her farm. On the way we popped down an alley where she knew there was a small pottery stall. We were invited to a tiny yard at the rear of the shop by the stallholder where he made small pots himself which were drying in the sun. He had finished his potting that day but invited us back early next morning to watch him work and to obtain directions for Bindapur which was in the suburbs about half an hour away.

At the local potters the next day the wife was kneading a large lump of yellowish coarse clay with her feet. She placed a large stone wheel on its metal spike, put a tall hookah pipe next to it and when all was ready the man squatted in front of the wheel, took a long pull on the hookah and began throwing small bowls off the hump, turning the wheel with a stick. I had a try on the wheel but found it very difficult. He said that the pots were fired at night in a small bonfire using tightly twisted straw.

We followed his directions to Bindapur, driving down small alleys until we reached the pottery area. We were amazed to see street after street in which nearly every house was a pottery. The roads were unmade and outside each house stood huge piles of dry clay often with small children breaking up the lumps. The houses were built in the traditional courtyard style with the pottery in the yard and lines of washing crossing above. Piles of fired pots balanced on the roofs. Each house had its own circular fired clay kiln incorporated into the structure of the yard. These were about six feet across and about eight high with an upper chamber where pots were stacked and covered with a clay and straw lid. Sawdust and sometimes dung was burned in a lower chamber. The kilns were fired at night; once a fire was started the heat was increased by throwing loose sawdust into the chamber so that it ignited.

We were invited into homes, offered seats and tea as we watched the potters work. Some were using the traditional stone momentum wheels but others had rigged up primitive electric wheels. The wares were mainly cooking, water and flower pots and the odd fancy item all made in ancient fashion which was passed from father to son. The pots for cooking and storing water had rounded bases for even distribution of heat over the stoves and for standing on uneven floors. They were thrown thickly and when leather hard the bases were beaten out thinly with a rounded stone on the inside and a paddle outside. The clay was grey, turning red on firing and a much smoother quality than the local man

had used. The women cooked on clay stoves and they showed us clay pipes. We were told that we must visit the best potter in the area and were taken to meet Mr. Harkishan.

The best potter, who spoke English, lived in a large house with a huge yard and two kilns one of which had a chimney. He was the first local traditional potter I had seen who was bridging the gap between artisan and studio potter. Many of his large and beautiful pots were covered with a red levigated slip which gave them a burnished appearance. I responded to the simple forms and fire markings but he told me that most of the pots were bought by ladies who painted them in gold, silver and garish colours or lacquered them and sold them at vast profit. Many of his pots were exported, especially to America. I bought a beautiful fire-flashed pot, lovingly carried it home to Kent and cherish it.