

# Transmutation of 'Traditional Pottery' to 'Studio Pottery'

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## Abstract

India is a land of rich cultural heritage. Art was always a part of lifestyle; arts and crafts were born out of necessity. Weaving, jewellery making, pottery, idols of gods and goddesses, iron smith etc were all part of society. But with time society became very complex and people were classified into different castes and groups. Pottery is one such craft which saw many changes in the human behavior. People who do pottery or works in the clay are called KUMBHKAR or KUMHARS. Figurines and seals from Harappa are the evidence which proved this fact. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the use of terracotta in the architecture. Temples at Birbhum in Bengal are the excellent examples of this style.

In our country we do not have the tradition of glazed pottery. According to the Hindu tradition pot once used for drinking or eating is thrown away and not to be used again. After the Harappa culture and before Historical period, pottery showed deterioration, both in quality and decoration. However, the terracotta toys and heads discovered of the Gupta period were considered as the masterpieces of art.

The potters used to work in the low temperature clay and often the surface of the pots is unglazed. But with change in the requirements of the people Government took essential steps to educate the potters and update them with new techniques and materials. Post-Independence in India many designs centers were established to revive this age-old craft. People were losing interest in pottery and they want to see some modern designs along with the utility and that's where these centers played vital role. Artist was trained in the centers as per the need of the time. Sometime the specialists in the specific art were invited by the Government to train the Local artists.

**Keywords:** Kumhar/ Kumbhkar – Potter, martaban – Jars to store pickle, Kiln – Furnace

## Introduction

Ceramic is a process in which pots and articles made of clay are hardened by heat. It is one of the oldest medium by which articles of daily life was made. Ceramics has always been the medium of communication between people whether it for the barter system or as an art object which expressed the emotions of the artists.

There are many faces of Ceramics.

1. Earthen Ware:  
Terracotta Is An Example Of This Type Of Ceramics.
2. Stoneware Ceramic:
3. Porcelain:

The water- pot in the Indian language is called '*Kumbh*' and the man who makes these is known as '*Kumbhkar*' or '*Kumbhars*'. Another name for the potters came to be known as '*Prajapati*', creator of the toys, which came from Brahma who also made man from clay. There are many legends related to the clay and the creator in our culture.

The trend of glazed pottery started with the invasion of Islam. When the early Pathan kings started building their mosques in the vicinity of Delhi, they had some craftsmen from Afghanistan who made plain blue colored and painted tiles which they incorporate in the design to give new look to the architecture. There are traces of these tiles in the buildings erected by the Tughlaks and Lodis. Before that we had no traces of glazed pottery in India.

The great Pathan builder Sher Shah Suri first introduced the craft of glazed tiles in Bengal. Later on Muslim potters started making glazed pottery such as *martabans* to store pickle and jams, bowls, *hukka* stands,

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etc. Potters of Peshawar, Gujrat, Lahore, Delhi, Ajmer, Multan, Khurja, Lucknow, Chunar, Agra and Gwalior used this technique of glazed pottery.

#### **Evolution of Studio Pottery in India**

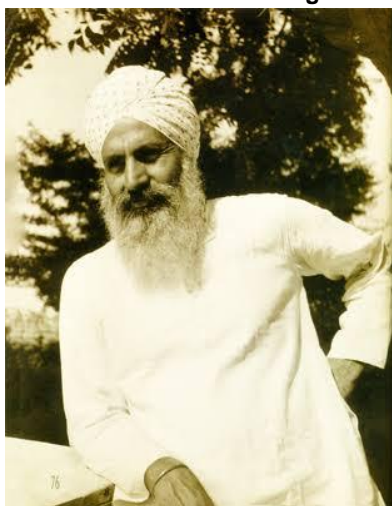
Indian civilization is always known for its terracotta craft and we do not have the tradition of glazed pottery. In our country many figures of gods and goddesses were found from the excavations shows that terracotta clay was considered auspicious to make the idols for worship. Till date at places like Molela in Rajasthan and Bengal, people in the villages make religious tiles in terracotta for their temples. Commissions were given to the potters or 'Kumhars' to make these religious tiles

