

Pottery Process, People, Contemporization; Journey from Traditional pottery to Contemporary/Studio Pottery in Mumbai – A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

At one time, the potters contributed majorly to the revenue of our country and now their condition and plight is heart rending. Modernization of India has stolen the sheen out of the lives of the potters. Usage of the age old tradition of earthen pots and objects is lusterless to urban India. Estimate shows that over 40 lakhs rural potters still work with the conventional potter's wheel. Out of the 15 lakhs of traditionally skilled potters, approximately 95% are engaged in making the red local pottery. It has been observed that only a restricted part of the society buy the village pottery products.

In India, the studio potters have inherited our country's traditional craft and the method they use is not different from the traditional pottery and yet there is! The studio potters have access to more advanced and modern tools. For example, their pots look more beautiful with the glazes they use to enhance the look of the product. Equipped with knowledge and experiences from around the world, the contemporary potters are able to create pots with innovative shapes and designs, which give their products the signature of being boundless from the simple material- earth. Their exploration to find the best way to express their creation has brought a fresh breath to this ancient art, which is aesthetic and unique. The Studio Pottery helped in boosting Indian pottery with more artists getting involved with keen interest.

1. Introduction

Travelling down the highways of Mumbai, we see on the road sides, clay pots and jars being hawked by the unfortunate and poor potters, at throw away prices.

The humble Indian potters have been subject to deep-rooted social prejudice for centuries. Yet, they have been dedicatedly crafting pottery either for objects required for religious ceremonies or utility products. But the wheel has turned with the advent of a fresh new breed of craftsmen. These are the non-traditional urban potters who create products in their studios, which are highly valued. It will not be wrong to say that 'Studio pottery' is almost an art form.

We can trace the emergence of studio pottery to the early 20th century, which was an effect of influences of several things. Potters all over the world represent studio pottery but has strong roots in Britain. In India, studio pottery started with the arrival of the Pathans and it started from Delhi. The story of 'Delhi Blue' pottery started around 1918, when Sardar Gurcharan Singh took the initiative to learn the art of making Delhi Blue pottery from his teacher Abdullah, in Delhi. After learning the basics of pottery making, Sardar Gurcharan Singh went first to Japan and then to Korea to train in pottery. Post years of training, he opened his own studio in Delhi and named it 'Delhi Blue Art Pottery'. He then started working with his teacher once again and created pottery which was different from the Egyptian Blue or Persian Blue pottery and he named it 'New Delhi Blue Pottery'.

Sardar Gurcharan Singh is credited to have founded the culture of Studio pottery in India, because he opened 'Delhi Blue Art Pottery' in 1952, the first of its kind in India. In 1991 a Trust was founded which institutionalized course has dedicated to pottery, offering courses of six months duration. The scenario today is that New Delhi has potters of two basic

genres - the traditional village potters and Studio potters. Things have however changed now, with traditional potters who have invested years in mastering the art of terracotta with boutiques and also in making glazed ceramic ware.

Traditional Pottery in Mumbai:

Pottery crafted from easily available and natural raw materials like clay and sand of local area, is what is called as Traditional Pottery. Mumbai, the city of opportunities, has a reasonable amount of potters. The artwork of the pottery is distinct, depending on the part of the city which it is produced in and it is amazing to note the variety in designs, shapes and sizes. The earthy Matkas are made from locally available clay.

In Mumbai, the traditional potters work together as a community crafting production pottery, which is need based and specific to the various occasions. They still adhere to the primitive style of firing the pots by digging in earth. Their main production is unglazed Ghadas for puja, Kulhars, Matkas for Kulfi, Haandis, toys, dolls, wall hangings, Lanterns and Diyas for Diwali.

Mumbai's Traditional Potters are located in areas like Kumbharwada, Dharavi, Naigaon, Kaman, Vasai, Bhayander, Panvel (Navi Mumbai) and Karjat. The traditional potters in Mumbai of these various areas are 'Kumbhar' by caste. However, because they have migrated from different places, their language varies from each other. The oldest establishment, with the largest community of potters of Mumbai is at Kumbharwada in Dharavi. Kumbhars means potters and Wada means colony and so the name Kumbharwada. The potters here originally hail from Saurashtra, Gujarat. Kumbharwada spreads across 22 acres of land, housing around 1400-1500 families out of which approximately 700-800 families still practice pottery. The potters here adhere to

traditional methods of production, using indigenous red and grey clay and bake the moulds in traditional kilns. Cardboards and waste forms are used to fire the kilns. Kumbharwada pottery is usually earthen pots, bowls and flower vases which are simple in design and comes in different shapes and sizes. However, the major focus, pre-Diwali, shifts to production of earthen lamps (Diyas), enough to light up the entire city of Mumbai.

