

# THE POTTER'S PARADOX

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## Abstract

We live in times where cutting-edge technologies are making traditional technologies obsolete and traditional cognitive pathways are quickly becoming artefacts. Should this eradication of traditional knowledge be normalized in the name of progress? The Potter's Paradox lies in the loss of ancestral knowledge while witnessing the robust growth of non-traditional practice. Pottery in India is ancestral and shared by millions of *kumbhars* throughout the subcontinent. The practice of this ancestral skill is quickly running into a bottle neck and will most likely soon be extinct. On the other side of the ceramic spectrum we find a growing and dynamic emergence: the Studio Potters. This cohort emerged in the 1970s and has flourished over the years with influences from Japan and America. Most studio potters operate in larger urban centres unlike the traditional *kumbhar* who work in a rural setting. Unlike the traditional *kumbhar* who have to source clay from fields, ponds and river beds, the studio potters often have processed materials that can be ordered online. Is this shift also a symbolic distancing from nature? Are there issues related to sustainability that studio potters need to grapple with? Are there new values that need to be ascribed to the act of making pots that take them beyond the functional and the decorative? To achieve the fusion of these two extremes on the ceramic spectrum, we propose the establishment of an academic program which will prepare students to be embedded in traditional potters' families as well as with established pottery studios.

## Keywords

Pottery, Traditional Potters, Studio Potters, Sustainability, Academics

## 1. The Paradox

### 1.1 Framing the Paradox

If one could travel in a time machine and observe the evolution of ceramics through the ages, one would realize that while technologies have changed, the relationship between humans and clay is still the same.

This relationship finds its emergence in the folds of prehistory. One day - the plastic nature of this ubiquitous earthy material triggered a technological revolution and contributed significantly in the long process of hominization. It could have been a pinch, a stratified slab or a coil which, modified, ushered hominins into the concept of the container. It might have taken generations or minutes for pottery and pyrotechnology to merge into ceramics, but this thermal process of heating the clay till vitrification marked the emergence of the nonporous. Nonporous containers are the signatures of man's control over nature. The grain, the water, the cooked food could be preserved and the potter was the magician, the shaman who initiated this transformation and was probably worshipped the same way, many moons later, the blacksmith were worship as supernatural entities. Today, we are a long way away from this ancestral worship. One day ... the potter was removed from the pantheon of the extra-ordinary and projected onto the dusty floors of the ordinary. And in the age of mechanical reproductions, the potter almost disappeared under the weight of mass produced plastic wares. This is where our paper begins ...

Today ... still at the dawn of the 21st century, pottery in India finds itself in a paradoxical existential state. On the one hand an ancestral tradition of mostly rural traditional potters is gradually being squeezed into a cultural bottleneck, while on the other hand a thriving studio pottery is increasing its membership. It is important to note that the fate of traditional potters is in no way related to the growth of the studio potters. Industrialization and mass production of plastic wares is really to be blamed for the fate of traditional pottery. Interestingly enough, the emergence of studio pottery appears to have benefitted from the colonial vestiges of enforced modernization and the introduction of clays, kilns, and glazes that could sustain 1300° c. Traditional pottery in India, working exclusively with terracotta and basic open or enclosed kilns only require a temperature above 900°C. 400 degrees is what separate two very different philosophies about pottery and ceramics. Yet, these 400 degrees also represent the bridge which, we will argue in this paper, needs to be crossed by traditional and studio potters to not only guarantee the preservation of this ancestral cultural tradition, but also to provide a forum for the emergence of a pan-Indian pottery based on the percolation of traditional techniques into the studio potters' clay.

## 1.2 Traditional Potters (TPs) and Studio Potters (SPs)



*The works of Om Prakash (L) and Raymeeker (R) suggest a possible osmosis between traditional potters co-existing with a new generation of studio potters, to shape the future of ceramics in India*

Before we can lay out our proposal for an academic structure which will focus primarily on preparing a new generation of potters to archive and integrate practiced techniques borrowed from traditional pottery as well as merging these ancestral techniques with techniques borrowed from contemporary studio potters, we need to provide a brief description of similarities and differences between the traditional potters and the studio potters in India.

