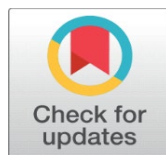


WOMEN ARTIST IN INDIAN CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS

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ABSTRACT

India has a rich heritage of terracotta art; the history of terracotta/clay goes back to the Harappa Civilization. It is one of the oldest mediums of communication between people, whether for the barter system or as a medium of expression for the artists. 'Pot' in the Indian language is called a *KUMBH/ PATRA* and a person who makes it is called a *KUMBHKAR*. A different name of potter came to be known as 'Prajapati' (creator of toys) that came from Brahma who made man of clay, there are many stories behind the origin of the term 'potter'. Pottery can be seen in all cultures all over the world and every culture has a significant style//character in its pottery tradition (Kempner, 2015). In traditional potter families in India, women were not allowed to work on the wheel, women help in preparing the clay, making figures (votive figures), and painting and decorating the ready pots.

In Indian society, patriarchy has been a very prominent feature, for long-time women were deprived of their basic right to education, right to own property, and freedom of speech. Many activists and reformers fought a long battle to provide gender equality in the field of education and all spheres of life in the field of *Art/Pottery* also it is education that broke the age-old barriers and notions related to clay and brought self-sufficiency and self-consciousness for graceful living an honorable status in the society. Development of Art Colleges and Design Schools in India encouraged many female students to learn different subjects like pottery, painting, sculpture, etc. All these subjects enhanced the technical knowledge of the students and paved their way into different art fields. Nirmala Patwardhan, Jyotsna Bhatt, Era Chaudhary, Shampa Shah, Dipalee Daroz, Manisha Bhattacharya, Kristine Michael, Madhavi Subramanian are some of the artists who encouraged the future generation, especially women ceramic artists in India. In the present study, we will discuss the contribution of women artists in contemporary Indian ceramics.

Keywords: Pottery, Studio Pottery, Women Artists

1. INTRODUCTION

Pottery or working on the wheel is not women's work in the rural traditions in India, women only help in digging the clay, preparing it, and making the figure of gods and goddesses and toys. The wheelwork is done only by the male members of the family. This tradition going on for centuries. The villages in Gujarat (Bardoli,

Devli Madhi & Madvi), Molela in Rajasthan, and Village in Nizamabad, UP are some examples where this tradition persists. Education played a crucial role in the upliftment of the stature of women in society. Education opened up several avenues for women where they can pursue their interests and support their families.

After Independence, the government took various steps to improve the education system in the country, many design schools were converted into Art Colleges and many new subjects were also introduced. Experts from different fields from India and abroad were invited to impart knowledge to students. This results in enhancing the interest of students in their respective fields, this new setup gave birth to many women artists who made remarkable changes in the art field.

2. IMPORTANCE OF ART COLLEGES AND DESIGN SCHOOLS FOR THE YOUTH OF INDIA

During the British rule, Art Colleges in India was established as a design institute, the main stress of the Britishers was on the skill development of the young generation. With this aim of skill development, many art centres were developed, and students were given training in wood carving, metal casting, textile design, pottery, etc. Britishers were more interested in the traditional crafts of India and schools were developed to produce artisans. To fulfil this purpose many centres were established like Saharanpur and Kashmir for wood carving, Chin hat, Khurja & Chunaar for Pottery, Bengal for textile etc. In the late 1950s, the country saw the emergence of a new education module. Many design schools were converted into Art Colleges and the foundation was laid for the institutions like NID. The new module was introduced to revive the education system in art colleges and design schools. These colleges introduced the use of modern methods and technology balanced with indigenous traditions. Previously established schools like Chennai, Mumbai & Lucknow, were remolded & new institutions at Banaras and Shantiniketan were established with this view in mind.