The raw material of clay is bought by the Kumbharwada potters from Gujarat and Rajasthan to make their products and they bake these products in their own kilns. Their products are sold by them in retail shops and they also sell through help of middle man to big markets.

The potters of Kubharwada, Dharavi, come under the association of PrajapatiKumbhar. Their intension of starting the association was to follow the tradition of the pottery profession and to help fellow potters of the community by providing education of latest and new technology, marketing of products etc. However, now things have become very commercialized which has worked against the potters which has led to the next generation of potters not wanting to follow their family tradition of pottery as there is hardly any money in it. The Government's lack of initiative to uplift the income to address this problem of these potters has driven the new generation of potters of Dharavi to look for and resort to alternate sources of income.

A walk down Kubharwada will make one feel they are in a traditional village in Gujarat, a stark contrast to the hustle bustle and high rises of Mumbai. It is a friendly and happy atmosphere there with families working and living together. However, due to lack of space, some potters have shifted to Naigaon to avail a more spacious place to practice their craft.

The next generation does not want to be involved in the craft of pottery. Therefore we are faced with a situation where this is the last generation who are practicing this craft. With the decrease of demand for such products they have closed shop. Their products no more sell in the local markets as their need for earning more money have led them to start new businesses or take jobs in the service sectors. Here too, the next generation has no interest in learning or pursuing the traditional pottery practice.

Contemporary / Studio Pottery in Mumbai

Studio pottery can be described as pottery crafted by professional artists or artisans who either work alone or in small groups, producing unique items or short runs. They can be called ceramic artists or an artist who uses clay as a medium. The studio potters mostly produce tableware and cookware and also non-functional items such as decorative or sculptural items. It is noteworthy that there is an increase in production of non-functional items by studio potters.

In the commercial market of Mumbai working with clay translates into making the Ganesha idols for the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi. A reasonable amount of artists are involved in making Ganesha idols with the local clay known as shadu clay. With the help of SardarGurcharan Singh, Mr. L.R. Ajgaonkar started his ceramic studio in Kalanagar, Bandra. In Mumbai, during that time, L.S. Raheja Institute of Art started a

six month's professional course in pottery. A traditional potter, Mr. Bhandare was appointed as a full-time faculty. Formal training in pottery was also provided in Kora Kendra, in Mumbai. Later, J.J. School of Art started a new department of Ceramics and pottery which offered training programs for students interested in pottery.

The studio artists buy raw material that is clays from Gujarat and Rajasthan to make a products and have their own kilns to bake the product. They sell their products through middlemen in big market as well as through their own retail outlet.

The culture of Studio Pottery started becoming popular and started spreading slowly. Even the traditional potters and artists got attracted to Studio pottery. Gradually Institutes in India started providing 4 years degree and diploma courses in the art of pottery making. A flow in students of Fine arts and hobby artists was seen who took to education in ceramic and pottery.

People from different parts of India came to Mumbai, with the Studio Pottery culture starting in the city. They came to get formal training in pottery and pursue Studio Pottery as a profession. A few of them stayed back to settle in Mumbai and opened their own studios. Added to this, some local people too started their own studios. Later, to support their income, the studio potters also started to take hobby classes for the interested people who were unable to afford going to institutes. Interestingly, some of these hobby potters became famous in the city.

Potters of Studio Pottery craft their products in unique and self developed innovative styles. Their formal trainings have taught them about the variety of materials from around the world which can be used and they are also equipped with the know-how of making their own raw material to get the desired outcome. The greatest gift that Studio Potters have is confidence in their ability.