A traditional potter (TP) by definition is a person who hails from a tradition that spans several generations. In India, since society was structured by the system of caste, traditional potters come from the *kumbhar* caste (called by different names in different parts of India, such as for eg. *kummari* in Telugu and *kuzhavar* in Tamil). The critique of the caste system by Ambedkar led to affirmative action policies by the government of India. Though the caste system still pervades large sections of India society, there has been an increasing awareness about caste discrimination that imposes a hierarchy in the castes. *Kumbhars* in most parts of India were respected but at the same time regarded as one of the lower castes. In “Turning the Pot, Tilling the Land” (Ilaiah, 2007, p.8) observes “our society suffers from lack of dignity of labour because in the framework of the caste system any process that involves labour is projected as undignified.”

A studio potters (SP), typically come from a position of privilege. They are first generation potters and except a very few who earn their livelihoods by setting up production potteries, most studio potters pursue pottery for aesthetic fulfillment. For some, pottery offers a meditative space and for some it simply brings them a little closer to the earth. Studio Potters have chosen to practice pottery for the love of it. Many are amateurs and some hone their craft and undertake professional production. Their pots have some unique quality and are produced in small batches. Their work could be functional or non-functional and sculptural. They often regard themselves as artists who use clay as their medium. Most of them work individually or in small groups in studio-setups. Most create works that are glazed.

While buyers turn to traditional potters for their needs such as cheap *diyas* for *deepavali* or for a traditional water pitcher (*surahi*) or for temple cooked prasada (as in Puri Jagannath temple), *kulhads* for chai, pots for sweetened curds (*mishti doi*), the audiences for studio potters are people who are willing to pay significantly higher prices for the aesthetics of a pot or some sculptural ceramic work. The increasing popularity of Studio Potters markets in larger metropolitan cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Baroda and Kolkata suggests that there is a growing audience to appreciate and support the growing number of studio potters.

## 2. The Evolution of Pottery

### 2.1 Review of Literature

In the introduction to their very well-researched work, “Pottery Techniques in Peasant India”, (Saraswati and Behura, 1966, p.vii), mention that their survey of pottery was carried out in 143 districts – that is nearly 44% of India’s total of 322 districts. The entire country is categorized into three zones and the districts studied are very well distributed over all the states. Their study provides a wealth of information on *kumbhars*, the traditional potters of India. Tools and implements, techniques of making pots and firing, types and aspects of pottery, the rank of potters in the caste structure are documented in considerable detail. However there is no data about the number of traditional potters.

In her book “Pottery and the Legacy of Sardar Gurucharan Singh” (Ravindranath, 1998, p.40) also provides interesting details about the history of pottery in India – from the Harappan times to the pottery during the Kushan, Mauryan and Gupta periods till the introduction of glazed tiles by the Pathan kings and later the Mughals. The study also mentions the influence that the British had on the development of ceramics.

In “Traditional Pottery of India” (Perryman, 2000, p.9) mentions that India has one million potters mostly “anonymous craftsmen, of whom the two famous potters of East and West, Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach, often spoke and wished in many ways to emulate.”

In the “Sociological Bulletin 55(3)”, (Sodhi, 2006, pp.367-382) draws our attention to innovations by traditional potters at Khurja and points out that contrary to perceived notions, traditional potters are not averse to new technologies. The study by Sodhi describes how a handful of Muslim traditional potters at Khurja, because of their association with china clay (*chinimitti*) could bring about a rise in pottery industry. The first modern downdraft kiln and the use of saggars for firing were introduced here in 1942. He also cites W.Ehrich (1965) who suggests that ceramics may be seen from the standpoint of ethnology and ethnography.

In his doctoral research on the “Existence of Potteries in the North-Eastern Region of India” and in particular in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura (Bhowmik, 2021) provides very interesting details of the types of pottery, its stylistic features and the present status. It also makes several suggestions for the preservation and revival of pottery in the North East. These include research and awareness programmes to skill building and support for marketing. Yet again we find no estimate of the number of traditional potters in the North-East.

