

## The Potters of Indore, India

Jane Gibson reports



Throwing chai cups



Pots drying on the roof



Layering the small pots and pieces of wood



Flame lit, covering with metal sheets

It is nine years since I was last in India. It was good to be back and to follow the familiar routine of medical conference with me hopefully finding potters and some days in Goa. I was lucky to be given the name of a well-known studio potter, Mudita Bhandari, who very kindly took me to meet the local traditional potters of Indore.

There are now only a couple of potters' colonies in Indore. The water pots are still in demand but due to space constraints within the city the city potters are not making them so regularly. They are mostly made in the villages around the city and brought here to be sold. Also, the making of sculptural forms for ritualistic purposes has declined. After getting lost down tiny lanes we were finally welcomed by Rajesh Prajapati, a traditional potter and his family. These potters only make disposable chai(tea)cups and tiny pots for a sweet (rabari and ras malai) which is poured into them and eaten with a spoon. The pots are sold in bulk to shops with a regular order which gives them a monthly income. In a small lane at the back of their house two men were throwing the tiny sweet pots off the hump. They used to use a momentum wheel

turned with a stick but now an electric motor powered two wheels.

In the back yard we met 92 year old grandfather and we were invited to watch the firing process that took place at 3.30 every afternoon. The whole small yard was a hive of activity with family members helping. In one corner the clay



**Throwing  
base of  
flower pot**

was being processed. Raw local clay is not very plastic so after being slaked, sieved and left to settle to a throwing consistency it is mixed with ash or sawdust. After being thrown, the hundreds of tiny pots are put on the roof to dry (see images on previous page). Due to the number of pots they had to fire they were doing two separate firings each about 4ft square. They fire with small bits of wood which are expensive but not as expensive as gas would be. A layer of wood is laid in a shallow depression. Then a layer of pots followed by layers of wood and pots alternately. A gap is kept in the centre by a broken water pot. A piece of paper is lit and put inside the broken pot. The flame slowly spreads to warm the pile as more wood is added. Pieces of metal sheet were placed over the whole pile and it was left to burn down for three hours getting to about 650c. It would be left to cool overnight and next day the pots would be packed up. All generations helped with the firing but the granddaughter is at college studying medicine so this group of potters will also die out.

Next door a potter was throwing flowerpots. He first threw the top half.



**Flower pots**

When leather hard his wife would bring them back and they were turned upside down on a chuck and the bottom thrown up finishing with a drainage hole. This potter also made oil lamps



for Diwali. On our way back we passed a shop selling water pots (left), so someone was still making them. I naturally bought one for my water pot collection.

Mudita (left, below) is a well-known potter making complicated architectural structures. She has recently moved house and is setting up her new studio and gallery. Here I was able to see some of her work and to meet her delightful mother who sculpts in metal. We also did a sightseeing tour of Indore with Mudita bemoaning the fact that so many lovely old buildings had been pulled down for road widening and constructing an



above ground metro.

Finally, we flew to Goa for a few days and I was able to find my potter friend Luizinha (right, with Jane))and give her a copy of my book in which she stars.

Read more about Jane's adventures in her book: *'Hunting Potters in South Asia'* published by Troubador and available from all usual places