3. GREAT WOMEN ARTISTS OF CERAMICS IN INDIA

India has a rich tradition of terracotta where most daily life essentials were practiced in this medium, due to its versatile quality, artisans usually work in terracotta to earn their living as part of life basics. Sardar Gurcharan Singh, Kripal Singh Shekhawat, and K V Jena, revived pottery in India, by introducing their knowledge of high-temperature clay wares, all these artists were inspired by the Japanese pottery style. Pottery was initially a male dominating field but slowly women engaged themselves in learning this trade, Nirmala Patwardhan, Ira Choudhury, and Jyotsna Bhatt are premier women ceramists who carried the torch of modern ceramics for women in India.

4. NIRMALA PATWARDHAN

Nirmala Patwardhan was born in 1928 in Hyderabad. She drifted towards glazing while she was studying at Shantiniketan in the 1940s, she started doing pottery at the age of 30. In 1957 she went to study ceramics at the State Academy of Art, Stuttgart, Germany. Later she got her training from Bernard Leach and Ray Finch. She was the author of the books Handbook on Glazes and 'Handbook for Potters'. [Bhattacharya \(2006\)](#)

'Handbook on Glazes' is a book on glaze recipes that are her experiments from locally available materials. Nirmala Patwardhan was instrumental in fostering the technical development of studio pottery and ceramics in India.

5. IRA CHAUDHARY

Ira Chaudhary was born in Shantiniketan, West Bengal. Her parents were followers of Gandhian and Rabindra Nath's philosophy. She learned art at Kala Bhawan, Shantiniketan. In 1951 she started her journey as a ceramic artist in Vadodra. Her initial days as a potter were very challenging because at that time in India there was very little knowledge available about ceramic processes and the materials were very rarely available. She gathered the initial information from the industrial and technical books available in the college's chemistry department in Vadodra. ("Ira Chaudhuri"). She expressed herself in clay with her unique language and personal style, she mastered the technique of 'Sgraffito'. Sgraffito is a technique in which the body of the work is covered with a different layer of colour/glaze and the surface is then scratched in such a way that a pattern appears on the colour below. The drawings on the pots are inspired by tribal art forms. (Chaudhuri). Her work is a unique combination of personal style and traditional art forms. Ira Choudhury gave new meaning to studio pottery in India, her work is a breeze of freshness in this world of impersonation.

Figure 1



Figure 1 'Naked Raku', Platter by Ira Chaudhuri

Source <https://irachaudhuri.com/>

Figure 2



Figure 2 'Sgraffito', Pots by Ira Chaudhuri

Source <https://irachaudhuri.com/>

6. JYOTSNA BHATT

Jyotsna Bhatt is an important name in contemporary Indian Ceramics. Her sculpture describes her passion for art. She learned sculpture under Sanku Choudhury at MSU, Baroda. Her keen interest in clay helped in developing her distinct style. Jyotsna Bhatt is known for her perfection and precision in her work, while people find it difficult to handle ceramic clay and always called the material fragile and delicate, Jyotsna Bhatt on the other hand was known to give robust form to her sculptures. (World, Celebrated Ceramist Jyotsna Bhatt Leaves behind a Legacy of Perfection and Beauty). Sculptures of cats, beautiful trilling birds, lotus flowers, etc., are some of the themes of Jyotsna Bhatt. She focused mainly on her palette and techniques, matte, satin-matte, teal blue, green and earth tones are some of her favourite glazes. She used both oxidation and reduction firings for her sculptures. As a teacher, she inspires many aspiring art students. She and some of her contemporaries are the trailblazers of modern ceramics in India.

Figure 3



Figure 3 Iconic Cat Sculpture by Jyotsna Bhatt

Source <https://www.architecturaldigest.in/>

Figure 4



Figure 4 Flower inspired Sculpture by Jyotsna Bhatt

Source <https://www.architecturaldigest.in/>

7. CONTINUED PATRIMONY

A new generation of ceramic artists emerged as a result of the exchange of knowledge and the development of new studio setups. (Daroz) These artists came from different educational backgrounds and adopted clay as their medium of expression. (Shah) Their experimentation with clay, aesthetic sense and a keen interest in clay gave them a different identity as ceramic artists and they made their teachers proud by making their mark on the global art scene. Dipalee Daroz, Manisha Bhattacharya, Kristine Michael, Madhavi Subramanian, and Shampa Shah are some of the women ceramic artists who continue to work in this medium and present India' in the global art scene. This new generation of ceramics artists developed their idioms and laid a strong foundation for the future of ceramists in India. These artists specialized in Raku, Anagama, Smoke firing, etc., and also experiment with different types of glazes and clay bodies. These artists produced a huge body of work including, sculptures, murals, installations, and also creative pottery. The great masters of ceramics encouraged a whole new generation of potters and sculptors to take clay as their medium of expression.