The doctoral research “Artisan to Artist” (Kristine Michael, 2023) goes into the stylistic development of Indian pottery in the colonial art schools (1850 – 1930) in much detail. Her study explores the intersection between knowledge, power and aesthetic production in the context of the experiments in ceramics in the art schools at Bombay, Madras, Jaipur and Lahore. For example, in 1857 G.W. Terry, not only brought his experience in kiln making to the Bombay School of Art, but in 1872 also invited Noor Mohammed, a traditional potter from Sind to teach students. The geological and mineral exploration carried out by the colonial government also led to a more systematic chemical analysis of ceramic materials. Alexander Hunter, an officer of the East India Company, made considerable efforts in locating, testing and cataloguing rocks, clays, soils, sands, metals and limestone resources in southern India. Hunter found that the refractory Cuddalore clay which was suitable for saggars and fireclay brick making, and the fine Arcot and Cuddalore clays which were ideal for modeling and ornamental work.

### 2.2 A Brief History of Pottery in India

The Indian potter was largely restricted to the use of terracotta fired in pit kilns using wood and bio-mass. These kilns could go up at most to about 850 to 900 C and glazed pots or glazed ceramic was unknown to the Indian potter till traders from the Middle East and China introduced glazed wares around the 17th century. The colonial art schools at Bombay, Madras, Jeypore and Lahore attempted to introduce production of pottery on a larger scale. There were attempts to test minerals and build furnaces so that production could be carried out with a greater degree of control. Many local master potters were enlisted in these experiments by administrators and British art educators in the 19th century. Some form of industrial ceramics for manufacturing roof tiles and sanitary ware were started in some engineering colleges by the colonial government introduced ceramics in some engineering colleges. The first modern ceramic unit was started by D.C. Majumdar in 1858 at Gwalior. The colonial interventions in ceramics did lead to some technical advancement but the large number of village artisans and potters were not a part of this project.

Tagore’s project of encouraging artisans at Sriniketan is significant; it continues to offer pottery courses to local potters. Artists who studied at Santiniketan included Devi Prasad, Ira Chaudhuri, Nirmala Patwardhan, and Kripal Singh Shekhawat.

Gandhi's efforts to create a new approach to education through Nai Taleem encouraged self-reliance and indigenous economies. Sewagram inspired potters including Devi Prasad (1921 – 2011) (who later worked at Garhi, Delhi), Kalindi Jena (who started the ceramics programme in 1967 at BHU, Varanasi), S.K. Mirmira (who shaped the Bhadravati programme in 1956), Dashrath Patel (who started the ceramics department of NID in 1961), B R Pandit (who started his own ceramic studio at Bhyander, Mumbai). Other potters, who setup independent studios in Mumbai, include Premula Pandit, Ralli and Perin Jacob.

Sardar Gurcharan Singh set up Delhi Blue Art Pottery in 1952 with the help of Abdullah, a descendant of a Pathan potter. Gurcharan Singh was greatly influenced by Shoji Hamada and went on to produce a beautiful range of handmade glazed stoneware pottery. The Delhi Blue pottery trained several young potters and played a key role in popularizing studio pottery in India. His son Mansimran Singh (with his wife Mary) started Andretta Pottery and Crafts Society in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh 1983. The pottery overlooks the majestic Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas and has trained several studio potters.

Deborah Smith and Ray Meeker, American artists started the Golden Bridge Pottery (GBP) at Pondicherry in 1971. Deborah was greatly influenced by Japanese pottery and later came to settle down at Pondicherry. Drawn to the Aurobindo Ashram, she was asked by the Mother to start a pottery studio. They started teaching in 1983 and went on to train a generation of young ceramists. Angad Vohra (Mantra Pottery) and Michel Hutin (Flame Pottery) were among the first studio potters who trained at Golden Bridge and then moved to Auroville to setup Shilpika where they trained locals from the villages around. Auroville has a very active community of studio potters many of whom trained at GBP. With the internet revolution, knowledge, technology and materials are now available easily. In the early years of ceramics in India, nothing was easily available to these pioneers who laid the foundations of high temperature glazes. It is their spirit of experimentation that paved the way for the vibrant culture of ceramics that we find in India today.

### **2.3 Influences in Studio Pottery in India**

Bernard Leach (1887 – 1979) and Shoji Hamada (1894 – 1978) are amongst the first studio potters. Leach is regarded as the father of British studio pottery and setup the Leach Pottery with Hamada in 1920. Studio pottery has its roots in the Arts and Crafts Movement of John Ruskin and William Morris that sought to recover the handcrafted from industrial production. The movement drew its inspiration from nature and natural forms, sought to use local materials as well as emphasizing a simple and meaningful life enriched by hand crafted creation.