2. Process of making pottery

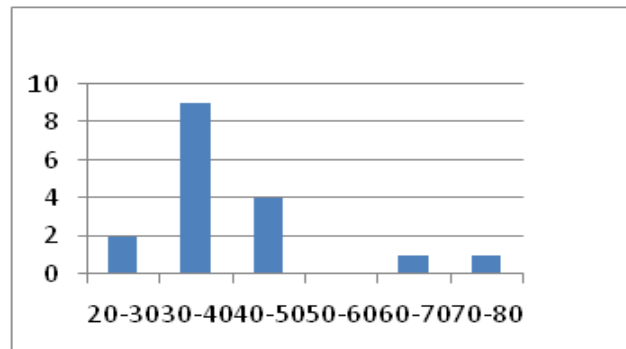
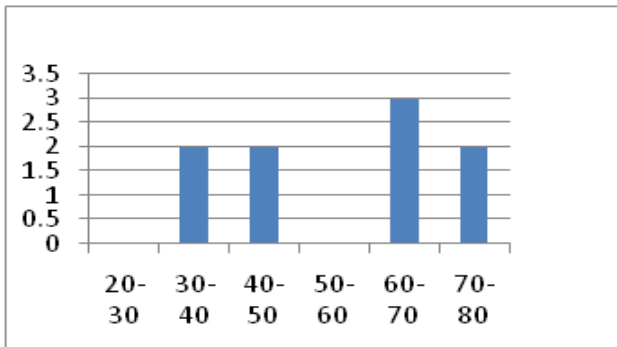
Clay is formed from rock which has decomposed in the earth crust for millions of years. The decomposition of rocks is due to erosion by water which breaks it down and deposits it, which makes clay a natural product which can be dug out of earth easily. It is interesting to note that clay used in pottery is not raw clay. Clay bodies are a mixture of clay with various additives which give the clay different properties when worked and fired, which is used in pottery.

The process of making clay includes mixing of sand and water, making a dough, making a hole in middle of dough, moulding the vessel in round shape (Sometimes used to decorate), drying the vessel, baking the vessel, using strong vessel for storage purpose.

3. Data collection & comparative analysis

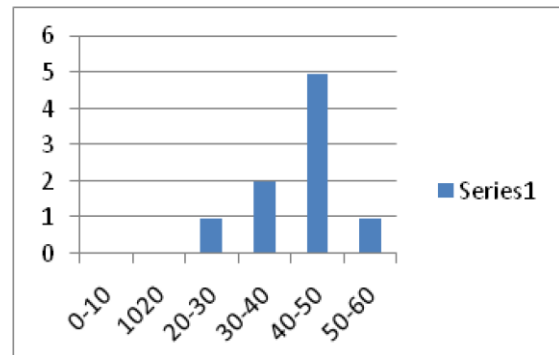
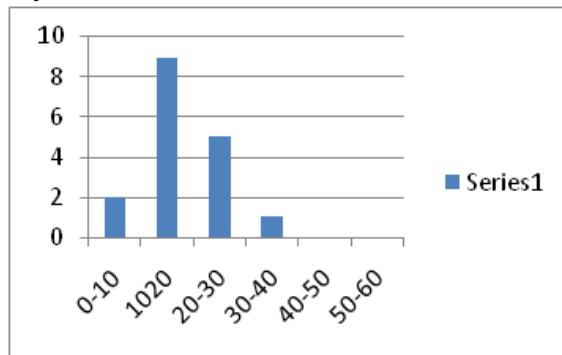
This research is a comparative study to demonstrate the similarities and differences between Traditional and Studio pottery, to come up with the best solution.

Age



Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
<p>In traditional pottery the age group is between 60-70 years, mostly working in craft. But their next generation is not interested in joining or expanding the family business. However some craftsmen have continued their family business and have learned about the new technologies and skills in craft which have helped them to run their forefathers business well.</p>	<p>Studio Potters are in the age group of 30-40 years and are pursuing pottery craft as a career. Many of them have formal training in pottery and ceramic craft. Some of them are hobby artists. It is evident that the culture Studio Pottery is growing fast.</p>

Number of years in craft

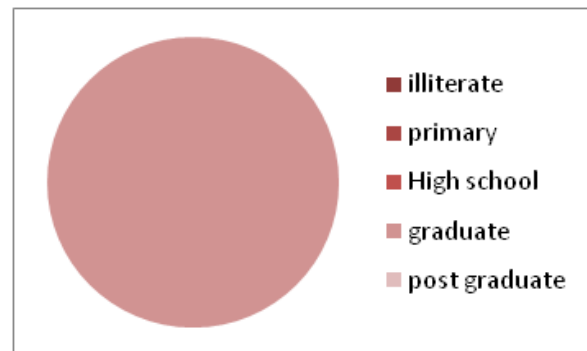
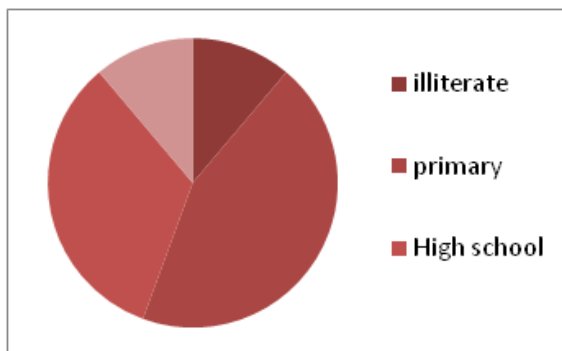


Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
<p>The traditional potters grow up in the environment of the craft and learn the techniques and skills from their family members. They start helping in the family profession, as early as 8 years of age. By the age of 15-16 years, they make the products by themselves. Mostly, traditional potters in the age group of 60-70 years actually have 40 years and more of experience</p>	<p>The Studio Potters can be called modern artists who work either by themselves or in small groups. They produce items of pottery which are unique and every stage of manufacturing is done by themselves. These potters took training in pottery and ceramics or are hobby artists.</p> <p>In Mumbai, Studio Pottery culture is fairly new . Various educational institutes started offering special education of the same field, which saw a growth in number of Studio Potters. Typically the Studio Potters have an experience of 15-20 years. But because some Studio Potters hail from traditional potter's family, they can be credited with a minimum of 30 years of experience in the field.</p>

Pottery as a profession

Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
<p>Traditional Potters have mostly chosen this profession as this is the profession of their forefathers. They are born and grow up in that environment of the craft. It is their family business, and also they are interested in continuing with it. Evidently, some traditional potters choose to uplift their family business even though they are trained/educated in other fields. Few traditional potters have been producing innovative products after learning more skills of the craft.</p>	<p>Studio potters are artists or hobby artists and it is their interest in hand made products that have made them learn about the craft and make it their profession. Studio Potters are generally experts in ceramics as they learn this craft from various institutes as well as learn the basics from traditional potters. This helps them to develop a good understanding of the technical and aesthetic aspects of pottery.</p>

Education Qualification



Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
<p>The traditional potters are used to working in this craft from a very early age. They have the advantage of having an in-depth and hands-on knowledge of the craft. As far as education goes, most of them are educated till high school and then start working the craft.</p>	<p>Studio potters mostly choose to make it their career by getting inspired by other people's work. Institutes such as J.J. School of Art, L.S. Raheja College are offering education in pottery and ceramics. The studio potters opt to educate themselves in the craft from such institutes and then make it into their career</p>

Techniques and Skills

Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
<p>There are two methods of making pottery: Hand-Build Wheel thrown Hand-built pottery is the easiest method and can be made by anyone once they are aware of how to do it. Wheel-thrown method requires the technical knowledge of how to handle the clay when on the wheel and some such important factors to the craft. Be it traditional potter or studio potter, they both are skilled with both the techniques.</p>	
<p>In Mumbai, the traditional potters are professionals catering products as per the demand of the local market, where the whole family is involved in every stage of manufacturing. Each member of the family is allocated the responsibility of some stage of the product making, as per their skill, which includes decoration of the product too.</p>	<p>Studio potters are independent and make the product as per their concept and style, which is mostly inspired by other artist's work or fellow professional's work. Typically studio potters work by themselves is involved in each stage of manufacturing of the product.</p>

Raw Material

Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
Both the traditional potters and Studio potters source the raw material as per the need of the product to be made, as different products require different raw material. The material also depends on the quantity of the product which is to be produced.	
Clay is the basic material used by both traditional and Studio potters. The specifics of the clay is that it should contain a good quantity of Iron Oxide particles to make durable, fine pots. Most potters' source clay from Gujarat and Rajasthan as it is perfect to make pots for daily use.	
<p>The traditional potters of Dharavi, source their clay from Gujarat and Rajasthan as it is economically priced and is easy to order for cluster. As for the traditional potters based in places near Mumbai city, they source clay from the local farms in that area.</p> <p>Besides clay, the other raw material used by traditional potters which are used in the process of pottery making are:</p> <p>Articles: Mitti / clay - various types of Mitti (clay/ mud) such as Red clay, black clay, pilimitti (yellow clay).</p> <p>Mustard oil, manual and electric potter wheel, gum, starch, wax, Kerosene,</p> <p>For Firing: Twigs, dry branches, leaves, firewood, rice straw, edible gum, husk, and ash.</p>	<p>Studio Potters source material as per their need, which depends on the product to be made. So they source raw material from India as well as from other countries.</p> <p>Mostly, Studio Potters use various types of clays and glazes to bring the desired outcome of aesthetics to their product.</p> <p>Materials used by Studio potters in the process of making the pottery are:</p> <p>Article: Electric Potter's wheel, Clays of different kinds, shaping tools, glazes.</p> <p>Firing: Electric kilns.</p>

Products

Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
<p>The list of products produced by Traditional Potters: Matkas (Pot), Diyas (lamps), Kullads (Cups), Matkas for Kulfi, Ghada and Graba (For puja), Ranjan (Big water pots)</p> <p>Tandoor, Sculpture, Wall hangings, Planters</p>	<p>The list of products produced by studio potters: Tableware (bowl, cup, dish, dinner set, desert set, pot) Mugs, Sculpture, Murals, Decor products</p>

