

# POTTERY TOWN VISIT REPORT



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**Background:**

[Pottery Town](#), Bangalore lies between Benson Town and Williams Town, close to Frazer Town and RT Nagar in Bangalore North. The closest railway station is the Bangalore East Railway Station. The main road has been dug up due to underground metro work for the construction of Pottery Town Metro Station. This has led to less number of Pottery stalls on the dusty main road and reduced the number of common visitors. Whereas the customers have been visiting the old workshops for preparing for Vinakayaka Chaturthi or for buying Tandoors.



Unpainted Ganesha idols

### The Composition of the artists:

Pottery town as the name suggests is the hub of clay-related activities for several decades. As one of the local residents of this settlement rightly mentioned, *“Our forefathers have been living here since the Britishers time. Due to our work this place came to be known as ‘Pottery Town’. Today you get pottery in other places too like Mavalli Road, KR Puram, etc. But there is only one Pottery Town. It is this place that will pop up even when you google it.”*

Many of them had come from various parts of Tamil Nadu like Thirupattur to Bangalore during the time of the Mysore King. They have been into this art/profession for over 5 or 3 generations, spanning up to 120-200 years of inter-generational history. The majority of them being Tamil speakers, there were also other artists who are Telugu speakers and few Bengali speakers who work in the workshops. There were some shops run by Muslim artists who spoke Hindi as well as Dhakkani.



An artist painting the Ganesha idol in the home



### Work and home:

During the British Raj, housing was provided to about 40 families in the Pottery Town. The unit of production is their family and earlier they used to have workshops within their homes. Due to the increase in population over the years, the house as a production unit did not give enough space. The Government gave them land on lease for their workshops. This space is located to the left hand side of the housing lane. They display their wares on the sides of the road closer to the entrance of their workshops. It was learnt from other sources that the area used to have about 4 furnaces or kilns to bake the idols. But currently, there is only one kiln as neighbours complain about the pollution from it.<sup>1</sup>



Housing lane given during British Raj

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<sup>1</sup> From the 2017 TOI article titled the “Century old pottery town fights battle for survival”.  
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/century-old-pottery-town-fights-battle-for-survival/article-show/59728683.cms>



### Labour and production:

There are about 35 families that still practise the art and sell their wares in the Pottery Town. Mostly their family members contribute labour towards the production of the idols and other earthen wares. On asking about the quantum of production, they shared that, *“We can't keep such an estimate as we do it ourselves. Some days if we are sick or go to the village for some festival, then we lose work that day. So it's difficult for us to calculate that.”*

One of the interviewees shared that her son helps with the workshop most of the time, but also does other work. But he works full time on idol painting for 3 months especially before Vinayaka Chaturthi. They did not share much about the revenue generated either. While we were in the shop, a family came to purchase an idol about 2 feet in height which was sold for Rs 650. Most of the idols in the workshop cum entrance of the house were about that size. Just a few Ganesh Idols were larger in size and were being painted by the son. Most of them were preparing Ganpati idols and small Gowri idols. The workshops that did not make the idols made other earthenware items such as diyas, pots, decor items, etc all round the year. They do not pursue other professions. A common item which appeared almost everywhere was the Tandoor pots and small bowls for sweets which they sell to the hospitality industry. This seemed to be a work for all round the year.



**Material:**

All of them claimed to only use clay (*kali mann in Tamil*). This was quite visible in the workshops with the small idols. However, there were few workshops with relatively large idols too. On asking about PoP they completely rejected using it as they have been traditionally using tank clay for this purpose. One of the interviewees also responded that each piece is made by joining separate parts of the idol. The inside of the idols appeared to be hollow as though they were prepared on moulds and had finger marks inside probably to smoothen it out. The artists shared that they procure the paints from the nearby Shivaji Nagar market. Three types of paints were mentioned: Fabric paint, Water based paint (they emphasised it gets dissolved in water) and Fluorescent paints. They clearly appeared to be chemical paints. Only very few idols had a clean, minimalist feel with exposed clay.



Clay kept outside the house



Almost all the artists said that they no longer source clay by themselves as it is not allowed within Bangalore. So, they all get it from a contractor to whom they pay about Rs 10,000 to get a load full of clay. He sources the clay from Chikka Tirupathi in Malur Taluk. Another interviewee shared that he pays the contractor about Rs. 32,000 - 35,000 for a load per vehicle. This contractor sources the clay from Kolar, near Andhra border. *(As we were talking about it, a vehicle came and dumped off the clay in front of a workshop. We have collected a sample piece, it appears to be common red clay used in pottery.)*



### **On recycled clay**

They shared that in Bengaluru the recovered clay/waste done post immersion is not useful to them as it is mixed and contaminated with other materials such as PoP, etc. One of the interviewees said that *“Idols made from different materials are immersed together, making the reclaimed clay useless to us. We prefer to use fresh and nice clay taken from the ground.”* For this reason, they prefer fresh clay which is nice and smooth to work with. Even if the recovery happens the ULB does not give it away, neither do they know what happens to it. More importantly they are not curious about it as the material is not of interest to them.

**Association:**

Here, near the workshops we also spotted the board of the Potters Association called the “**Kumbara Kara-kushala Kaigharika Sahakara Sangha, Ltd**”. On enquiring we found that the Association has 15 main leaders and around 120-130 members who are active in the profession and live in the Pottery Town. The Association takes care of their needs, and basically the community issues are resolved through the associations. A deeper research would be needed to understand the functioning of the association, which will unravel the collective actions and rationality in decision-making of the community. Moreover, such association acts as a repository of values and beliefs systems of the community and helps to understand the economic organisation as well.



Name Board of the association



### Interactions with Government:

The artists we spoke to said that artists/potters in the rural areas receive most of the welfare schemes and support from the government, the city based potters hardly receive any kind of government benefits. This can be verified by looking at the various schemes by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) (Ministry of MSME) is known to host Pilot projects for training of the artist under the Mineral Based Industry (MBI) including for the Potters under the Gramodyog Vikas Yojana (GVY). The CVPI, KVIC, Khanapur (Karnataka) is a multi-disciplinary training centre of KVIC, which conducts Trainer's Training on wheel pottery. The Annual Action Plan for 2020-21 under MBI mentions 100 artists under 4 SHGs (20 artists) shall be trained under the Wheel Pottery scheme at 5.20 Lakhs for one batch, to be happening in Bangalore.

<sup>2</sup>

They shared that the government just letting them quietly pursue their work without interference would be the best for them. They also shared that even though for years they have been saying that they never use PoP for the idol making, still the ULB officials visit their workshops to check each and every idol every year. They are yet to come this year (as on 21st August 2023).



<sup>2</sup> KVIC (Ministry of MSME) Operational Guidelines for Pilot projects of Pottery Activity under Mineral Based Industry (MBI) vertical of Gramodyog Vikas Yojana (GVY)  
<https://msme.gov.in/sites/default/files/Pottery.pdf>