The studio pottery movement in America gathered momentum in the mid-twentieth century when studio potters "introduced ceramics into collegiate education, advancing clay theory and moving the modest material from a tool in the production of art to being accepted as a critical fine art form in its own right. From a history in the factory manufacture of functional items, studio pottery became a platform for vivacious self-expression with function becoming optional." Deborah Smith and Raymeeker started Golden Bridge Pottery in 1971 in Pondicherry. Deborah was a translator for Susan Peterson when she was working on a book on Shoji Hamada. She was greatly influenced by Japanese aesthetics having apprenticed to master potter Yamamoto Toshu at Bizen. Gurcharan Singh who started Delhi Blue Art Pottery (in 1952) also drew some of his inspiration from his years in Korea and Japan where he had met Soetsu Yanagi, Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada.

Jagdish Swaminathan envisaged a unique institution Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal that sought to bring the tribal and contemporary arts together. P.R. Daroz was invited to set up its ceramics studio and Bhopal became a centre for many studio potters.

### **2.4 TP's and SP's: A Possible Future of Pottery in India**

In order to understand the future of pottery, it may serve us better, to widen our lens and attempt to understand the evolution of human choices, not just over a few centuries but over a much longer span of time. Some studio potters now, may be found in one of the seven thousand passenger aircrafts criss-crossing the skies, at day and at night without colliding, as they are guided by the eyes of satellites. Political differences are sometimes forgotten when astronauts and cosmonauts circle the planet in space stations. Mobile telephony and the internet have bridged ideas and people in distant lands. Medical research has given us wondrous drugs that target anomalies at the level of the DNA. The ceramic industry creates a range of products for space shuttles to vitrified floor tiles; from table ware and sanitary ware to artificial teeth. This journey from the Earth to the Moon and beyond; from uncovering secrets in deep space to those within atoms, may be described as an "outer" journey. The creativity of the traditional potter is celebrated, but in museums; life and art continue to be separate worlds for many 21st century humans. As we voyage outwards, we could mull over a few observations. The first is our increasing levels of consumption and a visible degradation of the environment. The second appears to be a loss of good sense that eludes our rational prowess - a loss of moral judgement. The third is arrogance that leads to hubris.

The need for an accompanying inward journey that is self-reflexive leads us to propose that the future of pottery is best viewed as a dialogue between tradition and the present. More specifically we propose new ways of enabling young learners, through praxis and field trips, through research and reflection, through ethnography and auto-ethnography, to begin such a dialogue. For most traditional potters, the difficulty of making a livelihood using their skills, suggest that they are no different from our hunter-gatherer ancestors. The imagination of studio potters makes them a part of a very different universe of privilege. One may ask, "What exactly is the relationship between the two?"

One may see in traditional potters, "The Unknown Craftsman" that Soetsu Yanagi dwells on. The simplicity and beauty of the work of the traditional potter, is exactly what is enshrined in our contemporary idea of sustainability. It is worth reflecting on the role that Yanagi envisages for studio-potters (and the artist-craftsman) as he observes that the artist of the future needs to be concerned about the requirements of the people around. The extent to which they contribute to society determines their value. Their (studio potters) products are so few and so expensive. They are more decorative than useful. Even if they are made for use they are expensive and are therefore not employed in daily life, thus becoming luxury items.

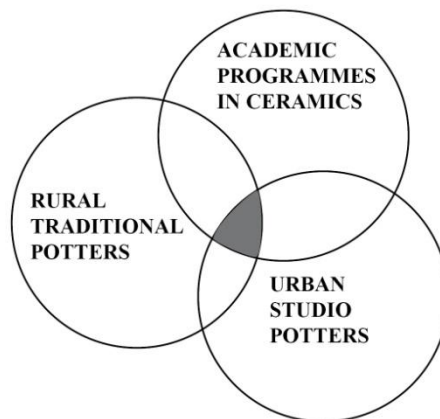
There could not have been a more damning indictment of studio potters. The redemption appears to be contained in the hyphenation; studio potters regard themselves as artists for sure - but they could understand better, what it means to be a craftsman. Even as they do this, to extend to the traditional potter and the unknown craftsman, the stature of a true artist, would be in order. A true artist, in our times, is one who is mindful of their own, carbon, footprint.