In contrast to the traditional terracotta craft there is another form of ceramic which is very popular in our country for making pot, bowls, tile and even large sculptures and that is 'Stoneware Ceramics'. Stoneware ceramics gained popularity in India after Independence, when Sardar Gurcharan Singh opened up first ever pottery studio and started training potter and artists in this field. In another part of India in 'Jaipur' Kripal Singh Shikhawat started experimenting with the blue glazes and revived the tradition of Jaipur Blue Pottery, in Uttar Pradesh K. V. was sent to train the local potters of the Chinhat in Lucknow and try to save the dying art of pottery.

In India the term Studio Pottery is very recent and the credit of the revival of traditional forms in studio pottery was given to Sardar Gurcharan Singh, K.V. Jena and Kripal Singh Shikhawat. They trained local potters who have been working with the low temperature for last many generations. They introduced them to high temperature clay and glazes and to some contemporary forms.

#### **Sardar Gurcharan Singh**

##### **A- Sardar Gurcharan Singh**



Gurcharan Singh was born in 1898 in Kashmir. He got his initial education in his city Gujjarwala. His father was an engineer and his job keep him busy and send him out of the city regularly. Later on Gurcharan Singh completed his BA from Chemistry and Archeology.

Abdullah was the name of the potter from whom Gurcharan Singh learnt pottery. He was

working in the factory of Gurcharan Singh's Uncle at that time. He was a pathan potter whose ancestors came to India with Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb bought some potters and craftsmen along with his army in India. While leaving the country some of the potters stayed back and have marital ties with the locals at different places. Gurcharan Singh was so inspired by Abdullah that he became his student. He learnt all the important steps of pottery like- preparation of clay, centering and throwing on wheel, glazing and firing.

Gurcharan Singh lived and trained in Japan from 1919 to 1921 at the Higher Technical School in Tokyo. He had a great personality. He was interested in literature and spirituality. In Japan he came in contact with famous ceramists of that period, Bernard Leach, Yanagi Soetsu, Tomimoto Kenkichi are some of them.



**B- Pot by Sardar Gurcharan Singh**



##### **C- Pots by Sardar Gurcharan Singh**

In 1922 he came back to India. For 3 years he was patronized by the Maharaja of Bundi. In 1927 he founded AIFACS (All India Fine Art and Craft Society). From 1930-1952 he headed the Government Pottery Institute at Ambala in Jammu. In 1952 after his retirement he came back to Delhi and started his own workshop at 1- Factory Road (Today popular as Ring Road) and named this workshop Delhi Blue Art Pottery. This workshop later on became Delhi Blue Pottery Trust in 1974. Around 1952 Government was establishing Delhi and Delhi Blue Art got many commissioned work from the Government like making

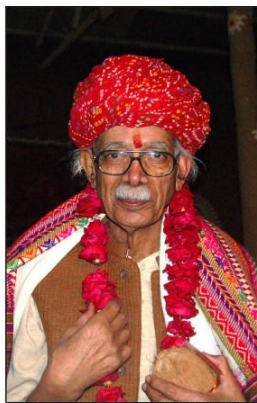
of tiles and screens, etc. At Delhi Blue commission work is going on along with the artistic studio pottery work.

#### D- Famous Delhi Blue Galze on the Jalis



Sardar Gurcharan Singh regarded as the father of Studio Pottery in India. He brought the Japanese, Korean and Chinese techniques and styles in India and blend it with Indian pottery traditions and created something unique. He was well versed in Archeology and Chemistry and had good knowledge about various minerals and oxides. To prepare glaze of different temperature was easy for him. Delhi Blue glaze, Titanium based White glaze and Tomako glaze were his specialty. His first book pottery in India was published in 1979.

