



Handloom and Handicrafts
of
GUJARAT

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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.



PREVIOUS PAGES | Potter moulding clay

A pot is skillfully moulded by a *kumbhar*, potter, using a potter's wheel. The potter's role is traced to stories of Hindu mythology. Clay is dug locally from lakes or ponds only a few times a year and then stored in large open heaps at the potter's home, which also serves the dual purpose of a workshop. Sometimes, the women of the family take charge of this chore. The potters still use a donkey to transport the dry clay to the home.

LEFT | Replica of an elephant

Gujarat has a unique tradition of votive terracotta, perhaps due to the Indus Valley heritage. Figurines of animals and humans, coated with lime and painted upon, are placed in shrines and sacred groves.

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.

Family at work

Traditionally, the entire family is involved in making of the pottery. Preparation of the clay is always done by the women—it is pounded and sieved to remove stones, leaves and twigs, then water is added to the entire mass and it is kneaded by the bare feet in a circular manner. The men work at the potter's wheel and later beat the pots to enlarge them. They also harden the pots on an open fire created by using straw and cow dung cakes. The women paint and decorate the pots.