**Table 1: A Summary of Key Characteristics of TPs and SPs**

Traditional Potter (TP)	Studio Potters(SP)	Remarks
Inherited the practice over generations	First generation potters	
Practiced as a profession	Most SP's do not make a living by making pots	Very few SP's take up production pottery as a profession
Use terracotta	Use terracotta, stoneware, porcelain	
Only bisque firing Some burnish	Bisque and glaze. Typically two or more firings	Some TP's have started to glaze. For eg. Khurja, UP; Jaipur Blue Pottery.
Number about a few lakhs to 10 lakhs	Estimated around 2000 to 5000	No accurate figures available
Hand-operated wheel / Kick Wheel / Electric wheel	Electric wheel / Kick wheel	
Prepare their own clay in large quantities	Source it from traditional potters / Online suppliers	Only very few studio potters prepare their own clay in large quantities
Mostly in villages	Mostly in larger metropolitan cities	Some TP's have migrated to towns and cities. For eg. Kumbharwada at Sion-Dharavi in Mumbai.
Make pots for ritual purposes and some functional ware such as water pots (surahis), lamps (diyas), planters, roof-tiles.	Table ware, Sculptural Ceramics, Experimental Ceramics	Table ware is also produced industrially. The tile and sanitary ware industry has also grown tremendously. For eg. Morbi in Gujarat.
Regarded as craft and in rare cases as art	Most seek to create novel and new forms that are mostly glazed.	Few SP's have developed the high level of craftsmanship that TP's have.
Teaching-Learning happens from childhood through association	Teaching-Learning happens from pottery courses by SP's and through institutions that offer an academic ceramics programme. Some SP's learn throwing pots from TP's.	The art schools started by the British offered courses in ceramics. BHU Varanasi , Bhadrawati, Sriniketan, and later, Santiniketan, MSU Baroda, NID Ahmedabad have offered academic ceramic programmes.

### 3. Proposed Academic Programme

**3.1 Rationale:** Hosted by an institution for higher education in India, the proposed program is designed to provide students with a unique opportunity to be trained in qualitative ethnographic methods (fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, and archival research) while being trained in the medium (ceramics) they are investigating. Based on the current state of welfare of traditional potters in India, and the high probability for a cultural bottleneck, it is paramount to archive these ancestral traditions. In the light of this imminent cultural extinction, it is deemed necessary to establish an academic forum for archival research and to facilitate a dialogue between traditional potters (TP) and an emerging tradition of studio potters (SP) in India.



**Fig 1.** A schema that situates the proposed academic programme in ceramics

### 3.2 Brief History of Ceramic Programmes in India:

Ceramics, here defined as any clay body going through some kind of thermal transformation, has a long history in India. So much so that ceramics can trace its ancestry back to the Mesolithic Cord-Imprinted style of pottery from Lahuradewa and Chohanmandi, some 9,000 years ago (7,000-6,000 non calibrated BC). From Mehrgarh to Harappa, from the Vedic and Gupta periods to today's traditional approach to pottery, one can only admire the consistency of forms and functions. This however could not have been achieved without a robust pedagogical process. Inherited techniques from a long lineage of potters is a common occurrence in the hereditary word of *kumbhars*. With the decline of the ceramic functional ware in India, replaced aggressively by its plastic nemesis, this ancestral knowledge is quickly fragmenting. Paradoxically, the colonial influence in the shape of the studio potters is thriving and becoming normalised as the established pedagogical mode for students in ceramics in India. Historically, attempts at integrating the *kumbhars* with emerging studio techniques have been few but significant. How did the *kumbhars* benefit from these attempts is what we will briefly discuss now.

One may trace efforts in teaching pottery and ceramics as an institutionalized process to the early art schools set up by the British at Bombay, Madras, Jaipur and Lahore. Kristine Michael (2023), a researcher at the JNU, New Delhi has just completed her doctoral thesis on this subject (this document is not yet in the public domain). She mentions that the colonial art schools sought to bring in a more systematic approach to the production of pots. The thesis goes into the stylistic development of Indian pottery in the colonial art schools (1850 – 1930) in great detail. Her study explores the intersection between knowledge, power and aesthetic production in the context of conducted experiments in ceramics in selected art schools in India. In 1857, G.W. Terry brought his experience in kiln making to the Bombay School of Art, and in 1872 he also invited Noor Mohammed, a traditional potter from Sind to teach students.