#### Kripal Singh Shikhawat



#### E- Kripal Singh Shikhawat

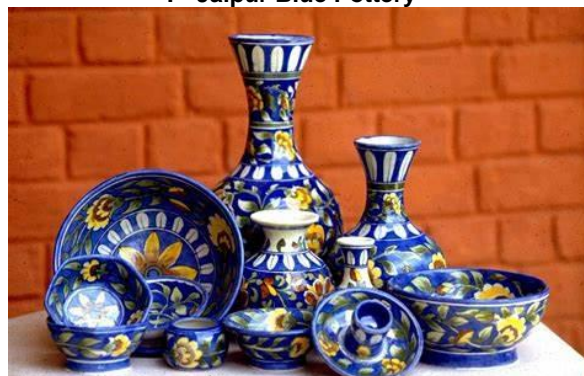
The art of blue pottery came to Rajasthan via Kashmir. The name comes from the eye-catching Persian blue color. The Jaipur Blue Pottery made out of Egyptian paste and is glazed at low temperature. Some of the pottery is semi-transparent and decorated with animal and floral motifs. Due to low temperature firing the objects are fragile and potters only made decorative objects like ashtrays, vases, coasters etc. The color palette is also very limited. Cobalt oxide, copper oxide and white are usually used.

In ancient times blue pottery was popular in Persia (present day Iran). During the time of Mughals this art came to India in Kashmir, Delhi and then to Agra. Mughals gave it a name Sangeene (which means made of stone). Maharaja Sawai Ram of

Jaipur was an advent lover of different arts, crafts and sports. He also used to conduct many competitions in his time. Once he conducted the competition of Kite

Flying. Many people of different states participated in it. There were two potters Kaluram and Churamani also participated and won the tournament also. When Sawai Ram Singh asked about them they told him that belong to the nearby palace of Bharatpur and are potters by profession. They also used to make decorative patterns in the court of Bharatpur as well. Then Ram Singh decided to send them to Delhi to learn the art of Blue Pottery. In 1868 they both came back to their town and then both of them were sent to School of Arts and Crafts, Jaipur to teach Blue Pottery. After them their sons Sawal Singh and Jamna Das continued this tradition of blue pottery and this way the tradition of blue pottery was passed on from one generation to another.

#### F- Jaipur Blue Pottery



Kripal Singh Shikhawat was born on 11 Dec 1922 in Mau in a Shekhawati district of Rajasthan in a well-to-do zamindar Rajput Thakur family

Kripal Singh got his primary education in Alsisar Village in Jhunjhunu district. Later on he moved to Piloni in 1940 and took up drawing and learnt oil pastels from Bhoor Singh Shikhawat, who was trained under Gladstone Solomon and C.R. Gerard at Sir J.J. School of Art. In 1942 after passing his examination he met industrialist Ghanshyam Das Birla who became his patron and supported him to join Shantiniketan

From 1943-1947 he studied at Kala Bhawan under Nandlal Bose, Benode Bihari Mukherjee and Ramkinker Baij. It is in Shantiniketan that he got attracted towards mural painting. Nandlal Bose and Asit Kumar Halder were given the work of copying the Bagh Cave Murals.

When it comes to the revival of the traditional crafts, one name came out predominantly 'Kamladevi Chattopadhyay'. She was a social activist and a national movement leader. She was not only into traditional crafts but also realized that with the change in time crafts should also develop modern sensibility. With this thought in 1958 she initiated a scheme under which four design centres were established at Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata and New Delhi. Artists like Riten Mazumdar, Toufan Rafai, Kalindi Jena, Subo Tagore, P.N. Mago, Raghu Goswamy, Manu Parekh and others worked at these centers. Kripal Singh interacted with Kamladevi at

New Delhi and understood the importance of the revival of crafts in India. His education at Shantiniketan and Kamladevi's craft revivalism convinced Kripal Singh to join her in this massive task.