8. YOUNG WOMEN ARTISTS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN CERAMICS

The younger generation of women ceramic artists came from diverse backgrounds and was trained and educated under expert teachers.

These artists are engaged in conventional and non-conventional forms. The knowledge of new technologies, glazes, and kilns and access to the internet help them study and observe the new inventions and styles in the field of ceramics that opens up new horizons for these young practitioners and their keen interest in clay helped them evolve their unique style. In this paper, the researcher will discuss 3 women ceramic artists who developed their idioms with practice and perseverance. They have a distinct style, and their works are appreciated by critics and art lovers. They have experimented with clay and pushed themselves beyond the argument of

conventional and non-conventional. The works are conceptual, and they have a direct dialogue with the viewer.

Mudita Bhandari- Mudita is Indore based artist, she is working as a ceramist for the last many years. For Mudita becoming an artist was not a conscious decision. Her mother is a sculptor and she saw her working in stone from my very early days. (Bhandari, Art Journey of the Artist) She has been inclined to ceramics since her school days. It happened during her school trips she went to 'KUMHARWARA', which is a colony of potters in Gwalior where she saw a potter working on a wheel. She didn't know what specifically caught her attention, but she got attracted to the work they were doing. The movement of the wheel and how the clay is taking shape on it by the touch of the potter's hand fascinated her. Mudita took admission in the Design Department of Shanti Niketan in 1993. It was a 5-year course. After completing her bachelor's degree, she went to MSU, Baroda, to complete her Master's in 2000.

Mudita's works are not based on any fixed idea, and she is very fascinated with human nature, how human beings perceive things and make things complex by overthinking. All the problems are a matter of fact, but we make them complex. (Bhandari, Art, and Inspiration) She also likes the idea of how we react to our space, when we reach any place our reaction changes towards that space. For example, if we are sitting in a room our mood is different and if we step out of that space our mood is changed. There are many layers to ourselves and our understanding of ourselves. We are living a life and every day we encounter many things happening around us; some catch our attention some are not. All these aspects of human nature inspire her to make her sculptures.

Figure 5



Figure 5 'Home' Terracotta by Mudita Bhandari

Source www.quartzinversion.com

The technique was never the main area of concern for Mudita. The technique has been her medium. It is an interlinked journey, there are many ways of making any form, and medium was never a hindrance. Form told her what to do, and what to use. Sometimes the composition demands red clay, sometimes stoneware clay. As a sculptor, she enjoys when the material is started challenging her because that's the point when you started thinking about the other way of acquiring your result.

Figure 6



Figure 6 “Knotted”, Fired Clay and Cement by Mudita Bhandari

Source www.quarzinversion.com

Clay as a medium has unlimited scope. If you are unable to do it this way, then there is another way. Technique and medium is a road to the destination, not a destination. The difficult part is to find your destination. Mudita tried to stay true to what she is feeling from within rather than what is acceptable and what is unacceptable.

The residency in ‘Gunehar’ in Himachal Pradesh left a deep impact on her work and personality. It was an interdisciplinary residency, and she was the only ceramic artist. The concept of the residency was to stay in the village for a month and use the locally available material and resources and the work has to be site-specific. She picked up every possible material for her composition, and start everything from scratch, clay, kiln, etc. The idea to work in the village was against the idea of how the artist should work in the studio. Work consists of terracotta house-like forms and displayed the units on the staircase. Then someone in the village told her that this was supposed to be the actual site of some of the houses of the villagers which got washed off during a flood. She was surprised how she got drawn to this place and constructed something which has a resemblance to the past of the place.