There are a few other instances where local master potters were invited to contribute to the effort of teaching. Tagore's project of encouraging artisans at Santiniketan is significant; it continues to offer pottery courses to local potters. Artists who studied at Santiniketan included Devi Prasad, Ira Chaudhuri, Nirmala Patwardhan, and Kripal Singh Shekhawat. The Institute of Rural Reconstruction was founded in 1922 at Surul at a distance of about three kilometres from Santiniketan. It was formally inaugurated on February 6, 1922 with Leonard Elmhirst as its first Director. Thus the second but contiguous campus of Visva-Bharati came to be located in 1923 at a site which assumed the name of Sriniketan. The chief object was to help villagers and people to solve their own problems instead of a solution being imposed on them from outside.

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Efforts to integrate traditional potters into the dynamic growth of studio potters have been sporadic but significant. When reluctance to depart from tradition is lifted, the traditional potter brings a historical texture to the studio potter's work and contributes to provide potters in India with their own signature – a welcome departure from what can only be described as a lasting and pervasive colonial influence. The main motivation behind establishing the program we are proposing is to provide an academic structure to urgently salvage the *kumbhars*' ancestral ceramic technologies. The program is dedicated to that effect. It differs from contemporary ceramic programs in that it offers students courses in social sciences (especially ethnography, history, material culture, ceramics), as well as promoting full immersion with traditional potters (TP) and studio potters (SP). This creates an academic opportunity for the students to learn simultaneously from a dyad of curricula, namely a praxis-based and a research-based curriculum. To highlight the merits of this pioneering program, we will briefly discuss a selection of existing programs in ceramics in India.

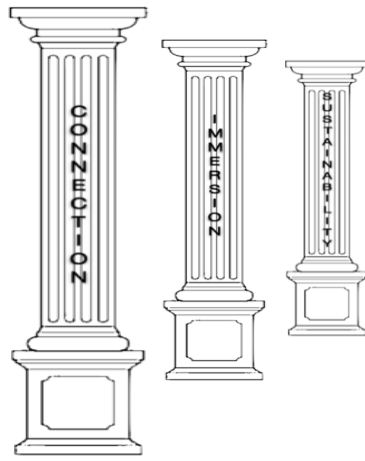
BHU Varanasi was started by Kalindi Jena in the 70's. BHU Varanasi offers an undergraduate and postgraduate programme in ceramics for about 10-12 students. The tradition of learning to throw continues. Students are also taught glaze chemistry, but there appears to be no systematic glaze chemistry course, despite the thriving ceramic industry in India.

The ceramic programme at NID Ahmedabad was started by Dasarath Patel. It was later developed by Shanatanu Jena. Currently Nilima Hasija is the faculty in charge of this programme. Kristine Michael studied ceramics at NID Ahmedabad.

Kalindi Jena's son, Shanatanu Jena learnt pottery from his father at BHU and went to NID Ahmedabad in 2003 to teach in the ceramics programme there. He moved to Sriniketan in 2009 as he was drawn to Tagore's idea of working with local artisans. He has been teaching there since then. Sriniketan continues to offer a 4 year ceramics course for local artisans. However, the new education policy and the aspirations of students has led to a more diverse programme, in which the learning of skill appears to have become somewhat diluted.

Santiniketan located just a few kilometers from Sriniketan, offers a ceramic programme that is different as it caters to students who come there to study fine arts. The art schools in India, after independence, attracted students who were not from any of the traditional crafts. The notion of the arts being superior to the crafts was institutionalized in these post-independence art schools. The students of these art schools did study the traditional arts – but with a motivation to find contemporary expressions in which developing some individual style was important.

While there have been some noticeable attempts at providing traditional potters opportunities to integrate the recent technological waves of innovations in ceramics, the majority of *kumbhars* in India have not had access to these forums. While the reasons for this absence of connection between traditional potters, studio potters and academia might be many, they present us with an incentive for remediation. It is at the juncture where academic opportune ties, traditional manufacturing processes in ceramics, and the dynamic vibrancy of a new wave of studio-based potters that the program we are proposing will find its *raison d'être*.