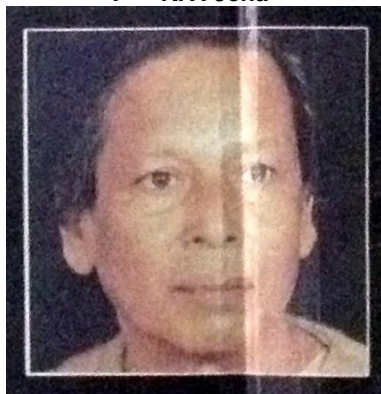
The credit of the revival of the Jaipur Blue Pottery goes majorly to Kripla Singh Shikhawat. But his journey in the search of this long-lost pottery style was not easy. He had to face many challenges. Firstly, because the potters who used to work in this medium did not transfer this knowledge to anyone outside their family and they gave different code names to many important raw materials used in this type of pottery style like Copper oxide as TABADA, and Cobalt Oxide as Saitu. Secondly around 1950s crafts were not taught anymore in the art schools as a subject and the craftsmen who were trained in this style were also not there. Neither the material was available not the people who know this craft. Initially this course was started in 1868 and in 1963 the government started this course again. After much research Kripal Singh got to know the basic materials used in the blue pottery. But at his place these materials were very highly priced. So he took the samples and went to the places where they are actually made. The price of the raw material from where they originate is much less as and that's how he found the materials at cheaper rates. To understand the classical colors and the hues he referred to the book written by Bernard Leach. Many foreign artists worked a lot in blue pottery.

#### **G & H- Pots By Kripal Singh Shikhawat**



**Kalindi Vedan Jena**

I- **K.V. Jena**



K. V. Jena was a ceramic artist who believed in the Guru Shishya traditions of our educational values. KalindiVedan Jena was born on 27 June 1927 at Indupur village in Orissa

They have a house on the outskirts of the village Paliraghunathpur and in this area there are houses of the people from all walks of life like carpenter, iron smith worker, leather worker, barber etc. Kalindi got his primary education at Ramchandrapur village in the school of Gopbandhu Ashram on Orissa. From the very beginning clay attracted him and he used stand for hours to see the construction of the idols in the temples

Uncle Krishna Chandra took Kalindi to Gandhi Ashram, Sevagram. Karishna Chandra was a believer and follower of Gandhian philosophy and after seeing the education system at Sevagram he decided that Kalindi will study here.

He started his formal education under Devi Prasad, who was teaching sculpture and painting at Sevagram. In 1952 K. V. Jena took admission in Seva Gram and chose painting as his subject. He wanted to become famous and have a good name in the field of painting but with time he started seeing beauty in pottery. He was so attracted towards this medium that he used to spend all his time in the pottery studio. He used beautiful color combinations in pottery also. His education in painting and love towards colors is quite evident in the surface decorations of his pots. In 1957, after 4 years of his education he joined Seva Gram as a pottery teacher.

In 1959, he left Seva Gram and joined Regional Design Centre at Kolkata. Here in Kolkata he came in contact with the world renowned ceramic artist William Mash. He was a master of his trade and came to India on a Government invitation to revive Indian Handicraft (specially low temperature glaze). KalindiVedan Jena worked as his subordinate. He got some very valuable information from William Mash about ceramics. He learnt the different aspects of ceramics like techniques, use of colors, development of different colors, oxides and minerals. The unlimited scope these techniques and glazes inspired Jena so much that he decided to take ceramics to the next level where he trained traditional potters in modern techniques and also increase their knowledge about the scope in traditional pottery

This development in ceramics gave a different identity to KalindiVedan Jena in contemporary Indian Ceramics. In 1961 he joined Central Design Center, Lucknow. Here he developed Chinhat as a ceramic production unit. He also trained local craftsman and impart new techniques to them. He experimented with clays of various temperatures and developed one common glaze for all of these glazes. This way it became convenient for the potters to use them because now they don't have to do multiple firings of different temperatures. New designs were also introduced; people also started appreciating these new designs and glazes. The rise in the demand of these ceramic wares gave rise to more money and this improved the financial condition of the local craftsman. Clay objects never loose demand, as people need them during festivals, marriages and

other functions, so it became important to preserve the tradition of traditional pottery. Chinhat emerged as an important center for ceramic production and design unit in the north and to improve the infrastructure and working condition of the potters State Government issued 1 lakh rupees to Chinhat pottery unit. With this financial aid one more unit was started at masauli village near to Barabanki, Lucknow. This unit was one of its kind because potters used the local red clay and made beautiful decorative ceramic wares. Because these objects are made from the local red clay the prices of these articles are very less and they are affordable by the local people.