Figure 7



Figure 7 Mudita Bhandari in Residency at Gunehar

Source <https://www.facebook.com/mudita.bhandari/photos>

The idea of the aura or the essence of space took Mudita's interest. With her work, she tried to show that every space has its aura and how one's mood change with the change in space, with this same idea, she started exploring the architectural forms to capture the essence of space. She plays with the form and space and tried to bring in light by introducing multiple pillars and playing with light and shadow. The porosity and density of terracotta clay did justice to her compositions. The change in place brought a shift in Mudita's compositions. Earlier when she was trying to capture the essence of architectural form and space, later she started exploring the space within herself. The impact of the events happening around her and her reaction to any situation and her psychology became a subject of study in her works.

Falguni Bhatt Falguni Bhatt is presently based and working in Kolkata. She completed her Bachelor of Fine Art in Sculptures and Master in Ceramics from MSU, Baroda in 1997. She is a founder of Indian Ceramic Art Foundation which promotes young ceramic artists all over India and she is also a representative from India at Jingdezhen Ceramic Center. Falguni worked very closely with Jyotsna Bhatt, and she is highly motivated by her work ethic and discipline, which helped her in developing her idiom.

The initial work of Falguni was figurative and object-based, but rather than imitating the objects she deconstructs the form and with this, she tried to break the stereotype of looking at any object. She says that stereotypes can become too rigid and there is no room for any growth, but once we overcome this challenge, we can see the multidimensional property of any object. She is deconstructing the stereotype of thoughts and practice reflecting an intense and deeply sensitive relationship with her surroundings as well as her state of mind.

Figure 8



Figure 8 'Bag', Ceramic Sculpture by Falguni Bhatt

Source (Aorang Studio)

In her later works, she seems to be dealing with architectural spaces, geological references, and socio-political changes in society. Her works coexist between the modern and traditional, old, and new, comfort and discomfort, and carefully tries to balance them. (Bhatt). Her training as a sculptor reflects in her work. She is not bound to any material, form, or technique and freely used various other materials

along with the clay. She used wheel-thrown forms and hand-building techniques as per the demand of the composition.

Figure 9

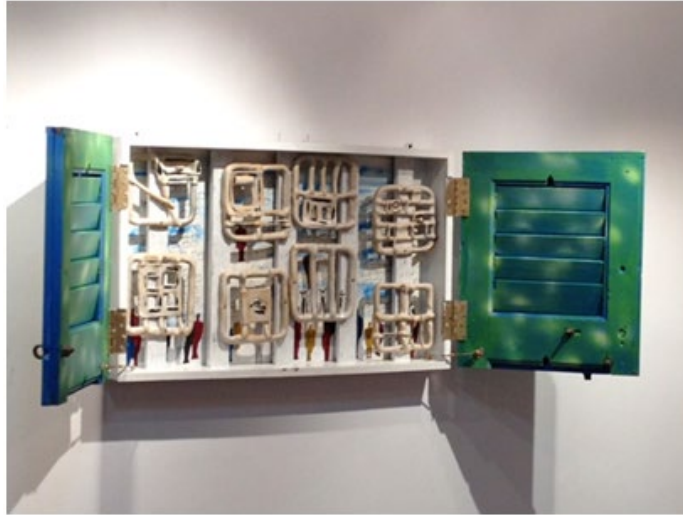


Figure 9 'My World', Ceramic and Mixed Media by Falguni Bhatt
Source (Aorang Studio)

'Where is the Wonderland' is a series of ceramic sculptures which presented the current situation of women in Afghanistan. The present political situation in the country changed the social status of women in the society and the place which once was their home, now women are confined behind the four walls of their houses. Falguni took certain elements from the story 'Alice in Wonderland and incorporated them into her sculptures [Stir \(2022\)](#). Forms are hand-built and used high-temperature pigments for drawings.