**Fig 2.** The three pillars of the proposed academic programme in ceramics: Connection, Immersion and Sustainability

The program we are outlining here scaffolds around three pillars to provide the students a robust pedagogical multidisciplinary structure. The three pillars are tentatively titled ‘connection’, ‘immersion’ and ‘sustainability’. These three pillars embody the core of our philosophy.

The pillar of connectivity embodies the research components of our program. With ‘connection’ we recognize the need for the students to be ushered into the historical complexities of a dire socio-economic collapse for traditional potters as a by-product of the cultural impact of plastic-based technologies. By investigating the technological lineage that links potters of the Harappan period to present traditional potters, the students will highlight the cultural urgency to archive this ancestral connection which is today on the brink of extinction. Promoting ethical research, the students will be trained in current data-collection techniques. Equipped with a repertoire of research techniques, they will collect critical material from informants selected among contemporary traditional potters and studio potters. This connection with potters will be conducted following the latest ethical guidelines about observation/participation and collection of data. To provide the students with a robust understanding in ceramics, a variety of courses will be available, ranging from basic pottery making technologies to advanced glazing techniques. By linking a corpus of courses in social sciences and ceramics, the students will be adequately prepared to connect with a dying tradition and offer opportunities to promote dialogue between traditional potters and studio potters.

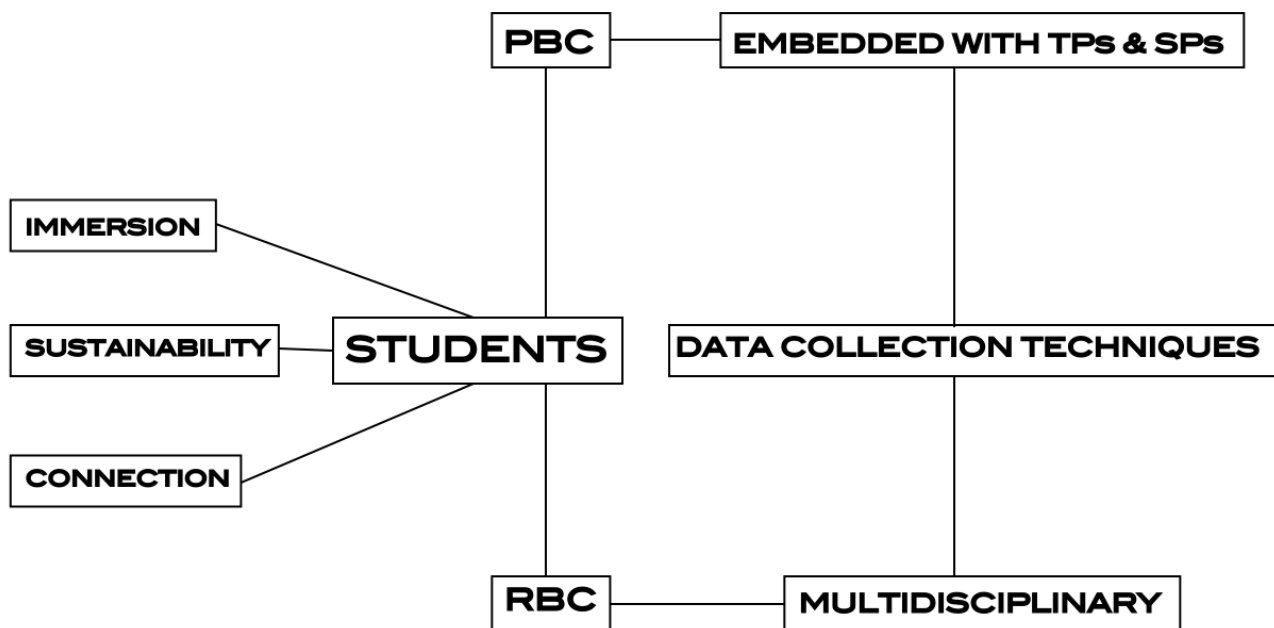
The pillar of engagement through immersion embodies the praxis component of our program. With ‘immersion’ we provide the students with an opportunity to perform ethnography-based fieldwork to document contemporary traditional potters’ status quo and provide opportunities to establish a dialogue between traditional potters and studio potters. Embedded in the everyday realities of potters in India, the students will have a unique opportunity to document the paradoxical situation they are currently in. But immersion will also promote student’s observation and participation in the many phases inherent to ceramics. Traditional potters and studio potters will train the students in the same manner they would train anyone dedicated to the idea of becoming a full time potter. It is here that the ethnographic component will be most salient and the students will keep rigorous records of their immersion by journaling their exposure to Indian potters.

