

The Origin of Pottery

Pottery is one of the oldest of crafts that man evolved at the dawn of civilization. Pre-civilized man abandoned his nomadic life and settled down as agriculturist, cultivating land and raising herds of animals useful to him. For a long time, he did not know of any kind of vessels either to store or to cook food; shallow pieces of barks of trees and hides were used to store water for a temporary period. The intelligent brain of man must have felt an acute need of some kind of vessel to solve his problem of storage and hence his urge to discover suitable substitutes. There are a few legends in mythology about the discovery of clay for pottery purposes.

The Origin of Kumbha"

In India pots are called "Kumbha" and potters "Kumbhars". The etymology of this word gives a substantial clue to the story of finding the use of clay and its wonderful properties. India was and is a land of elephants, and they by nature love to play in muddy water, and always pour water on their foreheads with the help of their trunks. In ancient times, it must have so happened that these elephants while playing in water must have poured muddy water over their foreheads. The clay on their foreheads must have dried after some time, giving them the shape of their foreheads. This might have given to man the idea that such dried hollows of clay could be used as vessels of storage. This is how the legend goes. Therefore, as the head of the elephant is known as "Kumbha" and later when man began to make such vessels in clay, he was called "Kumbhar", and potters to this day are called "Kumbhars".

There is another legend about the origin and use of clay for storage purposes. Brahma, the creator of Universe, had made use of clay to prepare a model of man into which he breathed life. That is why a potter in India is also called "Prajapati", meaning the creator of "man". This clearly proves that clay craft was known in India at the beginning.