K. V. Jena was actively involved in the development of many ceramic centers in India and he never hesitated to help others. The concept of studio pottery was first developed around 1960- 1970, but in India British Government started ceramic pottery and sculpture subjects in the college curriculum of Government College of Art and Craft. In 1967 Jena joined Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalaya as a teacher in the fine art department. Here also he developed a pottery course for the students of bachelor level. This was a successful attempt because this was the first college where started teaching and he laid the foundation of the pottery department effectively. He used his experiences he gained at Masauli and Chinhat and developed wood firing kiln and low temperature glazes. He used these facilities for nearly 10 years and then college gave Electric furnace to the pottery department and then Jena started using high temperature clay and glazes.

K. V. Jena believed that it is a natural process that an artist of one place get inspiration from the artist of other place and origin but to copy someone else's creation is an extinction of one's own original style.

#### **Aim of the Study**

The aim of the study is to find out how the transition in pottery took place in India. Our country is known for its crafts from the very beginning, pottery is also one of the craft being practiced and passed on from one generation to another. But today it is not only confined to utility objects, artists expressed their emotions through pottery. The study also tried to find out the thin line between traditional pottery and studio pottery.

#### **Review of Literature**

(Kristine, 2018)

Kristine Michael in this book explored the art and life of Sh. Kripal Singh Shekhawat. His contribution to ceramic gave techniques like 'AREESH' and 'NIHONGA', which are the fresco wall painting methods. Kripal Singh ji revived the Jaiupr Blue Pottery and gave it new depth and meaning, where he put equal stress on form and decoration. He used SUMI Ink to make drawings which he obtained from Lamp Black and Glue. This book gave me detail information about the forms, designs and techniques used by Kripal Singh Shekhawat.

(H.D, 1974)

The author of the book explored the pottery technique of Aharian Community of ancient India. The

forms used by the Aharian Potters are inspired and borrowed by the Harappan Civilization.

(S.C, 1992-93)

The writer in this book wrote about the stature of Kannauj in Indian history. Kannauj was an important center of art activities and as popular as Hastinapur, Mathura, Kaushambi, etc. I learnt two new terms from this book, 'Naigamesha' and 'Naigami' which are the names of the deities associated with the child birth. Clay figurines of many gods and goddesses like Ganesha, Vishnu, and Maheshasurmardini were found from this place.

(Birdwood, 1986)

The author of the book talks about the importance of form more than the pattern and glaze in pottery. He says that the design and motif should be kept in subordination to the form. He also put stress that not more than two colors should be applied on any vessel or pot and potter should also restrict himself from repeating the design.

(Mukul, 1959)

This book is dedicated to the terracotta temples of Birbhum, Bengal. These temples belong to God Shiva and God Vishnu. Subject matter of the temples reflects religious traditions and figure of Siva-Durga, Radha-Krishna, Ramayana, Mahabharata and life of Lord Rama. All important temples of Birbhum contains inscriptions in ancient Bengali script Adityapur, Bankati, Barihat, Chandida-Nannur, Dubrajpur, Ghursia, Hetampur, Ilambazar, Jayadevakenduli, kalikapur, Raipur, Suri, Surul etc. are some of the places around Shantiniketan which are famous for terracotta temples. This book enriched my knowledge about the tradition of erecting terracotta temples in India, where it the duty of the people of the upper class to give something back to the society.

(Kala, 1950)

Kausambi is considered as the greatest center of terracotta industry in ancient times. Terracotta was mass produced by the artists of Kausambi. The author talks about the history of terracotta in India and different types of making terracotta figurines. The most important and common figurine found in India and foreign land is the figure of mother goddess. She has typical features-elaborate head dress, jewellery, prominent breast and wide hips. Many female figurines, Busts connected with magic, Serpent goddess, Mother-Child, Winged Figure, Mithuna couple, Dampati Scenec, religious figures were found from kausambi.