The pillar of concerns for the environment embodies the current need for potters to reconnect with more organic ancestral techniques and fully appreciate the extent of the dependency on chemicals which, in the long run, might become detrimental to ceramics. With ‘sustainability’, we provide the students with an opportunity to reflect on the Anthropocene as it will impact on the acquisition of resources in an imminent future. By investigating the customary approaches of traditional potters and contrasting these with the recent technologies available to studio potters and adding to this equation the resource-depleting current climate change, the students will be guided through series of reflections on palliative processes that might allow ceramics to survive despite environmental adversity. From this angle, it is not only the traditional potters which would benefit from this program, but the studio potters as well by being provided with a forum to discuss solutions to a problematic which will affect them probably at a greater degree than the more organic-based traditional potters.

With these three pillars, the students will benefit from a synergetic approach to academic investigation fusing together research (theory) and praxis. The multidisciplinary nature of our program is on par with recent global reformatting of pedagogical processes in higher education. Its merit is primarily to provide students with a research-based curriculum (RBC) and a praxis-based curriculum (PBC). By being fused into what is still only a blueprint, this programme will usher the students into a unique and pioneering approach to ceramics. As described succinctly in the schema below, the



program operates on the basis that a successful student-oriented program must be scaffolded with robust pedagogical pillars in order to provide a learning environment which is conducive to the production of meaningful outcome for the students and the subjects) they are investigating. In the context of our paper and the paradoxical situation ceramics in India is currently facing, our program offers a novel solution to construct a feasible remedial process.



**Fig 3.** A schema for the proposed academic programme in ceramics

The research-based curriculum (RBC) will be formatted to provide students with a sufficient theoretical background in the social sciences to conduct ethical fieldwork with different groups of potters in India. Core courses in ethnography, ethnology, (pre)history of ceramics in India and material culture will provide with a sufficient all-around theoretical structure to navigate through the complexities of data collection. The program will also conduct seminars in formal settings where traditional potters and studio potters will expose the students to their current status quo.

The praxis-based curriculum will provide opportunities for the students to immerse in the everyday life of Indian potters. Students will be conducting archival work through interviews and simultaneously they will be trained in pottery making techniques by their informants. This dual approach to fieldwork will produce thesis and dissertations which will contribute to finding solutions for the precarious future for ceramics in India. The students will be required to spend specified contact hours with their informants and conduct thorough data-collecting processes. To ensure quality, the students will keep a journal which will ultimately be archived and consulted by their informants to provide a forum for dialogue.

## Conclusion

The program we are proposing is still a work-in-progress and will benefit from constructive criticism from the communities of potters and academics engaged in its emergence. The perspective of this study would also be enhanced through a review and comparison of similar efforts in curricular research. There has been a renewed interest in design schools in engaging with traditional crafts and livelihoods. The bamboo studio at the IDC School of Design has attempted to develop a curriculum for bamboo crafts at Gadchiroli, Maharsathra. The programme conducted for traditional weavers at the Handloom School in Maheswar, MP, offers interesting insights. It would be of interest to look at other efforts and this study would certainly benefit from such engagement. By formatting curricula design to ultimately highlight and address the dire situation of traditional potters in India and archive their inherited traditions, the students will make a significant contribution to the preservation of an immaterial and endangered cultural tradition in India. But in the spirit of remedial, the program also provides opportunities to research solutions to minimize the impact of a cultural bottleneck and a forthcoming environmental crisis. What can be already discussed are the contributions such a program might make to what we have titled 'The Potter's Paradox'. By fusing layers of disciplinary approaches into one coherent program, we are trying to usher students in ceramics in to the realities of the 21st century.

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