Storage& Innovations

Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
<p>Traditional Potters make products for the local markets which is mostly for festivals like Navaratri, Diwali etc.</p>	<p>The Studio potters mostly cater to the urban and international market. Their products are crafted in their own styles which add to the aesthetics of the space.</p>

Challenges

Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
<p>The first and most crucial challenge faced by both the traditional potters and studio potters are marketing of their products. The lack of awareness in the market about how and where to purchase these handmade products has resulted in lack of response for these products.</p> <p>Since the last 2 years the studio potters have taken the initiative of taking workshops to spread awareness and educate people about how and where to purchase such products. Lack of support from the Maharashtra Government and their policies.</p>	
<p>Traditional potters do not have proper studio space and the infrastructure is poor. So they are forced to manage in whatever space is available.</p> <p>As very few potters are interested in continuing with making traditional pottery there is a dearth of manpower which the potters face.</p>	<p>The studio space of the studio potters are mostly small and are confined within their house. Very few have a good infrastructure.</p> <p>There is a lack of community centres in Mumbai.</p>

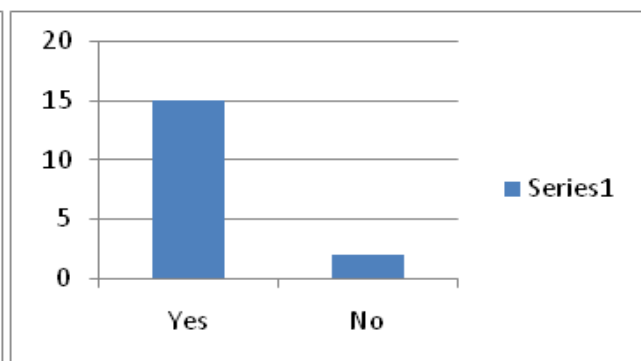
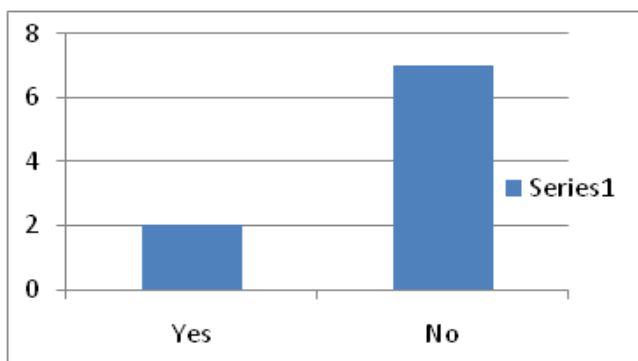
Earnings

Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
The earnings of the traditional potters are not enough for their livelihood. Their average income in a month is as low as Rupees Ten Thousand.	The studio potters resort to marketing their products via social media platforms, online sale, exhibitions etc. Their involvement in the academic field by holding workshops, hobby classes and teaching in the institutes where this craft is taught, is also a source of earning. The average income of a month of studio potters is as minimum as Rupees Twenty to Thirty Thousand.

Potters Association

Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
Both the traditional potters and the studio potters have their individual associations for supporting the craft. The cluster collective started the association.	
List of association: PrajapatiKumbhar Association. The association is made to solve the problems and hurdles faced in uplifting the craft. However, due to interpersonal issues in cluster the association is not in a position to work at present.	List of association: (1) Studio Potters Community (2) Bombay Potters Market The associations help and support the studio potters in all aspects. Help in starting their business, organizing workshops and exhibitions etc. is provided by the associations.

Future Scenario



Traditional Potters	Studio Potters
Evidence shows that the next generation of traditional potters are not interested in the craft as there is virtually no earning in it. So they are searching for other sources of income to keep up their livelihood.	The studio potters are much more organized and commercialized. They are adopting new technology to expand their business and are reaping benefits out of it. The studio potters are also setting examples and inspiring art students to take up this craft as their profession.

4. Conclusion

We often say that a man is known by the virtue of his work. However, in the case of the community of potters in India, this saying does not hold good. The potters put their heart and soul into moulding clay, with their skilful hands into magnificent pots and other objects. In spite of their beautiful creations their future seems bleak due to shutting down of most of the industries which has left the craftsmen either unemployed or paid meagrely for their artistic work. The art of making traditional pottery is dying every day. The traditional potters in Dharavi Mumbai need subsidy and support for gas furnance so that the process of pottery making will be simplified and their children instead of running for jobs in merchant navy, they can take the craft practice further to next generation with the introduction to modern technology and design.

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