Figure 10



Figure 10 'Where is the Wonderland', Ceramic Sculpture by Falguni Bhatt
Source (Aorang Studio)

9. NEHA KUDCHADKAR

Neha Kudchadkar is a Mumbai-based visual and performing artist. Her clay practice involves photography, performance, and clay. Neha completed her Master's in Fine Arts from MSU, Vadodara. After her MFA she went to Golden Bridge Pottery to work as an apprentice under Ray Meeker. Her days in MSU and GBP are the turning point of her carrier, where on one hand MSU gave her the skills and knowledge she required for her clay practice on the other hand GBP gave her exposure and broaden her horizons. In 2013 she went to Royal College of Art London to pursue her 2nd MA. Neha came in contact with clay while learning Ikebana at school. Going to Arts College and taking up clay as a mode of expression was a conscious decision for Neha. She says that clay suits her temperament [Kudchadkar \(2022\)](#). The spontaneity and fragility of the material interest her. She is also interested in the social, political, technical, and geological history of the material (The Making of an Artist).

Neha's art practice involves many mediums like photography, installation, and Kathak, but for all these mediums she thinks through clay. She says she does not have any fixed style and her approach varies from project to project. Home/Land, Hand job, Thought Cast and Something Polis are some of her ambitious projects.

Figure 11



Figure 11 'Handjob', sculpture by Neha Kudchadkar

Source https://www.instagram.com/p/CZGi6_KP1L6/

Neha's approach to clay is super finished and minimalistic. This understanding of clay comes from a certain body language. She is aware of her body and uses her body very consciously while working in clay. The body language is influencing the work and work is influencing the body language. In her work, she tried to bring together her knowledge, language of dance (Kathak), and clay. She implemented the technical aspects of both and add her knowledge to bring out her work.

The amalgamation of these mediums is natural, and she doesn't want to forcefully bring them together. She does not think about the work in terms of making but in terms of what she wants to research and how the work is going to change her. The conversation then determines the outcome [Kudchadkar \(2022\)](#)

'Handjob' is a slip cast model from the artist's figures. The artist calls it a tool kit for loving. These tools serve various imaginary functions. Each tool is modelled

as a prosthetic directly from the artist's fingers and because of this it does not fit exactly on anyone else, but this misfit is interesting to the artist. These tools can be used for groom, nurture, and love and come with the manual -how to use it. These tools call for action from the audience, the artist wants people to use them on the public platform and is interested to see how that action changes the work and the exhibition space. (Schleiffenbaum).

Figure 12



Figure 12 'Something Polis', by Neha Kudchadkar

Source <https://www.indianceramicstriennale.com/>

'Something Polis' is influenced by her visit to the Utne (Sweden) and Hevron (Israel). These cities at one time were culturally and economically wealthy and people had big plans for their lives in the city, but these cities collapsed in the power struggle. This work explored the hidden energies that are behind the formation of any city, it's the people who are the spirit of any place. Neha tried to show how cities grow and collapse on themselves. Since this work was displayed at Indian Ceramic Triennial, Jaipur, she also investigated the plan behind the formation of Jaipur. She used ceramics and found construction material and photo documentation to implement the idea.

10. CONCLUSION

Women artists have existed in the field of art from the beginning, but they have been denied the recognition they deserved. History also celebrates very few women artists. Women artists have made their way into the art field after a lot of hard work and precision, they have been entangled in a constant struggle against stigmatization and discrimination by society for ages. Many attempts have been made to stop this gender base discrimination and eventually women artists came to

the forefront. The development of pottery departments in Art Colleges, pottery studios, and multidisciplinary art studios encouraged many women to join and learn pottery and clay work. The women ceramic artists of India made a mark on the global art scene, proved themselves with their knowledge and hard work and they are educating the new generation of artists through their practice and their literary work. Ceramics in India in the past 20 years saw some very important developments in terms of concept, thought process, and innovative use of the material by the artists. This paper studied the various styles adopted by the artists to express their sentiments.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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