

BHUVNESH PRASAD – A TALE OF A YOUNG MASTER POTTER

Bhuvnesh Kumar comes from a rich lineage of pottery makers from Alwar District in North Western Rajasthan. He is a 7th generation potter with a rich and varied experience being one of the son's of a father like Giriraj Prasad, a National Awardee for Terracotta in 1987 and a mother like Smt. Angoori Devi, who also won the National Award for Terracotta in the same year. Giriraj further went on to win the Shilp Guru Award in 2006. Giriraj pioneered the art of highly finished double fired terracotta (pottery which is fired within a dung laden sealed container). This gives the piece of pottery a mirror like finish with a surface pattern which is an uncontrollable mix of the biscuit tones of terracotta with the grey & black tones of spaces carbonized by the burning dung or wood shavings inside the sealed container. Never shall you find two pieces with the same surface finish. However, getting this finish & fluidity is no easy job – only fine clay which has been sieved a number of times is used. Once the shape is achieved on the wheel & the piece is partly dry, then it is scraped & then finished with a smooth stone which gives the nearly dry clay an almost mirror like finish. Once ready for firing, either a number of pots or a single pot, depending on the size are put into a two piece pot and sealed with clay. The kiln is fired at temperatures ranging from 700 to 975 degrees Celsius.

Bhuvnesh, born 22nd March, 1976, as a young boy was very taken in by his father's skill & deftness not only on the wheel but also in not limiting himself to just small pieces of pottery but executing large pieces of terracotta. Even though his days were spent studying at Government Boys Secondary School, Janakpuri, he would put in some work on the wheel every day since a part of home at Uttam Nagar, New Delhi was the designated workshop space. After passing out of XIIth standard he did a 1 year diploma course at College of Fine Arts, New Delhi better understand form & utility.

After his diploma Bhuvnesh joined his father's workshop & was led through the finer nuances of pottery making. From making what was bread & butter pottery for the various exhibitions that they took part in around the country, he also started wanting to push the limits of form & build extremely large terracotta shapes. During that period he experimented with building forms which were nearly free flowing on both the vertical & horizontal axis but this creative burst also tested his skills, not only in understanding the material he worked with but also techniques for throwing & joinery for large pieces. Firing such large pieces were a completely independent test in itself. All this frenetic activity was noticed & led to the Crafts Museum in New Delhi, asking him to build a terracotta pot standing ten feet tall at their premises. Bhuvnesh had to use all that he had learned in the past and improvise like never before. On the successful completion of the project he received the National Award for Terracotta in 2002. Further experimentation on large sizes continued along with activities like teaching school children the craft of terracotta pottery at schools like Delhi Police school, and being a pottery consultant to the Times of India group of newspapers', News in Education initiative. Further recognition followed in the form of an UNESCO Award in 2005.. In the same year Bhuvnesh visited Australia for a month long interaction with Australian potters along with his father, mother & brother. His brother is a trained potter but chose photography as a profession & accompanied them on this trip as an interpreter..

Bhuvnesh, today is still doing large terracotta pieces like modernistic terracotta bottles though these have been created for commissions rather than for public consumption. In a recent innovation he has started experimenting with terracotta cookware because he thinks there is great potential for the same – his ancestral home in Rajasthan still use terracotta cookware. He is changing the clay content so that the cookware can be thin, light & completely adaptable to use on modern cooking gas. He does a rather interesting aubergine roaster which works very well. Others include a momo steamer, frying pan, cooking pots, etc. His life mantra is to never say no to any challenge however big or small. He is married & has 2 daughters & 1 son. His wife Sunita Devi helps him with sales during exhibitions. Bhuvnesh has a passion for Rajasthani drums & is a frequent participant at a lot of religious festivals where music & drum beating is de rigueur.