(P.N., unknown)

Author of the book spoke at length about Sardar Gurcharan Singh, his work and his take on ceramic culture in India. Gurcharan Singh Ji spoke how blue pottery originated in India, the factors behind the popularity of blue pottery. The art of blue pottery originated in Egypt in 5000 years ago and then it travelled to Iran, Iraq and Kabul. In India the art of blue pottery came in the Mughal Period. Sardar Gurcharan Singh Ji created the 'The Delhi Blue Pottery Trust' in 1991-92, which became one of the most important centers for practicing ceramic art in India.

(Singh, 1979)

Author traced the history of pottery in the world. According to him pottery first started in Egypt and from there this tradition travelled to Turkey, China, Korea, Japan and India. He mentioned in this book that great Pathan builder Sher Shah Suri introduced the first glazed tile in Bengal and from there the style of glazes pottery started in India. The tradition of glazed pottery came with the Islamic invasion, and the potters of Peshawar, Gujrat, Lahore, Delhi, Ajmer, Multan, Khurja, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Kashmir, Agra and Gwalior started practicing this style. (Pottery, 2020)

This website is dedicated to the Delhi Blue Pottery Trust, founded by Sardar Gurcharan Singh. I got valuable information about the whole life journey of Sardar Gurcharan Singh, his education and work style. (Jagdeep, 2020)

This website is dedicated to Kripal Singh Shikhawat and his attempt to preserve the Jaipur Blue Pottery. We can read the biography and can also see some of the works of Kripal Singh Shikhawat. This website was made by his students, who are trained at the main center of Jaipur Blue Pottery in Jaipur. The procedure of low temperature blue pottery is also mentioned in this website. (Linda, 2020)

This is the thesis of the scholar Linda Madi of Bharat Hindu University on the life and work of KalindiVedan Jena. I got important information about the work style, his thought process and his contribution in the field of ceramics in India. The thesis is divided into many different phases and one can see very closely the development of an artist from a student to the great masters of ceramics in India.

#### Hypothesis

1. India is known for its terracotta craft but in my paper I will explain that not only terracotta but stoneware ceramic also gained popularity among artists.
2. Lot of experimentations is going on in the field of Ceramics in India and for the upliftment of the potters.
3. My paper will show that ceramic is no longer an object of daily use but adopted by the artists as a mode of expression.
4. My paper will also present how traditional craft and contemporary ceramic art is going parallel in our country and flourishing at the same time.

#### Methodology

For achieving the objectives of paper, various methods would be exercised for collecting data for the research topic 'Transmutation of 'Traditional Pottery' to 'Studio Pottery'.

Phase I Survey (Interaction, Observation, Interview).  
Phase II Data Collection (Books, Articles, Social Media, Magazine, Videos)

#### Place of work and Facilities to be Used

##### Place of Research

The research will be conducted by the means of interview of the artists.

##### Facilities to be Used

1. Museum
2. Books

3. Library
4. Websites
5. Journals
6. Archives
7. Research studies
8. Social Media
9. Magazines
10. Videos

#### Data Collection

##### Primary Data

The primary data will be collected by interviewing significant artists. For compilation of primary data

##### Secondary Data

The data will be collected from various books, journals, articles, abstracts, magazines, newspaper, social media, websites, thesis, dissertation, videos, pictures, synopsis, blogs which will support the primary data which will be collected.

#### Conclusion

After Independence many steps were taken by the government for the craftsmen in India. Many government grants were released for the opening of the design centers. Especially in pottery many artists were trained with modern techniques and high temperature clay and glazes. These artists after training were sent to the different parts of the country to train various groups of potters. Traditional potters were introduced with new designs, clay, colors and firing techniques. In return these new methods brought change in the aesthetics of the tradition designs. Sardar Gurcharan Singh, Kripal Singh Shikhawat and K.V. Jena were the notable names who worked for the revival of the traditional craft.

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