Handloom and Handicrafts of Gujarat

Edited by Villoo Mirza and Vinutha Mallya

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CRAFT AND ART OF CLAY
ONE SOUL FROM MANY PARTS

Clay is one of the oldest materials known and worked on by mankind. It is the very tap root of every civilisation in the world. Modern-day Gujarat is geographically located in the most ancient region of the sub-continent—the Indus Valley civilisation. This glorious lineage is visible even today in vessels, figurines and toys that are used in everyday life for agriculture, cooking, rituals and festivals. The clay objects of Gujarat demonstrate sophisticated forms, intricate pattern and ornament, and ergonomic functionality for daily use. The artisan behind this dazzling array of objects is the humble kumbhar from the Prajapati community, who is an integral part of every village. There are several differing stories from Hindu mythology as to the origin of the first prajapati and the first kumbh or pot that was a gift from the gods.

The main raw materials and tools that the potter uses come from his surroundings and the neighbourhood mati—the terracotta or red clay. Preparation of the clay is always done by the women who pound and sieve it to remove stones, leaves and twigs. The heavy spoked wheel or chaak is made of teak wood and cement nowadays, while the older versions were made in stone. It is thought that Lord Brahma is present when the clay is being formed into a pot—hence the women are not allowed to work on the wheel. Besides the clay preparation and firing, the women do all the clay relief work on walls, the hand-modelling of toys and small votive figurines, and also the delicate, painted decoration on the pots that look remarkably akin to the embroidery motifs on their garments.